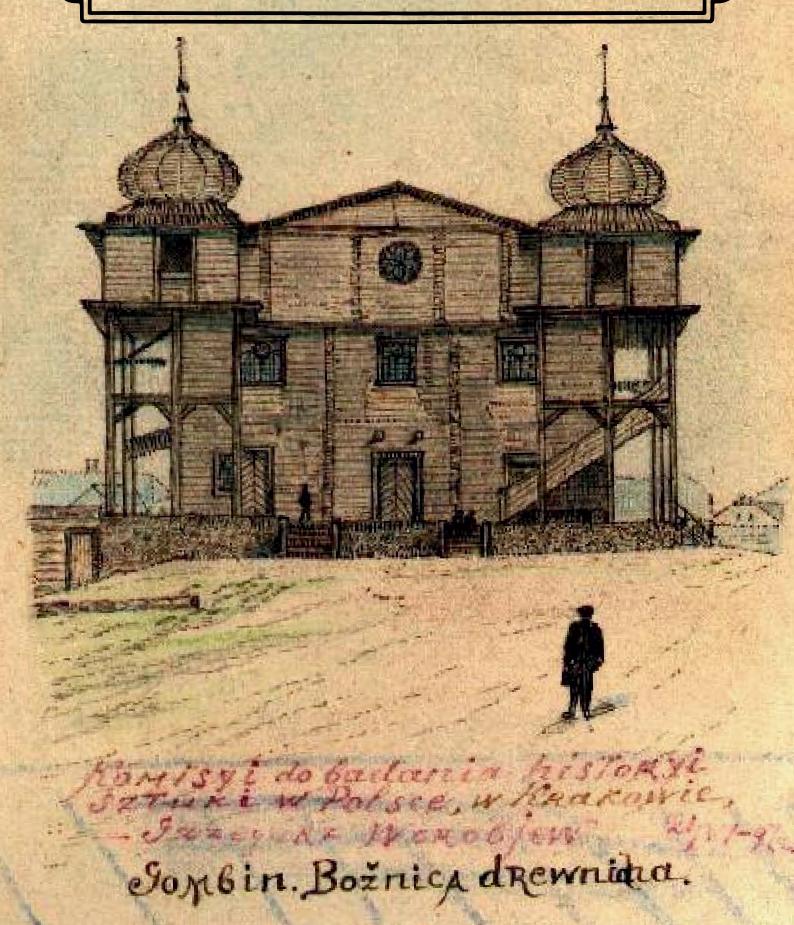
A Walking Tour of Gombin

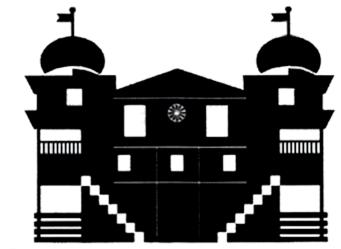
October 16th, 2025



A Walking Four of Gombin

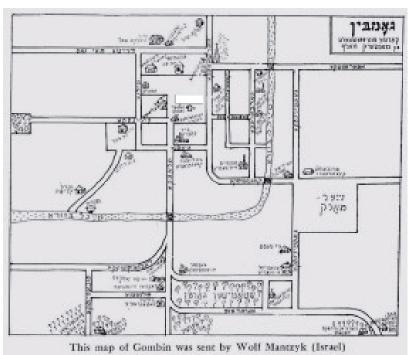
Polish & Jewish Culture: Yesterday and Today

October 9^{th} - October 19^{th} 2025



Gombin Jewish Historical Genealogical Society

Introduction



Gąbin, nestled on the plains of central Poland, was surrounded on the south and east by pastures of wheat, rye, and potatoes. On the outskirts of town, coming from the south, there were four huge windmills that manufactured flour from local farmers' grain. On the road from Warsaw to

the east, at the entrance of town, was another flour mill with modern machinery. To the north and west, the town was surrounded by beautiful pine forests. At this entrance, there was a mechanized lumber mill. At the northern end of town was a large park and



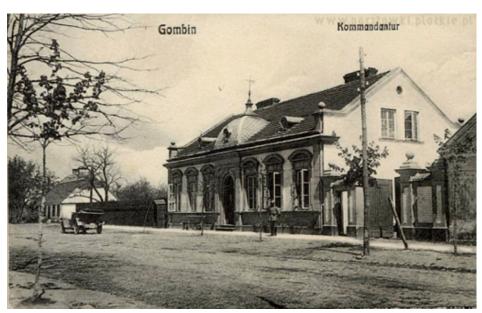
the nearby Protestant church with its high steeple. A narrow creek ran through the town with two wooden bridges connecting both sides. In spring, the creek flooded over the top of the bridges, and in winter, it froze, and people skated on homemade wooden skates. There were multiple groups of people who lived in and around Gąbin: Poles who were Catholic, Germans who were Protestant (Evangelicals),

Mennonite "Haulanders," and Jews. Each group had its own religious institution, which rose high above the surrounding squares and buildings.

Jews had lived in Gombin for centuries. There is evidence of Jewish names on the municipal list of taxpayers dating from 1564. In the following years, decrees were issued forbidding Jews from purchasing leather except under limited conditions in 1576 and milk in 1582.

The wooden synagogue was built in 1710. During those years, Jews were only permitted to live on certain streets. By the early 20th century, Jews lived in the center of town and worked in commerce, trade, and small manufacturing.





<u>The Stary Rynek:</u> The Old Market Place

This was the center of the town of Gabin, and Gabin was the center of the agricultural area surrounding it. The Jewish population lived mainly in the town. They were merchants, tradesmen, and laborers. "There were regular market days twice a week (Monday and Thursday) and yaridem, or market fairs, at irregular intervals. On these events, the entire large market square and annex were spread with Polish and German peasants who came by horse-drawn carts from





the countryside to vend their farm products." (Jacob Rothbart, Yizkor Book). The full breadth of the square was covered by canvas vending booths covered by overhanging canopies, each with its own special wares displayed on hooks and tables." There were Jewish women selling bread and rolls, Polish butchers selling kolbassi, sausages and ham. There were booths, offering ready made shoes and peltz (sheepskin coats), and tailors, and cap makers offering made-to-order clothes.



"On all sides of the square were elegant buildings of stucco and brick residences of two or three stories above the ground floor stores." At the east end of the square was the Catholic church and across from it, the city administration buildings as they are today. Along the south side was the

Jewish Folks Bank and along the north side the Jewish Library. A few streets further south was the Jewish 'cheyder', one of several at different levels, which existed alongside a system of public schools including one in the Napoleon House for a period. The market square annex, attached to the main square was lined by a row of "yatkes" (Jewish butcher shops).





<u>The Yiddishe Craftsmen & Occupations in Gombin:</u>

- Tailors
 - Shneiders
- Jewish Cobblers
 - Yiddishe Shusters
- Jewish Tanners
 - Yiddishe Gorbers
- Hat Makers
 - Kirzshners un Hitel Machers
- Furriers
 - Peltzen Machers
- Bakers in Gombin
 - Bekers in Gombin
- Jewish Butchers in Gombin
 - Yiddishe Katzavim in Gombin
- Jewish Fruit Traders
 - Yiddishe Sadovnikes
- Drying Fruits
 - Dos Trukenen di Fruchten
- Jewish Boot Uppers Makers
 - Yiddishe Volkers
- Musicians
 - Kleizmerim
- Village Traders
 - Dorfsgayers
- Market Women
 - Mark Zitzers
- Shopkeepers in Gombin
 - Yiddishe Kremers in Gombin
- Mordkhele, the Rope Maker
 - Mordkhele Shtrikmacher





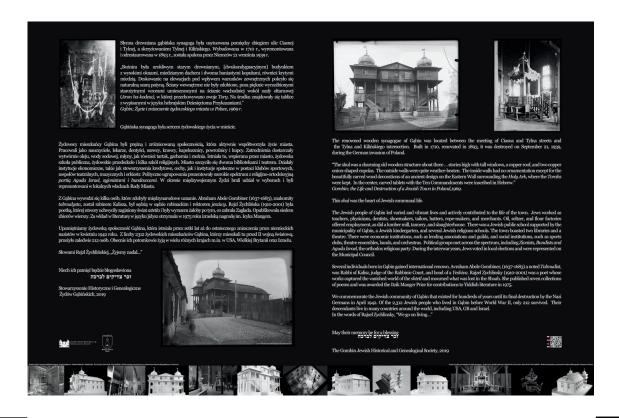


<u>Memorial Plaque on</u> <u>Market Square</u>

After working with the civic authorities for the town of Gąbin, the Gombin Society commissioned a Plaque memorializing the Jewish Community. It was designed by Wojtek Wasilewski and erected in 2021 in a moving ceremony

Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich and the Mayor of Gombin, Krystof Jadczak, Look at the Newly Unveiled Memorial Plaque

attended by townspeople, school children, and civic authorities in Gąbin, the Chief Rabbi in Poland, Michael Schudrich, and Gombiners worldwide via a Zoom link.



<u>The Synagogue</u>

The Grand Gabin Synagogue was built in 1710 in an oriental style at the intersection of what was then Tylna, Ciasna, and Kilińskiego Streets. In 1893, it was renovated. The barrel roof was sheathed in copper, and the two onion-shaped domes were also covered in copper with flags showing the dates the synagogue was built and renovated. The outside walls were





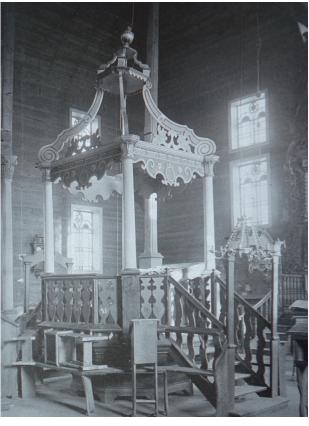


quite weather-beaten.
Inside the walls were
covered with natural wood
boards with no
ornamentation except
around the ark where the
Torahs were kept. The ark
was said to be carved by
craftsmen using a single
knife. The eastern wall was
covered with old sheets of



brass engraved with flowers. Antique curtains covered the ark, which was said to hold more than 50 Torah scrolls.

The synagogue was set ablaze on September 21, 1939. It and the surrounding buildings housing the Mikvah, the Chevre Kedusha (where bodies were prepared for burial), and Beit Midrash (Talmudic Study center) were destroyed.





<u>3rd of May St., Browarna</u> <u>St., and Garbarska St.</u>



Prior to 1918, Poland was partitioned between Germany, Austria, and Russia. Gąbin was in the Russian area, often referred to as Congress Russia. During this period, Jewish education took place in cheders. After Poland

regained its independence, public schools were opened and students were required to learn Polish and to be exposed to a 'modern' curriculum, including history and

science. However, students were still separated by ethnicity/religion. When a new public school for Polish students was built on 3rd of May St, Jewish students moved from



Garbarska St to the old Polish school on Warszawska St.

Also on 3rd of May St. was a Jewish Kindergarten, a secular school that promoted Yiddish and Polish and wanted to raise "aware Polish citizens".

Connecting the Market Square and Garbarska St. is Browarna St. After the deportation of the Jews from Gąbin, the Germans razed the Jewish cemetery, removed most of the matzevot, and used them for



paving roads and building sidewalks. More than 200 matzevot are known to have been used for the construction of the bridge on Browarna St. Nearby, the sidewalk had been lined with matzevot. 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 that was erected in the Jewish cemetery as part of its restoration in 1999.



Visible Hebrew inscriptions in matzevah used in a Gąbin sidewalk

Located south of Warsaw St and north of the stream, the old maps show Garbarska St. as the location of the public baths, a tannery, and the first Jewish school. At the far end was the Stupay oil factory.

<u>Polonia Theater,</u> <u>Grynbaum's Colonial</u> <u>Groceries, New Market</u>

Polonia Theater:

In the 1920s, after Poland regained its independence, Jewish life was transformed by the influences of Zionism and Bundism (Jewish Socialism). Young people, in particular, joined associations where they met to hear lectures, study, and debate the best future for the Jewish people. To prepare themselves for the new lives they hoped to see, they joined

scouting groups, learned farming, and participated in sports clubs and drama circles.





Jakob Grynbaum opened the Polonia Theatre in the 1920s. It was home to traveling Yiddish Theatre Companies as well as a very active Drama Circle in Gombin, which put on multiple plays per year for many years. There was even a drama club for children.

We are so lucky to have photos of the productions put on by the Drama Circle, as well as programs of the plays produced here from the Chaja Teifeld Collection at the USHMM.



In 1937 as a young physician,
Henry Grynbaum returned from
France to visit Gąbin (at the same
time Sam Rafel was there) He
gave a talk in the theatre on
Family Planning called
"Enlightened Motherhood" to an
overflowing crowd.





<u>The Nowy Rynek, New Market, Grynbaum's Colonial Groceries</u>

"The New Market was a huge rectangular space paved with cobblestones and a water pump at the center. All around were small farmhouses. In the summer, farmers would return here with cattle and horses from the nearby fields, and mothers would bring their children for drinks of fresh, warm milk." ~Henry Grynbaum

On the northeast corner at #1 and 2 lived the Grynbaums.
Jacob was a grain merchant, and he and his wife ran a
Colonial Groceries store on the first floor of the family home.





At the beginning of the German Occupation, on September 21, the Germans ordered all the men to gather on the Nowy Rynek, where they were beaten by soldiers and guarded by a machine gun placed on the balcony of the Grynbaum's house. At the same time, Wehrmacht officers set fire to the synagogue, which was consumed by fire, as well as the other buildings in the synagogue complex.

The City Park



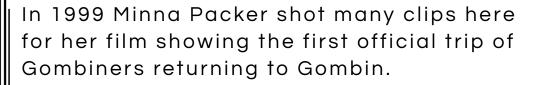
The Gąbin City Park was once the Old Horse Market. On Sundays, it was filled with the horse carriages of the parishioners of the Evangelical Church. Most of the carriages were drawn by

two horses, but some had four or six; In 1904, the city administration decreed that the square should be converted into a park. This is where Gombiners came for relaxation, walking, and recreation. There is a section of Sam Rafel's 1937 film taken in the park showing groups of people stringing up hammocks as a way to take in the fresh

air, surrounded by tall trees. Many large homes were built around the park, including the Adler Pharmacy. The family of Sarah Laks owned and operated a well-known bakery and pastry shop near the Park. This was also the home and office of Dr. Dziewczepolski, a



Jewish doctor (shown in this Polish military uniform). He was remembered as a man with the highest ethical standards who worked days and nights, treated the poor for free, and gave them money for medicines. He was last seen in the Majdanek concentration camp in 1943.





Strazacka St. and Fireman's Field

This page tells about the deportation and destruction of Gombin's last remaining Jewish community (The following is excerpted from the Jewish Community of Gąbin by Magdalena Karczewka. It reads as if it is eye witness testimony. The entire history can be found on the Gombin Society Website)



Gombin Ghetto, Main Gate

In 1941, the remaining Jews of Gombin were forced to leave their homes and move to a ghetto which was largely along Kilińskiego and the adjoining streets. In April 1942, the deportation began. 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 Fireman's Field. They were beaten and abused along the way. The Jews spent three days there, writing down their names and undergoing selection, where young men were separated from the elderly, women, and children. The field was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by soldiers. A barrel of dirty water was given to the Jews for drinking

and washing. Despite the ban on contact with the Jews and the threat of death, some Polish neighbors passed food and water to the Jews.

On April 14, 1942, the lists were completed and trucks were waiting for the Jews. Jan Borysiak remembers: "They (the Germans) gave orders to leave the luggage in the square and the people were thrown into the trucks, cramming them so much that they suffocated. Eventually, the trucks with the last groups departed, leaving behind a deserted square. Shortly after the liquidation of the ghetto, the Gąbin occupation authorities organized an auction of Jewish property after burning the worthless things. The last act in the destruction of the Jewish community of Gąbin was the razing of the cemetery in late August and early September of 1942.



Kilińskiego St.: The Heart of the Jewish Community

Kilińskiego St. was the heart of the Jewish community. At one end was the synagogue and at the other the Jewish Cemetery. In between lived much of the Jewish community. "The streets were lined with low wooden houses. There was

no running water, requiring water to be carried from nearby wells. Until the end of WWI, there was no electricity, and light was furnished by kerosene lamps. Poorer people lived in one room with a mud floor



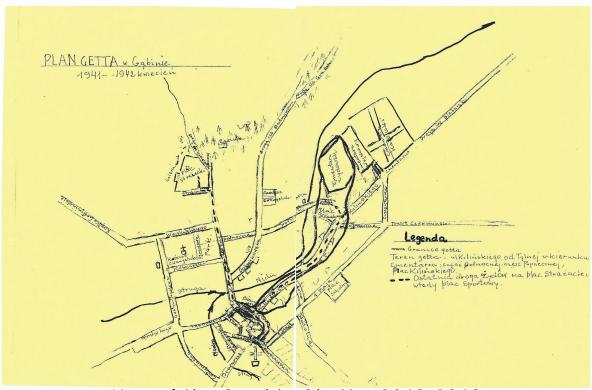
and brick or tile stove for both cooking and heating. The more affluent could afford a kitchen, living and dining space, and one or more bedrooms. In the general living space, there was a high tile stove for heating during the cold Polish winters. In winter, before bed, one would put a



brick in the stove until it was hot, wrap it in a blanket, and bring it to bed to provide warmth.

During the German occupation, Kilińskiego St. formed the main part of the ghetto.

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. 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.



Map of the Gombin Ghetto, 1941-1942

Conditions in the ghetto were appalling. It was hugely overcrowded, with multiple families sharing space that had formerly been occupied by one family. There was homelessness caused by over-crowding and the influx of Jews from other communities, and a spread of diseases caused by lack of food and unsanitary conditions. There was total impoverishment of the Jewish community caused by the lack of any paid employment and the deportation of many men to labor camps. In April 1942 when the Germans made their final move to liquidate it, there were 2,150 Jews crammed into the ghetto.

The Jewish Cemetery

A Jewish cemetery has existed for centuries in Gabin, probably for as long as Jews lived there. We know that in 1915, additional land was purchased that doubled the area of the old Jewish cemetery. In 1942, after the Germans liquidated what remained of the Jewish community, the Jewish cemetery was razed, fences torn down, most of the gravestones removed for use in construction, and a deep trench was dug across the burial grounds as part of the





belt of German fortifications that surrounded the town.

For the next fifty years, the Gąbin Jewish cemetery lay as an abandoned wasteland.

Restoration:



In 1997, the Gombin Society began an initiative to save the cemetery. In partnership with the the civic and religious authorities in Gąbin, the Gąbin Land Lovers, the Nissenbaum Foundation, and with contributions from Gombiner survivors and descendants from around the world, the following steps were taken: the demarcation of the boundaries of the cemetery, the recovery of the gravestones, the enclosure of the cemetery with a

new fence, and finally, the construction of a memorial lapidarium with the recovered matzevot.

For years, visitors to the cemetery took note of the one remaining complete matzevah lying in the woods just to the right of the lapidarium. Its large size and weight probably made it too difficult to move, and so it lay face up on the cemetery ground for 83 years.



In the spring of 2025, with the approval of the head Rabbi in Poland and the Jewish Cemetery Commission, the Gombin Society raised this giant matzevah to standing. We discovered that it belonged to Rabbi Shoel Szapiro, son of Shmuel, who died in 1836 or 1837. When we visit the cemetery, we will dedicate the matzevot, which attests to our long-term presence in Gąbin.







Gaces of Gombin





Rabbi Natan Nute Nutkevich, Gabin Rabbi 1921-1933





Rajzel Zychlinsky, Yiddish poet 1910-2001











Greenbaum Family

Sochaczewski Family 1927

























Conclusion

The memory of Gombin, of its people and its religious, cultural, and social institutions, lives in the minds of the few survivors who are scattered over the face of the earth. When we are gone, Gombin will cease to exist even in memory, and this would be its second extinction.

To prevent this tragedy (the Yizkor book was published) as a memorial to our town in hopes that in years to come it will be read from time to time by people who will tell their children that once upon a time there was a Shtetl Gombin, and so keep the memory of this town alive after all, like an eternal flame.

From My Shtetl Gombin: Reminiscences of a lost world, in Gombin: The Life and Destruction of a Jewish Town in Poland, by Henry Greenbaum

