

B'NAI GOMBIN

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society (GJHGS) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that seeks to educate the public about the history and genealogy of the Jews of Gombin. To achieve this goal, the GJHGS collects and publishes relevant materials, encourages historical and genealogical research, and undertakes activities aimed at preserving documents and relics of the culture and history of Jewish Gombin.

B'nai Gombin is the newsletter of the GJHGS. Everything published in *B'nai Gombin* is meant to provide information for Gombiners and their descendants. Articles, stories, poems, or other genres about Jewish genealogy, Poland, Gombin, or other subjects of interest to Gombiners submitted, may be published in *B'nai Gombin*. The views and opinions expressed in *B'nai Gombin* are not necessarily those of the Gombin Society. For further information or to receive back issues, contact the Gombin Society (GJHGS) by mail at 320 County Route 105, Highland Mills, NY 10930 or by email at info@gombin.org.

Visit our website at
www.gombin.org.

©2003 Gombin Jewish Historical
& Genealogical Society

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 • **President's Message: Discovery & Connection**
- 3 • **Gombin Cemetery Maintenance**
- 4 • ***Back to Gombin Update***
BY MINNA PACKER
- 5 • **A Gombiner Archive at YIVO?**
BY BERNIE GUYER
- 6 • ***Praise for Back to Gombin***
- 7 • **Gombin's New Website!**
- 8 • **New Directions for the Gombin Society**
- 9 • **Register of Jewish Survivors**
BY ADA HOLTZMAN
- 10 • **Case Studies: Fleeing from Warthegau to
Südostpreussen**
BY JAN GRABOWSKI
- 13 • **Konin Cemetery Memorial Project Status Report**
BY ROB PROSEPRI WITH ADA HOLTZMAN
- 14 • **Editor's Note: Memory Lapses**

EDITOR: NOAM LUPU

ISSUE 14, JUNE 2003

DISCOVERY & CONNECTIONS

The Gombin Society is about discovery and connections. I am continually amazed that this small Polish shtetl has produced such a diverse and interesting group of descendants. During this year as president of the Gombin Society, I have been particularly pleased to make the following discoveries and connections.

This winter, I reconnected with both Melvin Wruble and Benny Guyer. They were among a group of young Gombiner men- including Sol Simon, Saul Tatarka, Leon Green, Sam and Manny Laski, and other survivors of the holocaust, who came to our house in Detroit after the War. I remember well the tattooed numbers on their arms and the way my parents welcomed them into our home. Teenagers when the war started, they survived the infamous work camp at Konin and numerous concentration camps. They saved the life of Rabbi Yehoshua Aaronson of Sanyik by making him a shoemaker. They are our Gombiner heroes.

With Phil Ball and Arthur Gertzman, I discovered the grave of our common great-grandfather, Pinchus Ryzman, 1841-1907, at the Newark Jewish Cemetery. It has always been a great irony of our family history that my great grandfather came to the U.S. with his 5 daughters, long before the holocaust. His only son, my grandfather Manele, stayed behind and perished at Chelmno.

Lidia (Drachman) Turner's father saw "Back to Gombin" and remembered that my family lived in Uruguay during the war; there are many Gombiners in Montevideo.

I've corresponded with David Rothbart, a well-known Gombiner, who is publishing a new book, *A Soldier's Journal*, an extraordinary memoir of his service in the U.S. Army in World War II.

Finally, Saul Jacob Rubin (Wirobek) is the retired rabbi of Congregation Mikvah Israel in Savannah Georgia, a shul whose roots go back to colonial times. His father was a close friend of my uncle, Max Rissman. My mother remembers the Wirobek family from Gombin as the sellers of eggs, and Ada Holtzman sent him an amazing set of documents that connect him to his past. He sent the Society a copy of his book, *Third to None; The Saga of Savannah Jewry, 1733-1983*, with the following inscription:

Presented to the Gombin Society. In memory of my beloved father Hyman (Hymie) Rubin, his brother Leo, and my grandfather Schmuel Wirobek, all of blessed memory. How grateful I am for the discovery of my heritage as a Gombin descendant. The discovery of my landsmen has stirred new life in my bones. May the Society be strengthened in its glorious work. With blessings.

Last year I set out 3 goals for my 'presidency':

1. Strengthening communications: Thanks to the hard work of Noam Lupu and many others we now have a new and exciting web site for the Gombin Society. This new site and the email list-serve will allow us to exchange more information and post attachments with emails. I hope this new communication will allow us to post the family genealogies and histories that were discussed at last year's meeting.

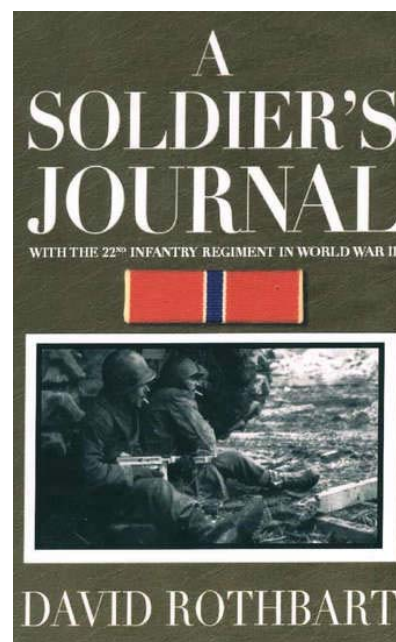
2. Archive: Through the connections of David Rothbart, we have an upcoming meeting with the archivists at the YIVO Institute in New York about the possibility of establishing a permanent archive for Gombin at YIVO. It is my hope that Gombin families will begin to use such an archive to save the historic photographs and documents that are now spread around the world in dresser drawers and manila envelopes.

3. Third Generation project: The goal of this project is to make the history and lives of the Jews of Gombin as relevant to our children and our children's children as it is to our parents and to us. I have just begun to talk to the Gombiner grandchildren about how to accomplish this goal and will report on progress at a later date. I welcome all suggestions.

I'm writing these words as America unleashes war in Iraq. I can't lay down my pen without expressing a prayer for peace in this world and for the safety of our families, our cousins in Israel, American soldiers and even for the people of Iraq.

B'Shalom!

BERNIE GUYER, PRESIDENT



MAINTAINING GOMBIN'S CEMETERIES

The memorial functions of the Gombin Society are dual. First, we restored the Jewish cemetery in Gombin itself and continue to maintain the site. Second, many of our own parents and grandparents were buried in Gombiner cemetery plots in the New York and New Jersey area, and we as a Society will also take it upon ourselves to ensure that these communal plots be cared for and maintained both in the short term and perpetually.

Cemetery in Gombin

One of the great accomplishments of the Gombin Society was the restoration and rededication of the Jewish cemetery in Gombin, a project led by Leon Zamosc, Jeremy Freedman and Ada Holtzman as well as many others, not least those Gombiners who donated to the efforts. Not only did we fence off and clean the cemetery site, we also brought together pieces of tombstones into a monument dedicated to those buried at the site as well as the Gombiner victims of the Holocaust.

Since there are no Jews living in Gombin today, one of our concerns since the cemetery's rededication in August of 1999 has naturally been its upkeep. Additionally, we are always vigilant of the potential for its desecration and disrespect.

A young Polish Gombiner, Sebastian Balko, visited the cemetery on our behalf this winter. Sebastian was one of our translators during our 1999 trip to Gombin and has continued since then to be in touch with the Gombin Society. He took these digital photographs and reported the following:



...I also went all around the fence and everything is O.K. There is no graffiti or other damage to the fence or the cemetery. I also found a candle (photo above). I lighted one previously during the Polish All Saints holidays, but the one I found wasn't mine. So somebody else must have lighted it, which I think is very nice of this person.

With Sebastian's help, the Gombin Society Board of Directors voted in May to contract another young Gombiner named Krzysztof to perform regular maintenance at the Gombin Jewish cemetery, mowing the lawn and maintaining the cleanliness of the memorial. We are in the process of signing a year-long contract with Krzysztof and will receive regular updates from Sebastian as to the state of our cemetery.



Cemeteries in New York and New Jersey

We are in the process of researching the status of these local cemeteries and how the individual plots are currently cared for. While this is a rather lengthy process, we have every intention of doing the necessary legwork to ensure that the communal Gombiner plots at each cemetery are cared for perpetually. When the time comes we also plan to allocate the necessary funds for this important project that is clearly part of our memorial mission.

If you have a parent or grandparent buried in one of these sites and wish to help us in these efforts, please get in touch with us at info@gombin.org. We can certainly use additional volunteers to ensure that our loved ones' resting places are properly maintained. ■

BACK TO GOMBIN FILM UPDATE

BY MINNA PACKER

I am pleased to announce that *Back to Gombin* was aired on Israel television on Yom Hashoah, April 29, 2003, during prime time on the Yes+ satellite channel. Our beloved Israeli representative, Ada Holtzman, has been forwarding positive comments from friends and colleagues who had the opportunity to watch.

Also on Yom Hashoah, the film was shown to audiences in several schools in New Jersey. At the B'nai Jacob Synagogue in Jersey City, I was invited as the keynote speaker and showed segments of the film to a diverse congregation of Holocaust survivors, second generation and third generation, and a group of Jewish and Christian students. It is an honor to have it shown on Yom Hashoah in different parts of the world.

The National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University views this film as an important contribution to post-Holocaust documentaries. They have recently become the official distributor of *Back to Gombin*. It is listed among the Center's new releases and has a Web Page devoted to it on the NCJF site. National Center is a unique film library created to preserve the pictorial records of the Jewish experience. The executive director, Sharon Rivo, found much about this film wonderful. In particular, she sited that the meeting of children of survivors and descendents from Gombin, with the people of this town in post-Communist Poland, is the aspect of this work that is most original in post-Holocaust documentary. Working with a prestigious distributor for the film is a goal I'm delighted to have achieved. To garner the support of one that is as esteemed in the Jewish world as is NCJF is especially gratifying. As representative of the film, NCJF will help publicize the work, recommend it to broadcasters and arrange for presentations and speaking engagements involving the film, as well as the distributing the videotape to individuals, libraries, museums and other institutions.

Recent international presentations of *Back to Gombin* included a screening at Lodz University in Poland for their Holocaust conference on May 11, 2003.

The film was also recently included in the International Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival. Shown at the Encino Theater, the film reached out to an audience that included Gombin survivors and descendents in the California area. I received a message from Lydia Drachman, daughter of Simon Drachman, formally of Gombin, who lives in South America. She was touched by the film and glad to have connected with her Gombin heritage. Others who had heard

of the film from friends and family on the East Coast, also attended the screening and sent their appreciation for the film's content.

As I present this work in various locations, I am surprised to find that there is often someone I meet who is in some way connected to Gombin. In Chicago, when I presented the film at the Descendants of the Shoah Conference, I met Michael Zolno, one of the organizers of the conference, who said he was connected to the Zolna family of Gombin. I also met a woman from Australia, Pauline Rockman, who works with the Shoah Foundation "down

under" in Melbourne. As it turned out, she is related to the Sochachevsky family, which were the sister and family of my own grandmother, Dina Ber. These families lived side by side on the little street called "Tilna" in Gombin during the 1920s.

The importance of these connections is more than anecdotal. From the personal to the public, *Back to Gombin* helps us to locate each other and connects us in a larger sense to our heritage, a heritage that was destroyed by the Nazi's in WWII.

Whether this leads to an awakening of our Judaism or a way to connect to family that

we would not have had the opportunity to know, the result is always to spark the curiosity about where we came from and who we were as a Jewish people in Poland.

It is with great sadness that I note the passing of some of the survivors who appear in the film and also some of the interviews I made that are part of the archive of BTG:

These include my dear friend, Jacob Spiewak, whose family of religious Jews, were watchmakers in Gombin. At our recent board meeting, Bernie Guyer, GJHGS president, showed me a small women's watch which was yellowed with age. He said that his mother, Chana, had purchased this watch at the jewelry store in Gombin which was owned by the Spiewak family. He said he wanted for Jacob's son, Alex to have it.

I also note here the passing of the great Yiddish poet, Rajzel Zychlinsky, who appears in BTG with her red hat, philosophizing and reciting "God Hid His Face" in Yiddish. She was unforgettable to meet and is unforgettable in the film.

I often hear the words of the late Bela Boll, echoing in my own mind. In *Back To Gombin*, she so defiantly said,—"in life you have to fight... even in normal life you have to fight. I learned in Hashomer Hatzair, just because you are a Jew, don't hang your head down. Hold your head up! Fight for your life! And that's what I did. I buried Hitler and I'm here and I'm talking to you. And that's Gombin!"

Remembering back to filming in Michigan, I note the

From the personal to the public, Back to Gombin helps us locate each other and connects us in a larger sense to our heritage

passing of Hania Tiefeld who survived the ghettos. She later posed as a Polish Christian in a labor camp by dyeing her hair blond; hoping that her blue eyes and fair complexion would support her claim. She was lovely and poised when I met her, as she shared her memories of escape with her sister.

Most dear to me and most grievous a loss for me, was that of my own mother, who was not born in Gombin, but in the Ukraine. A friend to the Gombiners, she had married Michael, my father, during the war. As many of you know my fathers families, the Zielonka and Ber families, lived for generations in Gombin. My mother died just as I was completing the final version of the film. She never got to see it. I showed her only early segments, before she became so ill. She always praised my work and said it was very important to capture these moments and loved the way I combined the interviews with the old footage (filmed by Sam Rafel in 1937). I so wish I could have sat with her last year in New York City when we premiered the finished film in the beautiful auditorium at Hebrew Union College. But I am so grateful to have had my father there, my husband and my children, my sister, my nephew, Joe Richards, who was so helpful to me in the production, and all of my dear friends and colleagues who supported me through the making of this work. It was truly a bittersweet celebration.

I hope you will support the efforts behind this important film by purchasing a copy for your video library and for those of your children. If you are connected to a synagogue, library, school or university, please encourage your department or institution to acquire the film for their collection.

You can order the film for \$49.99 plus \$6 shipping from the Gombin Society's online store at www.gombin.org or by mailing your check to:

The Gombin Society (GJHGS)
320 County Route 105
Highland Mills, NY 10930

I am available for personal speaking engagements along with presentations of the film. If you would like for me to visit your synagogue or institution for a presentation, my contact information is:

Minna Packer, Packer Productions
308 Eighth Street
Hoboken, NJ 07030
Tel: (201) 656-3722, Mobile: (201) 993-8264
packerproduction@prodigy.net
Website: <http://pages.prodigy.net/madisonpark/>

I look forward to sharing the *Back to Gombin* film with you. Please feel free to contact me with any requests, comments or questions.

A GOMBIN ARCHIVE AT YIVO?

BY BERNIE GUYER

On April 4, 2003 I met with Ms. Fruma Mohrer, the Chief Archivist at YIVO, about creating there a permanent archive of life in Gombin. This initial meeting was promising, but requires the Gombin community to make some decisions about the purpose and form of the proposed archive.

YIVO was founded in 1925 in Vilna as the Yiddish Scientific Institute and headquartered in New York since 1940. YIVO is devoted to the history, society and culture of Ashkenazic Jewry. It is the preeminent center for the study of East European Jewry and Yiddish language, literature and folklore. The YIVO archives contain some 1400 collections consisting of manuscripts, correspondence, film, photographs, sound recordings, art works, and other artifacts, including collections from specific Shtetlach.

We Gombiners have a vast and unique collection of historical materials about our beloved shtetl. This collection includes the 1937 Sam Rafel film, the new *Back to Gombin* film, our yizkor book (being digitized by the National Yiddish Book Center), poetry by Rajzel Zychlinski, and a unique web-site created by Ada Holtzman that contains scanned images of historical documents including the Russian census of Gombin and the Gombin Business Directory among many others. In addition, all of our parents and grandparents have pre-war photographs and documents from their family and friends. Finally, the YIVO Archive itself has a unique collection of Nazi identity photos of Gombiners taken in the ghetto and somehow sent to Rajzel Zychlinsky.

What will become of this vast collection as our elders pass on? How will the next generation learn about Gombin, and where will they find the historical record? To sustain the historic link, I propose that we work with YIVO to create a home for the Gombin Archive. We have some important decisions to make, however:

- What is the purpose of the archive? Do we expect to create an exhibit?
- Will Gombiner families respond to our call to donate their original historical documents? What are the incentives for them to do so?
- How will we raise the funds needed to create an archive?

These questions need to be discussed and decisions need to be made quickly. I welcome your feedback. ■

PRAISE FOR *BACK TO GOMBIN*

“I have now had the opportunity to view this beautiful film. I found it very affecting. This work is a very important part, in my view, of the continuing race against time to permanently humanize the Shoah. This film helps to rescue the memory from the horrible curse of being overwhelmed by its own magnitude. This must be done before the historic opportunity is forever gone.”

– David L. Weiss, Executive Director, CINE

“*Back to Gombin* takes what is ordinary and turns it into a sense of discovery. You’ve made a trip come alive as a pilgrimage, a journey of past and present!”

– Michael Berenbaum, Executive Producer, *Burning Questions*; former Director, The Shoah Foundation

“Beautifully produced!

– Israel Horowitz, Playwright

“The film is intended to show the forces and passions that drove second and third generations to rebuild something they had never experienced, but somehow, nonetheless, needed... Minna Packer, the daughter of a Gombiner herself, eloquently succeeds in this task.”

– Monica Strauss, *Aufbau Deutsch-Judische Zeitung*

“*Back To Gombin* is really splendid, in all kinds of ways. There is so much that is excellent in this film, particularly the responses from the second generation, the mixing of black-and-white and color, especially as some contemporary footage in B/W matches the 1937 clips, so extraordinary also.”

– Dr. Daniel Harris, Ph.D., Bildner Center For Jewish Studies, Rutgers University

“Jews and non-Jews respond strongly to the film, largely because of its detail and specificity. Watching this film is an extremely powerful experience.”

– Rabbi Robert Scheinberg, United Synagogue of Hoboken

“I received *Back to Gombin* and viewed it with great pleasure (and pain). It is such an important story to relate to the next generation... *Back to Gombin* could show students the meaning of memory in Jewish tradition and in all our lives... So much can be learned from the experiences of the people in the film... The film is moving and significant. It brings to life once more what we have all lost, and it reminds us again that hatred must be resisted by always remembering the past and those who died. Your black and white footage of the inhabitants of Gombin captures so well the joy and normalcy of life before the Germans came.”

– Professor Rosalie Franks, University of Maryland

“Both poignant and beautiful... The weaving in and out of time periods is seamless and engrossing... The film helps us to learn and remember what happened... The descendants of Gombin will not forget their ancestors.”

– Ahn Behrens, *Waterfront Journal*

Selected Engagements and Screenings:

Yes+ television satellite - Israel
Los Angeles International Jewish Film Festival
New Jersey Jewish Film Festival
Back East Film Festival
International Jewish Genealogy Conference, London, England
Descendants of the Shoah Conference, Chicago, Illinois
The Polish Consulate, New York City
Columbia University
Hebrew Union College, New York City
Stevens Institute
National Council of Jewish Women
The United Synagogue of Hoboken

GOMBIN'S NEW WEBSITE!

It was with enormous pleasure that the Gombin Society Board of Directors received the initial unveiling of its new website at the Gombiner Gathering in March 2003. You can now visit online Gombin at www.gombin.org.

Last year, the Board decided to allocate some funds toward updating and redesigning our website. The Gombin Society functions primarily via the Internet and we recognized that it was vital that the Society have a website that can both showcase the Society's work and provide Gombiner researchers access to the material we have amassed. Our specific goals included:

- Creating a more professional design
- Updating the site with new information about the Gombin Society as well as newly uncovered Gombin historical documents
- Creating a searchable database of Gombin genealogical documents
- Maintaining an online store to sell the Society's publications including reproductions of historical documents and the Gombin Yizkor Book
- Allowing Gombiners to submit their memberships or make ad hoc donations online using a credit card

With the help of Rob Prosperi, the enormous work of web designer Andrew Schlaikjer, and the leadership of Noam Lupu, we have set up a website that we believe provides better services to Gombiners and to online researchers. While the site will still be a work-in-progress for several more months, it already contains a wealth of information and useful tools.

As you browse the site, you will find it divided into the following sections:

About Us: Learn about the Gombin Society, find the roster of the Board of Directors, and find out how to join the Gombin email mailing list to be a part of our online correspondence.

Gombin History: An enormous, growing, collection of material on the history of Jewish Gombin from the earliest documentation of the town in 15th century through the events of the Holocaust. We are still adding material to this section and will constantly update it as new material becomes available. These documents range from the general

(i.e. wooden synagogues in Eastern Europe) to the specific (i.e. individual Holocaust testimonies), but will provide an unmatched archive. There are also links, which we will continue to update, to external resources that may be helpful to researchers. This section will also include a glossary to guide readers through unfamiliar terms or references to historical events.

Society Initiatives: Learn about the accomplishments and ongoing projects of the Gombin Society. Links are already developed for the Rededication of the Gombin Jewish cemetery and the memorial at Chelmnno, but we will be adding further material on these projects and their planning stages, including photographs. You will also find links to some of the current projects discussed in this newsletter, which will be updated as these projects develop.

GombiNames Database: This database contains over 15 documents that have been diligently recovered by researchers like Ada Holtzman and Leon Zamosc from personal collections and public archives throughout Poland. Through the diligent work of our webmaster, these documents have been formatted electronically and can now be searched with a single click. We are currently testing a preliminary version of the GombiNames Database and hope to have the final version launched by the end of the month. By entering the name you are researching, the database will show you every entry with that name in any document you choose (or all the documents). In the longer term we hope to incorporate the Soundex system used by the National Archives which would develop alternate spellings for the name you wish to search and also show you those results.

This will be a priceless research tool for Gombiners and should not be missed. Keep checking the website for updates on the launch of the final GombiNames Database!

B'nai Gombin Newsletter: Download electronic back issues of the newsletter directly onto your hard drive or view and print them.

Shop @ Gombin.org: Gombin's very own online store. Using the PayPal system, we can now accept credit cards for any purchase of the Gombin Society's publication, of Rajzel Zychlinsky's collection of poems, or of Minna Packer's documentary film *Back to Gombin* (article 4). You can even make your annual membership donation online. Check out our products and support the Society without writing a check or wasting a stamp. ■

Visit us at www.gombin.org
and send your comments or thoughts to webmaster@gombin.org

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE GOMBIN SOCIETY

FROM THE GOMBIN SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

In 1996, the Gombin Society was formed primarily in order to collect donations for the very important memorial initiatives led by Leon Zamosc, Jeremy Freedman and Ada Holtzman. The new Society was led by a dedicated group of second- and third-generation Gombiner descendants. They sought to reach out to Gombiner descendants around the world in order to garner the financial support needed to restore the desecrated Gombin Jewish cemetery and to erect a monument to the Gombiner Holocaust victims at the site of the Chelmno death camp. Publishing this newsletter regularly and holding summer gatherings in the New Jersey area were ways of recreating a Gombiner community with the momentum needed to remember its ancestors.

By August of 1999, after countless hours of volunteer efforts, these two main projects were completed. Quite naturally, the Gombin Society lost some of the intensity of its early years. As a result, financial contribution to the Society has dwindled as has the number of volunteers committed to the perpetuation of a Gombiner community. The last issue of this very newsletter was published in December of 2001.

We may indeed have lost some of our initial momentum: for one, we are no longer in a race to restore the space of our ancestral Jewish cemetery before it is overtaken by construction. Secondly, Minna Packer has traversed the globe collecting the testimonies of Gombiner Holocaust survivors as part of her documentary film *Back to Gombin*, also racing against time to reach these elderly survivors. As Minna mentions on page 4, some of the survivors she filmed have already passed, luckily leaving behind their video testimonies for future generations.

Nevertheless, the work of the Gombin Society is by no means over. At our March 2003 Board meeting, we began to discuss the new directions of the Gombin Society, how it will respond to new obstacles in preserving the memory of Jewish Gombin and how it will continue to build and educate our worldwide Gombiner community. To those ends, we have already begun several new projects being unveiled in this newsletter:

Website: As seen on page 7, we have already redesigned the Gombin Society website and updated its content to include new research and updates on the Society's projects. As we continue to update the site with new material and include as much historical documentation as possible, we hope that Gombiners will take advantage of this wealth of information. We also hope that this site will keep our worldwide Gombiner community informed of the Society's projects, of gatherings we hope to continue to coordinate, and of the results of ongoing genealogical and historical

research.

Archive: We are conducting preliminary research to create a Gombin archive at YIVO to collect, catalog, and properly preserve the various documents we as a Society have compiled and each Gombiner family has (see page 15). Such an archive would be an invaluable collection for future researchers, as well as for future generations of Gombiners who wish to learn about their ancestors.

Memorial Projects: We will continue our dedication to the memorial projects in Poland, on the one hand by ensuring the proper maintenance of the cemetery in Gombin (see page 3), and on the other hand by continuing to pursue the Konin memorial plaque project (see page 14 and the insert in this newsletter). We are also working with the elder organizations, the New York and New Jersey Gombiner Societies, to take on some of their responsibilities in maintaining the Gombiner cemeteries in the area.

Future Generations: As Bernie mentions on page 2, one of the new goals of the Gombin Society is to involve the "third generation," today's young Gombiners in the Gombin Society and in the Gombiner community. Through the redesigned and updated website, we hope to reach out to the Internet generation and make the Gombin Society and information about Gombin accessible to young Gombiners. We will continue to make their involvement a priority of the Gombin Society and have already begun preliminary discussion of potential projects (for example, one suggestion we are exploring is funding a young Gombiner to join one of the many Jewish youth group journeys to Eastern Europe that teach young adults about Jewish life in that region, about the Holocaust, and about the important role of memory).

As we pursue these new directions and develop new projects, we hope to find Gombiners throughout the world who wish to be involved in accomplishing these important ongoing tasks. We also hope that Gombiners will continue to support the Society by making their membership donations and by specifically supporting the Konin plaque project as described in the insert to this issue.

You can contact us anytime by email at info@gombin.org with your suggestions or to get involved in one of our many projects. You can now also make your membership donations or make a donation earmarked for the Konin plaque project by going to the online store at www.gombin.org. Continue to visit our website for updates and please continue to support our important work as we continue to maintain the Gombiner community that has become family for so many of us.

REGISTER OF JEWISH SURVIVORS

BY ADA HOLTZMAN,
EXCERPTED FROM HER INTRODUCTION TO THE ONLINE
DATABASE

After completing the computerization of Pinkas Hanitzolim II, I volunteered to coordinate the second most important project of computerizing the *Pinkas Hanitzolim I: Register of Jewish Survivors Lists of Jews Rescued in Different European Countries*, published by The Jewish Agency, Jerusalem 1945.

My relation to this Registers of Survivors published by the Jewish Agency ("Suchnut") right after the Holocaust in 1945, is explained in my Introduction to the database compiled from Pinkas Hanitzolim II. I was very pleased that JewishGen managed to put this most precious database online, available to the whole Jewish world, but I felt that the first volume of the Register should also be on the Internet. Before computerizing the first volume it was extremely difficult to search a survivor in this register, because it was made from various lists and sub-lists (166) and one had to review them all in order to search for a name. So even if you had the book (which is very rare now), one could not use it efficiently. All this is solved now.

I got the initial scanned file from Yad Vashem and I sent the various lists to seven dear volunteers all around the globe, who did the necessary proofreading. JewishGen, Yad Vashem and myself are very grateful to these volunteers and extend our sincere thanks to them. Without their dedicated work on the lists, the project couldn't have been materialized. One volunteer phoned me after finishing her part and told me that she was proud to be chosen to work in this important project... And I am proud to have these dedicated volunteers who also work for JewishGen and Yad Vashem in other various projects. The volunteers whom we all thank very much were: Alex P. Korn from Canada, David Amdurer from U.K., Morris Wirth and Sandra Krisch from U.S.A. and Asher Jung, Erica Marom, Shmuel Kehati and myself from Israel.

There is a very popular radio program in Israel "Kol Israel Reshet Bet": "Hamador Lechipus Krovim" ("Searching Relatives Bureau") which is broadcast every day. One of those days recently, in one of the programs, I heard the voice of an old man, sounds in his 80s, stating solemnly that he is looking for ...his mother... After her name, he recited other 47 names, all close relatives of him, all perished eventually in the Holocaust but the old man has still a hope... Because the hope also survives and only when he dies, the hope dies with him... (Halina Birenbaum "Hope is

the Last to Die").

Each name is the whole world! In this volume they all come to you, the survivors of Buchenwald, the women survived in Bergen-Belsen, the inmates of Dachau, the refugees in Sweden, the Jews surviving in Theresienstadt, the remnants of the grand European Jewry... Through each individual story, you can learn about the Jewish People and their tragic history in the last century. One special survivor shone to me in bright light: Primo Levi, Torino, list nr. 32 "Jewish Survivors in Some Italian Cities - Milan - 32I", page 270, the survivor of Auschwitz, writer of the unforgettable book: "Se questo e un uomo". He is one name, one world, out of 61,697 names, 61,697 worlds, recorded in the Survivors Register...

The first Volume of the register ("Pinkas I") is much more complex than the second one, and many of the various lists contain much more genealogical details than Pinkas II, such as current residence, year of birth, age, father's name, occupation, previous residence, and more. It was very difficult to compile the original book, as written in the book's own introduction. Now imagine the difficulties I faced when all those lists had to be converted into one comprehensive database. I needed minimum knowledge of Hungarian, Dutch and Czech Jewish Genealogy, which I didn't have. Through help of various people from JewishGen SIGs I managed to acquire that basic knowledge.

I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to Joyce Field, JewishGen Research Director for her constant help, dedication, persistence and vision. I wish to thank Warren Blatt and Michael Tobias from JewishGen for their wonderful masterpiece, converting a giant database into one compact, comprehensive and simple searchable database. My thanks are also extended to Yad Vashem for scanning the lists and giving them to JewishGen for proofreading and eventually post them in the Internet. I also thank Shalom Eitan from Israel for his help in obtaining the permission from the Jewish Agency to publish the lists on the web. Heartfelt thanks to the Jewish Agency for its agreement to post the lists and have them available to the whole Jewish world. I learned that recently the Sochnut closed their "The Search Bureau for Missing Relatives" headed by Batya Unterschatz for many years and which used the Survivor Registers as part of their main sources, but I hope it will be re-opened, because people are still searching their lost family members and the hope is the last to die.

Finally I wish to dedicate this project to all those who did not return and who are not registered in this book. ■

The Register of Jewish Survivors can now be searched online at
www.jewishgen.org/databases/Holocaust/0064_PinkasNitzolimI.html

CASE STUDIES: FLEEING FROM WARTHEGAU TO SÜDOSTPREUSSEN

BY JAN GRABOWSKI

Two and a half years of forced seclusion had further exacerbated the already uneasy relationships between the Jewish and the Polish communities. When, in the spring of 1942, the Germans began closing down the ghettos and sending their population to the death camps, the Jews who escaped had to face a changed, often unknown, and most often hostile, world. Fleeing one ghetto in order to move to another one, considered safer, was one of the most common strategies for survival among the Jews of northern Mazovia. Early in the morning on April 21, 1942 the Gestapo office in Plock (Schrottersburg) received a telephone call from an informer (Vertraunes-Mann or V-Mann) that a Mrs. Lehman had rented a truck with a driver and requested a ride from Gabin to Strzegowo (Mlawa county). Since the same Mrs. Lehman had rented a truck in March from Peters Shipping firm, and was said to have illegally transported Jews, the Gestapo had reason to believe that the present trip involved smuggling Jews as well.¹ On orders of Regierungsrat (government adviser)² Hinze, the truck was followed by a Gestapo car and intercepted on the southern outskirts of Plock. During the search of the vehicle the Gestapo officers discovered six Jews (5 adults and one child) hidden in the back of the truck, while Mrs. Lehmann sat in the front, in the cabin, next to the driver. By 10pm, the whole group was incarcerated in the Gestapo headquarters in Plock, awaiting interrogation.

It did not take much time to establish that Mrs. Lehmann's real name was Eva Stuczynska. The arrested woman claimed to be Russian, Greek-catholic expatriate living in Poland since the nineteen twenties. Fortunately for the suspect, the Gestapo did not probe any further. In fact Eva Stuczynska was not Russian but Jewish, and had, for quite some time, been involved in smuggling Jews out of the ghettos. According to the accused woman, her interest in helping the Jews was based upon purely financial calculation, since the refugees agreed to pay hefty sums for bringing them to the relative safety of the Strzegowo ghetto. Over the next nine months between her capture and her transfer to KL Auschwitz on January 12, 1943, Eva Stuczynska displayed extraordinary courage, resilience and wits that enabled her to save her own life, as well as the lives of her five underage children. Despite repeated beatings and brutal interrogations she stubbornly clung to her legend of 'Aryan-Russian' origin³. She claimed to have resettled to Poland from the post-revolutionary Russia and to have later married a Polish Jew, Stuczynski, who agreed to take care of her and her equally Aryan children. Nevertheless, the Gestapo officers had doubts, all the more since

other people arrested in the April raid indicated that Stuczynska was, in fact, Jewish.⁴

At this point we might want to turn to the testimony of Lucja Stuczynska, the oldest daughter of Eva.⁵ Shortly after the liberation in 1945 this 19-year old woman gave an account of her war-time experiences to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKZP). Her deposition has been preserved in the files of the Jewish Historical Institute, in Warsaw.

In May 1941 someone denounced my uncle Leon Stuczynski and his whole group to the Germans. They were all caught in a village, accused of smuggling food to the ghetto. My mother escaped and went into hiding in Gabin; the others were dispatched to W³oc³awek, and hanged. No one was left to supply the ghetto in food... In the winter of 1942 some two weeks before the action [liquidation of the ghetto] we left Gabin and moved to Strzegowo, where we established ourselves as Aryans. Our family included five children aged 4 to 16 and our mother. Papa, because of his accent, had to be placed in the ghetto.⁶ The action in Strzegowo started eight months later. One wanted to gain time... In the very beginning of our stay in Strzegowo Mama was caught transporting Jews from G³bin and Gostynin to Strzegowo and to Mlawa, and placed in a Gestapo prison in Plock. She was sold out by Kazimierz Banasiak, a truck driver from Plock, working for the Gestapo. During the investigation I visited Plock three times. They took me to the ghetto, to see whether some Jews would recognize me. They learned nothing. To the very end they thought we were Aryan.

The 16-year old Lucja was released by the Gestapo in order to take care of her younger siblings, while her mother underwent further beatings and interrogations. In the eyes of the Germans, "an Aryan who helps the Jews can never be pardoned."⁷ Eva Stuczynska's victory came when the Gestapo finally concluded that "from the police point of view she should be treated as a Pole."⁸ That decision, made in December 1942, paved way for Stuczynska's later transfer to KL Auschwitz. It may seem as a grotesque form of victory, but in practical terms it meant that the woman was shipped not to a death camp (as she would have been, if found Jewish) but to a concentration camp where the odds of survival were significantly better. The official recognition of her 'Aryanness' was a guarantee of survival for her children, as well.⁹

In her postwar deposition Lucja claimed to have visited her mother in Plock Gestapo jail. Indeed, going back to the

dossiers of the Ciechanów Gestapo, I was surprised to find her statement corroborated by letters, addressed to the German authorities written in neat schoolchild's handwriting. On August 4, 1942 the 16 year old "Tola Lucie Studow" wrote to Plock Gestapo office:

My mother Eva Stuczynski is being held, since April 20, in Plock prison. She has left behind five children aged 5 to 16. The children have no means to survive. We are in an extremely difficult situation and we hope to see our mother back at home. We hope that this sincere plea of desperate children shall be heard. Yours deeply respectful, eldest daughter Tola Luzie Studow.¹⁰

As one can deduce from Lucie's testimony, her plea was successful and she was able to see her incarcerated mother -- a rare feat in the off-limits dungeons of the Plock Gestapo. One year later, after her mother had been transferred to the concentration camp, the energetic girl wrote a letter to Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz with the same request. This time, however, she was unable to break through the Nazi bureaucracy. On June 26, 1942 Auschwitz denied her request to "visit prisoner no. 19953."¹¹

Between the visits to her jailed mother and the struggle to feed the four younger siblings, Lucja Stuczynska kept in touch with her father, who lived in the closed-off Strzegowo ghetto: "It is difficult to have your mother in prison, father in the ghetto, yourself to pretend to be a gentile and to support four younger siblings, including a boy."¹² She intervened twice on behalf of her father, but in the end he decided to stay with other Jews in the ghetto:

He told me that he prefers to die together with all the others, than to live and to carry a death sentence in his pocket. Imagine my surprise when I read in a letter from my mother [from Auschwitz] that she conveys warm regards from my father. I refused to believe, I was certain that she wanted to raise my spirits, but I found out that the entire transport from Strzegów went straight to the oven. They had left just a few men to work; among them - my father. My parents met one another while working close to the latrines and they kept seeing each other nearly every day. Life is strange. (Later on) Father was taken in transport and never came back. My mother was able to escape from the transport and, owing to the speedy arrival of the Russians -- she survived."

The saga of the Stuczynski family is further corroborated by another report filed shortly after the end of the war. A Feliks Kisielewski escaped from the Strzegowo ghetto in

early 1942, but kept in touch with Lucja Stuczynska "who lived there with Aryan papers... and who often jumped the fence to get to the ghetto, where she had a father, whom she provided for."¹³

The Stuczynski family owed their survival to a combination of courage, resourcefulness and - to a certain degree - to a fair number of miracles, without which a Jew stood no chance of surviving in the occupied Poland. The other Jews caught at the gates of Plock during the April 21 night ambush were, however, not as fortunate as the Stuczynskis.

The flight from small ghettos of northwestern Poland was directly linked to the early phase of the planned extermination of the Jewish population of the territories

incorporated into the Reich. Gabin, from where the Jews tried to escape, lay in the so-called Warthegau, a part of Poland incorporated directly into the Reich and governed by Gauleiter Arthur Karl Grieser, one of the most brutal administrators appointed by Hitler in the conquered Polish territories.¹⁴ Strzegowo, on the other hand, found itself in the neighboring province of Sudostpreussen. While Erich Koch, the Gauleiter of this province, in terms of brutal treatment of the Jews took second seat to none, the 'evacuation' of the ghettos in the Warthegau commenced in late Fall of 1941, earlier

than in other areas. As early as July 16, 1941 the German authorities decided to ship the Jewish population of the province to the central Lodz ghetto. On January 2, 1942 Greiser had signed a secret order requesting that 'racial cleansing' of the area under his jurisdiction begin.¹⁵ In early Spring of 1942 the warnings about the feared 'deportations to the East' reached the Jews of Sudostpreussen and every Jewish community in the province was aware of the impending danger. Certain ghettos were considered safer than others. The Warsaw ghetto, for instance, with its 400,000 Jews, was seen as a safe haven because: "nothing could happen to such a large population."¹⁶ The smaller ghettos, however, were painfully aware of the precariousness of their own situation. Strzegowo was apparently perceived as a better bet than the small ghettos in the Warthegau. In principle, the Germans preferred to locate the ghettos close to the railway tracks -- which clearly indicated their temporary character and the eventual resettlement of their inhabitants. In this respect the remotely located Strzegowo ghetto was an exception to the rule. The local Jewish community was able to bribe the German bureaucrats into leaving the local Jews in place. As the victims were to learn soon the 'security' offered by the ghetto did not extend beyond November 1942, when most of Strzegowo Jews were placed on peasant horse-carts and driven to the Mlawa railway station, from where they were sent to the

The Stuczynski family owed their survival to a combination of courage, resourcefulness and a fair number of miracles

gas chambers of Treblinka. The remaining inhabitants of the Strzegowo ghetto were herded to the trains at the end of November and sent to Oswiecim.¹⁷

Moses Wand, the chief of the Gabin Jewish council (Judenrat) and one of six Jews intercepted by the Gestapo on the road to Plock, seized the imminent threat on Friday, April 17, 1942 when he had seen “a grouping of political leaders, SA people and policemen. This, in turn, indicated that the Jews were to be resettled. I have to add,” continued Wand, “that I have heard some time ago that in other counties [Kreisen] the Jews were being resettled.”¹⁸ Drawing on his acquaintance with the German mayor of Gabin, Wand was able to gain some time and escaped together with his wife, Chaja, and his seven-year old son Natek. On their way out, they stumbled upon three other people, with whom they had shared the house. They fled together, towards the woods, hoping to reach the house of Maciejewski, the Polish forest ranger.¹⁹ Maciejewski and his family have been involved for some time, as it seems, in helping the Jews. After three days spent in ranger’s barn, Moses Wand and the other hidden Jews were relieved to see the long-awaited arrival of the truck with Eva Stuczynska. Their relief was short-lived, however, because Jerzy, the eldest son of the ranger spotted a civilian car parked in the woods, close to the house. Assuming (quite correctly) the worst, Maciejewski ordered the Jews out, and the whole group embarked upon the ill-fated trip to Plock. After a brief period of interrogations, the five adult Jews were sentenced to death by hanging “in a public execution in the Strzegowo ghetto.” On orders of Regierungsrat Hinze the seven year old Natek was ordered back to Gabin, into the custody of the Jewish council. The Judenrat, however, together with all other Gabin Jews had in the meantime already been ‘evacuated’. Nevertheless, Gabin’s mayor promised to deliver the child into the hands of the ‘evacuation commando’ the very next day.²⁰

What happened to the Gestapo agent who denounced Stuczynska? Truck driver Kazimierz Banasiak, mentioned by Lucja Stuczynski as the *V-Mann*, was called in for questioning on May 26, 1942.²¹ Having asserted his innocence, he was sent back home the same day. The secret police wanted to make certain that the driver accepted no money from the condemned Jews before and during their trip from Gabin to Plock.

Notes

¹ Ibidem, “Verdacht steht, sich als Deutsche ausgegeben zu haben. Sie hat ausserdem Juden aus dem Gau Wartheland in den Reg.-Bezirk Zichenau eingeschmuggelt.”

² There were several civilian ranks in the German secret police, starting with the Kriminalassistent, to Kriminalrat (criminal police commissar), to Regierungsrat (government adviser) and to Oberregierungsrat. Regierungsrat’s equivalent in the SS was a Sturbannfuhrer and

Oberregierungsrat’s - an Obersturmbannfuhrer. (A. Eichmann’s testimony: T/37, p. 250).

³ During interrogations Eva Stuczynska was beaten with an iron rod. One of the Gestapo officers told her that she should understand that “Jews had no rights” (ja, wir verstehen, aber Juden haben kein Recht). ZIH, Relacje, 301/303.

⁴ The explanations given by the arrested woman grew increasingly complex. In order to justify her own escape from Gabin, Stuczynska recalled the hostility of German mayor of the town, whom she claimed to have accused of too much sympathy toward the Jews!. The mayor threatened her with reprisals. Numerous passages of interrogation protocols have been underlined in red ink by the Gestapo officers, with word “Jude?” added on the margin.

⁵ Zydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute, - hereafter ZIH) Relacje (Narratives) No. 303, collection 301.

⁶ The Jewish upper classes, and the intelligentsia in particular, often spoke fluent Polish and could blend more easily with the “gentile” society. The working class of the ghetto, however, spoke Yiddish and their Polish (if any) had a heavy accent, known as “zydlaczenie”; a dead giveaway.

⁷ ZIH, 303/301, p. 2.

⁸ IP, GZ, 148/6123, ...in staatspolizeilicher Hinsicht als Polin behandelt wurde.

⁹ In the case of Ewa Stuczynski, the Gestapo attempted to establish her Jewishness conducting interviews in the Strzegowo and Gabin ghettos. In other cases, they sent pictures of the suspects to more distant areas, hoping for a positive identification. See the dossier of Helene Noak (Melcarz), IPN, Warszawa, GZ, 148/4065. Noak was arrested in April 1943 in Lublin, in the eastern part of Generalgouvernement. Her photographs have been sent and circulated among Poles living in Krasnosielisk and Makow Mazowiecki, not far from Warsaw.

¹⁰ IPN, GZ, 148/6123, fol 126. “Gesuch! Seit von 20 April 1942 befindet sich meine Mutter Ewa Stuczynski in dem Strafanstalt Schrottersburg. Sie verliess zu Hause fuenf unvolljaehrige Kinder im Alter von 5 bis 16 Jahre ohne Mittel zum Leben. Da wir befinden sich in sehr schwerer lage bitten wir sehr hoeflich um die Entlassung unserer Mutter nach Hause. Wir hoffen, dass die herzliche Bitte der armen Kinder wird beruecksichtig. Hochachtungsvoll die Aelteste Tochter Tola Luzie Studow“.

¹¹ IPN, GZ, 148/6123, fol. 132-133., Letter dated May 19, 1943,

¹² ZIH, 303/301 p. 2. Hiding Jewish boys was, for obvious reasons, considered the most dangerous task of all.

¹³ ZIH, Relacje, Coll. 301/310 relation of Feliks Kisielewski, born June 17, 1919.

¹⁴ Greiser’s office in Poznan was responsible for the first

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

KONIN CEMETERY MEMORIAL PROJECT STATUS REPORT

BY ROB PROSPERI WITH ADA HOLTZMAN

As most readers will recall, the Gombin Society has been planning a project to erect a memorial at the Konin cemetery since almost immediately after the trip to Gombin in 1999. Though it only took a few months for the impact of the visit to the mass grave on the edge of Konin's Catholic cemetery to stir several people to start exploring ideas for a memorial project, it has unfortunately taken until now to get a concrete plan assembled, approved and coordinated with support in Poland.

Background & History

For readers that may not be aware of this project, it came about as a result of a trip to the Konin cemetery during the Society's fall 1999 trip to Poland. Though the basic facts surrounding the cemetery and Jewish mass grave were known prior to the trip to Poland, actually visiting the mass grave in the Konin cemetery was an extremely moving event for many, if not all of the attendees. (Note: Please see the references below for details regarding the history of Konin, the Work Camp, Gombiners that were sent there and the creation of the mass grave in the Catholic cemetery.)

The first thing I noticed upon arriving at the site of the mass grave is how banal it appears. Located on the outer edge of the Catholic cemetery, its basic appearance and condition is very similar to the surrounding graves, excluding obvious factors such as its size and the star of David on the tombstone. Not until after much reflection does the fact that it does not appear unusual make an impact. There is no damage or graffiti on the tombstone; it was neatly cared-for and flowers were found on the site when we arrived. We were told an anonymous local inhabitant looked after the gravesite and regularly cleared leaves away, brought flowers, etc. Its also notable to point out that a mere 10 feet away, just beyond the outer edge of and all along the cemetery's border, there was much trash, broken glass, etc. Because of its location on the border, this site could very easily have been neglected and become part of the outer border, however the loving care it has received for more than 50 years has very clearly led to it being treated as part of the Konin community's revered past.

The tombstone currently over the mass grave has a brief inscription in Polish, which no one ever recalls the translation of, which indirectly led to this project. Several Society members independently reached roughly the same conclusion, that the site needed another sign, preferably in English to allow more visitors to read it, which captured the basics of who was buried there and why. The project goal is simply that: to erect a stone Matzevah with a simple plaque noting

the events and a vow by Gombiner survivors and descendants to Never Forget the victims buried there.

Initial authorization and token funding was sent to Dr. Lucja Nowak, the director of The Regional Konin Museum in Poland in May of 2001, to begin the process of requesting proposals, reviewing language and wording issues with the Polish and local government, etc. After much time and numerous obstacles, we are now represented pro bono by Michael Traison, a lawyer of the International law firm Miller, Canfield, Paddock & Stone who is very active in Poland in preserving Jewish heritage. He made the breakthrough in the negotiations with Dr. Nowak and the artist who designed the Matzevah. We have recently reached basic agreement on project specifics as summarized below. We now need to act decisively to build on the recent project momentum to fund, authorize and complete the project.

Current Status

The current plan is to erect a stone matzevah, using local stone in minimalist style similar to the other tombstones in the surrounding cemetery, inlaid with a metal plaque, engraved with the following simple text, in English and Polish:

HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF JEWISH PRISONERS
MURDERED BY THE NAZIS AT THE KONIN FORCED
LABOR CAMP IN 1942 AND 1943
BEING JEWISH WAS THEIR ONLY CRIME
MAY THEY FIND ETERNAL PEACE

WE SHALL NOT FORGET YOU!

JEWISH GOMBINER SURVIVORS AND DESCENDANTS
FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, 2003

The stone will be located adjacent to the mass grave and will supplant the existing tombstone; site arrangement will be decided after final proposals have been reviewed and exact placement approved.

Project Funding Status

The current project is estimated to cost approximately US\$3000, though exact costs cannot be determined until final proposals are received and the Gombin Society Board selects and approves a specific design. To date, a little over US\$850 has been donated to the Gombin Society earmarked specifically for this project, most of that contributed several years ago. This is amazing considering the funds were donated without a dedicated fundraising effort or even a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

EDITOR'S NOTE: MEMORY LAPSES

BY NOAM LUPU

THIS ARTICLE ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN *FLAK MAGAZINE*

On April 28, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) announced an international design competition for the World Trade Center memorial, which will commemorate both the 1993 and 2001 terrorist attacks; the winning proposal will be chosen in October. One can safely assume that the competition will attract a who's who of contemporary architecture, similar to recent international memorial competitions in Berlin and Oklahoma City. But what's less clear is whether the competition will elicit a substantive debate over how to memorialize the victims; so far, the competition's organizers seem to assume that picking a design will be a straightforward process. Which is a shame, because the sheer size of the project presents the opportunity to reconsider how our society remembers its national tragedies.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, it seemed everyone had an opinion on whether to rebuild, what to rebuild and how to memorialize. Temporary memorials ranged from spontaneous collections of letters and flowers to Paul Myoda and Julian La Verdere's Towers of Light. In November, Fred Bernstein published his proposal for twin piers projecting into New York Harbor that would mimic the WTC towers and symbolically point toward Ellis Island. And both insiders and the public were incensed when the LMDC didn't seem to play along. After the public meeting last July in which the LMDC unveiled its six concepts for redeveloping the WTC site, nearly everyone involved criticized them for "look[ing] like Albany" -- shorthand for a lack of imagination.

Many civic groups claimed, as the founder of September's Mission, a group representing victim's families, told one newspaper, that "it's a waste of time to put site plans together without a memorial program in place." Indeed, in its recommendations to city and state officials, the coalition of architects and urban planners known as New York New Visions insisted that the memorial process be "a formal, transparent, and open process to determine the nature and location of memorials."

Nevertheless, American critics, perhaps preoccupied with regime changes abroad, have remained uncharacteristically silent since the LMDC's not-so-transparent selection of Studio Daniel Libeskind's design. This despite the usual New York propensity toward argument, despite the unapologetic nationalism of Libeskind's overt 1,776-foot tower, his Park of Heroes, the Wedge of Light and the physical

improbability that "the sun will shine without shadow, in perpetual tribute" into his structure between 8:46 am and 10:30 am every Sept. 11.

More importantly, this silence comes despite a great deal of progress over the past two decades in understanding memorialization. Since the so-called "memory boom" in architecture began in the late 1970s, artists and thinkers have grappled with the problems posed by memorials, their designs and how the public interacts with them. The problems are many, but they largely break down into three questions: First, can memorials -- which are often designed to evoke a particular meaning -- truly provoke remembrance of all those who died? On the other hand, by causing us to engage with memorials themselves rather than the event it stands for, is it possible that they actually distort the truth? And third, given all this, can we develop nontraditional memorials that will remain true to the event and the purpose they serve?

In response, artists and architects across the globe have been designing memorials that do a better job of evoking memory, of representing events too terrible to imagine and perhaps impossible to represent. Their work, though, hasn't been without controversy. Maya Lin's minimalist Vietnam Memorial in Washington created a space that allowed for reflection, though it was criticized for belying the horrors of the war. Friedrich St. Florian's design for the World War II memorial now under construction on the National Mall in Washington has been criticized for its classical iconography (including sculpted eagles and laurel wreaths), which many architectural observers associate with Albert Speer's plans for Berlin under Adolf Hitler.

And yet for all this rethinking, these sorts of questions are strangely absent from the WTC competition. Remarkably, one of the jury's members, James E. Young, has asked these very sorts of questions of the competition for the Berlin Holocaust memorial in his book *On Memory's Edge*. Young even asserted (despite its lamentable phrasing), "Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions and exhibitions in Germany than any single 'final solution' to Germany's memorial problem." But Young has failed to bring such a level of critique

to the WTC debate.

At the same time, though, Young's assertion suggests a solution. Imagine just such an annual memorial competition. Imagine the sort of unfinished memorial that such an ongoing process would construct. Imagine an exhibition space, rather than a concretized memorial, that would display, year after year, new designs for a memorial never to

*Imagine the kinds
of memorials we
would be designing
today at
Gettysburg, Verdun
or Guernica*

be realized. Such an ongoing competition would urge generation after generation to grapple with the magnitude of the 1993 and 2001 attacks. Indeed, one of the guiding principles delimited by the LMDC for competitors is to “inspire and engage people to learn more about the events and impact of Sept. 11, 2001 and February 23, 1993.”

Imagine the expected 5 million annual visitors to the WTC site constantly engaging with new and old proposals -- proposals submitted in 2003, in 2013 and in 2023. (Imagine the kinds of memorials we would be designing today at Gettysburg, Verdun or Guernica.) It would be an evolving memorial (“evolve over time” is another of the LMDC’s guiding principles), one that reinvents itself each year, perhaps even responding to itself. Over time, the WTC site memorial would develop a dialogue on how to fulfill its myriad tasks.

Come July, artists and architects from around the world will have submitted their designs to the LMDC’s jury, limiting themselves to the space delimited by Libeskind, to conveying “the spirit and vision” of the Libeskind design, and to presenting a structure that, whatever its accommodations, will never attain consensus. New York and the country seem content to have a priori disqualified the likes of once-exalted nontraditional conceptions such as the Towers of Light or the twin piers. They should reconsider the omission and give Lower Manhattan an ongoing memorial that truly fulfills its complex mission of remembering, healing, engaging and evolving. ■

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

plans of mass extermination of the Jews. These projects included “swift methods of execution that would be a more humanitarian way of solving the Jewish question than (the anticipated) starvation.” See: S. Datner, J. Gumkowski and K. Leszczynski, “Zagłada Żydów w Obozach na Ziemiach Polskich” (The Annihilation of Jews in Camps on Polish Territories), in: *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce (GKBZHW P)*, XIII (1960), p. 63.

¹⁵ Madajczyk, Czesław, *Polityka III Rzeszy w Okupowanej Polsce* (The Policy of the III Reich in the Occupied Poland), vol. 2, Warszawa, 1970, p. 308-309.

¹⁶ Ringelblum archive XX.

¹⁷ Michal Grynberg: *Zydzi w Rejencji Ciechanowskiej, 1939-1942*, (Jews in the Ciechanow District, 1939-1942) PWN 1984, p. 73.

¹⁸ IPN (Warszawa), Gestapo Zichenau (Ciechanow), 148/6123, fol 16, interrogation of Moses Wand, April 22, 1942. Wand, Chaja and Moses Wand, both interrogated on April 23. Interrogation of Frajda Zolna, April 21, 1942.

¹⁹ IPN, GZ, 148/6123 and 5399, interrogations of Hinda Rudnik, April 21, 1942.

²⁰ Natek has been delivered to Gabin on April 23, 1942.

²¹ IPN Warszawa, 148/6123 fol 43-45. Interrogation of Kazimierz B. May 26, 1942. ■

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

specific project plan. However, it is also a clear indication of how deeply Konin and the cemetery history affected those who have heard the story. To date, contributors include several people who visited the site that rainy day in September 1999 as well as a few others who have only heard the story.

Please consider making a contribution to the Gombin Society to help us complete this project. We believe we can complete the project within the estimated cost, however we need to proceed relatively quickly in order to take advantage of the recent successful negotiations. Please send your contributions marked “Konin Cemetery Project” and they will be set aside from other Society funds, exclusively to fund this project. We will record all gifts and thank all non-anonymous contributors in a future issue of this newsletter, however your true thanks will be in knowing you’ve helped keep the memory of the Konin victims alive for future generations.

Personally, I would like to deeply thank two people: Leon Zamosc for bringing the Konin cemetery history to my attention and arranging the Gombin Society’s visit during our trip to Gombin in 1999, and Ada Holtzman for her burning passion, inexhaustible source of knowledge of all things Gombin, and amazing patience regarding this project. Please help me thank them by helping us complete this important project, which will help preserve the memory of those that suffered at Konin as well as educate unknown others who will help future generations trying to look back and understand.

Additional Background and Reading

1. Jewishgen’s Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities: http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol1_00235.html

2. Ada Holtzman’s websites:

<http://www.zchor.org/konmatz.htm>

<http://www.zchor.org/ALEI.HTM>

<http://www.zchor.org/KONDEAD.HTM>

3. Theo Richmond, *Konin A Quest* (Vintage Books 1996).

4. Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe Aaronson, *Alei Merorot (Leaves of Bitterness)* including diary from the Konin Labor Camp Published by Rabbi Y. Aaronson, B’nei Brak, 1996. ■

Visit the Konin Memorial Initiative
website on the Gombin Society
website at
www.gombin.org
to view the list of documented
victims buried at the Konin mass
grave



GOMBIN JEWISH HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

SECRETARY: MINNA PACKER

PRESIDENT: BERNIE GUYER

TREASURER: MINDY PROSPERI

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ELLIOT BALLEEN

HAROLD BOLL

RONNY BOLL

JEREMY FREEDMAN

ALISA GUYER

NOAM LUPU

JOE RICHARDS

REPRESENTATIVE IN ISRAEL: ADA HOLTZMAN

REPRESENTATIVE IN BRITAIN: JEREMY FREEDMAN

The Gombin Society (GJHGS)
320 County Route 105
Highland Mills, NY 10930

TO: