

A Multicultural tour of Gąbin

by Leon Zamosc

Author's note: *In previous visits, our tours of Gombin have only focused on key Jewish landmarks. This time, we want to highlight the multicultural heritage of Gąbin, including sites that give a sense of the roles of the different national-religious, linguistic-cultural groups that were an integral part of the town's life before the Second World War. Readers should be aware, however, that this is the first attempt to outline a multicultural route of this kind. I wish to apologize in advance for any omissions or mistakes in the preparation of the itinerary. Another important disclaimer concerns the fact that, by necessity, my efforts to lay out the track have been constrained by the information I had at my disposal. As a result, the itinerary contains more information about the Jews than about the other groups that were part of the multicultural palette of the Gąbin. This shortcoming will be certainly remedied in the future if the design of the multicultural route of Gąbin is seen as a collaborative work in process. This work has greatly benefited from Magdalena Karczewska historical research and the assistance of Zbyszek Balcerzak and Wojtek Wasilewski. I look forward to continue working together in order to improve the multicultural route.*

Until the Second World War, the human landscape of the town of Gąbin could be described as multinational, multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multicultural. The official demographic statistics offer an entry point to this diversity, describing the composition of the town's population by national-religious groups:

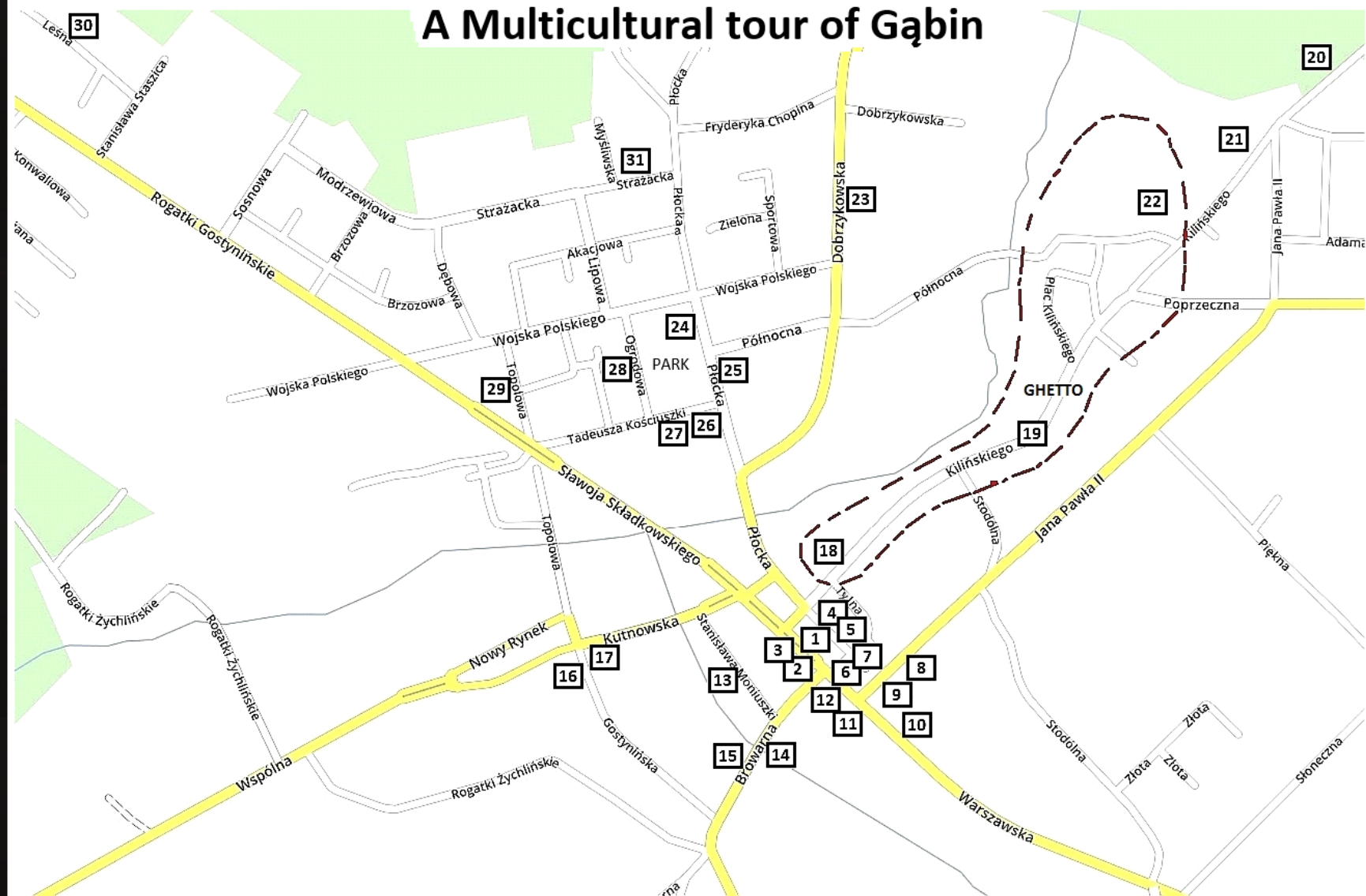
Demographic evolution of Gąbin, 1800-1933.

Year	Total	Poles	Jews	Ethnic Germans	Others
1800	1274	758	615		
1808	1183	606	577		
1857	3627	1642	1897	388	
1866	4110	1733	2048	329	
1913	6652	2654	3835	363	
1921	5777	3286	2377	111	3
1928	6450	3750	2710	150	20
1933	5721	3025	2469	226	1

Source: Magdalena Karczewska, *The Jewish community of Gąbin, 1918-1945*, Master's thesis, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń 2004.

Against this context, the following itinerary focuses on the three main collectivities in Gąbin: Poles who spoke Polish and were Catholics, Jews who spoke Yiddish and had their own Jewish religion, and ethnic Germans who spoke German and were Evangelicals. It would be disingenuous to think that these groups were integrated into a perfectly harmonious human ensemble. We are well

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aware that, in addition to differences in power and cultural inclinations, there were mutual prejudices and suspicions that often resulted in conflictive interactions. Still, for hundreds of years these communities managed to coexist in relative tolerance, keeping their distance in most aspects of their social, religious and cultural lives, but finding enough points in common to interact, individually and collectively, in ways that were productive for continuing to live together. There is a lesson to learn from their experience of coexistence, and from the fact that it was the political use of their differences by nationalist extremists that put an end to their worthwhile experiment.

The itinerary

1. Stary Rinek - Market Square

The Market Square, at the center of town, was a rectangular expanse with two manually operated water pumps. All around stood two-story brick or stucco buildings with store fronts. They had replaced the wooden structures had been destroyed by a big fire at the beginning of the 20th century. There were regular market days twice a week and market fairs on special occasions. During these market events, the full breadth of the square was crowded with canvas vending booths covered by overhanging canopies, each with its merchandise displayed on hooks and tables.



The eastern side of the square on market day



Stary Rinek postcard, early 20th Century



The western side, church in the background

2. Former Pieracki St.

The buildings on the western side of the square were mostly occupied by tenements and stores of Jewish families and offices of various institutions and organizations, including the headquarters of the Jewish unions of craftsmen and merchants. All the buildings were damaged by the Luftwaffe bombardments of September 1939. After the demolition, the space remained empty, becoming a park after the Second World War.



Pieracki St. buildings on the square's western side, before and after the bombardments

3. Józef Piłsudski Boulder Monument

During the First World War, Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935) formed a military unit with members of the Riflemen's Association and Polish Rifle Squads in order to fight for Polish independence against the Russian Empire. He emerged from the war as a powerful military and political figure in independent Poland, serving as Defense Minister during 11 successive governments, two of which he headed himself as Prime Minister (1926-1928 and 1930). He is viewed in Poland as a father of the Second Republic, re-established in 1918, 123 years after the 1795 Partition of Poland by Austria, Prussia and the Russian Empire. Piłsudski monument in Gąbin is one of the many erratic boulders left behind in the area by the Central and Baltic glaciations.



Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935)



Piłsudski Boulder Monument

4. Jewish People's Bank, 5 Stary Rynek

Before the Second World War, the building on 5 Stary Rynek housed the Jewish People's Bank. The bank's story began with the Loan Association Ezra (Assistance), founded in 1902 with 250 members. In 1922, Ezra was replaced by the Jewish Credit Cooperative, which established its offices on 5 Stary Rynek. In 1923 the cooperative reorganized itself as the People's Bank in order to administer the funds collected by the Gąbin Jewish emigres in the United States. During the interwar period, the People's Bank played a key role in the economic life of the town because the American landmen's funds were essential to support the Kehila's budget and offer cheap loans to the Jewish craftsmen and merchants of Gąbin. On the eve of the German invasion, Abraham Zamosc was serving as director of the bank and chairman of the Jewish community. He was arrested after the occupation with other community leaders. After their release, they were smuggled from Gąbin to Warsaw. It is not known whether Abraham Zamosc died in Warsaw ghetto or was deported to Treblinka.



Abraham Zamosc, director of the People's Bank and Chairman of the Gąbin Kehila

5. Gąbin Landlovers Association's Museum Building, 6 Stary Rynek

This recently renovated building was the birthplace of Sławoj Składkowski (1885-1962), the last Prime Minister of the Second Polish Republic (1936-1939). He had become famous for the public restrooms which he ordered to put on the roads when he was Minister of internal affairs after 1926. There is a commemorative plaque on the building. The house was built in classical style, topped with a basket-shaped pediment where the construction date (1806) is inscribed. The interior of the building features barrel-cross vaults. The building serves as headquarters and museum of the Gąbin Landlovers Association.



Sławoj Składkowski (1885-1962)



The museum building before the recent renovation



Exhibits in the Gąbin Landlovers' museum

6. Gąbin's Town Hall

The Town Hall, inaugurated in 1826, is a classical, brick, two-storey building. From the front, the portico is decorated with two Ionic columns. Facing the Market Square, the building features an avant-corps with a stepped attic and a balcony recess. The Gąbin official seal is a gate with a raised grate. Throughout the interwar period, the Jews participated in local elections and were represented in the municipal council. The temporary council after Poland's independence had 15 members, including five Jews. In the elections of 1917, twelve Christians and six Jews were elected to Gąbin's municipal council. When the last municipal elections were held in 1934, there were six Jews among the 16 councilors: Salomon Bolel, Chaim Lurja, Abram Łacki, Mordka Wolfowicz, Abram C. Żychliński, Jaska Żychliński, and Hersz Lajb Siekierka. They represented different Jewish political camps, including Zionist parties, the religious Orthodox party Agudat Israel, and the leftist party Bund.



The Town Hall in the 1950s

7. Volunteer Fire Brigade

Next to the Town Hall stands the building of the Volunteer Fire Brigade with a plaque commemorating the participation of Sławoj Składkowski in the construction of the facility in 1933. The brigade had been established in 1905 and the poor condition of its headquarters had spurred support for a new building and new equipment for the firefighters. The Volunteer Fire Brigade was the most important center of Polish cultural life in the town. The brigade's brass band, which included about twenty musicians, animated all the events in Gąbin. It performed at the town's park and in nearby towns, earning income for the brigade. In addition to concerts, the Volunteer Fire Brigade ran the Falcon Gymnastics Society and organized theater performances and silent film sessions.



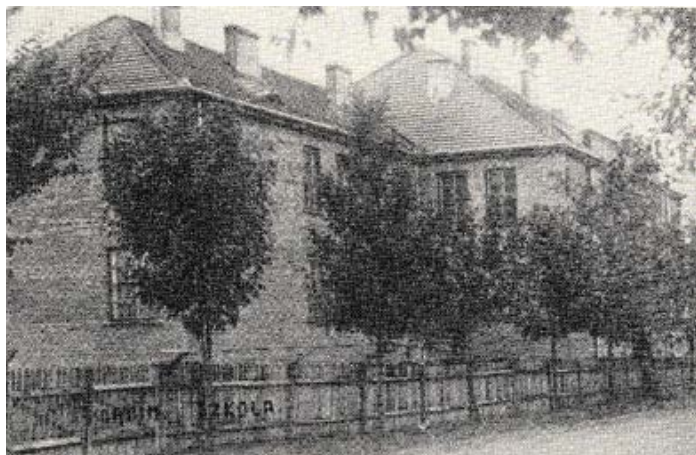
Volunteer Fire Brigade, 1933



Brass band of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, 1913

8. Site of the new public primary school, Maja 3 St.

In the early years of the Second Polish Republic there were four primary public schools financed by the municipality in Gąbin. About 120-150 pupils received meals in these schools, which included two Polish schools in Warsaw and Kościuszki streets, a Jewish school on Garbarska St. (more on this below) and the Evangelical school on Gostynin St. The frequent requests for fuel, repairs and furnishings indicate that the budget was not enough for the needs of the schools and their 16 teachers. A



The new public primary school

significant improvement was the construction of a large school building on May 3 St. during the years 1923-1927. The Polish schools were transferred to that building, while the Jewish children were moved to the facility on Warsaw St. The May 3 St. school was among the buildings damaged by the German bombardments of September 1939. The occupation authorities drafted Jewish and Polish workers to demolish it.

9. Site of Jewish Kindergarten, Maja 3 St.

The Jewish Kindergarten on Maja 3 St. was run by the Central Organization of Jewish Schools, which was the only secular Jewish educational institution in Poland that completely avoided religion lessons. The organization was under the influence of the Bund. It promoted Yiddish as the language of instruction and its main emphases were on the natural sciences, the humanities, and the need to raise "aware Polish citizens" who also learned the Polish language and the history of Poland.¹³⁷ Sonia Cemelinska-Nowogrodzka, Channa Celelinska and Rajzla Żychlińska were among the teachers who worked in the kindergarten.



Jewish Kindergarten, with teachers
S.Cemelińska (right) and C. Cemelińska (left).

10. Second Jewish public primary school, Warszawska St.

The school on Warszawska St. was one of Gąbin's two primary schools for Polish students. In the 1920s, when all the Polish children of the town were concentrated in the new public primary school on Maja 3 St., the Jewish students were transferred from their original school on Garbarska St. to the vacated building on Warszawska St. Icek Rembaum, a teacher and an educator from Plock, was headmaster of the school on the eve of the war. He had musical talents and organized student orchestras and choirs. He perished in the Holocaust together with his wife Gita (née Russak) and their 16-year-old daughter Ester (Natusia).



The school building on Warszawska St.



School students with headmaster Icek Rembaum

11. Gąbin's Catholic church

The present parish church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was built in 1958-65. Historically, Gąbin has had three previous Catholic churches. The first parish church, a wooden building from the 13th century, was destroyed by war. The second parish church was a brick building erected by one of the Dukes of Mazovia at the beginning of the 15th century. It is most likely that the founder was Ziemowit, Prince of Rawa and Sochaczew, who must have built the church in 1437, when he gave Gąbin the formal privileges of a town and allowed the residents to use the pastures and forests. The brick church stood until 1913, when it was burned down by the great fire that engulfed the town. A new church in the neo-Gothic style was built on the site and put into use in 1934. Damaged by the Luftwaffe bombings of September 1939, it was among the buildings that were demolished by the Germans using Polish



Neo-Gothic church , 1934



Present church, 1965

paid workers and Jewish forced laborers. Polish and Jewish children aged 11-13 were put to clean the bricks. The Germans allowed Catholic services until the mid-1940, but they harassed the priests and imposed bans on reading the Gospel in Polish and singing songs with suspected patriotic lyrics. The arrest of priest Władysław Turowski in November 1939 was followed by the detention of his vicar Marian Żebrowski in August 1940. Father Turowski was in concentration camps and died at Mauthausen in April 1942. Father Żebrowski survived the camps and was liberated in Dachau by American troops. In 1941, the Germans began to close down the Catholic churches in the Wartheland. In the Gąbin area, mass could only be celebrated at nearby Czeremno because the local priest had prevented anti-German demonstrations before the war.



Father Władysław Turowski, died at Mauthausen in April 1942

12. Monument to the ten martyrs executed by the Nazis.

In June 1941, as retaliation for the killing of a German policeman near Gąbin, 86 Poles from the town and surrounding areas were detained. Ten of them were executed on June 15, 1941. The other prisoners were sent to Inowrocław prison and to concentration camps. The town erected the monument for the ten Polish martyrs soon after the war. According to a report of losses prepared by the Gąbin municipal board, 53 Poles died or disappeared during the 1939-1945 war period. Of that number, six had been soldiers killed in warfare, 23 were murdered, 19 died in camps and prisons, and five during forced labor. There were 27 people physically impaired, 15 of them with serious injuries.



Execution of ten residents of Gąbin,
June 1941



Monument to the ten martyrs
next to the church

13. Site of the first Jewish public primary school, Garbaska St.

The school was established in 1915 for Jewish students. The manager was Regina Perczakówna, who emigrated to America in 1920. The new headmaster was Ignacy Sztokhammer. Abram Kalmus also served as director of the school before its transfer to the Warszawa St. building. Before the establishment of the public schools, the chedarim had been the only form of education for Jewish children in Gąbin. The traditional chedarim were the religious equivalent of an elementary school, teaching the basics of Judaism and the Hebrew language. In response to the development of Jewish secular education, the Orthodox Jewish party Agudat Israel sponsored “reformed chedarim” in which the language of instruction was Yiddish and the teaching of religion was supplemented with modern general subjects. Eventually, the Polish government approved the release of the students of “reformed chedarim” from the obligation to attend the public school system. The result was that Jewish children could be educated in public schools with instruction in the Polish language, or in private religious schools in which the language of instruction could be Yiddish and/or Hebrew.



First Jewish public primary school with teachers Kalmus and Sztokhammer, 1924

14. Browarna St. bridge

Following the deportation of the Gąbin Jews, the Germans razed the Jewish cemetery, removing most of the matzevot and using them for paving roads, building sidewalks, and other construction work in the town. More than two hundred matzevot are known to have been used for the construction of the present bridge in Browarna St.



The bridge in Browarna St.

15. Browarna St. sidewalk

Near the bridge, matzevot had been used for lining a sidewalk. In 1998, the Gombin Society paid a local contractor for their recovery and replacement of the curb. The recovered stones were incorporated into the lapidarium monument that was erected at the cemetery site as part of its restoration in 1999 by the Gombin Society.



Visible Hebrew inscriptions in matzevah used in a Gąbin sidewalk



Browarna St. sidewalk, lined with matzevot



The recovered matzevot

16. Jojne Grunbaum's Polonja cinema, Gostynska St.

Starting in 1909, film screenings became popular as a new type of entertainment in Gąbin. The "Polonja" cinema hall was established by Edward Modzelewski but, during the interwar period, its owner was Jojne Grinbaum. The hall was also used as a place for festivals, meetings and celebrations of the entire community of Gąbin.



The Polonja cinema

17. Hasidim's shtiebel site, Plocka St.

Facing the New Market Square, a Hasidic shtiebel (prayer house) stood on the corner of Plocka and Gostynska streets. Gostynin, Plock and Żychlin were important centers of the Hasidic movement. In Gąbin, however, Hasidism did not gain much popularity. The Hasidim in town worked as teachers in chedarim, like for example Rabbi Benjamin. Other Hasidim were chazanim (cantors) like Rabbi Lajbisz, or shochtim (ritual slaughterers) like Josef Dawid Klapman.



Hasidim's shtiebel on Plocja St.
after the bombing of Gąbin

18. Gąbin' Grand Synagogue site and the Jewish Kehila

A parking lot marks the precise location where the Grand Synagogue of Gąbin once stood at the confluence of Ciasna, Kilinskiego and Tylina streets. The synagogue was built of wood in Oriental style. The thick wooden logs were still fresh and in good condition. Above the synagogue entrance there were two tall turrets, each topped by a flag. Imprinted on one flag, the number 1710 referenced the year of construction. Imprinted on the other flag, the number 1893 indicated the year of restoration. The synagogue contained a magnificently carved ark that had been designed by a craftsman who used a single carving knife. In the waiting room there was a set of shackles once used for religious offenders. The ascent to the bimah consisted of six small steps, associated with the 'six steps of the throne' (I Kings 10:19). On the bimah there was a chair for Elijah the prophet. From the ceiling hung an old brass chandelier crowned with a Polish eagle. The eastern wall was covered with old sheets of brass engraved with flowers. There was an ark-



The parking lot where the synagogue once stood



The Grand Synagogue of Gąbin, viewed from Tylina St.



Façade of the Gąbin Synagogue



Interior of the Gąbin Sinagogue,
recreated by Wojtek Wasilewski

covering fashioned from the saddle of a Tartar general, sewn with threads of pure gold. There were more than fifty Torah scrolls, as well as ancient, antique curtains for the ark. Next to the synagogue, there was a Beit Midrash, built in 1833, which housed five Torah scrolls, and a small building that housed the traditional institutions managed by the Kehila. The governor's office forbade any alteration of the synagogue's appearance, to prevent it from losing its original style.

On September 21 1939, the Germans ordered all Jewish men to assemble at the New Market Square. They were awaited by soldiers who beat them. At the same time, Wehrmacht officers poured gasoline and set fire to the synagogue. The synagogue, Beit Midrash and outlying buildings were consumed by fire. The Torah scrolls had been hidden in the cellar of a brick house. The silver Torah ornaments had also been removed to the iron safe in the Kehila offices, but they were also lost when these buildings burned down. The Germans imposed a heavy fine on the Kehila for doing nothing to prevent the fire.

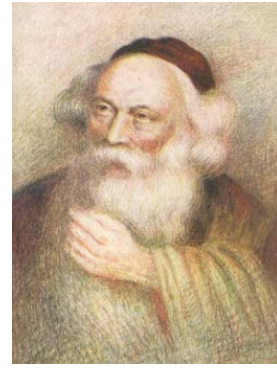


Burning of the Gąbin synagogue
by Wehrmacht officers

During the interwar years, the Kehila's board included the rabbi and eight elected members. All the community's men could vote and candidates for election had to have approved credentials. While Orthodox Jews had great influence in religious matters, they did not control the Gąbin Kehila as they did in neighboring Gostynin and Płock. As mentioned above, the Jews of Gąbin divided their political loyalties among the Zionist parties, the leftist party Bund, and the religious Orthodox party Agudat Israel. The board elected in the 1931 Kehila elections included four artisans (related to the Bund), three Zionists and a member of Agudat Israel. The most distinguished rabbi in the history of Gąbin was Avraham Abele ben Chaim HaLevi Gombiner (c. 1635-1682), popularly known as the Magen Avraham, born in Gąbin. He was a Talmudist scholar and a leading religious authority in the Jewish community of Kalisz during the seventeenth century. His main work was the Magen Avraham commentary on Rabbi Joseph Karo's Shulchan Aruch, where he sought to incorporate the customs of his contemporary Poland. Among other things, he held that children can count for a



Meeting of the Kehila board with representative of Gąbin landmen in the United States



Rabbi Abele Gombiner (c. 1635-1682), known as the Magen Avraham

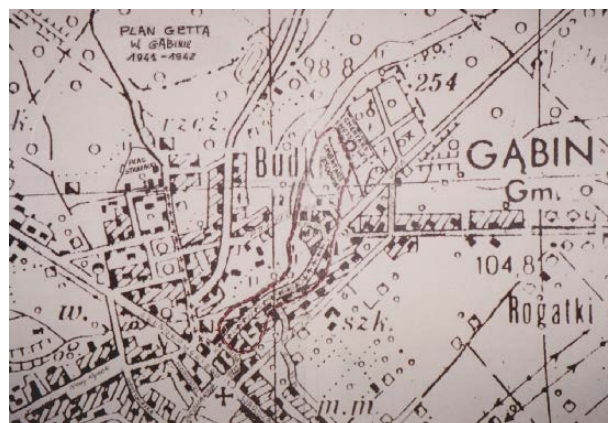
minyan for reading the Torah, which has served as a basis for recent debates about counting women for a minyan as well. The Gąbin rabbis of the interwar period were Yehuda Lejb Złotnik (one of the founders of the Mizrahi religious Zionist party in Poland), Natan Nuta Nutkiewicz (who later served as rabbi of Rypin and was eventually killed in Warsaw ghetto by a Ukrainian guard), and Zalman Unger (son of the famous teacher Uriah Unger from Włocławek). Rabbi Zalman Unger was murdered by the Germans on the same day of the burning of the Gąbin synagogue, after being dragged through the streets in his ceremonial robes with a pitchfork in his hands.

19. The Jewish ghetto, Kilinskiego St.

During the occupation, the Germans ordered the Gąbin Jews to wear a yellow badge and set up the Judenrat, a council of 7 members headed by Mosze Wandt. The Judenrat had to draft Jewish workers for demolition, construction, and other works in Gąbin. It also had to assist in resettling the Jews, organizing groups for deportation to forced labor camps, and collecting the fines and “contributions” of cash and valuables demanded by the Germans. In addition, it was responsible for the internal life of the Jewish community, dealing with religious issues, housing problems, food and fuel supply, and social assistance. The Judenrat had its own Jewish police (headed by Mosze Wandt’s brother) to maintain order among the Jews, perform requisitions, and escort displaced persons. Early in 1940, the Germans began to evict Jewish families from their homes and concentrate them in a ghetto. Initially, the Jews could walk in and out, contact Polish neighbors and buy food from farmers. The ghetto spanned an area of Gąbin that had been densely



Jews performing forced labor in Gąbin



Gabin ghetto



1941: enclosure of the ghetto



1942: 2,150 Jews crammed in the ghetto

inhabited by the Jews before the occupation, including Kilińskiego St., parts of Cmentarzna and Poprzeczna streets, and some blocks of the center of town. Conditions in the ghetto were appalling: huge overcrowding, homeless families, constantly spreading diseases, and a total pauperization of the Jewish community caused by the lack of paid employment. In August 1941 the Germans officially enclosed the ghetto with barbed wire, separating it from the rest of the town and banning all Polish-Jewish contacts. In April 1942, when the Germans made their final move to liquidate it, there were 2,150 Jews crammed in the ghetto.

20. Catholic cemetery

The present Catholic cemetery of Gąbin was founded in 1815. The cemetery's chapel, located next to a small chapel of the Tarczyński family, was built through a joint effort of parishioners coordinated by Father Jerzy Drozdowski in 2004-2007, replacing a former chapel built in the 1970s. The oldest graves and tombstones go back to the middle of the 19th century. One of them, in the northern part of the cemetery, corresponds to Józef Szelisk, officer of the Polish army who died in 1862. A special place on the cemetery is the memorial line of graves of the 10 victims shot by the Germans on June 15, 1941. There are other graves of victims of the occupation, including those of 20 other men shot in Gąbin between September 19 and 21, 1939. In 1919, monuments were built on the graves of local heroes of the January 1863 Uprising and two Gąbin soldiers killed during the First World War. A common grave contains the remains of 51 soldiers of the "Poznań" and "Pomorze" Army, who fell in combat in September 1939.



Gąbin's Catholic cemetery



Graves of the ten martyrs of Nazi murder

21. German First World War cemetery

This cemetery contains the remains of German soldiers who were killed in the First World War, fighting in battles that took place in the area of Gąbin during November and December 1914. Most of them died from wounds in the field hospital in Gąbin. Some Russian soldiers are also buried in the cemetery. The place had been neglected, but in the last couple of years, volunteers of the Scouting Team of Gąbin and other history enthusiasts have been cleaning it on All Saints' Day.



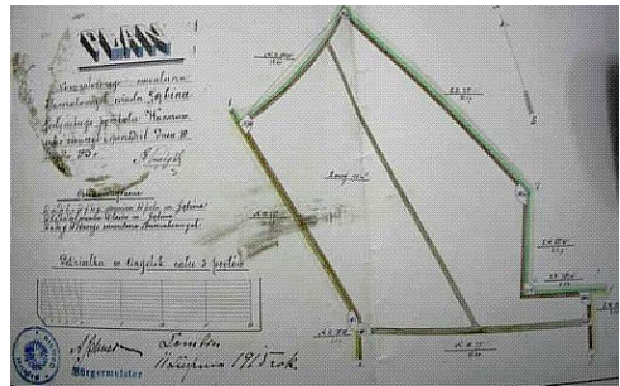
Gąbin's First World War cemetery



Young volunteers at work on All Saints' Day

22. Jewish cemetery, Kilinskiego St.

In 1915, the Kehila purchased additional land to double the area of the old Jewish cemetery of Gąbin. The cemetery is located on a hill at the end of Kilinskiego St. While some areas of the cemetery are covered with pine trees, the oldest sections are dotted with majestic, centenary oak trees that in all likelihood must have been planted when the cemetery was initially established. The existing pictures show that the tombstones and monuments were relatively modest, bearing little resemblance to the opulent memorials that were common in the Jewish cemeteries of large Polish cities like Warsaw and Lodz. As explained above, the Germans razed the cemetery after the deportation of the Jews, removing most of the Jewish cemetery matzevot and using them for construction work. After the war, the remaining stones continued to be taken by Gąbin neighbors for construction and other uses. In the 1990s, few stones remained on the site, which was included in the list of endangered



Expansion of the Gąbin Jewish cemetery, 1815



The cemetery in Sam Rafel's 1937 film



Gate of the restored Jewish cemetery of Gąbin



Memorial monument and lapidarium

Jewish cemeteries in Poland. In 1997 the Gombin Society undertook a project to raise funds, demarcate the area, install a protective fence and a gate, and build a memorial monument to the Gąbin Jews. The matzevot recovered from the sidewalk on Browarna St., together with other stones returned by Polish neighbors, were incorporated into the monument's lapidarium. The restoration project, which was founded by the Gombin Society and the



Dedication ceremony, August 1999

Nissebaum Foundation, had the wholehearted support of the Gąbin Landlovers Association. More than 50 descendants of Gąbin Jews from all over the world attended the dedication ceremony on August 16, 1999.

23. Evangelical-Augsburg cemetery, Dobrzykowska St.

In the period of Prussian rule, many German colonists arrived to the region. They were attracted by the opportunities in agriculture and the privileges promised by the Evangelical–**Augsburg** church, which encouraged ethnic Germans from West Prussia, Pomerania and Wielkopolska to come to Gąbin. While most of them lived in their farms, some took residence in the town introducing the artisanal manufacturing of cloth. The Evangelical cemetery was established in 1825 on Dobrzykowska St. as the burial place for all the



Gąbin's Evangelical cemetery

Evangelicals of the area, rural farmers and urban dwellers. Noteworthy are the neo-gothic cast-iron tombs from the 19th century, the lodge, and a stone fence with a gate from 1825-29. While many have been lost, more than a hundred gravestones from different periods remain in the cemetery, the oldest dating from the 1850s and 1860s.

24. Monument to the Unknown Soldier, Town Park

Like many other towns in Poland, Gąbin has dedicated a monument to the nameless soldiers who have given their lives for the country. Every year on November 11, the anniversary of the restoration of Poland's independence in 1918, the town's authorities, school children, members of civil organizations, and the general public march together from Józef Piłsudski's boulder monument to the Unknown Soldier monument located in the town's park. There, a ceremony is held reciting prayers, attending the call of the fallen, lighting a flame and lying flowers.



Monument to the Unknown Soldier in Gąbin



March and ceremony in Gąbin, the anniversary of the restoration of Poland's independence

25. German Kommandatur, First World War

During the First World War, Gąbin was only affected by a bombardment in June 1915 that destroyed a house and killed three people. In the years of German occupation (1914-1918), the town was part of the Gostynin-Kutno county, with capital in Kutno. Under the German occupation (1914-1918), the mayor of Gąbin was Albert Schneider, later replaced by von Hagen from Germany. Despite the difficult conditions and repression, there was a secret cell of the Polish Military Organization under the command of Lucjan Jankowski, a group of about twenty scouts led by Wacław Milke, and a circle of the Polish Socialist Party. In the last days of the war, mayor von Hagen resigned and left Gąbin. The building of the German Kommandatur during the occupation has been well preserved: its appearance today is the same that it had in 1915.



Postcard of the German Kommandatur, 1915.



The German Kommandatur building today

26. Town's court building, 1 Kościuszki St.

Before the Second World War, the building at the corner of Płocka and Kościuszki streets housed the town's court. When the building was renovated in 2018, the removal of the plaster on the walls unveiled visible traces of German writing, probably notices or slogans. Since it is known that during the German occupation the Schutzpolizei (Uniformed Police) was based "in the magistrate's building", and it is also known that a Nazi court (Amstgericht) and an employment office (Arbeitsamt) functioned "in Kościuszki St.", it is possible that one or more of these organs of Nazi power had their headquarters in this building.



Court's building facing the town park



Traces of German writing on the walls

27. Doctor A. Dziewczepolski, 4 Kościuszki St.

In 1928 A. Dziewczepolski was stationed in Brest (Belarus) as a Lieutenant of the Polish Army's 9th battalion (according to a document, he corrected his name from Adolf to Abram). Later he studied in Warsaw, where he practiced internal medicine and gynecology before opening a practice at 4 Kościuszki St. in Gąbin. He came to be remembered as a man of the highest ethical standards who worked days and nights, treated the poor for free, and gave them money for medicines. After the outbreak of the Second World War it is known that he was in Warsaw. He was last seen in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943.



Lt. A. Dziewczepolski

GĄBIN pow. Gostynin

*Ubezpieczalnia Społeczna w Płocku,
Lekarz domowy w Gąbinie: dr.
Korzyński Kazimierz; ubezp. 227
osób.*

Lekarze:

→ **Dziewczepolski Adolf (Aron) (1897,
1925) wewn., położ., ul. Kościusz.
ki 4.**

**Korzyński Kazimierz (1895, 1925)
wewn., ul. Poniatowskiego 3 (lek.
domowy Ub. Sp.).**

Dr. Dziewczepolski in the 1936 Medicine Yearbook.

28. Evangelical-Augsburg church site, Ogrodowa St.

As mentioned above, many Evangelical colonists settled in the region at the end of the 18th century. In the towns, they developed cloth manufacturing. Civil records show that the clothiers of Gostynin and Gąbin were ethnic Germans from Wielkopolska, Lubusz and Pomerania. Their arrival led to the initiative to establish a parish and build an Evangelical-Augsburg church in Gąbin. The parish was founded in 1827, including nine communes with 26 villages and 2,723 residents. The parish was large, including settlements in a radius of more than 10 kilometers around Gąbin. In the town itself, however, only 467 of the 2,355 inhabitants were ethnic Germans. The construction of the church and the home for the pastor proceeded quickly. The church was made of brick, covered with tiles. The façade was decorated with a portico with four Ionian columns and a balustrade

Forming a porch. From the front, the attic was visible, ending with beams to which the cross was attached. In 1830, the Evangelical church was completed. Throughout the rest of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, the share of ethnic Germans in Gąbin's population went down from 8.0% in 1866, to 5.4% in 1923, and 3.9% in 1933.

The months before the German invasion of Poland were marked by increasing tension between the Poles and the ethnic German minority, which had been galvanized by the rising power of Nazi Germany. Activists of the Deutscher Volksverband (German Union, party founded in 1924 by the ethnic Germans of Poland) organized provocative

meetings with Nazi flags and salutes. There was a branch of the Volksverband in Gąbin itself, led by the pastor Bruno Gutknecht. In July 1939, two Gąbin residents of German origin were tried in Płock for mocking the Polish army and insulting the mayor of Gąbin. The feeling that Gutknecht and his group were engaged in anti-Polish activities was confirmed during the occupation, when the local ethnic Germans massively joined the Nazi party and actively participated in the organs of Nazi rule.



The Evangelical-Augsburg church, before and after the Luftwaffe bombardments of 1939

They provided the personnel for the Hilfpolizei (local Auxiliary Police) and their youngsters were enlisted in the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth). There were very few who did not support the Nazis, and they had to be careful in public to avoid repression. One of them was Reinhold Wegert who, as manager of a mill in Sanniki, was in contact with the occupation authorities. He warned the Poles before arrests, helped some to escape to the area of the General Government, and facilitated the shipment of food parcels to Poles who were working in Germany. A teacher named Kuhn and a miller named Ratzlaff did the same in Wymysle. When the war ended with the collapse of the Third Reich, the ethnic Germans of Gąbin had to leave and resettle as refugees in Germany, sharing the same fate of all those of German origin in Eastern Europe. The Evangelical church of Gąbin did not survive as a testimony of their former presence. It had been damaged by the Luftwaffe bombings and the Germans themselves had taken care of its demolition.

29. Evangelical Pastor's house, Dawna pastorówka, Topolowa St.

Now a private residence, this building was the home of the pastor and organist of the Evangelical-Augsburg community in Gąbin. It served as a prayer house while the Evangelical church was being built on Ogrodowa St. The building is listed in the document "Care Program for Historical Monuments in the town of Gąbin", published by the municipality of Gąbin in 2017.



Evangelical Pastor's house

30. Mania Segal's guest home, Lesna St.

This house on Lesna St. was once a guest home owned by Mania Segal. The healthy air and the pleasant natural environment of forests and lakes made Gąbin an attractive place for resting and recreation. Some local residents, including Jewish families, adapted their homes to receive guests who spent their vacations in the town. Inspired by the success of these "summer resorts", the municipality of Gąbin sought to promote the town as a tourist destination. As a result of these efforts, Gąbin became a member of the Holiday and Tourism Board of Warsaw Province in 1938.



Mania Segal's summer resort"

31. Firemen's field on Strazacka St., concentration of the Jews for deportation

Pretending that they were organizing a transport to another town, the SS, the Hilfspolizei (Auxiliary Police) and other local ethnic Germans armed with rifles, revolvers, shotguns, and clubs, herded the Jews from the Gąbin ghetto to the Firemen's Square. On the way through Płocka St. they were beaten and abused. Three days spent the Jews on the Firemen's Square, writing down their names and undergoing selection. They were divided into groups, with young men separated from the



Hered to the deportation site



The Firemen's field

elderly, women and children. A few tried to escape, but they were betrayed by peasant informers and murdered by the Germans. The square was surrounded by barbed wire and tightly guarded by the soldiers, who killed several old people at night. A barrel with dirty water from the pond was given to the Jews for drinking and washing. Despite the ban to contact the Jews and the threat of death, the situation was so tragic that some Polish neighbors passed food and water to the Jews. The headmaster of the Jewish school, Icek Rembaum, provided spiritual support. On April 14 1942, the lists were completed and the trucks were waiting. When the young men were driven away (to Konin's forced labor camp), Rembaum intoned a prayer and others joined, despite the guards' beatings. Eventually, the trucks with the last groups departed towards the extermination camp at Chelmno, leaving behind a deserted square.