

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 descendents. 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, contact the Gombin Society by mail at 185 Skyline Drive, Highland Mills NY 10930 or by email. www.gombinsociety.org

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Gombin Synagogue Model at Jewish Museum of Florida Exhibit

On recent display at the Jewish Museum of Florida was an exhibit that tells stories of Polish shtetls and some of their Jewish families who settled in Florida. The genesis of the exhibit was the donation by Englishman Peter Maurice of ten models of 17th & 18th century Polish wooden synagogues. He researched and built the 1/40-scale models. One of these is the Gombin Synagogue (see photo, right)



Gombin was given the status of a town in 1437. Located on the road from Plock to Lubitz, it developed as a commercial center for the surrounding farms. In 1795, after the Third Partition of Poland, the town was controlled by Prussia (Germany). From 1815-1918, it was part of the territory of Congress Poland.

Jews were first recorded in the 1507 census, but probably lived there prior to that date. In the early 18th century, during renewed development in the town, the Jewish community grew. The majority made their living in commerce or as artisans. However, they were limited as to which streets they could live on, and between 1823-1862, the Jews

were restricted to a special part of town. In 1915, in the midst of World War I, the town was occupied by the Germans, who allowed the residents to organize politically and socially. In the January 1917 municipal elections, Jewish candidates won 12 of the 18 council seats. Between the two world wars, most Jews in Gombin continued to make a living from small-scale commerce, peddling and artisanal work.

The German army occupied Gombin on September 7, 1939. Immediately, the Germans began forced labor on the Jews. On September 21, the Jews were ordered to the New (**cont. p2**)

B'nai Gombin is going online.

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It's Not Your *Bubbe's* Poland Anymore!

by Arthur Gertzman

Most American Jews have roots in Eastern Europe with a majority coming from Poland. This ancient country had anti-Semitic policies for all of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It became the center of the Holocaust in World War II with three million Jews murdered there. Auschwitz, the largest Nazi extermination camp was in Poland.

Poland had been brutally occupied by German forces from September 1939 until the end of the war in 1945. While western Germany entered onto a path of democracy and moral self analysis, Poland, occupied by Soviet forces in 1945, continued under another politically oppressive communist government until the fall of the USSR in 1990. Anti-Semitism by Poles continued

in Poland during, and even after the war. Soviet policies became anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli as a result of the Israel-Arab wars and these policies were imposed on the Polish Communist government. The natural conclusion of American Jews was that Poland had always been anti-Semitic and continued to be so in the post WW II period and up to the modern day.

I travelled to Poland in December 2011 with a group of American and Australian Jewish leaders. I was invited because of my volunteer role as President of the Gombin Society, a U.S. successor group to a Landsmannschaft (Neighbors) group from the Polish Shtetl, Gombin, where my mother's family had lived up to the War.

My visit took us to Warsaw, Lublin, Krakow and Ulanov, a

typical former Jewish Shtetl. We also spent a day at Auschwitz. The group was led by the *Forum for Dialogue Among Nations*, a non-Jewish, Polish group working to improve the understanding of Polish Christians about the Holocaust and the long-term anti-Semitism that existed in Poland. I learned that a major effort by the Polish government and the new, educated and modern leaders of Poland is making great strides toward exposing the long term nature of Polish anti-Semitism. The *Forum* is using very creative teaching techniques to open a dialogue with the modern Polish youth in the middle and high schools to bridge the gap between the attitudes of the older, more conservative Polish generation and the next generation still in their formative years.

(continued, p. 3)

Gombin Synagogue Model at Jewish Museum (concluded)

Market Square, where they were abused, and some killed, while the synagogue was burned down. In early 1940, all 2,100 Jews were evicted from their homes and moved to a separate section (ghetto) of town. By May 1942, all the Jews of Gombin had been transported to concentration camps (primarily Chelmno). Only 212 Jews from Gombin survived the war: 180 who escaped to the Soviet Union during the German invasion and 32 who hid.

The Gombin Synagogue was built 1710. Structurally different from its contemporaries, the women's section was within the main building, at the western end of the first floor above the polush

(vestibule). The towers were capped with traditional Eastern European onion shaped cupolas, no doubt copied from the local Orthodox Church.

Its estimated dimensions were 53' x 59' with a building height of 55'. There was a flag on top of each tower; the one on the south tower bearing the date 1710 of construction, the other bearing the date 1893 when the synagogue was renovated.

The synagogue was considered to be of great artistic merit and was even admired by Napoleon who gave two French flags and other pieces that adorned the interior of the synagogue until it was

destroyed. The interior was in the Baroque style with a three-tier Ark of the Law.

Between the two world wars, the Polish government declared the synagogue a national monument, and attempted to purchase it from the community in order to turn it into a museum. Unfortunately, the offer was refused. If it were no longer a synagogue, the Germans might not have destroyed it.

The Nazis burned the synagogue on September 21, 1939 (Yom Kippur).

From the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami FL

Message from Gombin Society President: Now is the Time to Support our Projects

Last December, I visited Gombin and saw for myself the deterioration in the state of the Jewish Cemetery that we reclaimed in 1999. Just as 15 years ago, when we mobilized the Gombin Jewish community around the world, we now need the participation of all Gombiners to support the work for sustaining our Jewish heritage in Gombin.

The Board of the Gombin Society has voted to raise money to repair the monument made of recovered grave markers (*matzevah*) worn by weather since its construction in 1999. Also we need to repair the cemetery gate, re-landscape the grounds and paint the perimeter fence. It is a big task and we will tackle these jobs in sequence. The whole project will require an expenditure of \$25,000. We have agreed to begin the first phase with a \$4,400 budget to complete the repair and preservation of the cemetery monument in Gombin.

Some of our board members are launching the project with an initial gift totaling \$1,500. We are asking all members of the Society to donate at least \$100. In addition, the Society will match all of our gifts up to a maximum of \$5,000. As a gift for a donation of \$100 or more, we will provide a boxed DVD copy of Minna Packer's wonderful film, "*Back to Gombin*". With this financial support, we can begin the repair and renovation project during late spring and complete it by the summer. We hope you will join us in this effort. Please send checks to our treasurer, Michael Kaplan, at 45 Copper Mine Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

The goal of the Gombin Society is to honor our parents' roots in Gombin. The maintenance of the Jewish cemetery is one of our most important accomplishments and obligations. In addition, in Poland, we are creating a dialogue with current (non-Jewish) residents of Gombin, through an educational program. To further our educational efforts, we have modernized the website, www.gombinsociety.org and made available historic photos of Jews of Gombin. You can also learn more about the Jewish history of Gombin by visiting Ada Holtzman's excellent website, www.zchor.org. Finally, we are planning to celebrate the 90th Anniversary (May 2013) of the founding, in 1923, of the Gombin Society.

Thank you for your support. Please contact me personally if you have questions.

Shalom, **Arthur A. Gertzman**, President, GJHGS, Tel 732 672 7602, arthuragertzman@hotmail.com

Donate now to the Campaign for Gombin
Goal is to raise \$25,000 to...
Repair and Restore the Gombin Jewish Cemetery
Educate the next generation of Jewish Gombiners
Make checks payable to GJHGS and mail to address above

Gertzman: Not your *Bubbe's* Poland (Concluded)

I have been speaking about my experiences on this trip and what I learned about the new Polish attitudes about anti-Semitism and Poland's place in the new Europe. Among the important points are:

-Yiddish is being studied by more people in Poland than in the US

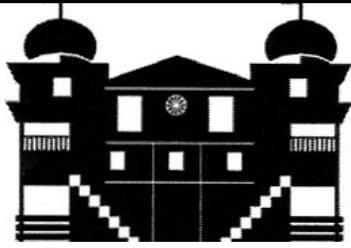
and Israel combined; only about 25,000 Jews live now in Poland.

-The US has the strongest relationship with Poland as compared to any other European country.

-Eight Polish universities have Jewish Studies programs which are all fully subscribed.

-The new phenomenon of *Philo-Semitism* is occurring in Poland.

-The largest Jewish festival in Europe occurs each year in Krakow, Poland.



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Save the Date - 2013

Gombin Society's 90th Anniversary Celebration

May 19, 2013, New York City



**185 Skyline Drive,
Highland Mills NY 10930**

Return Service Requested