

B'nai Gombin

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society



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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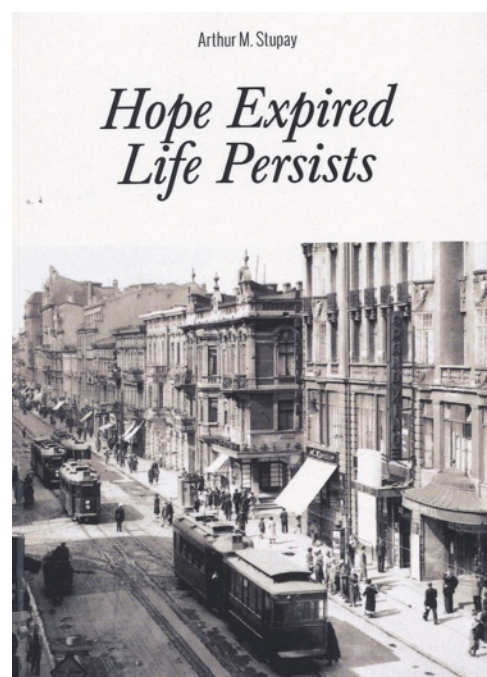
Hope Expired, Life Persists; a new book by Gombiner, Arthur Stupay

Hope Expired, Life Persists was published by Lodz University Press in July 2014. It is the story of Jacob Stupay, the author's uncle, who was a well-known ophthalmologist in Lodz, Poland's major industrial city. He trained at Berlin University (Friedrich Wilhelm), the citadel of medical and industrial research at a time when the big three of science were in residence: Albert Einstein, Max Planck and Fritz Haber.

After medical school and military service in the infamous Polish Russian War of 1919-1920, and in post-war Poland for another two years, he settled and eventually married in Lodz. What kept this successful, worldly Pole in Poland? What were the forces that attracted him to Poland? What were his alternatives?

He married a sophisticated woman, Flora Herman, whose family were squires in their region in western Poland. They had two children and lived on the main street of Lodz, Piotrkowska Street- the Fifth Avenue of pre-war Lodz.

The story deals with Jacob Stupay's life and times in Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. Poland was becoming increasingly suffocating, with a troubled economy and a dysfunctional political system, but Jews and Poles could not leave without substantial financial consequences. Toward the end of the 1930s, Poland for Jews was unlivable, with laws aimed at reducing them to paupers. But yet there was a cadre of professionals



Hope Expired, Life Persists (continued from p1)

like Jacob Stupay, who were in sufficient demand to live a comfortable life.



The Stupay family in Poland in 1914: Jacob is standing, second from left, next to Irving, the author's father.

The war was thrust on an unprepared Poland on September 1, 1939, and within 6 months many Jews were forced into ghettos throughout Poland. Jacob fled with his family to Warsaw, but soon Jews there were required to live in the "Quarantine Zone," the German euphemism for the Warsaw Ghetto. The Ghetto was a complicated place, with some remaining phone service, night clubs, fancy restaurants, existing together with starvation, disease and cruel death on every block. Also, Jews in the ghetto had contact with Aryan Warsaw, and amazingly many escaped and found succor outside the ghetto walls. The curtain began closing on July 22, 1942, when the Nazis began to implement the "Final Solution" plan.

Here the story of Jacob Stupay takes a surprising turn. After the tragic death of his wife, children and closest family, he was saved by a Gentile

relative. The book documents the horrors of the last days in Warsaw and how the Nazis and their collaborators conducted their roundups. The story also discusses many controversial aspects of the period, such as the role of the Jewish Police, antagonisms between German and Polish Jews, and between Hungarians and their co-religionists. It also raises very heated questions about what kind of Jewish responses were possible in the impossible conditions of wartime Poland.

The book ends with conditions in Poland in January 1945, at the end of the war, with the city's physical destruction and the death of nearly 20 percent of the Polish population. How did these life experiences impact the survivors like Jacob Stupay? Could they function normally? Did they have symptoms of PTSD or its equivalent? How did they react to their diminished surroundings, and how did the Poles see the survivors? Jacob lived in this tumultuous period and his story has many lessons for us; his survival should be celebrated. Jacob died in 1955. The author never met him, although they had some correspondence during Jacob's last two years.

The author, Arthur M. Stupay, is a financial executive former partner of Prescott, Ball & Turben, a large Cleveland-based brokerage and banking company, now part of Wells Fargo. He has been co-chair of the Bankers and Brokers Division of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and serves on a number of corporate boards, and he and his wife, Dr. Diane Stupay, are board members of several Cleveland arts organizations. Stupay was an adjunct professor of economics at John Cabot University in Rome, and a member of Board of Visitors of Hiram College. He is also a board member of the Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society.

A *B'nai Gombin* Interview with Arthur Stupay

Why this book? This book deals with the entire life of a Holocaust survivor, Dr. Jacob Stupay, whose existence was to be erased. My first book, *Memory and Understanding*, discusses letters from my mother's siblings about their lives in Poland, but it is not completely biographical. The second one, *Family and Roots, The Poland Connection* is a memoir and reflections from a trip to Poland in 2007. In this new volume, I needed to understand the foundations of the Holocaust and the terror of the times that seem unimaginable today. At the same time, I felt an urge to explain why only a few of my relatives left Poland when they could still emigrate. Was Poland always a swamp of anti-Semitism and discrimination? The answer is no. Jews had a culture and some autonomy that is worth remembering.

What is the Gombin connection? The main subject, Dr. Jacob Stupay, was born in Gombin, in 1889, as were his father and grandfather. There were many Stupay family members in Gombin, but many left before 1900, when they could move to the larger cities in Poland.

Why write a scholarly book rather than focus solely on one person and the family? While the book has many footnotes, it is not solely meant to be a definitive history of the times. What I confronted at an earlier stage is that there were relatively few books on the lives and conditions of professional Jews in Poland. There were a lot of first person experiences of the Holocaust, but not many that provided some context of their life before the war. Polish life was not one long tale of misery. Families flourished. People enjoyed life in the country, on picnics and sporting events. The local markets were vital economic engines. Polish, German, and Czech universities were among the best in the world. I felt a need to try to

understand choices our families made and why so many stayed.



What did you find intriguing about your uncle and your father's family? First, my uncle married a sophisticated woman from an important family in a town nearly completely forgotten, Leczyca, near Lodz. Second, I loved getting into what Berlin was like at the beginning of the century, 1910-1920, the earlier glory years and the wartime hardships. After all, most educated people spoke German, as they now speak English. Berlin was the home of legendary scientists, including Helmholtz, Planck and later Einstein. Applied research made German companies leaders in creating a new world of products. Also, I was interested in the family dynamics. They were not rigidly orthodox, keeping solely to themselves and their communities. They were real people with ambitions and an enormous appetite for modern life. Some even intermarried and were fervently Polish, though keeping our main Jewish traditions. I believe that many led satisfying lives, especially Jacob Stupay, the main subject of the book—of course, until the late 1930s and the Nazi invasion.

Stupay interview continued...

What about your grandparents and their attitudes about education of both their sons and daughters?

I found this aspect of their lives most satisfying and endearing. For most of their children, they created an environment that engendered loyalty and support. Definitely, all the children, all eight of them including the girls, went to gymnasium and at least one to a major university (for medical studies). My father always planned to go to law school, but his circumstances in Havana and New York prevented him from completing it. He and several of his siblings came of age during World War I, when no one in Poland could attend a university. The daughters also went to school and could function in the Polish economy in the 1930s. The rabbi of their mid-size town (Wloclawek, not far from Gombin), Yehuda-Lieb Kowalski, was a liberal, a Zionist, and encouraged his community to partake in wider European culture and philosophy. He and his predecessor, Rabbi Karo, were quite worldly and gave sermons referring to Europe's leading philosophers.

Was there diversity of Polish life, even in the shtetls?

Yes, people were people, especially Jews, and when Polish/Russian society opened up, the young Jews, at least in the beginning of the 20th century, readily adopted to Polish life and culture. They and my family dressed in modern style and spoke Polish and Russian. They traveled to and read about other European countries and America. Jewish and Polish newspapers flourished, as did theater, sports and literature. But this did not happen until the beginning of the new century in 1900. There were many pockets of poverty in small towns, and many were stuck there in communities where the Rabbinate and leaders may have benefitted from "old time religion." But when Poland was made independent again after 125 years, in 1919, there was genuine excitement about the future—not for everyone, but for those ready for a secular future.

Thoughts about future projects? One thing I hope is that this book provides is an example for others to explore their roots especially in Gombin, Gostynin and surrounding towns. Other families also came from wealthy backgrounds and community environments, and we should be vitally interested in and celebrate their lives before the Holocaust. In the process, we will all benefit from new insights and pleasures of knowing more about a forgotten land. Arthur Gertzman, GJH&GS president, did this brilliantly in two previous books on his Gombin family (Rissman's) as did Minna Packer in her films. I also gained a lot of inspiration from Max Guyer's priceless family pictures of sports events, including boating, in Gombin (**B'nai Gombin, Issue #23, Sept. 2008**). Poland then was not as stolidly Christian as pictured today. It was a quilt made up of different sects of Christianity (Eastern Orthodox, Roman, Lutheran and other Protestant groups), Jews, Moslems, Roma etc. We all have a lot to learn.

Regarding future projects... Since I completed the book last year, but only published in July 2014, there have been at least a dozen important new books on the Holocaust, World War I in Poland, Versailles, shtetls, Warsaw Ghetto, etc. In the future, I would like to continue my family research on members who lived in South America, especially Uruguay, about whom I know virtually nothing—their histories and experience. Finally, I have a project on my professional interest, the U.S. economy in the 1980s and my part in it.

Where is the book available? It is on Amazon, published by the Lodz University Press. I can provide copies for \$10 plus \$2.60 in postage, with half the proceeds going to the Gombin Society; contact Arthur Stupay at dastupay@roadrunner.com

Plum Trees for the Gombin Cemetery

The newly renovated cobble-stone path in the Gombin Cemetery will soon be lined with two rows of plum trees (24 in all). The landscaping of the cemetery and upgrading of the pathway has been carried out through a contract with M-FLOTERM, a Gombin firm owned by the Florkiewicz family. The gateway was repaired and painted.

Plum trees were selected for this project because they are traditional in the Gombin area. Plum-tree orchards were located on the estates of Polish land-owners, usually aristocratic families. Before WWII, Jewish businessmen, like my grandfather, **Manele Rissman** (BG), would purchase the rights to the fruit from these landowners. At harvest time, the entire family would work in the orchards, picking fruit and drying them for prunes which were then shipped by barge up the Wistula River to markets in Warsaw.



Commemorative plaques will be placed at the base of each tree. Gombin Society members can honor a relative with a dedicated plaque. Contact Arthur Gertzman through the Gombin Society and make a donation to support the project, www.gombinsociety.org.

Update your email and home address:

Contact the Gombin Society to assure that you continue to receive B'nai Gombin either online or through the mail: Go to www.gombinsociety.org or mail updated form below to

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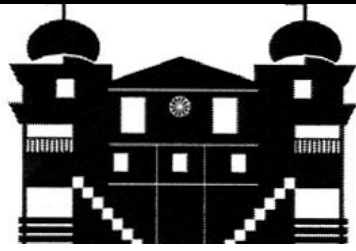
Pay dues or contribute to cemetery plaque: Michael Kaplan, Treasurer, Gombin Society, 45 Coppermine Rd., Princeton NJ 08854

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