

## President's Report: Gabin (Gombin) Trip Report, July 17-18, 2005

Bernard Guyer

Sunday, August 21, 2005.

**Gabin, the town.** There are many new houses- some quite large in the town. I particularly noted that on Kilinskega Street many of the old structures we had seen in 1999 have been torn down and replaced with new construction. These people work in Plock, Gostynin and Warsaw and commute daily or weekly. Gabin is becoming more of a desirable bedroom community.

**The site of the Gombin synagogue** is now a graveled parking area for a new small food market that has been built on Kilinskega Street. The area going down to the river, where the mikvah stood, is still open brush. Houses back on to this area. We need to follow-up on the ownership of this land.



**Jewish cemetery:** The cemetery looks fine, vegetation is cut back. The face of the lapidarium has been cleaned, but there is a lot of debris around the stones. The entire concrete area and the remaining matzevot need to be cleaned. There is no graffiti or evidence of any vandalism. The gate is always left open. There were old yorzheit candles around.



**Chelmno:** At Chelmno I was fortunate to meet Krzysztof Gorczyca, an archeologist working for the Museum at Konin. There is much new research and excavation taking place at Chelmno to document the full extent of the atrocities committed there. The grave sites are far more extensive than previously realized. Underground furnaces have been discovered, even under the place where the shtetl monuments have been erected. They are also doing a “dig” at the site of the former manor house.



**Konin Catholic Cemetery;** mass grave of the Konin work camp Jews. This is unchanged from when we were there in 1999. No new matzevah has been erected. Ada will follow-up with Dr. Nowak from the Konin Regional Museum.



**Gabin Landlovers Association (Towarzystwo Milosnicow Zeimi Gabinskiej, TMZG):** I met Anna Ostrowska, the new president, and Mr Borysiak (whom we met in 1999). The museum looked wonderful- somewhat expanded and very clean and orderly. The room with info on Jewish Gabin was somewhat expanded with materials, but they have not been on the mailing list for B'nai Gombin. There is a new room dedicated to Skladkowski, who was the prime minister of Poland at the time of the Nazi invasion. They have a copy of one of the 1927 Yiddish theater playbills (“It’s Hard to be a Jew”) with the names of Max Chaja (Guyer) and Zelda Tajfeld Guyer.



**Sanniki:** I drove there because my father’s family was from Sannyik (pronunciation depends on how it is used grammatically in speech). There is an old chateau that was lived in by Chopin.



**Mayor of Gombin:** Mr. Krzysztof Jadczyk met briefly with me. He was mayor in 1999 and remembers the first visit. We talked about our common heritage and the planned visit for 2006. He was a bit concerned about too many buses arriving in town. We spoke frankly that there were some Gabiners who would not welcome the visit. In 17 years it will be the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gabin. I asked about whether there had been any thought of a memorial to the Jewish community or the famous synagogue. He thought it had been discussed but the cemetery was more important.

**The Balko's (Romek and Cecylia):** Sebastian's parents invited me to stay with them for the night. They are delightful people. We ate and drank together and even Sebastian was connected by internet so that he could participate in the conversation. The Balko's are the kind of Polish people who have no animosity toward Jews and will welcome our connections. We share a common history with them. Romek's father was in the Polish army, captured by the Nazis and spent 5 years in Sachsenhausen prison. Romek loves art and music and can sing Jewish songs in Polish. He knew the Polish words to "Mein shtetle Beltz" which I sang in Yiddish (we all had a bit too much vodka!). I need the name of Sebastian's aunt, an eccentric retired math teacher who lives next door.



**Michael Nowicki** (pronounced Novitzki) translated for me. He is a very nice young man who did a masters degree in foreign relations at university, worked in the US as a guest worker for a while, and now can't find a decent job.

**Maria Kaminska:** I visited Mrs. Kaminska in her home. She was very welcoming, kind and speaks pretty good English; she had baked a cheese cake for me and we drank coffee. We talked about Gabin. Her father was from Gabin, but they lived in Warsaw where he worked as a notary. They would come back to Gabin for the summers, and there she knew the Wolfowitz family. She is proud of her medal (The Righteous Among the Nations) from Israel. She has kept in touch with Wolfowitz sisters and with Steven Drew, the son of Dr Dziejczepolski (in Santa Monica CA). She was trained as a dentist and worked in a clinic in Gabin.

