

שם טוב

SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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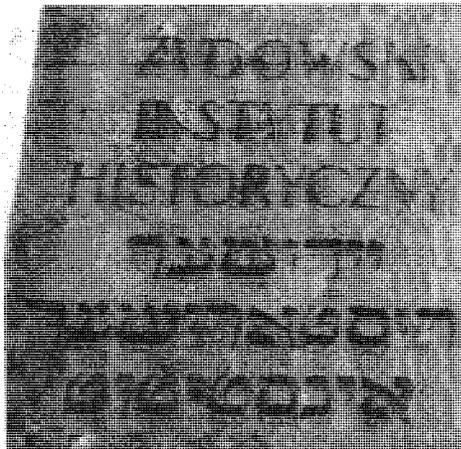
JUDAICA POLONIAE

Notes from my trip to Poland

by Peter Jassem

I recently visited Poland, the land of my birth, where I lived until I left for Canada shortly before the fall of the Iron Curtain. I remembered it as a totalitarian country that didn't allow any political, ethnic, cultural or religious diversity. Although some form of Jewish life existed, it was concealed within small and invisible circles of the remaining Jews. With the fall of communism and the rebirth of freedom of expression and assembly, many ethnic groups emerged from the shadow of history. I visited several Polish cities and located extensive information relating to Judaica in order to further my genealogical passion and desire to learn about the lost world of the Polish Jews. And I wasn't alone. Numerous publications, restoration of monuments of Jewish culture, formation of organizations and festivals indicate that there is much popular interest.

I started my tour in Warsaw. My first steps led to the Jewish Historical Institute (ZIH) on 3-5 Tlomackie Street. It is located opposite the controversial high-rise building, thirty years under construction and only recently completed, founded on the grounds of the Great Synagogue destroyed by the Germans on May 16, 1943. The institute preserves numerous photographs and artifacts relating to this temple, once Warsaw's most prominent Jewish sanctuary which could accommodate 3,000 people. ZIH is the home of the Jewish Museum, the permanent Jewish Ghetto Uprising Exhibition, the library of an extensive collection pertaining to Jewish topics (about 60,000 volumes) and many periodicals, archives with valuable collections on the Warsaw and Lodz ghettos, including Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum's Underground Archives of the Warsaw Ghetto, and a research centre attracting lovers of Jewish culture. The building is undergoing major construction and many sec-



Stone plate on the wall of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw
Photo: Peter Jassem

tions were closed to the public. The Jewish Historical Institute in Poland is funded by the state and acts under the auspices of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Research papers linked to the history of Jews are published in the institute's periodicals: a quarterly *Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland*, printed in Polish (with summaries in Yiddish and English), and the *Bleter far Geshichte* (Pages from History), published in

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Upcoming Events

19th Annual Conference on Jewish Genealogy New York City August 8-13, 1999

For more information:
<http://members.aol.com/nyc99conf>
email: nyc99conf@aol.com
write: Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc.
600 West End Avenue, Suite 10F
New York, NY 10024



Tuesday, June 22, 1999 at 8:00 pm
at the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue
470 Glencairn Avenue

"Breakthroughs of the Past Year"
Reports by some of our members

*We wish you a pleasant summer.
Please watch the "What's New" column in
the Canadian Jewish News for the date
and program of our September meeting.*

WORKSHOP 1999 A GREAT SUCCESS

On Sunday, May 30, the JGS held its Workshop 1999 with a full house of over 90 participants. In addition to an inspiring speech by Stan Diamond, President of the JGS Montreal and Project Coordinator of Jewish Records Indexing - Poland, the workshop featured seminars, Birds-of-a-Feather sessions, and displays aimed at all levels of interest and experience. Judging by the feedback from participants, the workshop was exceptionally well received. Over half of the participants were beginners who were inspired to seek their family roots (and hopefully to join the JGS).

Special thanks to the workshop committee and volunteers, who worked hard to make the afternoon enjoyable and well run. Elizabeth Jassem's beautiful work on the workshop posters made them a collector's item. Everyone appreciated the lovely display of family trees and the door prize from Jytte Birnbaum. A thank you also to Indigo Books, which supplied a door prize and coupons for discount purchase of genealogy books for all participants. Stan Diamond gave an impassioned and enjoyable talk and thrilled the audience with his introduction of Maurice Klagsbrun, a Holocaust survivor in Toronto who had recently been reunited with family through the efforts of the international network of Jewish genealogists. Our thanks to Stan for his insight, wisdom and passion, which was the highlight of the event.

Volume XV, No. 2

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Contributions are invited. Submit material c/o The Editor, P.O. Box 446, Station A, North York, Ontario, Canada M2N 5T1.

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada was founded in 1985 and currently has about 180 members. Membership costs \$30 per calendar year, \$20 for persons living outside the City of Toronto. Meetings are held September to June, usually on the last Wednesday of each month at 8:00 p.m. (doors open at 7:30) at Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue, 470 Glencairn Avenue, Toronto (unless announced otherwise). Guests are always welcome. Details are usually printed in the *Canadian Jewish News*.

The goals of the society are to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information through meetings, outings, workshops and guest lecturers, and thereby to promote an awareness of genealogy within the Jewish community of Canada. The society is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and is registered as a non-profit charitable organization.

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Yiddish. ZIH is also home of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Genealogy Project run by the Director of Research, Yale J. Reisner. The project, thanks to generous contributions from the foundation as well as other sources including our society, is now able to preserve its extremely valuable archival materials in adequate condition. The project enabled many people to locate their lost relatives, siblings, learn about their parents or discover their own identity or original surname.

I had merely a brief opportunity to visit Mr. Reisner's tiny office cluttered with books and documents as the only time I could meet him was Friday afternoon, and he had to leave his office before dark. We had a very interesting talk and I was impressed by Yale's commitment and knowledge. Within a short period of time he was able to locate some information about my family. One of the often forgotten sources was a pre-war telephone book of Krakow that listed many of my relatives and gave exact addresses, which I later traced to photograph the places where they once lived.

As I walked Yale to the streetcar I couldn't resist asking how it felt to be perhaps the only person in Warsaw wearing the scull cap. I learned that it seemed natural and didn't present any problem other than an occasional comment by a group of skinheads.

In ZIH a lady whose son attends the Jewish elementary school also helped me. I learned

from her that the school, originally designated for Jewish children, currently includes about 50 percent Polish pupils whose parents appreciate the exposure to a different culture, an opportunity to exercise tolerance, and benefit from high educational standards.

I continued my route towards the area near Grzybowski Square and Twarda Street where on various buildings I found numerous plaques depicting Jewish organizations. They include: Our Roots - Jewish Information and Tourist Bureau, Association of Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland, Educational Centre for Jewish Culture sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Center for Jewish Education and Youth Club, The Association of the Jews - Combatants and Persecuted During World War II, the kosher restaurant Menora and others. But most notable are the Nozyk Synagogue on 6 Twarda Street, renovated and reopened for service in 1983, and the E. R. Kaminska State Jewish Theatre on 12-16 Grzybowski Square. I wished I could stay longer to see the musical "If I Were a Rich Man" based on Jerry Bock's "Fiddler on the Roof" as well as the spectacle "...and the Miracle Happened," presenting the tradition and customs of the Jews of Poland and Israel.

My next steps led me to the area of the former ghetto. The massive 36-foot Memorial of the Ghetto Heroes unveiled on the fifth anniversary of the uprising in 1948 is a symbol of a nation struggling for liberation. On the same cobblestone square stands a modest memorial of Zegota with the words: "Zegota 1942-1945, the organization established by the Polish Underground State to rescue Jews of the Holocaust. It was the only such organization in German-occupied Europe which was sponsored and funded by its government in-exile." And inscribed in small letters were the words: "Donated by American friends of Zegota." Information on this organization is contained in a book by Irene Tomaszewski and Tecia Werbowski recently published in Canada under the title *Zegota - The Rescue of Jews in Wartime Poland*.

Once in Warsaw, one cannot resist visiting nearby Lodz, the second-largest city in Poland, known as Polish Manchester. The Jewish population of Lodz before World War II is estimated at 233,000, or 34.7 percent of the en-

SEARCH AD

GELWACH/GELBWACHS, Dwoira/Deborah,
daughter of Mendel Gelbwachs of Glogow,
Galicia, Poland.

Born approx. 1900-1910, resided in Toronto
about 1930 to 1940s, may have married
(possibly SOLOMON) and moved to the U.S.
Anyone having information is asked to contact:

Monique Charlebois
Legal Counsel, Office of the
Public Guardian and Trustee
595 Bay Street, 8th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2M6 CANADA
Fax: (416) 314-2781

tire population of the city, outnumbered only by Warsaw. Well-known figures included the powerful industrialists I. K. Poznanski, Aszer Kon, Borys and Naum Ejtingon. It was also home to a number of famous painters, sculptors, writers and poets, including Julian Tuwim, author of *Kwiaty Polskie*. Today the beautifully restored palaces of the industrialists, gigantic ghost factories and Europe's largest Jewish cemetery are the most visible witnesses of the Jewish past. The cemetery is undergoing major renovation funded mostly by the Nissenbaum Foundation, whose name is embedded prominently in a tall building in the centre of Warsaw.

Those who research Lodz may find traces of their ancestors on many remaining tombstones. My host in Lodz, a Christian Pole with an Auschwitz number tattooed on his arm, accompanied me in my hour-long walk along the wall of the cemetery.

In German-occupied Poland, Lodz was the location of the first ghetto, which held 202,474 Jews. Only 887 were liberated. This is also the best-documented ghetto. The Nazis were precise in their record-keeping there. As a result, in 1994 Yad Vashem published a five-volume collection *Lodz - names: list of the ghetto inhabitants, 1940-1944*. It is currently available in large university and reference libraries throughout the world. The volumes contain thousands of names of Jews from Lodz and nearby towns as well as those transported there from Greater Germany, including Austria and Czechoslovakia as well as Luxembourg. It is an invaluable source of information for genealogists. Toronto readers can find it in the Robarts Library.

My main destination was Krakow, the city where most of my family lived prior to the war. With the addresses from Mr. Reisner in hand, I was eager to see the grey buildings which once glowed and were home to the Jassems and the Statters, my grandparents, granduncles and aunts and their families. My great-grandmother lived there too. It took many frames to photograph them all. I was of the impression that I no longer had any remaining family in Krakow.

I went to the Jewish New Cemetery on Miodowa Street in search of the tombstone of my great-uncle, Pawel Statter, which included

names of family members who perished in the Holocaust. Instead, I found the stone of a relative, Karol Sznewajs, as well as that of Samuel Silberring dated 1973; his name was new to me but attracted my attention. My great-grandmother's maiden name was Silberring. Well, I thought, the last Silberring had died. On my return to Canada, I remained preoccupied with it and decided to check the current listings in the Krakow phonebook. There I found three Silberrings! Before long my father, who lives in Poland, was reunited with his long-lost cousins. Through the use of current directories, I once helped one of our members find a distant relative in Poland as well. In addition to phone directories, there is the recently published *Słownik nazwisk współcześnie w Polsce używanych* by Kazimierz Rymut. It lists all surnames currently in use in Poland, the province of residence and number of individuals under that particular name. This useful book is available worldwide, and can be found in Toronto at the Robarts Library.

My relatives lived in central Krakow, but to explore the Jewish past one has to visit the Jewish district of Kazimierz, once a separate city named after King Kazimierz Wielki or Casimir the Great who invited the Jews to Poland in the fourteenth century. He was known for his legendary affair with Esterke, daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant from Krakow. The Jews were moved from Krakow to Kazimierz at the end of the fifteenth century, and thereafter it became an important centre of Jewish life and culture. Many synagogues have been restored or are undergoing renovation, and there are a number of Jewish restaurants, bookstores, art galleries and memorials. The Isaac Synagogue offered two documentary films: *Kazimierz 1936 - the Jewish District of Krakow*, portraying the vibrant life on the streets and town squares; and *The Removal to Krakow Ghetto - 1941*, the tragic tale of its downfall. The Temple Synagogue, the largest of all, was cluttered with scaffolding through which there was already evidence of the magnificent work of Polish masters of renovation. The Remuch Synagogue adjacent to the Old Cemetery was closed but I was told it opens for services every Shabat. At 24 Szeroka Street the Old Synagogue, built over five hundred years ago, houses The Jewish Historical Museum. In front of it, leaning modestly

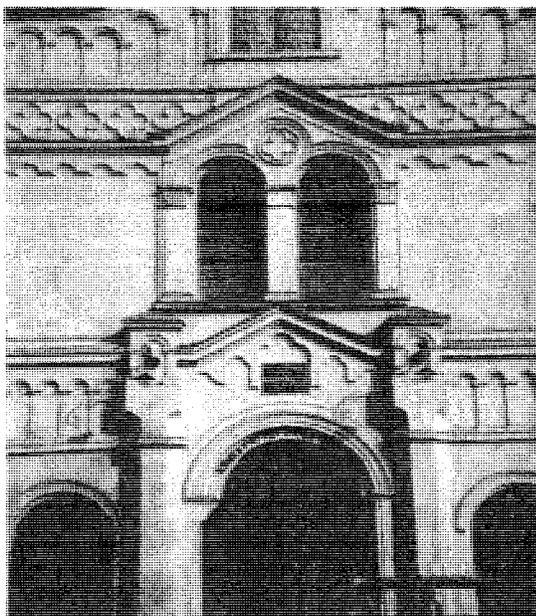
(Judaica Poloniae continued)

against an ancient stone wall, stands a lonely well-preserved stall resembling a narrow wooden kiosk on wheels, one of so many that once crowded the busy marketplace.

I was eager to explore the resources available at the Jewish Commune of Krakow, but it closed early. Later I wrote them from Canada and the chairman, Mr. Jakubowicz, was able to help me. Also, the State Archives on Sienna hold valuable resources. To obtain documents of former students, one should approach the Jagiellonian University Archives. To research the Krakow ghetto, one should visit ZIH in Warsaw, which holds 19,500 I.D. applications with photographs of the Krakow Judenrat, also accessible at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The records are presently being indexed and will soon appear on the JewishGen website. Also, marriage records from May 1928 through August 1939 from the reform Temple Synagogue of Krakow are available there.

At night in the Austeria Café, one of several Jewish restaurants, I enjoyed live Yiddish music, traditional food with a few shots of kosher vodka in the candlelight of menorahs and the company of my father and a reunited cousin, Marie-Ann from Munich, whom I found a few months earlier through my irresistible genealogical search. The outside wall of the café is decorated with an ornamental poster announcing the annual Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow. The city has become the centre of revived Polish interest in Jewish tradition and Mosaic faith. The Research Centre on Jewish History and Culture is located at Jagiellonian University and there is the Jewish Cultural Centre in Kazimierz.

One of my last stops was Zakopane, a famous resort in the Tatra Mountains just a few hours' drive south of Krakow. My grandfather



*Synagogue in the Kazimierz district of Krakow
Photo: Peter Jassem*

Markus Statter had a large general store there and his eleven children enjoyed a peaceful childhood. One of them, Adolf "Dolek" Statter, remained in Zakopane and became a successful lawyer and businessman. During the war he was appointed chairman of the local Judenrat. Two historians whom I met there confirmed the information I found in books and documents: Dolek had displayed great compassion and bravery and used highly inventive ways of outwitting

the Nazis and easing the suffering of his people. My father helped locate his last home as well as that of my great-grandfather and found an advertisement of his business in an old Zakopane newspaper.

My genealogical quest in Poland far surpassed my expectations, but it also revealed the sea of opportunity for further exploration. I left my homeland with the firm conviction that, despite everything, the memory of Polish Jews will not sink into oblivion. ☆

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M. STATTER
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Materiały budowlane
**Urządzenie kompl. dla will
i pensjonatów.**

*Ad of my great-grandfather's business in Zakopane 1924
newspaper found in Muzeum Tatrzańskie in Zakopane*

Recommended books

Shtetl - The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews by Eva Hoffman

A brilliantly written and historically accurate account of many centuries of Polish-Jewish co-existence and a heart-breaking story of a small Jewish town in eastern Poland.

Ashes and Miracles - A Polish Journey by Irena Friedman Karafilly

A moving and informative book based on the author's recent trip to her childhood homeland in search of her Jewish roots. The author provides a detailed description of contemporary Poland seamlessly blended with the highlights of Poland's troubled history.

Peter Jassem, an architect by profession and a genealogist by passion, arrived in Canada from Poland eleven years ago at the age of thirty-five. He has recently discovered his Jewish roots and managed to build a family tree of about 1,500 within the first two years of his research. Peter is now an active member of the Executive Committee of our society. He also belongs to the Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation (Toronto), Geshet Galicia, Rzeszow SIG and participates in the Jewish Records Indexing - Poland project. He renders genealogical services and translates family tree research-related documents.



Emblem of State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw

Fall 1999 Genealogy Series

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) has received an invitation from the North York Central Library to give a series of lectures as part of the fall program in order to popularize genealogy, teach family tree-making and genealogical research, and present techniques of family history publishing. The lectures are designed for the general public and are suitable for teenagers to seniors. They will take place at the library at 5120 Yonge Street, Toronto.

Sunday, October 17, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Room 1
"Jewish Genealogy for the 21st Century - How to Make Your Family Tree Grow"

Speaker: Dr. Rolf Lederer

A bird's-eye view of how to start your research will be provided. Techniques include interviews, locating records, searching the Internet and sharing information with other researchers. Visual aids will be utilized.

Dr. Lederer is a psychiatrist in Toronto. He was co-founder of our society in 1985. He has traced back several branches of his family to the beginning of the 18th century. He writes and lectures on genealogical topics in Canada, the United States and Israel.

Sunday, November 14, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Room 1
"How to Document Victims and Find Survivors of the Holocaust with Resources Available in the Toronto Area"

Speaker: Henry Wellisch

A comprehensive and practical lecture full of tips which will make participants aware of the extensive resources available locally for research pertaining to the Holocaust.

Mr. Wellisch was president of our society from 1993 to 1998. He was born and lived in Vienna until his departure in 1939. For the last fifteen years he has researched his family who lived in Vienna for many years and he was able to trace his roots back to the 18th century.

Sunday, December 5, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Auditorium
"How to Self-publish Your Family History"

Speaker: Dr. Larry Gaum

A presentation of the methods the speaker used in publishing his own family history, and how this can be achieved through the "magic" of computers. Visual aids will be utilized.

Dr. Gaum is an oral surgeon. About five years ago, after extensive research on his family in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and his ancestry in Belarus, he set out to write and publish a book, *"From Belarus to Cape Breton And Beyond - My Family My Roots."*

The lectures will run about 1 hour and 30 minutes, including a question-and-answer period. Admission is \$5. Please register in advance by phone at (416) 395-5623.

JEWISH RECORDS INDEXING - POLAND

by Stanley M. Diamond

How It All Started

Over the past seven years I've progressed from simple curiosity about my family's history to an interest in the source of the unique mutation of the beta-thalassemia trait carried by my paternal ancestry. The scientific research relating to the mutation ultimately led to the launch of an ambitious and challenging project with the aim of indexing the Jewish vital records of Poland.

Five visits to Poland in the past three years have given me a unique opportunity to gain certain insights which I would like to share with others, and I would like also to comment on current access to Polish vital records and on what is being done to make future research easier.

Jewish Records Indexing - Poland (JRI - Poland)

I'm pleased to be leading the Internet-based project to build a searchable index of all 19th-century Jewish vital records of Poland, a project known as Jewish Records Indexing - Poland (JRI - Poland). The seeds for this project were sown during my first Polish visit, although it was strictly a personal research effort to reconstruct the branch of my family carrying the beta-thalassemia genetic trait. During that visit the initial cordial relationship with the management of the Polish State Archives was created, a relationship which would ultimately lead to many wonderful opportunities for others with similar roots.

The Two Major Components of the Project

The project has two major components:

(1) *Jewish Records Indexing - Poland*

This involves the indexing of the LDS microfilmed records comprising about 2,000 films from more than 500 Polish towns and villages. These microfilms generally include Jewish records from 1826 to 1865 or 1875 with even some rare cases of 20th-century records.

(2) *The Polish State Archives Project*

While the LDS films have approximately two million records, we have estimated that there are another five to seven million 19th-century records that were not filmed. Generally, these cover the last 25 to 35 years of the 19th century, when many of our grandparents and great-grandparents were living in Poland.

How the Indexing Is Being Achieved

Jewish Records Indexing - Poland

The indexing of the LDS films is being done by Shtetl CO-OPs on those towns for which mi-

crofilmed records exist. Volunteer leaders having an interest in those particular towns head these CO-OPs, and the leaders assemble teams to do the data entry from photocopies of index pages. At present there are Shtetl CO-OPs in six countries. Israelis are playing an important role leading CO-OPs for Mlawa, Plock, Staszow, Warka and Zdunska Wola data recording. Another vital role is being played by the Toronto Copy Service which photocopies the index pages from the LDS films for some of the Shtetl CO-OPs.

The Polish State Archives Project

This project is being done in Poland on an archive-by-archive basis with a JRI - Poland Archive Coordinator for each archive. He or she appoints Town Leaders to handle fundraising for the records of each town within the archive. Polish professionals do the data entry - from photocopies of index pages - in the original language of the record. An Excel macro program, written by JRI - Poland Database Manager Michael Tobias, automatically converts Cyrillic entries to Latin spelling for the searchable JRI - Poland database. Copies of records may be ordered from the Polish State Archives at \$10 each by simply printing out, filling in and mailing the order form provided on the JRI - Poland website:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl>

Recent Meetings with the Executive Director of the State Archives

My visit to Poland in October 1998 involved scheduled meetings with the Executive Director of the State Archives. The agenda included a review of progress of the Polish State Archives Project with the aim of resolving some of the current problems and initiating plans for speeding up the work. It was also an opportunity to introduce Michael Tobias, on whom so much of the project's success depends, to senior archives management.

Software

The contract with the Polish State Archives called for the complex JRI - Poland software system and search engine to be installed in the archives, and the archives plan to use the system for some of their other data, totally unrelated to JRI - Poland. This arrangement can only enhance the partnership and result in more opportunities for future cooperation, perhaps in other areas.

(continued on page 8)

Comments on Progress

The Mlawa project, like the Pultusk project before it, started with JRI - Poland placing an order for all the index pages from late 19th-century registers not already microfilmed by the LDS. This required an enormous effort of turning thousands of pages of old and fragile registers to find the index pages, then turning the books over and making photocopies. Photocopying for that town alone meant repeating the procedure 2,113 times! To reduce similar demands on any one branch, the Polish State Archives have now agreed to open up the indexing project and allow JRI - Poland to place orders for index pages from several branches at the same time. This will result in a continuous flow of index pages, thus avoiding delays in the work of our data entry team in Warsaw and enabling the project to move ahead more rapidly. Likely to be included in this new phase are the remaining branches of the archives in the Warsaw region, including Lowicz, Nowy Dwor, Otwosk, Rawa Mazowiecki and the regional branch in Warsaw itself. (Update: Nowy Dwor is scheduled for completion in time for the Summer Conference in New York.)

One additional problem to be resolved is how to index the records for the years for which the 19th-century registrars did not create indexes. Since the work of creating the indexes must take place *in situ* in the branch archive buildings, this has presented a special problem for JRI - Poland.

Fortunately, the Polish State Archives have offered a novel solution which will be finalized in the coming months. (Update: Plans are to start with the indexing of the columnar records for Bialystok.)

Privacy Legislation

As one of many steps Poland is taking to gain acceptance to the EEC, the country has brought its privacy laws into line with those of the European community. As a result of the new Privacy Law enacted August 29, 1997, there are many gray areas which have led to delays, as the archives consider their options for making available to the public all or part of certain record collections. Because of this legislation, part of my genetic research is on hold, pending advice from the archive's legal department.

Public Access to the Archives

While the door has not slammed shut, access is no longer what it once was. This unhappy development has to be seen in the light of two inter-related events, the first being the tragic death of Professor Jerzy Skowronek, the late Director-General of the Polish State Archives. The second was the result of various abuses of Professor Skowronek's open door policy. The archives were overwhelmed by large groups of overseas visitors, many of whom lacking any archival research experience expected to be promptly handed a stack of registers containing their family records.

The current situation is that each researcher must now have a letter of authority from the Warsaw headquarters before he or she can undertake research at any branch of the archives. If in the course of an investigation one also needs to look at material in another archive, there is no automatic access and one must again apply to Warsaw for another letter of approval specifying the other archive. Since many archives don't possess a fax machine, additional applications are often dependent on the regular post or personal visits to Warsaw headquarters. It must be stressed that requests for permission should always be sent before visiting Poland. On arrival they will be found in the International Department filed by name.

Paying for Records

Those researchers who have ordered records from the Polish State Archives know about the inconvenience and expense of sending payments via bank transfers, the standard method stipulated by the archives. However, steps are currently being taken to set up a system of payment

Advertising Rates

SHEM TOV is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by August 1999 for the fall issue. Please indicate how many insertions you would like. As the chart indicates, our basic rate is discounted for advertisements placed in four consecutive issues (one year) instead of a single issue only. By placing an ad in *Shem Tov*, you are reaching a growing number of readers in Toronto, across Canada and internationally, and helping to support a unique and vital journal.

	One issue	Four issues (one year)
Full page	\$60	\$200
Half page	\$30	\$100
Quarter page	\$18	\$ 60
Eighth page	\$10	\$ 32

Search ads are also available. Rates are \$5 for the first 25 words and 25 cents per word thereafter; your name and address are free. Please write advertisement clearly, with family surnames you are researching in *uppercase* letters. Make your cheque payable to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) and mail to: JGS of Canada (Toronto), P.O. Box 446, Station A, North York, Ontario, Canada M2N 5T1.

(JRI - Poland continued)

by credit card. When that happens, JRI - Poland will include a Polish and English credit card form on its website.

Updating the Available Vital Records in Poland
Miriam Weiner's book *Jewish Roots in Poland*, published less than a year ago, is in fact the only detailed list of Jewish records of Poland ever published. Unfortunately, like any inventory, it became out-of-date as soon as it was published. Since JRI - Poland must know exactly what is available in planning orders for index pages, the archives will be providing up-to-date information on the available registers for those towns/records to be indexed. This knowledge will help JRI - Poland estimate more accurately the number of pages to be indexed, and thus plan fundraising for the work associated with each town's data.

Galician Records

The Archives have also been working on a detailed inventory of their holdings of Galician registers. While they intend to publish this inventory, at the time of my visit it had not yet been decided whether it will take the form of hard copy or CD-ROM. Along with the release of the inventory, it is hoped we'll see some indication of when and how the data in these registers will be available for research. As soon as they're available, JRI - Poland will undertake to index the material. In the meantime, because of the fragility of the registers, access is severely limited and only the Executive Director of the State Archives can grant permission.

Present and Future Challenges

I left Poland satisfied because the basic aim of expanding the JRI - Poland project has been achieved and overall the outlook is positive. We are now poised to speed up the project and can foresee a time when all eight to nine million Jewish vital records of Poland, less than 100 years old, will be indexed and available for research.

However, major challenges remain. Firstly, JRI - Poland must continue to find and mobilize volunteers to start up Shtetl CO-OPs for the remaining 400 towns in the LDS archives. Secondly, we must attract other genealogists to become Archive Coordinators for the Polish State Archives Project. Thirdly, these Coordinators, in turn, need to identify potential Town Leaders to take on the responsibility of fundraising for their towns' records' indexing. Participation is the key word and we need more and more volunteers from every country. ☆

JEWISH VITAL RECORDS OF RUSSIAN POLAND *

YEARS	1808-1825 **	c.1826-1865 ***	c.1866-1897	1898-1940
Type/ Location	Roman Catholic civil transcripts in LDS microfilms.	Jewish vital records in LDS microfilms. Approx. 2,000 reels of film.	Jewish vital records in Polish State Archives. Not micro-filmed.	Jewish vital records in Town's Civil Records Offices. (USCs)
JRI - Poland Indexing Status	Not currently included in the project.	Shtetl CO-OPs are indexing the records.	Being indexed under Polish State Archives JRI - Poland Project.	Records less than 100 years old not available for indexing.

* Applies to records in localities within the semi-autonomous region under Russian rule known as the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland). The area covered forms almost half of present-day Poland.

Typical languages of the records:

Until 1867: Polish

1868-1916: Russian

1917 onward: Polish

** Records for areas of former Galicia were started c. 1787. Records were either in German or German and Polish. The format is columnar and most records are not indexed.

*** Approximately half of the LDS microfilm collection is available at the Douglas E. Goldman Jewish Genealogy Center at Beth Hatefutsoth in Tel Aviv.

Stanley M. Diamond is founding President of the JGS of Montreal and Project Coordinator of Jewish Records Indexing - Poland. He is the genealogist for the international team doing research related to his family's novel mutation of the beta-thalassemia genetic trait and is co-author of a scientific paper related to the project. As part of his genetic research, he is documenting the rare incidence of that trait in Ashkenazic families in the Diaspora. In 1986 he retired from the Intalite International Group of Companies where he held the position of Chairman.

(The foregoing is an edited version of a talk given by Stanley M. Diamond to the Israel Genealogical Society, Jerusalem, on January 5, 1999. Reprinted from the Spring 1999 issue of Sharsheret Hadorot with the permission of the Israel Genealogical Society.)

About the Polish Genealogical Society of America

by Peter Jassem

"It is time for Poles and Jews to recover the memory of generosity and the generosity of memory, to take the risk of erring on the side of compassion. For ourselves, we need to stop splitting our own memories in half, and pushing away those parts which are too distressing for owning or acknowledgment. As for those who perished, the time has come to let them rest in our full remembrance, and in peace."

Eva Hoffman, Shtetl

Polish Jewry used to be the largest Jewish community in Europe and a world center of Jewish civilization, culture, and religion for many centuries. Of the world's Jews today, perhaps more than 80% can trace their roots to the area once occupied by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Jews of Poland did not live in isolation. On every level - economic, cultural and political - the interlocking of the two peoples was evident. Polish and Jewish traditions influenced each other, and the turbulent history of the area shaped the fate of the two nations of one land until the final days of the destruction of Polish Jewry by Nazi Germany. And even then the fate of the two nations was inseparable. Hundreds of thousands of Poles were murdered alongside the Jews in the concentration camps.

And now when the time has come to look back, the historians, writers and of course genealogists try to retrieve from the ashes the picture of the past. The picture is at first blurred, faded, unclear, missing many details. Only through our incredible stubbornness, years of laborious research, endless reading and writing, can we restore this picture. And to make it as real as possible we have to remember that the Jews, wherever they lived, did not live in isolation.

For this reason I would like to encourage everyone to research the history, geography and culture of the country of one's origin in its entirety. One of the helpful techniques is to explore the resources pertaining to these countries through networking with non-Jewish genealogical societies and individual genealogists of the geographical area of one's interest. And there are many resources, including vital, military and census records, old address, phone

and business directories, period maps and city plans, translator guides, historical books and periodicals, old photographs, etc. that are not restricted to a single ethnic group. Exchanging ideas, research techniques and documenting the same locations could also be very beneficial to the development of genealogical projects.

The Eastern European genealogical community is well represented in North America through numerous multi-national, national and ethnic genealogical organizations, including two umbrella societies: The East European Genealogical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 2536, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4A7, Canada; and The Federation of Eastern European Genealogical Societies, P.O. Box 510898, Salt Lake City, Utah 84151-0898, USA.

My area of interest and expertise is Poland, the country of my origin, my birth and my first language. Therefore, I have contacted the most notable among the continent's numerous Polish genealogical societies: The Polish Genealogical Society of America (PGSA), located at 984 North Milwaukee, Chicago, Illinois 60622. My initial inquiry was received very warmly and was followed by long and interesting letters and informative material, including a number of bulletins which present a scholarly level of knowledge and professionalism of editing. I would like to present the PGSA in this short overview.

Founded twenty years ago, with 2,000 members and growing, it is the oldest and largest of all Polish genealogical societies. It is national and international in scope. Its membership, although primarily drawn from the Great Lakes area, also includes persons and organizations from all fifty states and various foreign countries. The membership is comprised of devoted letter writers, middle-aged, educated and drawn primarily from second- to sixth-generation descendants of immigrants from Poland. Increasingly, younger members are joining the ranks of PGSA as the international trend of locating one's roots continues to grow in popularity. PGSA is always trying to establish communications with genealogical societies of countries neighboring what was the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well

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as the ethnic minorities within the country as the need for multi-ethnic organizations is evident by the multi-ethnic composition of PGSA's newer and younger members.

The PGSA sponsors an annual fall conference held in the Chicago area; and every other year in May it co-sponsors, with its sister societies, a United Polish Genealogical Societies Conference in Salt Lake City to acquaint attendees with the newest resources available at the Family History Library.

The PGSA publishes two periodicals: the quarterly *Bulletin* and the semi-annual journal, "Rodziny" (Polish for "families"). The 16-page *Bulletin* typically presents shorter articles and features such as "Genealogy in Cyberspace" and "Genealogical Advisor column." It provides a summary of interesting articles in other publications and Information Exchange, where members can trade information on lines they're researching. The 20-page *Rodziny* features more scholarly articles, translations of Polish sources such as armorial entries on coats of arms, and the like. The *Bulletin* is largely designed to give timely help with actual research, and *Rodziny* gives historical and cultural background to help members make sense of what they uncover. I have reviewed several of these journals and found them to be very informative. The articles help one understand and explore the history and geography of Poland, inform of new resources and books, provide guidance to translators and genealogists and review various articles published by genealogical societies across North America. Articles such as "Soundexing and Genealogy" by Gary Mokotoff, publisher of the Jewish genealogical journal *Avotaynu*, and William Hoffman's review of Miriam Weiner's book *Jewish Roots in Poland* might be of special interest to our members. The section "Articles of Interest" refers to many publications, including those on Jewish genealogy (from *Avotaynu*, *Landsmen* and other periodicals). Our board has initiated the exchange of periodicals between JGS and PGSA. Existing and future issues will be placed

among our library resources and will soon become available. Our members are also encouraged by the PGSA president to submit articles on Polish-Jewish genealogy to the PGSA bulletins. We would welcome similar contributions from PGSA members. Also, future exchange of Jewish and Polish speakers on subjects of mutual interest would be valuable.

The PGSA has also published more than a dozen books dealing with Polish genealogical subjects. They include a five-volume series of indices with over 81,000 entries to obituaries which appeared in the Chicago Polish-language newspaper *Dziennik Chicagoski* from 1890-1929; William Hoffman's *Polish Surnames: Origins and Meanings*, a 200-page book on the history of the development of some 15,000

Polish surnames; and *First Names of the Polish Commonwealth* by William Hoffman and George Helon, a book that notably includes Hebrew and Yiddish names. Daniel Schlyter, a collection development specialist at the LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City, is the author of the excellent work *Essentials in Polish Genealogical Research*, also available from PGSA. Messrs. Hoffman and Schlyter serve on the PGSA Board of Directors. Other PGSA publications include the packet items providing basic information on aspects of Polish genealogical research that present

difficulties for beginners. The packet is sent out to each new member. There is, for instance, a translation packet with lists of Polish, German, Russian and Latin terms one encounters, words for family relationships, names of months, numbers, etc. There is also a map packet with maps of Poland's changing borders over the years (very useful to determine which country or province your shtetl belonged to at a certain point in time), and so on. Our societies have mutually agreed to exchange copies of the beginners' kits and let each other "borrow" some pages from the respective packets to enhance our handouts. Our set has been in the process of a major update and re-editing for several months and will become available to all members, beginners or not, in the fall of this year.



PGSA emblem

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Since 1991 the PGSA has developed a Bulletin Board Computer System that offers a constantly growing database suitable for the Polish genealogical family researcher. The system also incorporates an electronic mail center that promotes communication among users. In 1996 the PGSA established a website providing access to its increasing databases and research techniques and sources throughout the world. Its address is www.pgsa.org. It expands PGSA's reach and provides access to valuable research tools and indices of the resources housed at the Polish Museum of America in downtown Chicago, including a link to the library computer. It also contains a space where information and resources on other Polish communities in the United States can be found. This center has been expanded to include Canadian resources since many immigrants to the US first arrived in Canada and then crossed the border into the US. The website also expands the membership benefits by allowing members to share the fruits of their research thanks to the idea of Members' Pages which they created and maintain.

The PGSA website has several distinct areas that tie into its overall objectives. *About PGSA* lets the public know the mission and displays the calendar of upcoming events. *PGSA Publications* offers browsers an opportunity to purchase PGSA-published reference materials and to find back issues of bulletins and journals. *The Resource Center* houses a listing of available resources on the Web. This is a smorgasbord of information that may assist researchers with specific needs. Databases is the most popular site; here you can find obituaries, etc. among other database indices to the Chicago daily newspaper *Dziennik Chicagoski*. Also, the PGSA Surnames index will soon be available so that researchers

working on the same family or within the same town or region can cooperate. Other pages include Polish History, Immigration and Shipping, as well as a taste of *Polish Arts* and customs (the non-genealogical information that makes genealogy human). Lastly, the PGSA has established a discussion *Forum* that enables members and non-members alike to share information and delve into research questions that will help researchers break "the wall."

The PGSA website supplements traditional publications and adds a wealth of information. Its resources are at our fingertips; just enter www.pgsa.org in your Internet browser. While the Jewish researcher might search this site for an old map or facts on the history of Poland, the non-Jewish Polish researcher can benefit from visiting the Jewish genealogical sites like www.jewishgen.org (with its excellent ShtetlSeeker and superb links) or www.avotaynu.com. It should be mentioned here that our board plans the creation of our own website in the near future, and we will welcome our members' suggestions and offers of help. We may look for inspiration at sites like the one of PGSA. Its webmaster's fine work has earned the Family History Favorite Award for websites

from *Ancestry*.

The Polish Museum of America, which includes the rich PGSA library collection, has recently hosted an excellent photographic exhibition entitled "Images of Polish Jews - And I Still See Their Faces," organized with the cooperation of the SHALOM Foundation of Warsaw. We hope that the exhibition will find organizers and a host in Toronto as well.

In closing, I would like to thank the President of PGSA, Paul S. Valasek; the PGSA Chief Editor, William F. Hoffman; and the PGSA Webmaster, Donald Szumowski for the detailed information, without which I could not have prepared this presentation. ✨



Current administrative map of Poland with the new provinces

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