

B'NAI GOMBIN

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

Issue 6, February 1998

Editor: Noam Lupu

Special Issue: Memorial Projects

- | | | | |
|--|--------|--|---------|
| About the Society | page 2 | A Letter from London | page 9 |
| Editor's Note | page 2 | Saving Jewish Cemeteries in
Poland | page 10 |
| If We Do Not Remember Them,
Who Will? | page 3 | from <i>Survey of Historic Jewish
Monuments in Poland</i> | |
| Gombin Memorial Monument at
Chelmno | page 4 | Institutional Support for the Gombin
Cemetery Project | page 11 |
| Saving the Gombin Jewish
Cemetery | page 6 | Our Experiences in Gombin | page 12 |
| Be A Part of This Miracle
by Mindy Prosperi | page 8 | by Jeremy Freedman | |
| The Blessing of Deductible
Donations | page 9 | Zbigniew Lukaszewski Speaks | page 13 |
| by Steve Tadelis | | interview by Leon Zamosc | |
| | | A Book of Gombiner Names | page 15 |
| | | by Jeremy Freedman | |

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society (GJHGS) is a non-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 P.O. Box 503052, San Diego, CA 92150.

©1998 Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society is a non-profit organization, open to all people, from all over the world, who have an interest in Gombin Jewish history and genealogy. The goals of the Gombin Society are:

- To educate the public about the history of the Gombin Jewish community and the genealogy of the Jews of Gombin.
- To collect, teach, disseminate, and publish knowledge and information on the history of the Gombin Jewish community and the genealogy of the Jews of Gombin.
- To encourage all interested persons to pursue historical and genealogical research focused on the Gombin Jewish community.
- To undertake activities aimed at protecting, preserving, and restoring vital records, documents, and physical relics and landmarks of the culture and history of the Gombin Jews.
- To undertake activities to preserve the memory of the Gombin Jews who perished in the Holocaust.
- To assist the activities of all other organizations whose objectives are related to the preservation of the heritage of the Jews of Gombin.

B'nai Gombin is the quarterly newsletter of the Gombin Society - GJHGS. Its main purposes are to inform Gombiners of projects and activities of interest to them, as well as to share experiences and writings. Any articles, stories, poems or other genres may be submitted for publishing. The views and opinions expressed in *B'nai Gombin* are not necessarily those of the Gombin Society. For back issues contact Noam Lupu at the Gombin Society's address.

Gombin also has a World Wide Web page at <<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/gombin.html>> including information about Gombin's history, the Holocaust in Gombin, the Gombin Society, the E-mail Mailing List, *B'nai Gombin* and more.

EDITOR'S NOTE

I recently had a rather disheartening conversation with a good friend of mine whose grandfather had just passed away. I told him of my work aimed at recording my grandparents' oral histories and documenting their lives and Holocaust survival stories. My friend, whose grandfather was a Holocaust survivor, reluctantly admitted that his grandfather took with him not only his survival story, but the history of his life in pre-war Poland as long with any memory of his brothers, sisters or parents.

My immediate reaction was disbelief at my friend's loss. It was one thing to lose a grandfather, but somehow I felt that with that loss, my friend lost so much more. The memories of his grandfather's entire family, of the shtetl he called home, of his journeys through the Holocaust, of the horrors he witnessed — all these died with him. The loss seemed so incredible to me, as if an entire shtetl had been wiped out all over again.

And so my conviction was only renewed, my burning passion to remember only rekindled, my efforts to save the cemetery of Gombin and memorialize the victims of Chelmno given further significance. It is only now that I truly understand the reasons I have always felt these projects were so important, vital to the memory of the Holocaust, vital to the memory of Gombin, and vital to the memory of so many family members I was never given the chance to know. In some ways I think I found new significance in the age-old saying "If not now, when; if not me, who?"

There are plenty of appeals in this newsletter asking you to reach into your pockets, but I would like to ask you to reach into your heart, to look at the past, at your ancestors and at Gombin, and preserve it for the future, for your children and for Gombin.

Noam Lupu

IF WE DO NOT REMEMBER THEM, WHO WILL?

A call to all Gombiner landsleit, survivors and descendants

In 1998 we will:

Dedicate a memorial to the Gombiner Holocaust victims at Chelmno

Build a fence to save the Jewish cemetery in Gombin

Thanks to your help, the Gombin Society has been able to do much to educate Gombiner descendants. Three hundred families read our newsletter in English and Hebrew, we have produced several publications about the Gombin Jews, we have encouraged the young to investigate their family genealogy, we have helped Gombiners to contact relatives and friends, and we have organized gatherings to honor our parents and senior Gombiners.

We are now urging you to support a cause of supreme importance: the initiative to dedicate a memorial for the Gombiners murdered at Chelmno and to build a fence to save the Jewish cemetery in Gombin. At the Chelmno extermination camp there are monuments and plaques in remembrance of Holocaust victims from other towns, but nothing has been done to memorialize the Gombin Jews. And in Gombin, where the Jewish cemetery is desecrated daily and threatened by nearby construction, our ancestors' graves are totally unprotected.

Now, after two years of efforts, the Gombin Society has succeeded in finding institutional support and initiating projects to finally dedicate a Gombin memorial at Chelmno and do something to save and protect the Gombin cemetery. This issue of *B'nai Gombin* offers extensive information about both projects and why it is so important to support these initiatives. You will learn about the work that will be done and the costs involved. You will also find a form with all the details on how to make your own contribution for this wonderful cause. We wish to highlight the following points:

- Your donation will be tax deductible. The Gombin Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has been officially recognized by the IRS.
- You will be able to choose and designate your donation for (a) both projects as needed, (b) Chelmno memorial only, or (c) Gombin cemetery only. You will be also able to dedicate your donation in remembrance of a particular person or family.
- Your name and the amount of your donation will appear with the names of all the donors in the newsletter *B'nai Gombin* which circulates among all Gombiners, and in the second (expanded) edition of the Gombin Memorial Book, which will be published by the Gombin Society.

We have already obtained financial support for a good part of the costs: two foundations will provide help, and you will see the names of many Gombiners who have already donated for the projects. Still, we will need more support to reach the targets, and we urge you to participate and contribute as much as you can.

We must bear witness to the Gombiner Jews murdered at Chelmno;

Jewish law imposes on us a duty to protect our cemetery

**PLEASE JOIN IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THESE MORAL OBLIGATIONS
MAIL IN YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TODAY**

GOMBIN MEMORIAL MONUMENT AT CHELMNO

Gombin was occupied by the German army in September 1939. On arrival, the Germans subjected the Jews to forced labor and abuses. A few weeks later they burned the town's wooden synagogue, and early in 1940 the Jews were concentrated in a ghetto. In the following months, about 200 were deported to labor camps, many of them eventually ending up in Auschwitz. In the Spring of 1942 the Germans liquidated the ghetto, dispatching the more than 2,000 remaining men, women and children to the extermination camp at Chelmno. Only 212 Gombiner Jews survived the Holocaust.

Today, the Konin Regional Museum is in charge of the exhibit and compounds at the Chelmno extermination camp. The museum facilitates the installation of memorials to those who wish to perpetuate and honor the memory of the Holocaust victims from their towns of origin. Landsmen and descendants have dedicated monuments and plaques to Jewish communities from many towns of the region, but nothing has been done to erect a physical token of remembrance for the Gombin Jews who were murdered at Chelmno.

In August 1997, in fulfillment of the organization's mandate, the directors of the Gombin Society-GJHGS approved the realization of a project to dedicate a memorial to the Gombiner Holocaust victims. In October 1997, GJHGS director Leon Zamosc negotiated the details of the project with Lucja Pawlicka-Nowak, the director of the Konin Regional Museum, and Jan Rassumowski, the artist recommended by the museum.

The shape of the Gombin Memorial Monument plaques will be reminiscent of the classic Jewish Eastern European matzevah, and their design will include ornaments and an engraved image of the Gombin wooden shul. The plaques will bear this inscription in Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish and English:

*Gombin In Eternal Memory
In this place of horror,
the valley of the shadow of death, Chelmno
in the Spring of 1942
over 2,000 Jews from GOMBIN
men and women, young and old
were gassed and burned
by the German Nazis*

*"If only my head was filled with water
and my eyes were a fountain of tears,
Then I would weep by day and night,
Over the destruction of the flower of my people"
(Jeremiah 8:23)*

*We are still here, We shall never forget
Survivors and descendants of Gombin
from all over the world*

The plaques will be installed on a tall structure (almost 10 feet high), built of white concrete, in the shape of two triangular columns linked together (each of the six faces will be about 2.5 feet wide). The first column, featuring a stainless-steel Star of David on top, will display the plaque with the semicircular Gombin shul design and the Hebrew and Yiddish texts. The plaques will be dark-colored, made of iron, especially treated with chemicals to endure and resist weathering. The second column, topped with a Menorah made of the same dark metal, will display the plaque with the Polish and English texts.

The Gombin monument will be erected in an area that the Konin Regional Museum has reserved for memorials dedicated to Jewish communities from individual towns. Within the overall layout of the Chelmno extermination site, this area is very centrally located on the right-hand side of the path leading to the main remembrance wall. The Gombin Memorial Monument will stand in the vicinity of a small square where a tall mast with an Israeli flag is surrounded by low trees. It will be the third monument to be erected in the area, immediately following the memorials for the Jewish communities of Brzeziny and Belchatow.

The total cost of the Gombin Memorial Monument at Chelmno will be 10,000 dollars, 60% to be paid in advance installments, and 40% upon completion of the work in the Summer of 1998. This cost covers all the expenses, including the actual construction work, the plaques, and the technical-legal work to obtain all the necessary approvals and permits from the relevant authorities. It should be noted that this project does not have any institutional support: all the funds must be raised through donations from Gombiner survivors, landsmen, and descendants.

SAVING THE GOMBIN JEWISH CEMETERY

At the site of the abandoned Gombin Jewish cemetery the oaks planted by our ancestors are still standing, but the place is desecrated on a daily basis because it is not protected. The cemetery is used by children to play soccer, it is littered with garbage and bottles left behind by drunkards, and it is cited in the study of the World Monuments Fund as endangered by pollution and nearby development. Few gravestones remain at the site; most of them were used by the Germans to build roads, sidewalks, and even a bridge near the center of town.

In August 1997 the Gombin Society-GJHGS approved the realization of a project to save and protect the Jewish cemetery in Gombin. The decision came after exploratory visits by GJHGS directors and extensive consultations with the Gombin Land Lovers, a local group interested in remembering the Jews and protecting the cemetery. In October 1997, GJHGS directors Leon Zamosc and Jeremy Freedman went to Poland to negotiate the project with our partners in Warsaw and Gombin: the Nissenbaum Foundation, the Remembrance Foundation, and the Gombin Town Hall, Land Lovers, and Communal Construction Company. The project to save and protect the Gombin Jewish cemetery includes the following elements:

- Demarcation of the cemetery. In the official registry of real estate of the Gombin area, the Jewish cemetery appeared as part of a larger lot that included other adjacent areas. As a first step to protect the cemetery, it was necessary to ascertain its boundaries, which were not demarcated. The GJHGS hired a geodesic surveyor who, on the basis of a 1915 map of the Jewish cemetery, drew a new map establishing the exact cemetery limits, its perimeter (580 meters), and the total area (3.5 hectares). A legal decision was obtained from the Plock Regional Conservator Office, approving the demarcation of the Jewish cemetery. This work has now been completed, at a cost of 275 dollars.

- Recovery of gravestones. The GJHGS signed a contract with the Gombin Communal Construction Company to recover gravestones that the Germans had

- used to line about 80 meters of sidewalk in Browarna Street. It is worth mentioning here that this same company has already saved stones and fragments while doing re-pavement work in other streets of Gombin. The cost for digging out the Browarna Street gravestones, taking them to storage, and replacing the curb was 880 dollars. This work has also been completed.

- Enclosing the cemetery with fence and gate. A quality welded metal fence, set on concrete bases, will be installed around the entire perimeter of the cemetery. An iron-wrought gate, with double and single door, will be installed at the entrance. The Nissenbaum Foundation, a Warsaw-based Jewish organization that works to preserve the traces of Jewish history and culture in Poland, will be in charge of designing the project, obtaining approval from the competent authorities, and doing the actual construction work. The total cost of the fence and gate has been estimated at around 35,000 dollars. The GJHGS has committed itself to contribute 15,000 dollars, which will be raised through donations from Gombiner emigres, survivors, and descendants. Another Warsaw-based organization, the Remembrance Foundation, will contribute 3,000 dollars coming from Polish Government funds. The rest of the funding will be contributed by the Nissenbaum Foundation, thanks to the generosity of its president Zygmunt Nissenbaum.

- Protection of the cemetery. The Nissenbaum Foundation, which has already done dozens of similar projects in towns throughout Poland, will include the restored Gombin cemetery in the list of Jewish heritage sites that it monitors for protection. In Gombin itself, it has been agreed with the local priest that the permanent guard of the neighboring Catholic cemetery will also take care of the Jewish cemetery. The priest has offered to talk to his flock about the need to respect the restored Jewish cemetery, and the town's mayor has stated that special efforts will be made to protect the site.

BE A PART OF THIS MIRACLE

by Mindy S. Proseri, *GJHGS President*

Dear Gombin Society Friends & Family,

As it is now the beginning of 1998 and, as I am writing this letter, I cannot help but reflect on the year that has passed and think about what the future holds for each of us, as individuals and as a part of the Gombin Society.

As with any time, we have had our joys as well as our sorrows. Our hearts continue to go out to the Weiss-Salomon family on the loss of Nathan Weiss, one of our own members who passed away during the time of our summer gather. As many of you may remember, we dedicated the meeting in his memory. And we have had our joys, with the acceptance of our own Noam Lupu to Columbia University for this coming year.

Within our organization, we have had amazing successes. We have reprinted the Gombin Yizkor Book and have recovered the 1937 Rafel film of Gombin. Both of these valuable pieces of history have not only been saved by our group but are now being made available to libraries and historical centers worldwide. Now, institutions such as the Washington Holocaust Museum, YIVO in New York City, Yad Vashem in Israel and the Imperial War Museum in London are all holders of the Gombin Yizkor Book. Speaking of the Imperial War Museum, some of our members have been consulted by their researchers, who are working to establish their own Holocaust Museum. With some "luck," they may choose Gombin to represent a "typical" shtetl and its fate during the Holocaust.

Miracles can (and do) happen! We are in the process of completing two extremely important projects:

1) **The Chelmno Memorial:** We have designed a beautiful memorial monument and plaque to be placed in a prominent location at Chelmno, the site of the death

of many of our family members, who lived in Gombin before the war. By doing this, we will finally acknowledge their deaths and our loss publicly. We hope to have this project complete and the monument and plaque ready for installation by this coming August.

2) **The Gombin Cemetery Protection Project:** Currently, the town of Gabin, Poland is in a growth mode. The forest is going down and houses are going up. And the Jewish cemetery, in addition to having been razed, with many tombstones removed and destroyed during the war, is now used as a soccer field, desecrated on a daily basis, and threatened by encroaching development! Through an amazing amount of hard work, the cemetery will now be saved! We have been given back our rights to the Jewish cemetery and, with the help of the Nissenbaum Foundation, we will restore it by putting up a fence and a beautiful gate at the entrance. And if that was not a miracle enough, suddenly the Jewish tombstones that had long been "lost" or used to pave roads during the war are showing up. . . just waiting to go "home." And we will put them there, fulfilling an ultimate Mitzvah.

Who would have believed two years ago that such miracles could happen at all, no less in such a short time? All it took to get this far was hard, hard work, unbelievable dedication, a great deal of patience, and lots of prayers. What will it take to get to a complete fulfillment of our goals? Just the easy stuff. . . MONEY!

So. . . I made it this far without asking for donations but I cannot in good conscience go further without asking for your help. After all, if you have read this far you must be interested in being part of what we are doing! In this newsletter you will find the details on how to make your contribution, I only ask that you please do it! I can only tell you that being a part of this miracle has made me prouder than any other accomplishment in my life. Please join us in this miraculous undertaking.

THE BLESSING OF DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

by Steve Tadelis, *GJHGS Treasurer*

Collecting money is no fun, especially when it does not go into your pocket. However, I must thank the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the United States of America for declaring us, the Gombin Society, a publicly supported organization. This will, hopefully, make collecting money a bit easier for me, as treasurer of the GJHGS.

Let me be more informative about what this means. There are two dimensions in which this declaration is beneficial to us all: First, whatever the society gets is exempt from income taxes. That is, every dollar you contribute to the society is a net contribution; no portion of it is diverted towards taxes or other such expenses. This is important because you know exactly where your money is going, where you want it to go! Second, every dollar you donate to the society is de-

ductible. Let me quote some of the relevant section from the IRS letter approving our status:

“Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the internal Revenue Code. . . Donors may deduct contributions to you only to the extent that their contributions are gifts, with no consideration received.”

What this means is that if your yearly income is \$100 (which hopefully it isn't!), and you donate \$20, then your taxable income is only \$80. To make things more concrete, if your family income is \$50,000 then every dollar you donate only costs you about 70 cents. If your income is above \$100,000 then every dollar costs you less than 65 cents. Putting things in a more practical light, if you feel that you can afford to donate \$100, then you can really write a check for \$150. And for those who can let go of \$500 dollars, you can write us a check for \$750. In other words, everybody wins!!

—*DEDUCTIBLE* continued page 15

.....

A LETTER FROM LONDON

Dear Gombiners,

I want to tell you all about Geoffrey Greenwood and Michael Heller, two Gombiner cousins here in London. Their mothers were daughters of Mark Gordon, who left Gombin in the early 1900s and came to England where he prospered as a woollens merchant.

Before I found my way to the Gombin Society I met Geoffrey Greenwood. He had been to Gombin and he had seen the devastation at the cemetery. He told me how anxious he was to have it preserved, like the cemetery he had seen at nearby Zychlin, from where another part of his family came from. Knowing that he would want to make a substantial contribution for the cemetery, I have been talking to him about the project of the Gombin Society. He, in turn, has been talking to his cousin Michael Heller. Tonight he confirmed that

each one of them will give \$5,000 for the cemetery project (a total of \$10,000), in commemoration of the Gordon family of Gombin. I am sure you will all agree that this is a fantastic gesture, and I would also like to tell you a little more about these two gentlemen.

Geoffrey Greenwood is senior partner of Nabarro Nathanson, one of the largest law firms in the country, with strong Jewish origins. Under his guidance that firm became a byword within the English Legal profession. For many years he has also been Chairman of Jewish Care, the biggest Jewish welfare organisation in Britain, embracing a wide range of projects (old, infirm, mental and physical impairment, blind, etc). His efforts have been legendary, and everything he has done has been entirely voluntary. In recognition of his merits, the

—*LONDON* continued next page

SAVING JEWISH CEMETERIES IN POLAND

by S. Gruber and P. Myers

For Jews, the care of cemeteries is an essential religious and social responsibility. Even at the height of Jewish emigration from Poland to America, members of the community stayed behind to ensure care for the graves of the dead. Jewish law stipulates that cemeteries must be carefully delimited and protected by fences to prevent desecration.

A recent study of the World Monuments Fund for the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage abroad has surveyed 1008 Jewish cemetery sites in Poland. The vast majority of these sites are abandoned, without clearly marked boundaries, and subject to natural deterioration, theft, vandalism, and land development. Only 190 cemeteries have walls or fences, and many have been encroached upon for industrial, residential, or recreational use. There is widespread profanation of mortal remains caused by the dumping of garbage, the removal of sand, and the building of houses, offices, warehouses, bus stations, and even stadiums upon hundreds of Jewish cemeteries.

In the last few years there has been a growing number of direct interventions from abroad to protect particular cemeteries. This work is usually funded by Holocaust survivors and descendants of emigrants from the town, including landsmanshaft groups in Israel and the United States. Recent work at dozens of cemeteries includes the erection of memorials, the construction of fences and gates, and the cleaning and re-erecting of gravestones.

This surge of initiatives has been made possible by the fall of Communism. The possibilities of travel to Poland have facilitated access to the cemeteries, and the political openness makes it easier to develop projects and find people who are ready to help among local

Poles from the towns. The advancing age of landmen and Holocaust survivors is another factor. Many of them want to make sure that the graves of their families and ancestors are protected, feeling that this is a necessary religious, political, and psychological act before their own death. Finally, there is the growing interest in the genealogy and history of the Jews from Poland, which motivates many descendants to save the cemeteries of their ancestral towns.

Abstracted from Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in Poland, 1995, published by the Jewish Heritage Council, World Monuments Fund and US Commission of the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad.

—LONDON from page 9

British Government appointed him as Chairman of the Committee for the Education and Training of Social Workers, a position of national significance. This Gombiner is a man of great achievement, held in the highest regard by his colleagues. Above all I can say from my personal knowledge that he is a man of considerable modesty and charm, and of an abundantly charitable nature.

Unfortunately I am not acquainted with his cousin Michael Heller. From what I know, I can say that he too is a high achiever in his professional activities, he is chairman of a public company. I understand that he is very prominent in charitable activity here and in Israel. He is also Chairman of the Technion Society (the Technion is an institute of higher education in Haifa with a worldwide reputation).

We should be fiercely proud of these Gombiners, not only for their attainments and communal and charitable commitments, but also for the great love they are displaying towards their ancestral shtetl and the final resting place of its departed.

Jeremy Freedman, February 18 1998

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE GOMBIN CEMETERY PROJECT

The Nissenbaum Foundation

In the project to save the Gombin cemetery, the main partner of the Gombin Society is the Nissenbaum Foundation, which will do the work and contribute more than half of its cost. Zygmunt Nissenbaum, a survivor from the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Nazi camps in Poland and Germany, created the foundation to save relics of the culture of the Polish Jews and to protect evidence of their martyrdom from oblivion. After the war, he stayed in Germany, becoming a successful businessman and leader of the Jewish community. In 1983, after forty years absence from Poland, Nissenbaum visited the Jewish cemetery in the Warsaw district of Brodno. Looking for the graves of his ancestors in that holy place of remembrance, he found remnants of broken tombstones and unearthed, desecrated human bones. Shocked by the neglect and devastation, he decided to devote his life to the preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Poland and all other relics of the culture that the Jews had built there for a millennium. Since 1985, the Nissenbaum Foundation has carried out dozens of projects to save cemeteries, synagogues, and other Jewish relics.

Nissenbaum describes his motivation as follows: “For forty years nothing attracted me to Poland. On the contrary, the terrible experience that had fallen to my lot on Polish soil kept me away. But deep inside I remembered my mother’s last message about the duty to bear witness. And even though I was very active in the anti fascist movement in Germany, the question returned of whether I had really done all I could, whether I had realized in full the testament of my mother’s suffering and the suffering of other murdered members of my family and of millions of Jews. Seeing the graves of our ancestors in the Brodno cemetery, desecrated and devastated beyond all imagination, showed me what I

thought was the most proper way to fulfill this testament. It gave rise to the idea of the Foundation, which since that time has become my second life.”

On the work of the Foundation, Nissenbaum says: “Our aim is to preserve the traces of Jewish culture on Polish soil, a culture murdered by German fascism, just as millions of Jews from Poland and Europe were murdered. We do it by stimulating research and publishing, by reconstructing and protecting cemeteries and other sacral and lay structures, all Judaica, by commemorating the countless sites of martyrdom of our nation. We want to build a bridge between the world Diaspora and the country of its birth, where almost the whole Jewish culture was created and developed for centuries in symbiosis with Polish culture. For it is here that Jewish culture has its roots. We hope for the aid of all Jews in the world who come from Poland. The Foundation enjoys great esteem amongst Jews in Europe and the United States, and we have met with support and understanding on the part of the Catholic Church and the state authorities in Poland. In saving the traces of Jewish culture, we hope not only for cooperation, but also for the creation of an atmosphere of respect for these traces.”

The Remembrance Foundation

Another important partner of the Gombin Society is the Remembrance Foundation, which will contribute \$3,000 to the project. Established in 1993 by the Polish government, with participation of the Union of Polish Jewish Communities, the Remembrance Foundation helps Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and other Jewish monuments throughout Poland. It also works to commemorate Jewish history and promote cultural relations between Jews and Poles. Jan Jagielski, director of the foundation, is in charge of the Monuments Department of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

OUR EXPERIENCES IN GOMBIN

by Jeremy Freedman

I went to Poland twice this year, each time with feelings of grave uncertainty. The second visit was less forbidding, perhaps because Leon Zamosc, fellow director of the Gombin Society, welcomed me at the airport!

We passed the evening over a beer in the (restored) old city. Next morning we visited the Jewish Historical Institute (as *hamishe* an organization as you could hope to find in present-day Poland) where we met up with Messrs. Lukaszewski and Borysiak of the Gombin Land Lovers Association. Later we visited the Nissenbaum Foundation whose benefactor miraculously survived the Nazis, made his fortune which he now devotes to commemorating Polish Jewry.

The Land Lovers took us by bus from Warsaw to Gombin. We were billeted with the American-born English teacher, Jerry Temanson, and his Gombiner wife, Anna. Their hospitality was sumptuous, nothing was too much trouble! Leon introduced me to our young translator, Sebastian, later I met his parents and we ate in their home.

We visited Priest Drozdowski in his Presbytery and Mayor Ciastek in his Parlor (my great-grandmother would have shepped such naches). Mr. Lukaszewski took me to the Land Lovers' Museum and to his home. Lovingly, he showed me his array of historical Gombin artifacts and ephemera. He and the Priest proudly took me on a tour of the Church. They showed me the memorial plaque to the old priest, murdered at Mathausen.

It goes without saying that, as western Jews, we might have expected favorable treatment from the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia of Gombin. Contemporary Poland has every reason to ingratiate itself with the economically dominant West and to demonstrate that anti-semitism is a feature of its past. While I would have

had no trouble identifying a cold and hostile reception, I had to be certain that the warmth displayed to us was genuine.

It is unthinkable that in this small town (where Leon had already spent a few days before I arrived) ordinary people did not know who we were, or why we were there. When I went into the flower shop to purchase some blooms for my hostess, the proprietress engaged me in conversation, at length and in passable English, most anxious to tell me how she had been a mother's help in New England. One morning, outside the Museum, we were scrutinized by two old ladies who then greeted us politely. We encountered them on further occasions that day, each time they acknowledged us again and with smiles. It was the absence of the proverbial cold-shoulder which began to persuade me that we were not unwelcome in Gombin.

Still more persuasive was the desire, on the part of everyone we met, to try and assist us with our mission. We had no need to explain it, everyone knew. On one particularly awkward occasion, when it seemed as though a tier of local government would deny us the historical boundaries of the Jewish Cemetery, a local doctor (who had worked in London for 2 years and who was collecting his daughter from an English lesson with Jerry Temanson) seized the telephone, started to translate for us and then announced that although there was a problem he anticipated a favorable outcome. It transpired that these civil servants were his patients!

It is 110 years since my great-grandparents left Gombin, in circumstances and for reasons about which I know next-to-nothing. I am not oblivious to the misery and privations that my people suffered in Poland over hundreds of years, nor to the manner in which they were treated in the final years of Polish Jewry. In the last 50 years such inhumanity has resurfaced in places as diverse as Cambodia, Nigeria, Yugoslavia and —*EXPERIENCE* continued page 14

ZBIGNIEW LUKASZEWSKI SPEAKS

Zbigniew Lukaszewski,
president of the Gombin Land Lovers
Association, was interviewed by Leon
Zamosc in October 1997

You want to know about myself, and about the activities of the Gombin Land Lovers Association. . . Well, I was born in Sompolno, Konin, in 1932. At the age of twenty I came to Gombin to work as a high school Polish language and literature teacher. Here I met my wife Henryka, and then I stayed on. I worked for 38 years in the same school. I organized a poetry society and later I became director of the student theater group. I looked after the school newsletter and I wrote articles for regional newspapers regularly. For many years I have been a member of the Cultural Society in Plock.

In 1975 we formed the Gombin Land Lovers Association (GLLA), with the idea of organizing cultural activities and collecting historical materials about Gombin. We gather documents, pictures, and memorabilia about the history of Gombin. We publish articles and brochures, we cooperate with the schools, and we participate in the annual local festival on Polish Independence Day. Since retirement from teaching six years ago, I have been able to devote more time to this work. The GLLA has 35 members, including teachers, technicians, merchants, the librarian, the priest, the mayor and the vice-mayor.

At the GLLA house we have a local history museum. We have organized about fifteen different exhibitions over the last few years. The first exhibition, in 1993, was exclusively devoted to Jewish life in Gombin. Now we are working on a permanent exhibition, part of which will be about the Gombin Jews. Who comes to see these exhibitions? Mostly students from schools in Gombin and neighboring towns. We also get visitors who come from Plock.

In the GLLA we have always recognized that the Jews were an important part of the history of Gombin. For many years I had been collecting books and materials about the Jews . . . I found anthologies of Jewish poetry, including the poems of Rachel Zychlinska from Gombin. On the Jews of the town, the main thing we had was Janusz Szepanski's book about Gombin history, which paid attention to the Jewish community. Four years ago a GLLA member, Jan Borysiak, wrote an article about the deportation of the Gombin Jews for "Jewish Word," a newspaper from Warsaw. But in 1993, when we organized the exhibition about the Jews, we were thinking in terms of gathering historical materials. It was only two years ago that we began to think about the restoration of the Jewish cemetery.

At first we thought that it would be better to erect a small fence, since there are not many gravestones left. We were very impressed by the Zychlin cemetery renovation, I went there and visited three times. . . I was ashamed that in Gombin we did not have monuments or plaques about the Jews who lived here. I started to talk with the oldest neighbors, asking about the gravestones. . . I learned about the sidewalk in Browarna Street. . . But we knew that the renovation would cost money, so we approached institutions looking for support. . . We tried with the Polish Ministry of Culture, the Jewish Community in Warsaw, the Zwiasek Religijny Wyznania Mojrzyszowego. . . We always received the same answer: they told us that they had no funds for doing this. Finally our friend Zalman Ben Yitzhak, a Gombiner from Israel who for years has been coming to do historical research, told us that an organization of Jewish Gombiners had been created in America. . . That was how we learned about you.

Why was I personally interested in the Jews? As president of the GLLA I had to pay attention to the Jews for they had been such an important part of life in —*LUKASZEWSKI continued next page*

—*LUKASZEWSKI* from page 13

Gombin. Also, there were personal losses in my life that made me understand the suffering of the Jews. . . . During the war the Germans killed my father and my brother in the camps. Their death makes me feel like the Jews felt. . . . it was the same fate of the Jews. My father was caught by the Germans while gathering money for the resistance, and he died in Dachau. My brother fought in the 1944 insurrection in Warsaw, he died in Germany. . . . I was a child when all this happened. My mother had died before the war, and when they took my father I was less than eight years old. I was left alone with an older sister who raised me.

It is true that there are no longer any Jews in Gombin today, but the old people are still interested because they remember the Jews. And the young are interested because they do not know about the Jews. You ask me whether they are really curious. . . . I can tell you that more than 500 people came to see our exhibition on the Gombin Jews. . . . They asked questions. . . . They wanted to know how many Jews were in Gombin, what happened with them, where was the synagogue, where was the cemetery. . . . They also asked whether there were any Jewish families left in Gombin.

We are happy that we are cooperating with you in the cemetery renovation. We are convinced that it is important to do this together, Poles and Jews, because it will help us to talk again, and overcome the many bad things that we all know happened in the past. I know that there are some Poles who do not like Jews, and some Jews who do not like Poles . . . so we need to do this. It is like a reconciliation, but we should know that it will take time. There are many examples of collaboration, not only in restoring cemeteries. Kutno, for example, has a friendship link with a town in Israel. We would also like to have a relation with an Israeli town. We need that, because people in Gombin lack contact with other cultures.

You tell me that many Gombiner Jews worry about the possibility that a renovated cemetery will be van-

dalized. It is true that today in Poland we have vandalism, but this is not something that reflects antisemitism. The problem of vandalism is more general, it is also affecting national monuments and Catholic cemeteries all over the country. The Catholic cemetery here in Gombin has been affected by vandalism . . . there is graffiti on the walls, they have destroyed gravestones, sometimes they overturn candles. This is happening not only in Gombin, but all over Poland . . . It is done by teenagers who pretend that they are anarchists or punks. They want to imitate what vandals do in Germany, France, England . . . It is the same thing that exists all over Europe. Recently in Poznan, the Frederick Chopin monument was destroyed, and today you can see graffiti in every monument and statue in Poland.

What can be done about it? It is very difficult to control, but in Gombin it is not as bad as in other towns, the police is doing a better work. When they catch them, they are punished, they get 48 hours behind bars, and they are taken to court. The best solution is a guard. There is a guard now in the Catholic cemetery: once the renovation is done he could also take care of the Jewish cemetery. Priest Drozdowski will cooperate with this, he has already said that he will talk to people about the need to protect the Jewish cemetery.

—*EXPERIENCE* from page 12

Rwanda. I do not delude myself into thinking that it is a simple thing to bring such brutality to an end, nor that this can happen in our lifetimes. Yet, for rapprochement and reconciliation to occur, gestures of kindness and regret must be offered and accepted. My limited exposure to a small number of the residents of Gombin suggests that they are extending the olive branch of friendship, it behooves us to reach out and grasp it.

A BOOK OF GOMBINER NAMES

by Jeremy Freedman

I was once engaged in a “memory-business” conversation with a learned and preeminent gentleman of my acquaintance. He told me in excited terms how the “Yizkor Book” of a certain shtetl could be found in a large municipal library in an American City. He had seen reference to it in a catalogue and he was off to the States to inspect it.

I suggested that he did not have to cross the ocean to see this volume, that there may well be a copy in England or perhaps one could be sent to him. He became irate, how could there be a copy, this was an ancient and holy book, handwritten by generations of Rabbis, Scribes and Scholars. To him, the only puzzle was how the book had escaped the Nazis and why it had ended up in a municipal library, rather than in an Academic or Judaic collection.

Now I was puzzled. I asked him what he thought this Yizkor Book contained. He replied that it held the names of all the Jews who ever died in that Shtetl, that it would have been read aloud, in full, each year on Yom Kippur when Yizkor was recited.

Readers will know that the genre of “Yizkor Books” that developed in USA and Israel after WWII invariably consisted of a collection of essays by survivors, emigrants or their descendants commemorating the destruction of their Shtetl. Whilst the story I have told here is true, and whilst there may have been a communal list of names of the deceased held in Gombin Shul, we do not have any such document today and we would not have expected it to have survived the all-consuming Nazi fires.

But we have something else, courtesy of our friends in Gombin. It is a book called *Mieszkaucy Gabina*, an ancient index, seemingly compiled in the last few years of the 19th century, listing the names of all the

residents of Gombin at the date of compilation, by surname and grouped together into households. The hand that compiled it updated it regularly, as children were born, until 1897. Then fresh hands took over. In 1914 the Imperial Russian (Cyrillic) script was replaced by the Roman alphabet. The very last entries are dated around 1930.

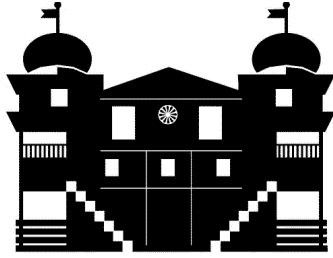
It is important to note that this book contains both Jewish and non-Jewish names. It records the deaths of (particularly) children and young babies, as well as emigration overseas. It has been suggested that its principal purpose was to assist in locating young conscripts for the Tsar’s Army. In any event it is an Index, it refers to a fuller tome presumably held elsewhere.

For the genealogists amongst us it is a fascinating record. Unfortunately some initial letters of surnames are excluded (e.g. J., M., Z., G.) so the Guyers and Zamosces will be disappointed. Moreover, many of the old pages have become torn and damaged, particularly amongst the “T’s” and to the detriment of Tybers and Tadelises everywhere. In a moving ceremony conducted in October in the Gombin Land Lovers Association Museum, Zbigniew Lukasewski, president of the Land Lovers, gave us a copy of this book to retain. As I write this note the copy is lying on the desk in front of me. I hope prepare it for publication by the Society in the near future, in the meanwhile I would be happy to use it to respond to queries on any genealogical points from the Gombiner public.

—*DEDUCTIBLE* from page 9

I trust this clarification gives you the information you need. You will get official receipts for any donation you make, which you will need to use for your tax returns.

I hope you will open your hearts (and your pockets) to give for our continuing needs and for the memorial projects we are involved in. I wish you all a very happy new year, health, happiness and lots of naches!!



GOMBIN JEWISH HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

President: Mindy Prosperi

Secretary: Noam Lupu

Treasurer: Steve Tadelis

Board of Directors: Harold Boll, Mark Frankel, Jeremy Freedman, Noam Lupu, Mindy Prosperi, Ada Holtzman, Gayle Sciacca, Steve Tadelis, Craig Weinstein, Jeffrey Wruble, Anna Zamosc and Leon Zamosc

Executive Committee: Harold Boll, Noam Lupu, Mindy Prosperi, Steve Tadelis and Leon Zamosc

Annual Meeting Committee: Mindy Prosperi and Craig Weinstein

Newsletter Committee: Noam Lupu, Minna Zielonka Packer, Gail Salomon, Gayle Sciacca

Web Page Committee: Harold Boll and Noam Lupu

Memorial Committee: Leon Zamosc, Jeremy Freedman, Ada Holtzman and Craig Weinstein

Yizkor Book Committee: Jeremy Freedman, Ada Holtzman, Noam Lupu and Mindy Prosperi

The Gombin Society - G.J.H.G.S.
P.O. Box 503052
San Diego, CA 92150

TO: