

# B'NAI GOMBIN

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

**Issue 9, April 1999**

**Editor: Noam Lupu**

## Table of Contents

<b>About the Society</b> .....	<b>page 2</b>	<b>April 13: <i>Yom Hashoah</i>, Holocaust</b>	
<b>Editor's Note</b> .....	<b>page 2</b>	<b>Remembrance Day</b> .....	<b>page 7</b>
<b>Dedication Ceremonies,</b>		<b>Postcards from the Abyss</b> .....	<b>page 8</b>
<b>Poland 1999</b> .....	<b>page 3</b>	by Ada Holtzman	
<b>President's Message</b> .....	<b>page 4</b>	<b>British Gombiners Meeting</b> .....	<b>page 10</b>
<b>Summer Gathering</b> .....	<b>page 5</b>	by Jeremy Freedman	
<b>Gombin Documentary</b> .....	<b>page 6</b>	<b>ISJM Conference</b> .....	<b>page 11</b>
by Minna Zielonka Packer		from report by Samuel Gruber	

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. Visit our website at <<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/gombin.html>>.

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## ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society is a nonprofit 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.
- Collect, teach, disseminate, and publish knowledge and information on the history of the Gombin Jewish community and the genealogy of the Jews of Gombin.
- Encourage all interested persons to pursue historical and genealogical research focused on the Gombin Jewish community.
- 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.
- Undertake activities to preserve the memory of the Gombin Jews who perished in the Holocaust.
- 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 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 website at <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lزامosc/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

August 1999 will forever be remembered in the history of Gombiner Jewry. Fifty-seven years after the remnant of this once thriving Jewish community was liquidated to Chelmno, we will remember their lives as well as their deaths.

In some small way, the forty or so Gombiners and Gombiner descendants attending the ceremonies in Gombin and Chelmno will recreate the Gombin Jewish community. That sense of community, of the bond that once united thousands of Jews in this small town, will again be alive if only for a single day. Gombin will again see a Jewish community united in its individual Jewishness, in its family heritage, in its memory mission to never forget.

Yet even outside of Gombin, the Gombin Jewish community is in a sense alive today. In fact, it never really died. After the war, the Gombiner societies in the US and Israel kept Jewish Gombin alive. Through their gatherings, their projects and their endeavors, the societies of the elders kept that community alive. Today, the Gombin society achieves a virtual community, through the Internet, through e-mail and through this very newsletter.

Today's Gombin Jewish community reads special-interest articles written for them, supports Gombin-related projects, discusses Gombin-related topics over e-mail and gathers in summer. The community is still here, we have persevered.

But like any community, whose institutions depend on member support, our forms of communication require funding. This newsletter, our projects and our gathering need your financial support. Please help us keep this newsletter going and this Gombin community alive by sending in your sponsorship.

Noam Lupu

# CHELMNO MONUMENT UNVEILING CEREMONY

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 1999



# GOMBIN JEWISH CEMETERY REDEDICATION CEREMONY

MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 1999

## **An invitation to all Gombiners and descendants**

Call Mindy Prosperi at (914) 928-8211

Dear Gombiner landseit, survivors and descendants,

Thanks to your wonderful response, the projects to erect the Gombin Memorial Monument at Chelmno and restore the Jewish Cemetery in Gombin are now being completed. We are now inviting all of you to attend the special memorial ceremonies in which we will remember the Gombin Jewish community and officially dedicate these works.

**Organizers:** The events are being jointly organized by the Gombin Society, the Nissenbaum Foundation and the Konin Regional Museum. Other institutions providing support include the Municipality of Gombin, the town's Landlovers Association and the Remembrance Foundation of Warsaw.

**Participants:** As we make public this invitation, a group of more than twenty Gombiners from four countries have already announced that they will come to Poland to attend the dedication ceremonies with their families. The initial list includes many directors of the Gombin Society, as well as Rabbi Joshua Witt from Israel and our distinguished sponsor Geoffrey Greenwood from London. Present at the ceremonies will be Zygmunt Nissenbaum and members of the other sponsoring institutions, representatives of the Israeli Embassy, Polish civil and religious authorities, notables from the Jewish communities in Warsaw and Lodz, and delegates from other Jewish institutions in Poland and abroad.

**Information:** To receive additional details please contact the president of the Gombin Society, Mindy Prosperi, tel. (914) 928-8211 (evenings). At this late date, the Society-organized package is closed. Therefore, travel and hotel arrangements must be made individually.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Gombiner Family & Friends,

Today, as I sit down to write this message, it is a holy time for many people, the weeks of both Passover and Easter Sunday. It is a time for people to think long and hard about freedom, slavery and our part in both as Jews and as human beings. And if we think these issues, like the Holocaust, are just apart of “our” past, we need only turn on the television or open a newspaper. On this holy day for the Judeo-Christian world, I am listening to the television, to talk of ethnic cleansing. My skin crawls even to think about this.

If there were any doubts in my mind about the importance of our work, about the absolute necessity of teaching about the lives of those who died in Gombin, and of those who lived, those doubts are banished now. Ten years ago, I visited the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. Upon entering, there is a sign: “Those who refuse to remember are doomed to repeat.” It is our obligation, the children of the 212 Jewish survivors of Gombin to “remember” and to educate those who will not make the effort on their own. And we, and our members, have many remembrance projects in the works.

Currently, Minna Packer is hard at work writing and taping a documentary of both survivors and the children of survivors from Gombin. If you have not already offered your time and your story to Minna, please consider it. We must tell our story, and Minna is telling it in a beautiful and compelling way.

A few years ago, a second generation Gombiner, surfing the Internet, came across the Gombin web site. This person is Jeremy Freedman, a man who has gone on to become a vital part of the success of our organization. And from that single Gombiner descendant in London, Jeremy has searched and found a village! Jeremy found enough descendants to hold the first British Gombiners Meeting last month!

Our summer pilgrimage is well underway. We will have the opportunity to visit Warsaw's historical sights. From there, we will go on to Chelmno to unveil our monument in memory of our families and then on to Gombin, our family home, to rededicate the newly restored Jewish cemetery. This is an unbelievable time for the Gombin Society and perhaps for the world. If you are thinking about joining us, please do! Please contact me and I will give you all the details you need. It will be a memory of a lifetime... maybe two generations worth!

Upon our return from Poland, we will end our momentous celebration with the 3rd Summer Gathering of the Gombin Historical Society. We will bring back video from our trip to Gombin and our stories. We will also cover lots of other items about future projects of interest to us all. Please mark your calendars now and see page 5 for further information.

So, you can see we have been very busy living up to our promises. We have become renowned both on the Internet and the Jewish historical community. But this is just the beginning, there is still much work to do. And we will try to do it, but we need your help. The cost of success is high. Currently, the only dues paying members of our organization are the Board of Directors. However, this is not enough money to cover our expenses... even the cost of producing the newsletter you are reading right now. Therefore, I ask that you take a moment and fill out the sponsorship card included in this newsletter. Please remember, it is our obligation and we need your help to continue to fulfill it. Thank you in advance...

Sincerely,

*Mindy S. Prosperi, President*

# “CEREMONIES IN POLAND” SUMMER GATHERING 1999

**When:** Sunday, August 22, 1999  
12:00pm - 5:00pm

**Where:** Temple Beth El-Mekor Chyaim  
338 Walnut Ave.  
Cranford, New Jersey  
(directions available by phone upon request)

- Come reminisce and schmooze with fellow Gombiners!
- See the video footage of the Memorial Ceremonies in Poland
- Hear fellow Gombiners recall their feelings and experiences at the ceremonies
- Find out about the Gombin Society's future projects
- Come be a part of our Gombin community. . .

**RSVP by August 1, 1999**

Janet Ballen (908) 272-1920 or Gail Salomon (908) 272-5444

\$10 fee per adult

Babysitting is available by reservation

# GOMBIN DOCUMENTARY

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by Minna Zielonka Packer

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I am the daughter of Michael Zielonka, the sole survivor of his immediate family, from Gombin. I am also the great niece of the late president of the New York Gombin Society, Max Green.

I am in production and directing a video documentary about the lives of the Jewish survivors of Gombin, as well as profiles of the second and third generations. This is a labor of love, driven by the need to record this story while we still have the remaining survivors among us. The point of view is not only the retrieval of testimonies but also how the murder of our families has had intergenerational ramifications, psychologically and sociologically.

The purpose of this work is educational, historical and cultural. It will be crafted as an artistic and inspirational document. The form is primarily documentary, including interviews with remaining survivors and with second and third generation children of Gombin Jews. That means most of you! The stories themselves, as told by those who lived them, are of pivotal importance and urgency.

I have begun the process of interviewing in digital video format, working with a professional D/P (video and cinematographer). I know many of the survivors as my father's friends. When I interact with them, they are struck by my fluent, *hamish* Yiddish and ease of communication in a language that is familiar to their early years. I am a bridge to the past by being the link to the present and future. It is a position unique to the child of a survivor and one that compels me to realize this documentary.

Resources and persons who have already attached themselves to this work include: Diana Sutherlin, president of Image Impact, Inc. and her team of technical wizards have already donated a great deal of

time and expertise to this project. Others who have committed are Lloyd Handwerker, a gifted DP/videographer/cinematographer who has worked on numerous features and films for Nickelodeon. Steve Scher, a well known cantor has expressed interest in providing liturgical and cantorial segments. Rabbi Robert Scheinberg of The United Synagogue of Hoboken has committed to his support. In addition, several persons affiliated with the Holocaust museum and several persons with strong contacts in the film industry have offered their help.

So far, work on this project has occurred through a committed volunteer effort. However, this will not accomplish the final cut. The production costs alone for realizing a short version (if it is to include footage of the cemetery project and Chelmno memorial), will be \$10-15,000. A 60 minute documentary is estimated conservatively at \$30-\$50,000. I urge you to help make this dream a reality. This requires asking for donations from you. Whether it be \$10, \$100, \$1000 or whatever sum can be afforded, your support will directly create this legacy.

Bearing witness is a continuous process. The living must be documented in a living form so that they and their stories are not forgotten. Today, a handful of survivors, their descendents and the families who came before the war survive from Jewish Gombin. From this, a *landsleit* has been recreated. The elders have created this network through local Gombiner societies, the current generation over the Internet and globally. This is the kernel of our survival. To chronicle this is of utmost importance.

All those interested in participating in and supporting this documentary, particularly as pertains to funding and content should contact me at:

Packer Productions, Minna Zielonka-Packer, 308 Eighth Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030; e-mail: madisonpark@prodigy.net; tel.(201) 656-3722

# APRIL 13: HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

## A message from the Gombin Society

*Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.*

*Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.*

*Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.*

—Elie Wiesel, Night

Dear Gombiners and Gombiner descendants,

We recently observed *Yom Hashoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, on which we recalled the horrors and tragedies of the Holocaust, vowing to never forget. This month, however, also commemorates the anniversary of the destruction of the Gombin Jewish community in the Spring of 1942. As we continue this 57th anniversary month, we urge you to pause and remember the over two thousand Gombiners—men, women and children—who were gassed and burned at Chelmno by the Nazis. Remembering them must not only be one of the main objectives of this society, but must be an objective for each and every Gombiner household.

Please light a memorial candle and say a prayer for the Gombiner Jews whose lives were cut short. Talk to your children about the victims of the Holocaust, about Gombin and its destruction. Show them the Gombin Yizkor book, tell them about their grandparents and great-grandparents, dig out your family photographs. If you have access to a computer, we urge you to visit our website, which constantly grows to include more information and photographs about the Gombin Jewish community that was. Our site also has links to other websites with even more information about the Holocaust, Gombin, Poland, genealogy and the importance of memory. The Jewish Gombin website can be accessed at <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lزامosc/gombin.html>.

As we recognize the importance of the mission to remember, please keep in mind the incredible efforts and achievements of this society. Please continue to show your support for this newsletter and the society in this sponsorship campaign. Without your continued sponsorship support, we cannot continue our mission to remember Gombin through education and important memorial projects.

*Board of Directors,  
The Gombin Society, GJHGS*

# POSTCARDS FROM THE ABYSS: THE GIPS FAMILY OF GOMBIN

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by Ada Holtzman

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I found a rare document in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem: two postcards in Polish from Lusia and Roza Gips of Gombin to their parents living in Warsaw, on Pawia street 41/4. The postcards date February 28 and March 3, 1942. These are heartbreaking postcards, cries of love and despair written while the events took place.

Traces of the Gips family from Gombin, who perished in the Holocaust, can be found in Beit Gombin in Tel Aviv. There are two memorial plaques: “Avraham Laib Gips and his family” and “Yosef Laib Gips and his family.” Also, in the 1925 Business Directory of Gombin, the following Gipses are mentioned: Building lumber—Gips; Sawmill—Abram Gips; Textile—Josef Gips.

The documents in Yad Vashem are archived under ref M10/554. This is a transcription of the two original postcards, which are kept by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Yad Vashem does not have the original document, only the transcription.

Pay attention to an appalling fact. Roza Gips writes to her parents about the horrible fate of their “neighbor Zychlinski.” She means, no doubt about that, to Zychlin and writes in this way for fear of the censorship. The Zychlin Jewish community was liquidated before Gombin. Some refugees from the massacre came to Gombin and testified. There is reference to this in some Gombiners’ Holocaust testimonies, among them Ben Guyer’s, who wrote: “Early in 1942, we began receiving the first bits of disturbing news about Jewish extermination. There

were some persons who fled from surrounding towns and they told us whole Jewish communities had been driven to Chelmno, where they were put to death by gas, and burning. We did not believe it; none of us wanted to believe that this could be true. Not only did we not believe it; we did not want to hear it told. Only after several Zychlin Jews who managed to escape came to us with stories about their townspeople who had been taken away by horse and wagon to Kvuszniewic and from there by freight train to Chelmno, where they were gassed, only then did our eyes and our minds open to the full extent of the horror awaiting for us all.” There are also other hints of the situation, written among the lines, like “the disease” as a reference to the Nazi occupation.

The postcards tell about the mood which prevailed—the fear, the horror and the sense of a fate accepted. The last request is a thick comb, evidently to fight off lice. This is a rare document, a last cry from the abyss.

Translation from Polish by Yakov Flinker.

*Gombin, February 28, 1942*

*Our beloved dearest,*

*Did you receive the two postcards of the 17 and 21 of the current month? I wonder why there is no reply yet to either letter. The Tajfeld family already received a reply.*

*Abram Stolcman already knows everything and he is probably making efforts in Krakow for his sister. My dearest father, tell me everything. Also Mrs. Markowicz proudly tells everyone that he is trying hard for her and Dziunia. She seriously believes.*

*—continued next page*



*My beloved, the times are a little better now, I have no idea if for long. Imagine that I was also forced to pay 8 marks in advance. Only Leon has been released. I have debts up to my ears and it is difficult for me to get out of this distress.*

*Think how everything has changed since we arrived. There is absolutely no way to survive off our salary. It will do maybe for breakfast. Lusia sometimes gets 10 marks every other week, but we cannot count on that. So we are deeply grateful to those who give the lunch meal, the basis for our existence. Lusia is an even worse beggar than I. Lunch is distributed irregularly. On Friday evenings, poor and wretched, she walks hungry. She is very sensitive and her situation is worse than mine. She often stays with Holcman—a truthful and faithful friend. I got used to them and connected with them. They are beloved people, helping everybody with all their powers. My beloved Mama, I have a small request from you. Please buy me a thick comb from a good brand. Tadelis and Lichtenstein got one. It is very important for us. I work under terrible hygienic conditions, so I must have this comb. The sufferings are the same. I got thinner. Write to us, all of you and answer our questions. I send my love, my regards and my kisses.*

*Be strong,  
your Roza*

*My beloved, I find it strange that you have not answered our last two letters. We are very nervous and worried. I want to see you as soon as possible and tell you personally about everything.*

*Lusia*

*~ ~ ~*

*Gombin, March 3, 1942*

*Our beloved and dear ones,*

*Today we received your letter and I immediately rushed to reply back. My beloved, the disease still exists. It is not known if the medicine helps. Horrible things happened to our neighbor Zychlinski. I trust you heard rumors about everything. It is so*

*difficult, my dear ones. I plead, do not take it too much to the heart. Keep your health and maybe there will still come a miracle and our children will be saved.*

*Look after your health and write often. Why does dear Father write so little? Enka and Aron do not write. Your postcards, my loves, are the medicine and give us peace of mind.*

*Our loved ones, nothing will help anymore. We are helpless. Mrs. Alenka receives news from her brother who made appeals and pleaded for her. Consult with him, but he does not believe it will help. Our darlings, you cannot imagine how sad we are without you. Last year we passed the holidays in a most wretched way but we were at least together with you. My beloved Mama, do not take it to heart and do not make trouble. It seems it must be this way. Tell how the situation is with you? How is Klainbard? What do they advise to do? Our warmest greetings and regards from the bottoms of our hearts and from all the friends and acquaintances. We kiss you strongly and embrace you.*

*Roza*

*Your postcard brought us great joy. We are very nervous and facing hard troubles. To this add the fact that you are so far from us. It is difficult, but it is what must be. I believe in fate.*

*How are you? How come Enka and Aron do not add a letter or something? You have no idea what it means to us, every living word from you. We long to see you and miss you very much. We miss the warmth of the family and a kind word. It is rare nowadays to get good news and from strangers. We do hear it, but it is all fake. Everything is fake. I am sitting at night with Mrs. Wyrobek and it is 23:00, late in the night. Our beloved cousins are with us. I work a little but we have many expenses and the money is not enough. How are Klainbard and Alinka? I kiss you and embrace you to my heart.*

*your Lusia*

# BRITISH GOMBINERS MEETING

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by Jeremy Freedman

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On Sunday evening, 22nd March, I finally gathered a quorum of British Gombiner descendants and spoke to them about Gombin, the GJHGS, the memorial projects.

We met at my parents' home, they kindly made space available. I begged, stole and borrowed the technology necessary to project videos and computer images onto a home movie screen. Some 30-35 people participated.

I spoke for an hour about:

Landsleit, Geography, History, the Gombiner Rov, Genealogy, Migration, the thirties, the Chalutsim, the Holocaust and Liquidation, Survivors, the American Societies, Beit Gombin, GJHGS, the Cemetery project, the Chelmno project and other topics besides. In just an hour I could only give the briefest overview of these matters but I had put together 78 images (photos, maps, documents) on my computer to illustrate my talk. The desktop projector was fantastic.

We stopped and did a little fressing and mingling.

For the next hour or more I showed the new improved version of Sam Rafel's film as transferred to video by October films (in readiness for the Imperial War Museum): cleaned up, slowed down. I accompanied it with some mood music, Dudu Fisher singing *Oifn Pripitchik*, *A Yiddishe Momma*, that sort of thing.

Then I showed some video footage that I have taken in Gombin over the past 2 or 3 visits, particularly the cemetery before and after, the market square and the little wooden houses. I expanded on a number of themes as these images appeared on screen.

People were very nice, they told me they had enjoyed it, that they were interested in knowing more

about Gombin, in visiting the shtetl (possibly in the summer), in the GJHGS, in contributing to the Cemetery projects.

For your information we had members of Tiber and Tadelis (of course) Gordon, Guyer, Tchuick and Weinbaum families. We had apologies from representatives of other families (including Harry Hyman who bears some relation to the Bolls).

I do want to say that the information was well received and that the quantity of material we have acquired and developed was much appreciated. Kol Hakavod to all of us.

I also endeavoured to mention (and show pictures of) all our most tireless workers—Ada, Mindy, Leon, Noam, Steve, Harold to name but a few—and our revered elders including the Zalman Ben Yitzchak and especially the late, lamented Meir Holcman

I am now arranging to do a presentation on Gombin and the Shoah at my shul on Tisha B'Av and am thinking about an annual British gathering in years to come.

## WANT BACK ISSUES?

If you would like to receive back issues of *B'nai Gombin*, send your request to the following address:

Noam Lupu  
Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society  
P.O. Box 503052  
San Diego, CA 92150

# INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF JEWISH MONUMENTS (ISJM) CONFERENCE

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excerpts from report by Samuel Gruber,  
ISJM president

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It was a heady week in late January for those of us who care about Jewish Monuments. So much of what ISJM and others have been talking about, dreaming about and working hard to get done was the focus of three days of presentations and discussions at the new Museum of Jewish History and Art in Paris at the international conference “The Jewish Patrimony in Europe” organized by Max Polonovski and the French Ministry of Culture and held at the new museum. The conference brought together scholars, researchers, museum directors, government officials, Jewish representatives and tourism consultants from across the Continent, as well as from Israel and the United States.

This was an important event—not since the Jewish Heritage Council of the World Monuments Fund (WMF) organized its Future of Jewish Monuments Conference in New York in 1990 had so many people come together to talk about so many different Jewish heritage documentation and preservation projects... It was a meeting of activists, conservators, arbiters of cultural property and, to some extent, those who hold the purse strings. Thirty speakers from a dozen countries reported on progress and problems regarding the state of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, Jewish quarters, and archaeological sites...

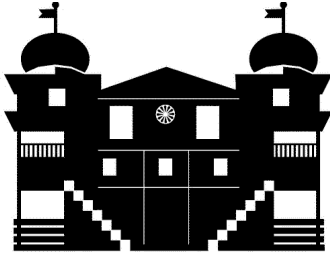
An indication of how far the acceptance of Jewish heritage has come was expressed by French Culture Minister Catherine Trautmann, who spoke to the conference on the closing day. “Jewish heritage in France is also the heritage of all the French

people, just as the cathedrals of France also belong to France’s Jews.”

Cemeteries were treated by several speakers. Valery Dymshits discussed the documentation of Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine and Moldova, focusing on the artistic legacy many of these sites still preserve. Using photos taken by David Goberman over many decades Dymshits demonstrated how many great works of gravestone carving are now lost—stressing the urgency for conservation programs for the most important sites, such as Satanov (see article in upcoming JHR). Michael Brocke, professor of Jewish studies at the university of Duisberg, and a pioneer in postwar documentation of German Jewish cemeteries, described the heroic effort of documenting and piecing together the shattered remains of the cemetery in Frankfurt. Peter Honigman described efforts to consolidate information and standardize methods for cemetery documentation throughout Germany.

Happily, throughout the meeting ISJM was repeatedly referred to as a reference point... There are plans to publish the papers delivered at the conference, and in the meantime, ISJM has invited participants to post their papers on the ISJM website ([www.isjm.org](http://www.isjm.org)) as well any additional materials about their work. Excerpts from the conference will be published in the Jewish Heritage Report over the course of the next year.

Max Polonovski, who organized the conference (with the able assistance of ISJM grant recipient Isabelle Meidinger) summed up the situation of Jewish Heritage in Europe: “Jewish heritage is an orphan, a victim in a generalized form of neglect and dereliction. We are fighting against time.”



# GOMBIN JEWISH HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

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**Representative in Britain:** Jeremy Freedman

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