

B'nai Gombin

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

90th Anniversary Celebration of Gombin Societies



On Sunday, May 19, 2013, about 75 Gombiners gathered at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Gombiner Young Men's Societies, including New York and New Jersey. The event included a history of the Gombin Societies researched and presented by Harold Boll; a showing of films about Gombin by Minna Packer; a recognition of Israeli Gombiner historian, Ada Holtzman; a short performance of dancing from Dana Boll's original production "Bella's Dream;" comments from leaders of the Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society; scanning of family photos and entry of family data into the genealogical data-base; some Yiddish dancing; much schmoozing and eating; and several family reunions.

This enlarged issue of B'nai Gombin contains photos from the event and several edited articles reflecting the presentations and happenings:

- Harold Boll: History of Gombin Societies in America
- Ada Holtzman: The Gombin in My Heart; Keep the Gombiner Light Burning
- Ellen Max Kaplan: Manczyks at the Reunion
- Dana Boll: "Bella's Dream"

History of Gombin Societies in America: 90th Anniversary Celebration

Harold Boll

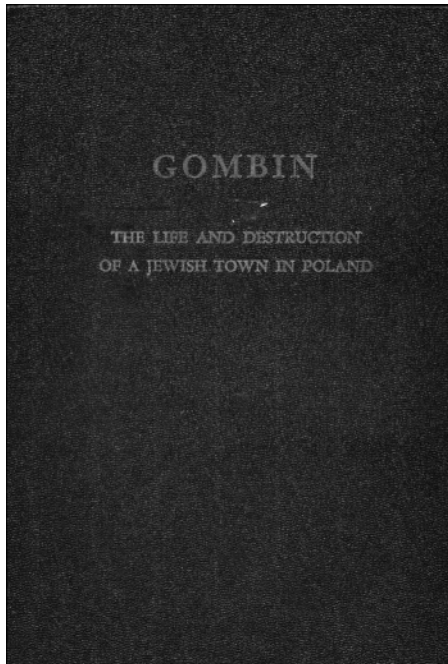
In her 1996 book, then first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton said, "It takes a village to raise a child". Growing up in New Jersey back in the 1950's, I had a village help raise me. That village stemmed from Gombin - our ancestral homeland.



Here are some of those Gombin Villagers. One way or another they all had a hand in shaping me as a child coming of age in the streets of Newark. First and foremost, I had a family that extended beyond my blood relatives. To me family meant any and all Gombiners. There was little distinction made between blood relations and those who were Gombin survivors. We Gombiner *Yidn* were a clannish people back then; always coming together for various events; visiting, calling, dinner parties - always seeing one another.

I have fond memories of the many Sundays we had large gatherings at grand picnics in the Orange Mountains of West Orange. My father would pack a cooler with ice and fill it with Hoffman soda bottles, miniature versions of the giant Hoffman bottle sitting atop the packing plant on South Orange Avenue. There were Sunday trips to Lake Hopatcong and week-long vacations at Bradley Beach, down

the shore. And then there were parties, visits and dinners at our homes, many of which were in the Weequahic, the Jewish section of Newark, a neighborhood made famous by author Philip Roth.



I had a good, happy childhood. I possessed a sense of belonging to a larger family- a Gombiner family. That family was there for me, to fill the void left by those who perished in the war.

The generation of Gombiners who came before us undertook the sacred task of keeping the memory of their beloved stehtl alive by publishing this *Yizkor* book in 1969. In it, individuals tell their stories in separate chapters, and collectively the story of Gombin is recounted in both English and Yiddish.

In the opening introductory chapter of the *Yizkor* book, Jack Zicklin, President of the New York Society was most eloquent in describing the motivation behind the creation of the *Yizkor* book.

"This memorial volume is published as a sacred obligation to the memory of our beloved city which together with hundreds and hundreds of Jewish cities and towns throughout Poland shared the horrible fate of the Nazi holocaust."

"Our goal was to erect a monument through which the coming generations - the children and grandchildren of the Gombiner Jews - would be able to acquaint themselves with the ancient past of Gombin and the roots of their origin."



SAM RAFEL

"I conclude with the hope that this "Pincus" will be found in the home of every Gombiner. In this manner the memory of our beloved birthplace will forever survive in the hearts and minds of our people."

Were Jack Zicklin still alive, he would be overjoyed to know that his wish has come true. The entire book has been scanned and is available online at the New York Public library web site.

The history of the Gombin Societies is inextricably wrapped up with the story of Sam Rafel. He was the driving force behind their creation and is given special recognition and praise by many who contributed to the making of the *Yizkor* book. In the introductory chapter, Jack Zicklin spoke eloquently about Sam Rafel:

"... it is impossible not to give special mention to our dear Sam Rafel, our former President. Sam was most active and enthusiastic about this project. He was devoted heart and soul to the idea of the

Gombiner Memorial Book as he was previously devoted to helping our needy brethren in a Gombin alive with the vitality of a living Jewish community.

Unfortunately, he did not live to see the appearance of this book, but we want it to be known that it contains much of his effort, loyalty and warm devotion. With the publication of this Memorial Book we pay a debt to his shining memory."

The second chapter, titled "Deserved Recognition" written by Louis Pochekha, the President of the Detroit Gombin Society, is devoted entirely to honoring the efforts of Sam Rafel:

"Sam Rafel is a well known name and is synonymous with the activities of the Gombiner Societies in New York and Newark."

"He encouraged our activists even in Detroit whenever measures needed to be taken to ascertain a successful monetary campaign.

"The personality of Sam Rafel has revealed itself to me not exclusively in fund raising matters.... but mainly for his individual idealism... and devotion to "Gombiner Activities" - that were near and dear to him for many, many years."

"He was always in a jubilant festive mood, he was a man of the people, our unforgettable Sam Rafel."

Sam Rafel, the son of a tailor, left Gombin, Poland in 1913 at the age of 17 and emigrated by ship to New York. It was a time when visas were not required; one only had to show on arrival that you possessed 25 dollars. During that first year he worked at a number of menial jobs in lower Manhattan and had a hard time adjusting to life in NY; he felt like a "greenhorn". He planned for his move to be temporary, but with the outbreak of WW1 return to Gombin was impossible. Furthermore, what little savings he had managed to accrue was lost when the bank he used went bankrupt. Upon moving to Newark, however, his fortunes began to improve. He met his wife, Yetta, who was born in Gombin and came to this country in 1910 as a young child with her parents. In 1916 he became the recording secretary of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and thereby considerably improved his financial condition.

Soon he began to think about his native Gombin and the needy Jews who lived there. He became the key catalyst in organizing Gombiners living in the NY/NJ metropolitan area to form the early philanthropic organization known as the Gombin Relief Committee whose charter was to provide financial aid and support to the Jews of Gombin. Among the early activists were Max Jacklin, the entire Kraut family (father Simon and sons, Alex and Philip), Louis and Max Green, Nathan Kleinert and many others.

Former Presidents of the Gombin Societies



MAX GREEN
First President
of the Gombiner Society in N.Y.



TEDDY KRAUT



ISIDOR PIURO



LOUIS GREEN



MAX JACKLIN



PHILIP KRAUT

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In 1923 that organization became the Young Men's Benevolent Association centered in New York. Jack Zicklin describes the early days of organizing. The idea of forming a Gombiner organization spread like wildfire among the Gombiner *landsleit* in New York.

NY Gombin Society



circa 1968

At the time there were about 40 families from Gombin who immigrated to the United States. And in October of 1923 a meeting was called at the Astoria Hall in New York that marked the beginning of the NY organization.

NJ/NY Gombin Societies



Gombiner Society, in Newark, with representation of the Society from New York and Mr. Chaim Kerber, from Paris; ~ 1965.

Around 1937, some New Jersey members became dissatisfied about being part of the NY organization, arguing that it was too far to travel from New Jersey. Others thought that the number of NJ members justified the creation of a separate group in the Garden State. The first meeting was held at the home of S. Lasky; A. Kesselman, a prominent lawyer, was elected first President, and Nathan Kleinert was elected secretary. A year later, Max Jacklin was elected president and worked assiduously in raising money for the Gombin Relief Fund.

The Detroit organization was founded in 1936 and also was active in keeping touch with Gombin and providing aid. Louis Philips wrote the chapter on the Detroit Society in the Yizkor book and credits the following people for playing key roles in the formation of the society. First mentioned were Shmuel Gayer [Guyer] and his son Sidney, who "*... in the thirties collected funds and kept up a correspondence with landsleit in Gombin.*" Also active were Jack Gayer, Julius Green, Max Rifman [Rissman] and Mordechai Schwartzberg.

Mrs. Yetta Rafel, wife of Sam Rafel, was the president of the NJ Ladies Auxiliary organization of the Gombin Society. Its main purpose was to help raise money for the Relief Fund and to furnish social activities. The following charming passage is excerpted from the chapter written by Mrs. Rafel in the Yizkor book:

NJ Gombin Society Ladies Auxiliary

MRS. YETTA RAFEL
Honorary President, New Jersey

THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE LADIES
AUXILIARY



The Purim-parties were gay and colorful. Who will forget the choosing of the Queen Esther. The woman who got the highest number of votes was crowned Esther. There was great competition among the men, everybody wanting his wife to receive the royal title. However, there was no jealousy and no one

was hurt as there was great comradeship and sportsmanship and the consciousness of purpose. Thus money was again raised for relief."

Sam Rafel went back to Gombin twice to coordinate the relief efforts. The first visit occurred in 1930, when he arrived back after an absence of 17 years to see his parents, brother, sisters and close friends. He brought a sizeable amount of cash that he gave to Jewish lending institutions.

He returned a second time with his wife in 1937 and brought with him a 16 mm black/white movie camera with which he made the now famous film depicting the people of Gombin. When he arrived, an affair was held in his honor at which three thousand people attended, virtually the entire population of Jewish Gombin. Once again he brought money to be distributed. During that period the people of Gombin were suffering under the dual hardships of grinding poverty and government sponsored anti-semitism. To alleviate some of their suffering, Rafel made an agreement with a local doctor that he minister free of charge to poor and sick Jews of the town and send the bill to the US Gombin Society.

In retrospect, his visit was only 2 years before the outbreak of WWII and the beginning of the holocaust. As Rafel writes in the Yizkor book:

"All this transpired in 1937 when none of us even remotely suspected that in two years Gombin and the other little towns and villages of Poland would be swallowed by the flames of a cruel war."

After the war, Rafel oversaw efforts to cut through red tape and managed to sponsor the immigration of over 50 families from Polish and German detainee camps to immigrate to America. My parents were beneficiaries of these efforts. Moreover he spearheaded the project to build the Gombiner House in Tel Aviv as a center for Israeli Gombiners and as a memorial to the stehtl of Gombin. Sadly Sam Rafel passed away shortly before the Yizkor book was published. In my view, he personified the Yiddish word, *Mensch* - a compassionate and caring human being who worked tirelessly to help others.

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*Minutes of the Gombiner Young Men
of New Jersey.*

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*Minutes of the Executive Meeting.
Dec. 14th 1939.*

A meeting of the Executive Board of the Gombiner Young Men of N.J. was held at the home of Brother I Perso, 100 Gramman Ave., Newark, N.J.

President A. Jackson brought forth a proposal of eight committees, with a chairman at the head of each.

The Committees are as follows:

- 1. Membership Committee.
A. Kleinert, A. Jackson, N. Solomon, S. Goldberg.*
- 2. Program Committee.
E. Krieger, A. Rafel, I. Perso, A. Levine, P. Michaelson.*
- 3. Order Committee.
A. Jackson, A. Hill, A. Blume, A. Levy, J. Kauter.*
- 4. Publicity Committee.
A. Krieger, A. Rafel, A. Mark.*
- 5. Finance Committee.
A. H. Krieger, A. Rafel, A. Jackson.*
- 6. House Committee.
I. Perso, S. Krieger, M. Solomon.*
- 7. Attendance Committee.
A. Krieger, A. Rafel, A. Kleinert, J. Kauter.*
- 8. Delinquent Committee.
A. H. Krieger, A. Blume, M. Greenhouse, S. Miller, A. Jackson, A. Krieger.*

A. President A. H. Krieger took over the Chair and asked for a report on our Theater City. Brother S. Krieger informed us that there was a profit of \$5.55 and an additional \$14.00 worth of

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meeting adjourned at 11:30 P.M.

*Respectfully Submitted,
E. Unger, Secy.*

85 copies to be sent out

June 8, 1944.

A meeting was called to order by President N. Kleinert at 10:30 P.M. Cheer chairman A. Jacobson reported all brothers well. A letter was read from Mr. Krieger telling us that he is recuperating. Mr. Krieger, picnic chairman reported everything ready. Relief chairman Cornfield told us things have slowed down a little. He turned in \$8 collected for pledges. He also made a motion which was passed to read a relief report once a month. Mr. Cornfield also told us they held one meeting for the Constitution. He asked for the thanks of women continue to get it in shape. Mr. Jake Tiber was welcomed to the meeting. 3 delegates for the Jewish Federation and Mr. A. Cornfield & Mr. M. Greenhouse. A vote was taken & passed to hold our closing meeting June 25th at 2:30 P.M. at the Essex House. Ben Jacobson made a motion which was seconded that we buy a \$500.00 bond (\$375). He reported that we have \$500 in bonds on hand.

*minutes collected
from Unger
June 8, 1944
\$26.00
am. Feb. 4.00
\$24*

My father, Raymond Boll, was the last President of the Gombiner Young Men of New Jersey. When he passed away 7 years ago, I took charge of the Gombiner papers, records and photographs in his possession. One of the fascinating items I came across when going through the archives in preparation for this talk is a hardbound notebook containing hand-written minutes of the Board Meetings. The first entry is dated December 14th 1939, just after the outbreak of WWII. The last entry on page 299 is dated June 8, 1944 - just 2 days after D-day, the invasion of Normandy. The recording secretary was an E. Unger whose very legible handwriting made reading the minutes quite easy. Most of the entries dealt with fund raising, new membership recruitment and planning social events. Sam Rafel's presence was evident in encouraging all Gombiners to dig deep to aid their brethren in Poland. References to other Gombiners were preceded with the honorific titles of 'Brother' or 'Sister', i.e. Brother Rafel or Sister Kleinert. Meetings were held at the homes of members on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month. The first Thursdays were intended as social gatherings, while the second dealt with business matters. Meetings typically commenced around 10 PM and finished sometime between 11:30 PM and midnight. It is a glowing testament to the dedication of those early members that they could work a full day, stay up late in the evening to further the goals of the organization, and then, on a short night's sleep manage to get up and go back to work the next morning.

GOMBINER YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION, INC.

GOMBINER • NEWS

PASSOVER EDITION

MARCH / APRIL, 1994 • NISAN / IYAR, 5754

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IN TRIBUTE

THESE WERE THE BEGINNINGS....

Bound together by ties of faith, a small group of GOMBINER joined as one family as they declared their intention to create a LANDSMANSHIP to be known as THE GOMBINER YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT ASSO.

The year was 1923....

MANY BEGINNINGS
MANY MILESTONES....

Challenges and accomplishments highlight our formative years; our leaders of the past have bestowed upon us a knowledge of a rich heritage that has touched us all in special ways. We salute them and acknowledge their contribution to the well-being of the existing GOMBINER SOCIETY.

65th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION....

As we celebrate this happy occasion, we wish you a pleasant and enjoyable WEEK-END. To the Members who could not attend, we miss you and wish you - A HAPPY ANNIVERSARY.

OUR HONORED GUESTS

MR. ARNOLD RAYMOND BOLL	MR. ARNOLD BEN GYER
MRS. SONIA GERNER	MRS. ROSE EYER
MR. & MRS. SAM FRANKEL	MR. ARNOLD MORIS NAJOLIK
MR. ARNOLD ROSE SHAPIRO	MR. ARNOLD OTTO SLIVER
MR. HENRY FRANKEL	MR. GEORGE SOJANA
MR. ARNOLD MANUEL MARGOLIS	MR. ARNOLD ROBERT GERSTL
MR. ARNOLD BEN KLEINERT	MR. ARNOLD MILTON KLEINERT
MR. ARNOLD SEYMOUR SLAVIN	MR. ARNOLD JACK WEKLER
MR. ARNOLD SAM WEISS	MR. ARNOLD MARK RUGGA
MRS. ROSLYN BALEN AND SISTER	
MRS. ROSE TADELIS	MRS. AMY LIEBERMAN
MR. ARNOLD BEN KRAUT	MR. ARNOLD HARRY DINKERMAN
MR. ARNOLD PHIL KRAUT	MR. ARNOLD LAWRENCE GRACE
MR. ARNOLD MURRAY KAMEN	MR. ARNOLD MILTON JOSEPH
MR. ARNOLD MORRIS CARSON	MR. ARNOLD MORRIS SINGER
MR. ARNOLD VAY KRAUT	MRS. ROSE BERNSTEIN
MR. MARK MORIS	MRS. BETH FRIEDMAN
MRS. SUSAN GREENBAUM	MR. ARNOLD GREENBAUM
MR. ARNOLD MICHAEL ZIELONKA	MRS. MINNA ZIELONKA
MR. ARNOLD LEE RICHARDS	

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New York and New Jersey Societies Host 2nd Annual Florida Gombiner Luncheon

Sixty-two Gombiner and some guests attended this year's event, held on January 10th, at David's Catering in Tamarac, Florida. Many of the attendees met londsleit for the first time. The exchange of greetings with hugs and kisses was a sight to behold.

It was a first for many, with lots of surprises...it was a real "getting to know you" session. We also enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres for over an hour, followed by a sumptuous lunch.

This year's party included several surprises. While awaiting desert, Raymond Boll, President of the NJ Society, warmly welcomed the audience. He then introduced

Bernie Kleinert, Vice President of the NJ Society.

After a few timely remarks, Mr. Kleinert reminded the audience that this was the 71st Anniversary year for the Gombiner, and he wished for many more celebrations.

Bernie then called on brother Alex Kraut, and presented him with a plaque honoring him for seventy-one years of continued membership.

A plaque was also presented to Hannah Guyer, honoring her as the "Queen of Gombin."

Both recipients expressed their appreciation for the recognition, and wished for a continued relationship with the Society...biz a hindert un tzvantzig!

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT PRESENTED TO

ALEX KRAUT

FOR EXEMPLARY COMPLETION OF
71 YEARS OF CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP IN THE
GOMBINER YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 10, 1994

BY: ARNOLD BOLL, President
NJ SOCIETY

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION PRESENTED TO

CHANA GUYER

FOR HER 71 YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE
GOMBINER YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
AND THE QUEEN OF GOMBINER

GOMBINER YOUNG MEN'S BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 10, 1994

BY: ARNOLD BOLL, President
NJ SOCIETYBY: ARNOLD BOLL, President
NJ SOCIETY

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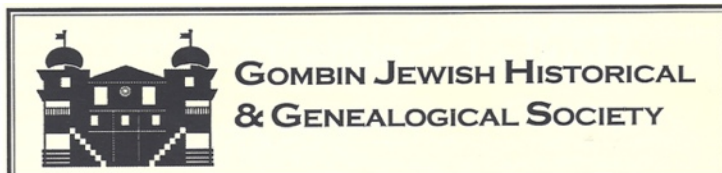
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The last two presidents of the of the NY and NJ societies, respectively, were Ben Kraut and my father, Raymond Boll. Their tenure lasted a long time- from the mid 1970's to the early 2000's. For the most part their efforts were directed toward managing cemetery plots and eventually planning joint social events. On the left side of the slide you see the program from 1988 celebrating the 65th Anniversary of the Society at a fancy, shmancy hotel somewhere in the Catskills. In addition to the two society presidents, I've highlighted some of the attendees who may have some ties to some attendees here today. They include Fania Odra, mother of Ita and Mary Odra; and Minna Zielonka who created the film "Back to Gombin"; and Roslyn Ballen, mother of Mindy Prosperi and Elliot Ballen.

On the right portion of the slide, is the 1994 newsletter reporting on the combined NY/NJ social event that took place in Tamarac, Florida. Bernie Kleinert, the NJ vice-president, pointed out in his remarks to the group that this was the 71st anniversary of the society. He then presented a plaque to Alex Kraut honoring him for 71 yrs of service. Also honored, was Chana Guyer, the mother of Bernie Guyer, whose remarkable memory was singled out. Her plaque reads:

*"We wish to honor Hannah Guyer whose memories of Poland never tire. As the **QUEEN OF GOMBINE**. She remembers all that she's seen. And we sing her praises higher and higher."*



Ada Holtzman
www.zchor.org



Leon Zamosc



Gombiners at death camp of Chelmno dedicating the Memorial to Gombin (August, 1999) 15

The above picture brings us to our current Gombin organization: the **Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society** that has taken over where the other organizations left off. Our origins are as follows. On Thursday evening, December 21, 1995, I received a call from Leon Zamosc, professor of Sociology at University of California, San Diego, who invited me to embark on a project with him to explore our Gombiner heritage. Leon related to me that for most of his life he had no particular interest in family history, but that the recent death of his father had sparked in him an intense desire to explore his roots as a Jew and especially as the son of a Gombiner. His enthusiasm and vision for this project was infectious and I gladly became a willing convert. We soon recruited a number of 2nd generation Gombiners and communicated with one another via email. These other founding members included: Elliot Ballen from Cranford NJ, Mindy and Bob Prosperi from NY, Noam Lupu from S.F., our 3rd generation representative, Gayle Frankel in Florida, Jeff Wruble from L.A., Jeremy Freedman in England, and Ada Holtzman in Israel.

Our initial goals were to: 1) Organize a trip to Gombin. 2) Secure the Jewish cemetery of Gombin from encroachment by building a wall around it. Also, to create a shrine from recovered Matzevot (tombstone) at the entrance. 3) To erect a Monument at the death camp of Chelmno to honor the memory of the Gombin Jews who perished there in 1942. 4) Honor the victims massacred at the Konin Labor camp.

In addition, Minna Packer-Zielonka set out with a film crew to record this historic trip to Gombin which is chronicled in her film "Back to Gombin".

We immediately commenced a fund raising effort to accomplish these goals. We received considerable help from the NY & NJ societies as well as individual contributions from Gombiners here in North America and, indeed, from all around the world. In August of 1999, after an absence of almost 60 years, Jews returned to Gombin, at least for a little while.

It was thanks to Leon's prodigious efforts, keen intellect and boundless energy that our group came into being and within four years accomplished all our initial goals. Sadly, some short time after the trip, Leon chose to absent himself from our organization, but we are all grateful for the indelible mark he has left us. Our archives are filled with the fruits of his scholarly research on Gombin and its destruction; it greatly supplements the information contained in the *Yizkor* book. Without his seminal efforts to get the ball rolling, it is conceivable that our organization would never have come into being. We are forever in his debt.

No re-telling of our organization's history would be complete without highlighting the herculean efforts of Ada Holtzman. Over the years she has made countless trips to Poland to research Jewish Gombin's history, recover *matzevot* and collaborate with Polish friends on various projects there. Her richly adorned website is a living testament to the memory of Gombin and its Jews. More than any other Gombiner, she has earned the right to be the heir to the legacy trail-blazed by Sam Rafel who, like her, worked tirelessly for the Jews of Gombin. On behalf of Gombiners everywhere- Ada- we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

And now to conclude this talk, I present to you a riddle: Who are these people anyway?



Newark Gombiner Lodge 174, Feb 15, 1931, Robert Treat Hotel in Newark, N.J.

Among the papers I salvaged from my father's home was this delicate picture of an organization called the Newark Gombiner Lodge 174 at a fancy gathering of about 120 people in 1931. Given the name 'Gombiner' obviously this organization has something to do with our *shtetl*. But why is there no mention

of it in the *Yizkor* book? And why did their founders include the word 'Lodge', which is reminiscent of VFW lodges? The lettering on the left side of the image indicates that this event is taking place in the ballroom of the Robert Treat Hotel in downtown Newark - a very expensive venue. Indeed the people in the picture appear to be well off- the men wearing tuxedos, women dressed in stylish gowns & jewelry, and a live band. They seem quite assimilated into American society; I spied no men with beards and only 1 yarmulke is in view.



Gombiner Lodge No. 174; ORG. Feb. 28, 1910
Newark, NJ

Note that the flag, in the enlarged image, shows that the organization was founded in 1910- 13 years before the founding of the NY Gombiner society in 1923, and it was still in existence in 1931. The Newark tax records show that it owned a property at 7 Whitney St, Newark which is right off of South Orange Avenue not far from West Side H.S., in a building housing other Jewish organizations as well. Cemetery records indicate that the society owned plots in the Hebrew cemetery across the street.

My working hypothesis is that when this organization was formed in 1910 it was purely a social organization with few ties to Gombin itself. The primary purpose of the NY/NJ Gombiner Society was to aid the Polish Gombiners, a service the Gombiner Lodge may not have provided. I suspect that after the creation of the NJ Gombiner society in 1937, members of the Lodge were absorbed by it.

In conclusion, let me say that I'm gladdened by the number of people who have turned out for this event. Being here offers us the possibility of regaining what has been long dormant: a sense of connectivity, an appreciation of our common roots as Jews, as Gombiners, and as the sons & daughters and relatives of the survivors and victims of the Holocaust. Hopefully a sense of fellowship has been established that will endure for many years. Thank you.

The Gombin in My Heart; Keep the Gombiner Light Burning

Ada Holtzman



Shalom Gombiners... Biegelajzen, Borensztajn, Chaja, Gtrnberg, Karo, Laks, Loncka, Manczyk, Piuro, Stupay, Szklarek, Tiber, Wruble, Zajac, Zamość, Zielonka, Zolna. And I could have read all the names of our families from “there”, from **GOMBIN**, (**Gąbin**) a Jewish community that graced this earth for hundreds of years and for the past 71 years, exists no longer.

Shalom to all my friends gathered together to celebrate 90 years since the founding of the

Gombin Society with all its branches in America. I send you all my greetings and thank you for your blessed continuous work to commemorate our beloved Jewish **Gombin**. I thank you for the honour that you are granting me today. It is not yet time to summarize my activities, because I will continue to do what I’ve done until my last day. **Gombin** is in my heart and is part of me! **Gombin** is my roots, and without roots, the tree of life cannot blossom and prosper. Remember the words of the Jewish scholar, *Baal Shem Tov*, founder of the Hassidism, “Remembrance is the Secret of Redemption.”

Today’s gathering is a family re-union, because in the *shtetl* - and **Gombin** is the mirror of all *shtetls* - everybody was related. But more than blood connections, they all shared a common heritage and common struggles to survive the hardships. They shared common dreams to found a better world outside Poland, realizing a dream of thousands of years to revive the ancient homeland *Eretz Israel*, and return to Jerusalem. Thus, we are united by common aspirations, cemetery, great synagogue, great Rabbis, leaders, parties and youth movements, wars, and a common tragic end.

This **Gombin** still dwells in the hearts of all the descendants scattered around the globe; the memory of ancestors is kept- a symbolic victory over the Germans. I’ve been involved in keeping the memory of **Gombin** alive in various ways. One is by helping to research the genealogy and history of its Jewry. **Gombin** became an integral part of my spiritual world. This commitment is not in order to receive any medal or reward, but simply my duty. I have done what I’ve had to do and will continue to do because

we, the children of those who were born “there”, are the link between the past and the future. We hold the torch of “memory” and pass it on to the next generations.

My heart is with you all at this celebration in New York, and my heart is with you all the time, even if there are periods that I am involved with other projects. It is a good opportunity to ask forgiveness from whomever I haven't answered during these years. You've shared your family roots history with me, asking for information, any piece of information. With as much patience and knowledge as I could, I've answered nearly all your emails, thousands of emails, and I'll continue. Maybe you wonder why, what is my motivation and how can I hear the same types of inquiries, more and more, again and again. I treat it as my small sacred mission, my commitment to my father and mother, to keep the Gombiner light on, so that **Gombin** is remembered.

Beit Gombin in Tel Aviv

I've also organized since 1997, with the elders of the past, remembrance assemblies in *Beit Gombin* at Tel Aviv. But for years, we haven't had enough men for a *kaddish*. The elder generation have nearly all died or become sick, and the second generation Gombiners do not appear regularly. This house, founded by the American organizations in the 1950s, seized by the municipality of Tel Aviv because of unpaid debts, has been restored as a cultural center for the elderly. In the Agreement, the new public owner was committed to keeping the memorial plaques on the wall, the memorial at the entrance, and to permit the annual remembrance gathering. The plaques, made of copper, bear the names of Gombiner families, and serve as symbolic tombstones to the murdered Jews of Gombin who have no *matzevot* of their own.

Every time, in addition to the prayers in public, I read something from the Gombin *Yizkor* Book translated by my father, **Meir Holcman** of blessed memory, into Hebrew from Yiddish. A few years ago, I read about the parting of **Balcia Cipris née Tiber**, daughter of the honorable banker of the town, **Abraham Tiber**. She describes their departure from Gombin with my parents in July 1939, the tearing apart from the family and the parting from the old world to found the new one in Zion; *Halutzim*, going to *Eretz Israel* at the last moment. The daughter of **Balcia** was in the assembly for the first and only time, and her eyes were filled with tears, as were all of ours.

Once **Geoffrey Greenwood** from the **Gordon** family honoured us and participated when he was in Israel. I'll continue organizing these Remembrance Meetings even if I'll be the last and only participant!

Everyone has his own "Gombin"...

Everyone has his own "**Gombin**." I've known many other organizations or private researchers who have a link to their own *shtetl*. I was deeply impressed and inspired by the English journalist, **Theo Richmond**, who took seven-years from his professional and personal life and dedicated those years to interviewing and recording all surviving Jews from his hometown of Konin. The book's title is: Konin: A Quest. In many ways, I've identified with this writer and feel that I'm on a similar quest.

I've gone on a voyage myself- the most fascinating voyage of all voyages, the voyage that has no end, the voyage to the past, exploring one's family history.

There is always a new life story, a new search, a new experience, a new death of another Gombiner from "there", taking his story to the tomb and leaving descendants who start exploring their roots a little too late.

How did it start...

In 1988, when communism started to fall in Poland, I flew there and landed in what seemed to me then as a third-world country. The cold was unbearable. I found Anna, who volunteered to take me to **Gabin**. I wanted to see with my own eyes, this birthplace of my ancestors from both my mother (Gostinski) and father (Holcman).

I wished to explore two issues: first, were there any survivors from my large family, and second, were there gentiles from Gombin who saved Jews during the war- "the Righteous among the Nations?" How is it possible that there was no survivor from my large family (32 men and women- my own flesh and blood; little girls and little boys- no one was spared). But maybe someone hid, was saved, and a human being survived, living under false identity? I've continued to inquire into these issues, and from my own family, the inquiry has spread to all the Gombiner families. New answers, while often disappointing, keep appearing from time to time. The last case appeared only recently, when **Andrew**, a grandson of **Ester Orlowska née Łacka**, contacted us from Australia. His grandmother **Helena Emila** (changed her name from **Ester**) was the girl who my father knew; in the 1920s, she married the Polish *Goy*, the forest-keeper **Orlowski**, and was baptised. This caused a big scandal in the *Shtetl*. She survived the war but died young in 1950. As amazing as it is, her Polish husband **Kazimierz Orlowski**, saved 2 Jewish boys whom he gave a shelter, under life threat to all the family. One of the boys was **Ester's** nephew, **Jakob**, whom the grandson found after 70 years, still alive in Tel Aviv. The family hid in a nearby village Zakulin so didn't witness the liquidation of the ghetto on 17 April, 1942.

I would like to mention some of the main projects, in which I have fulfilled my sacred mission.

Sam Rafel's Film of 1937

Andrew, the grandson of Loncka, then identified her in photo number 68, the woman in the white dress, in Sam Rafel's film from 1937, and this is the last Jew who was identified in the film, just a few days ago. 12 years ago I captured the images in the film with a very primitive technique at the time. Then I took care to identify the people more than 10 years ago, and I gave the information also to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which has this film in their holdings and the names in their database.

I constructed the website <http://www.zchor.org/rafel/rafel.htm>. I must mention also the unforgettable Gombiner survivor **Mendel Wruble** of blessed memory, a distinguished Gombiner who identified more than a hundred names in the film.

Sam Rafel, was a great person, who dedicated his life to the commemoration of Gombin Jewry and raised funds towards the welfare of the survivors, many of them in Israel. He returned to his beloved homeland in 1937 to make this immortal film of Gombin and its Jews. By his deep vision and great love, he filmed the people, the synagogue, the cemetery, and his heritage from the old home-town. Later, in April 1942, all the Jews, so vivid and full of life, were all tragically murdered, the great synagogue burnt, the cemetery desecrated and destroyed, a community which existed since the 15th century was erased off the earth forever.

This project wouldn't be possible without the help of **Sam Rafel's** descendants who gave the copyrights and the Gombin Society which took care to restore the film with the 21st century new techniques. I thank you very much and would like to commend also **Jeremy Freedman** who dealt with the London War Museum that has displayed this film for more than 10 years. **Every Person Has a Name! and a face, and a family, and a life story ... A whole universe is behind each name!"**

Gombin is Alive on the Internet

In the summer of 1996, I received a phone call from my father, **Meir Holcman**. "**Ada**, you won't believe it, there is a newsletter of a group: "B'nai Gombin" (sons of Gombin) in America, and this group is on the Internet!" This seemed so incredible to him that after so many years; **Gombin**, his destroyed beloved *shtetl*, still existed in America, in the new media, which he didn't quite understand. What is the Internet? This phone call changed my life. I joined the **Gombin** group forum on the Internet and started this endless voyage to **Gombin**, the **Gombin** in my heart.

I've devoted my spare time to collecting the genealogical and historical documents of my parents' *shtetl*. Then I made all the sources available to everyone, on my website and on the search engine of the Gombin Society's website. But still I keep getting an endless flow of questions and inquiries. I patiently explain, check, and correspond with each one for hours and hours, as if he or she were the most important person in the world- important for me as he/she will keep the torch of **Gombin** alive and give it later to his/her descendants.

Gombin is Alive in Memorials in Poland

I am proud to be part of the group that erected the memorial to Gombin at the site of the death camp Chelmno, where the Jews of Gombin were murdered. This stone is very impressive and serves, forever and ever, as the symbolic tombstone of the Jews, who have no tomb of their own, and their ashes scattered in the earth of that cursed site. My father translated the Yiddish version with many tears coming straight from his bleeding soul.

Then the incredible restoration of the cemetery of an ancient community. So many contributed, dealt with the Authorities, raised the necessary funds and made this restoration a fact, an act of the highest respect and love to fellow Gombiners, ancestors and relatives, may their soul be bound in the bundle of life.

My Father Meir Holcman

My father also translated the Yiddish part the Gombin Yizkor Book into Hebrew, and this was very hard for him, especially since he knew many of the Holocaust survivors mentioned in the book, all being his



Hashomer Hatzair (1934). Leah Florkewicz; Meir Holcman to her right

family members, friends, or his pupils in *Hashomer Hatzair*, where he was a guide. I saw that his memory was so lucid and vivid that I started asking him questions about the people and families of the Internet group. He remembered everything and everybody and cooperated with me. I then transmitted his reminiscences to the inquirers. The more he was asked, the more he remembered. He translated many other documents from Yiddish into Hebrew and wrote his own memoirs, which I've published in a book after his death "Meir Holcman", Tel Aviv, 1999. Most of this book is translated into English

and appears in the JewishGen Yizkor Books database in the Internet:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/gombin2/gombin2.html>

My Mother Rywcia (Rivka) Holcman née Gostynski

My mother, **Rywcia** née **Gostynski** died very young, in Kibbutz Evron of Hashomer Hatzair, of which she was among its founders since 1939. She died suddenly, leaving us with endless pain and longing for her for more than 40 years now.

Her descendants would have been her consolation for the murder of her sick mother, **Yochewet** née **Honigstok** from Kutno and Kiernoza, for whom she cared for many years in her youth. Her father **Jakob Gostynski**, a butcher in the little town for many generations, who bought for 1000 zloty each immigration permits from the Jewish Agency for her and my father and other 10 youngsters who left in one of the last ships to Eretz Israel and thus saved their lives and their chain of generations. They didn't spare her old grandfather **Moses**; her brother **Pinkus (Pinchas)**, killed in Auschwitz, and **Chana Laski**, his wife, whom he married in the ghetto, murdered like all the Jews of the ghetto Gombin in Chełmno.

Hundreds of other relatives and acquaintances perished in the Holocaust. There was a deep pain which she had hidden from us, the children, *sabras*, so we wouldn't know: we, the new healthy generation born from the ashes in Israel, a free State- the miracle after the disaster. So we grew up in peace and free of nightmares. But here and there, that hidden pain penetrated me anyway. It was when I saw distant and close relatives from "there" coming to visit us all the time, when the parents talked Yiddish and Polish between themselves all the time; when I looked at the old photographs of the family and *Hashomer Hatzair* from "there"; when I saw my mother very agitated and tormented from the news of the Eichmann captivity trial in Jerusalem. I wasn't even 10 years old then. These memories were inside me all the time and burst out since I went to Poland for the second time, with the "Back to Gombin" mission in 1999.

About 15 years ago, I founded a special website dedicated to my mother's memory: www.zchor.org (*zchor* means remember!).

More than a million surfers have visited this website, and it has been recognized, appreciated, and recommended. It started with the family history and grew to that of the community and Polish Jewry. I researched Gąbin (**Gombin**), and added many genealogical sources free to all researchers, from the old Residents' Book found in the Plock State archives; the Duma voters list from 1905 where I found the names of my great-grandfathers, and many others. Among them, the crown of my labours, Akt 454 from the Plock State Archive, the residents' register, with a wealth of genealogical information, translated into English from old Russian handwriting and Polish. The Gombin Society donated the funds needed for that project, which is a commendable fruit of cooperation, and thus I had this document translated and alive on the Web.

Later I discovered that my grandmother was born in Plock, that my great grandfather was born in Wyszogrod, and his sons, many of them distinguished Rabbis spread all over Poland. So I've developed the website to include many Jewish communities in Poland that were destroyed during the Holocaust. I built virtual memorials for them, a commemoration to people without graves...

Many times I was asked what my motivation was to be engaged in such a painful subject of Holocaust remembrance. The truth is that inside I felt that this makes me one centimeter nearer to my mother... and my father... even if I lost her when I was only 18 years old... and my father died 15 years ago. By this website, they still exist, at least in my consciousness. Their ancestors still exist and the culture in that distant and snow-covered country, Poland still exists. I commemorate my parents' comrades, idealists, relatives, and acquaintances. It serves also as the remembrance to my parents' partners who shared with them the new life in *Eretz Israel*. I feel that I touch my parents again and learn about them and their generation's ideals, founders of the *kibbutzim* and the builders of this tortured new country: The State of Israel- the Dream of Jews in thousand of years became true and my parents were among the *Halutzim* (pioneers) who made this miracle with very hard work, idealism, and naivety, fighting the way to freedom in a new and old unsown homeland - Israel. My longing for my parents is the secret of my energy and devotion to **Gombin in my heart...**

Manczyk/Max Family At The Reunion

Ellen Max Kaplan

For those of you who had the opportunity to attend our splendid 90th Anniversary Celebration in May, you might have noticed a conspicuously large contingent of Max/Manczyk family members. My family. The American Maxes were drawn to this gathering by a desire to learn more about Gombin, their ancestral home, and to meet a family member from a branch of the family from whom they had been separated for a century. Indeed they knew nothing of this branch of the family. My discovery of new family members in Brazil was facilitated by Ada Holtzman's posting of the AKT 454, which listed the names of my great-great grandparents as well many of their children. Following up on this lead my husband eventually located Luzer Manczyk. Luzer's parents took him (age four), along with his infant brother and older sister Malka, to Brazil in 1929. Luzer's father was Jankiel Mojsie Manczyk, son of Luzer Manczyk, grandson of Chiel Manczyk- all names to be found in AKT 454. Luzer now lives in Sao Paulo, not far from his three sons, their wives, and six grandchildren.

In the three years since the initial contact was made we have traveled to Brazil twice (including once in time for a traditional Passover Seder) meeting our family and traveling the country. This year it was Luzer's turn to pay us a visit to the Max family, the name adapted in the United States. His visit coincided with our Celebration.....perfect!

We awaited Luzer's arrival with all the



Israel Baruch with Luzer Manczyk

excitement and anticipation that would accompany the visit of a head of state. In fact, he is the patriarch of the Brazilian contingent that left Gombin in 1929 for Rio de Janeiro after being unable, because of US immigration policy, to obtain entrance to the US where his father's oldest brother Nathan lived, or, because of British immigration policy, to Palestine, where his father's sister lived. A contingent of Gombiners already in Rio was there to welcome them and offer them help in re-settlement. Indeed Malka eventually married one of these transplanted Gombiners.

Among the high points of Luzer's visit was the opportunity to meet some members of the American branch of the Manczyk family. We are related through our great-grandfather Chiel/Kiel

who was born in Gombin in 1832, married Hanna Lewkowicz and had five sons. The oldest son, Luzer, was born in 1867 followed by Abram Icek born in 1872. Luzer remained in Gombin, married Fajga Ester Bauman, and when she died within a year of their marriage he married her younger sister Ryfka with whom he had 13 children. His younger brother Abram came to the US in 1891, settled in Newark, married his first cousin Mindel and had 10 children. Great-grandfather Chiel and his wife also immigrated to this country and ran a grocery store in Newark.

Despite miserable weather the day of the 90th Anniversary Celebration, our family members persevered and cousins that hadn't seen each other in many decades were there to welcome Luzer. Kenneth Max,



Nathan's grandson arrived carrying a large stash of family photos that were totally engaging for all family members. Martha and Eileen, daughters of Louis, the fourth child in Abe and Minnie's family were also there. Luzer spoke to Israel Baruch who was born in Gombin and Bernie Guyer whose older siblings had been born there. At the end of the event, overwhelmed by feeling of love from his American family and a new connection to Gombin, his birthplace, Luzer pronounced it to be one of the best days in his life. I have to concur.

Bella's Dream: Bringing a Gombiner Story to Life through Theatre and Dance

Dana Boll, granddaughter of Raymond and Bella Boll, wrote and choreographed a play with dance chronicling her grandparents journey as refugees from Gombin during WWII. A preview of one of the dances in the play, "Such a Day," was performed by Lisa K. Hokans and Dana Boll at the 75th Anniversary Celebration.

The Boll's left Gombin in September 1939 after Bella had a vivid dream one night where her deceased uncle advised her to leave town right away. Pregnant with her first child, she and Raymond set out with no known destination. Little did they know that their journey would take them to Siberia, the deserts of Uzbekistan, and across an ocean to the USA.



Bella's Dream had it's fully staged premiere June 18-30, 2013 at the Flamboyant Theatre at Clemente Soto Velez Cultural and Educational Center, produced in collaboration with Going to Tahiti Productions. 14 professional actors and dancers brought the story to life, and over 300 people came to see the performance over its 2 week run. Set in a modern-day supermarket where sensory recollections brought the action into the past, audiences were introduced to Jewish Gombin, assisted by projected images from the Sam Rafel film and other personal and historical photos. The text of the play was based on spoken word

interviews with family and enhanced by testimony of other Holocaust survivors. Dances depicted the deeper, unspeakable layers of the Holocaust story, many movements inspired by the words of Gombin poet, Razjel Zychlinsky.

There were 4 post-show talkbacks with the audience attended by many Gombiners, who shared further recollections and discussed various topics including the power of individual actions in wartime, the transmission of trauma, the importance of continuing to share Holocaust stories, and the experience of performing a personal history.

Show Business Weekly reviewed the play, saying that "the compelling characters and rich panoply of cultures and voices made for a potently theatrical experience." Another review from StageRush.com observed, "That Boll is able to immortalize her relatives' strife and eventual triumph is not only an incredible tribute to her family, but it also renews the cycle of tradition and respect for heritage that pervades



through Bella and Raymond's story. It is once again a reminder that the fight for freedom during the Holocaust went much deeper than the here and the now."

The play's development was supported by The Gombin Society, The Brian and Darlene Heidtke Foundation, and the Bay and Paul Foundations and many generous individuals. Photos by Julie Lemberger (with permission).

Photos from the 90th Anniversary Celebration



Harold Ball Presenting History of Gombin Societies



Arthur Stupay and Pratik Mahbubani do genealogy



Minna Packer discusses her films on Gombin



Arthur Gertzman- President of GJHGS



Mindy Prosperi at lecturn



Manczyk(s)/Man(s) with family photos



Gayle Solkloff and Ita Leach

Support the Gombin Cemetery Repair; Join Zicklin in Matching Grant Opportunity



In 2012, the GJH&GS repaired the cemetery monument in Gombin. The fence surrounding the property is fourteen years old and is in need of repainting. Many gravestones are fallen and need to be placed in a proper upright condition. The grounds are in need of re-landscaping. The cost for these needed repairs is \$25,000.

Gombiner Larry Zichlin has already donated \$4500 as part of a generous matching grant; it's up to the rest of the Gombin Society to raise the remainder. Please help raise these funds so we can complete the needed repairs to the Jewish Cemetery in Gombin, where we all have relatives.

Help restore the Gombin Jewish Cemetery with your donations to match the award from Larry Zicklin. Make checks and Send to:

**The Gombin Society
45 Copper Mine Road
Princeton NJ 08540**

or donate online at www.gombinsociety.org

**UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS AND EMAIL!
ADD YOUR CHILDREN and GRANDCHILDREN TO
THE GOMBIN MAILING LIST!**

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society GJHGS) is a 501 (c)3 not-for-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 descendents. 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, contact the Gombin Society by mail at 185 Skyline Drive, Highland Mills NY 10930 or by email.

www.gombinsociety.org

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