

# B'NAI GOMBIN

Newsletter of the Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society

**Issue 8, December 1998**

**Editor: Noam Lupu**

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*This issue of B'nai Gombin is dedicated in loving memory to  
Meir Zelig Holtzman, z"l*

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society (GJHGS) is a non-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 descendants. 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 or to receive back issues, contact the Gombin Society (GJHGS) by mail at P.O. Box 503052, San Diego, CA 92150.

Visit our website at <<http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/gombin.html>>.

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## ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Gombin Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society is a non-profit organization, open to all people, from all over the world, who have an interest in Gombin Jewish history and genealogy. The goals of the Gombin Society are to:

- Educate the public about the history of the Gombin Jewish community and the genealogy of the Jews of Gombin.
- Collect, teach, disseminate, and publish knowledge and information on the history of the Gombin Jewish community and the genealogy of the Jews of Gombin.
- Encourage all interested persons to pursue historical and genealogical research focused on the Gombin Jewish community.
- Undertake activities aimed at protecting, preserving, and restoring vital records, documents, and physical relics and landmarks of the culture and history of the Gombin Jews.
- Undertake activities to preserve the memory of the Gombin Jews who perished in the Holocaust.
- Assist the activities of all other organizations whose objectives are related to the preservation of the heritage of the Jews of Gombin.

*B'nai Gombin* is the quarterly newsletter of The Gombin Society (GJHGS). Its main purposes are to inform Gombiners of projects and activities of interest to them, as well as to share experiences and writings. Any articles, stories, poems, or other genres may be submitted for publishing. The views and opinions expressed in *B'nai Gombin* are not necessarily those of the Gombin Society. For back issues, contact Noam Lupu at the Gombin Society's address.

Gombin also has a website at <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lزامosc/gombin.html> including information about Gombin's history, the Holocaust in Gombin, the Gombin Society, the E-mail Mailing List, *B'nai Gombin* and more.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

A couple of years ago, when my grandparents were visiting us in San Francisco, I got a letter from Ada Holtzman. It had not been long since I had met Ada over e-mail and she had become an active member of our virtual Gombin community. The letter, which I had been expecting for some time, contained an invaluable treasure — a photograph of Yochevet Laks, my grandmother's older sister.

Over 50 years had passed since my grandmother had seen even an image of her sister, who returned to Gombin after the two escaped together, never to leave. I will never forget her face, the tears that came down her cheeks, the emotions I could feel racing through her. The silence, as she looked down at the small photograph of her sister in Shomer Hatzair uniform, seemed to last forever. I could only imagine the rekindled pain mingled with the joy of seeing a face missing so long.

It was Meir Holtzman who found this photograph among his vast collection and who parted with it as a gift to my grandmother. Neither my grandmother nor I could ever forget him for that.

But Meir was so much more than a Gombiner with a photo collection. His life was Gombin, its memory his mission. He wrote anecdotes about life in Gombin, translated Yiddish documents about Gombin history and gave so much of his time. His dedication to the memory of Gombin, its Jewish life and people will never be matched.

I will never forget Meir. His life and dedication I will forever admire. I somehow find it so appropriate to borrow the eternal phrase and say to Meir: Shalom, chaver.

Noam Lupu

# GOMBIN JEWISH CEMETERY REDEDICATION CEREMONY

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 1999



# CHELMNO MONUMENT UNVEILING CEREMONY

MONDAY, AUGUST 16, 1999

## **An invitation to all Gombiners and descendants**

RSVP before February 15, 1999

Call Mindy Prosperi at (914) 928-8211

Dear Gombiner landseit, survivors and descendants,

Thanks to your wonderful response, the projects to erect the Gombin Memorial Monument at Chelmno and restore the Jewish Cemetery in Gombin are now being completed (for further information see the reports and pictorial supplement in this issue). We are now inviting all of you to attend the special memorial ceremonies in which we will remember the Gombin Jewish community and officially dedicate these works.

**Organizers:** The events are being jointly organized by the Gombin Society, the Nissenbaum Foundation and the Konin Regional Museum. Other institutions providing support include the Municipality of Gombin, the town's Landlovers Association and the Remembrance Foundation of Warsaw.

**Participants:** As we make public this invitation, a group of more than twenty Gombiners from four countries have already announced that they will come to Poland to attend the dedication ceremonies with their families. The initial list includes many directors of the Gombin Society, as well as Rabbi Joshua Witt from Israel and our distinguished sponsor Geoffrey Greenwood from London. Present at the ceremonies will be Zygmunt Nissenbaum and members of the other sponsoring institutions, representatives of the Israeli Embassy, Polish civil and religious authorities, notables from the Jewish communities in Warsaw and Lodz, and delegates from other Jewish institutions in Poland and abroad.

**Information:** To receive additional details please contact the president of the Gombin Society, Mindy Prosperi, tel. (914) 928-8211 (evenings). A basic package has been organized for the days of the dedication ceremonies, including lodging, bus transportation and a program of guided visits in Gombin, Plock, Konin, and Chelmno. There will be additional options for those interested in group rates for the flights, stop-overs in London, and/or Jewish Heritage visits to Warsaw, Cracow and Prague.

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Gombiner Family & Friends,

Since last we spoke many changes have occurred. One of the changes was the passing of summer into fall. The holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur marked the time. In this time of reflection, I sadly saw several people close to my family and to our Gombin family pass on. On a personal note, my husband Robert's grandmother passed away last month. A gracious and charming woman, we are sad to see her go. But at 98 years of age, it was indeed, her time.

We had another loss that hit very close to our Gombiner family. In September, Meir Holtzman, father of Ada passed away. My first encounter with Mr. Holtzman was indeed miraculous for me. I "met" Mr. Holtzman through his wonderful daughter Ada. I had tentatively put out a request for any information about my father's family. And suddenly there it was... a response from Meir Holtzman.

Not only did he know of my father's family, my grandfather was the family doctor who treated his mother during a prolonged illness. He told me wonderful things about my grandfather... he made him real to me and my reasons for belonging to the Gombin Society real also.

I can continue to sing the praises of Mr. Holtzman, which include his tireless work in translating our Yizkor Book and his unbelievable memory of people and places throughout Gombin. But mostly, I will remember his unending belief that we were indeed doing the right thing! The following articles will talk about the progress on our varied projects, the rededication of the Gombin cemetery, the memorial at Chelmno and the addition of the Gombin film to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibit. For all his efforts towards these projects and more we would like to dedicate this issue of *B'nai Gombin* to Mr. Meir Holtzman... may he rest in peace knowing that his work will help his family in Gombin finally do the same.

Sincerely,

*Mindy S. Prosperi, President*

## ROLL OF DONORS UPDATE

We are pleased to acknowledge the following Bronze donations for the Gombiner memorial projects in Poland (received after the Roll of Donors was published).

- Sam Ballen, United States; additional donation for both projects; in memory of the Biegelaisen family
- Floyd Bornstein, United States; donation for both projects; in memory of Morris, Celia, and Philip Bornstein
- Ruth and Steven Drew, United States; donation for both projects; in memory of family Dziejczepolski and Samulewicz
- Jerome and Esther Krueger, United States; donation for both projects; in memory of Bella and Morris Krueger
- Pamela Hope-Levin, United States; donation for both projects; in memory of the Jewish kinder who perished during the Holocaust
- Yosef Luszyński, Israel; donation for both projects; in memory of Nysen, Marjem, Icek, Frymet, and Ester Luszyński
- Herman Zvi Zielonka, Israel; donation for both projects; in memory of: the family of Fiszel Ber (Philip) Zielonka

# WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE THIS INITIATIVE

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by Father Jerzy Drozdowski,  
Catholic Priest of Gombin  
All Saints Day sermon, November 1, 1998

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When we look at the cemeteries of old Gabin, it is clear that we, the Catholics, are in a much more fortunate position than the Evangelists and the Jews, whose cemeteries were destroyed. Now, however, work is being done to build a fence around the Jewish cemetery. Because of that work, I would first like to remind you, especially the young, about a few facts, and later I will present my appeal to all of you.

There were Jews living in Gabin since the Middle Ages. For hundreds of years they participated in the growth of the town, and some served as soldiers defending our country in September 1939. At that time, there were 2,500 Jews in Gabin, a small part of the population. We know that differences in language, religion, and customs created many unnecessary miscommunications between them and the Poles. Sometimes this was related to the fact that the Jews had better results in trading, maybe because that allowed them to help themselves better in the face of their problems. We also know about their horrible fate under the German occupation: their historical synagogue was burned almost immediately, they were ill-treated in many different ways, confined to the ghetto, and finally in the middle of April 1942 taken to Chelmno to be gassed and burned. Only a few survived, because they had left earlier, or they survived the concentration camps. Twenty-two hundred Jewish residents of Gabin died, men and women, old and young. It was later discovered that, in the case of some families, about forty members were murdered!

And the Jewish cemetery in Gabin? After the deportation of the Jews, the walls of the cemetery were demolished on orders from the Germans, and the rubble was used to harden Dobrzykowska street. No respect was shown to the Jewish graves either: the tombstones were used as sidewalk curbs on Browarna and Moniuszki streets during the occupation, when the bridge was built. All this was horrible, inhuman. When we think about it, we Catholics may feel fortunate that we still have family graves in our cemetery, that we can go there to pray, lay flowers and light candles.

In the last year, Pope John Paul II and our Episcopal brothers have warned us in their teachings about anti-Semitism. Jews are called “older brothers in faith.” Commenting on this, Rev. Stanislaw Musial, a Jesuit, has written in “Tygodnik Powszechny” that “if anti-Semitism is a sin, then the whole case takes on a new dimension, because for Christians a sin against God and Humanity symbolizes the tearing of knots with God, it is like cutting a living branch from a tree... This is a serious matter”.

Today there are few remaining Jews from Gabin. The survivors and descendants live in different countries: in Israel, in England, in France, in the United States... How can we be shocked, or take them for wrong when they come back to enclose the old Jewish cemetery and install a plaque saying that this is the place where the ashes of their ancestors rest? We must acknowledge and accept this initiative. Let us all respect it as something that they have the right to do, not only because Poland is a country of laws, but also because it is our moral obligation.

*[Translated by Joanna Gorska, with help from brother Mike and parents Grzegorz and Bozena; typed by Mary McCole-Blaukopf]*

# MEIR ZELIG HOLTZMAN, Z”L

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Written by daughter Ada Holtzman  
and read at his funeral  
Elul 25, 5758  
September 16, 1998

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Meir Zelig Holtzman, our dear and beloved father. . .

It is hard for me to elegeize you, here, in front of your open grave, and all of us who loved you find it hard to believe that the bitter, premature day has come — even if the last days we knew the situation was hopeless — and that we are leading you on your last journey. Here, under the ancient olive tree, you will sleep your eternal sleep at the side of our beloved mother Rywcia (Rivka).

It was your last wish to be buried here, on the land of Kibbutz Evron, of which you were one of the founders and which you always served with extreme faithfulness and devotion for so many years. And all that you have ever done, be it manual work or later, party matters, you did with modesty and honesty, fully believing that this was the right way, that this was the realization of the pioneering spirit which you also implanted into hundreds of young enthusiastic Jewish people back in Poland, where you were born. You dedicated your best years, energy and resources to the Shomer Hatzair movement, to your party M.P.M. (The United Workers Party) and to Kibbutz Evron.

You were born on May 14, 1914 in the small town of Gombin in Poland. Your father Elyahu Holtzman, a fruit merchant, died as result of blows by the hands of cruel Polish anti-Semites and you grew up an orphan from a tender age. You were the joy of your mother’s heart, Rasza, of the Zlotnik family. Many of her 12 brothers from Plock were among the founders of the religious Zionism in Poland;

many became famous men of wisdom, folklorists, researchers of the Yiddish language and important writers who enlightened your childhood in your mother’s house in the small village and directed you toward Zionism, a way which you always followed. You were a youth leader in the town, one of the heads of the Shomer Hatzair’s movement and hundreds of youth went the way you guided them and remember your legacy to this day.

Your mother Rasza, an intelligent woman and leader, a widow who managed the family business and raised you, the youngest of her 10 children, with infinite love. In spite of her piety, she gave you her blessing to forsake exile and fulfill the dream of returning to Zion. And so you chose the way of socialist Zionism as a solution to the Jewish problem. You dedicated yourself to activities in the Shomer Hatzair, attracting hundreds of youths from the Gombin branch, from summer camps and Kibbutzim Hachshara from all around Poland where you served as a *madrich*, guide and educator.

For many of the following years in Israel you were involved in public activities. You cleverly managed M.P.M.’s interests in the north of the country, with tolerance and wisdom. There was no limit to your devotion to the party, to which you dedicated endless and tireless days and nights of work. You believed with all your innocent heart in the Shomer Hatzair’s ideology; blindly, without reservations, ignoring obstacles, going through fire and water, stuck to your belief in a better world in Eretz Israel. You believed in the Kibbutz, in equality, in justice, in the idealistic values of the Socialist Zionist revolution, of which you were part from its foundation, a pioneer among pioneers, man of integrity, dreamer of the dreams of your generation.

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During the past two years we worked together on the perpetuation of the memory of Gombin, the lost small town of your youth and of your family who perished in the Holocaust. I was full of admiration for your clear mind, your sharp wit, your intelligence, your fantastic memory, your analytical ability, your deep knowledge of the history of Poland, its Jews, the Zionist movement and the Shomer Hatzair.

You left me many audio cassettes on which you spoke lengthily, and your serious and intelligent voice are registered for eternity, as well as more than two hundred old photographs of the family and the shtetl, of the members of the movement in Poland and members of Kibbutz Evron, which your outstanding memory evidenced in detail.

I also have drawers full of pages written compactly in perfect Hebrew, fruit of the blessed work to which you dedicated yourself, where you registered the history of Gombin which you remembered and of your family. You have bequeathed me, for future generations, the genealogical tree of your family, Holtzman/Zlotnik, and the family of our mother Rywcia, Gostinsky/Honigstock. With combined efforts both of us reconstructed it branch by branch, most of them so tragically cut off in the most horrible Holocaust which befell our people. You were the last voice to record the memory of hundreds of family members who perished in the Nazi Holocaust, including your seven brothers and sisters, their spouses and 13 innocent little children. You did it so that we shall remember and so will our children after we are gone.

After you retired a few months ago, a fact which saddened you greatly, you found new interest in writing memoirs and in translating the Yizkor book of Gombin which had not been previously translated from Yiddish to Hebrew.

And now, in my house, more than 300 pages lay orphaned, filled with your handwriting, pages rich in history, descriptions of the small town's person-

alities and of the village's history. You, dear father, are maybe one of the last whose mother tongue is Yiddish and who were born in a small town in Poland, the shtetl, and who suckled its culture with your mother's milk. But you, like many others, preferred to expand out, to break the shackles of tradition in order to fulfill the Zionist dream of equality for all in the reborn and renewed Land of Israel. But deep in your heart you did not cease to love and respect your parent's house and to dream in Yiddish, your mother tongue.

The memories and the nostalgia often filled your eyes with tears. You sat and painstakingly translated chapter after chapter, as well as tens of other documents from which transpired outstanding information about your parent's house.

Many times I marveled at your capacity to express yourself, at your memory which has no rival. You remembered every member of the family, every pupil and every chassid, every rabbi and every leader, every friend and every partner. You described with talent, which moved the heart, the snow covering the roofs of the town of your forefathers, the lake in spring and the endless forests, the forests of Gombin where your love for my mother grew and blossomed. There, your souls were bound together. Mother, Rywcia nee Gostinska, was the love of your youth, and she stuck with you, her first and only man, and she followed you on your the ways of the *Ha'apala* (illegal immigration to Palestine), *Khoma Ve'Migdal* (Tower and Stockade in the Mandated Palestine) and fulfilling pioneering in Kibbutz Evron, Western Galilee.

You married my mother Rywcia, the love of your life, and you both immigrated on board the illegal ship "Colorado" in July 1939, just one and a half months before the calamity. All these years you have lived with the silent and oppressive sorrow, burden of constant pain about your family who perished in the Holocaust. Notwithstanding, you mobilized

—*continued page 10*

# REMEMBERING MEIR: MESSAGES FROM GOMBINERS AROUND THE WORLD

He must have been a wonderful man, and I know you will miss him sorely. I hope that you will be comforted by the work you're doing to help preserve his memory and the memory of his home town.

—*Ruth Morris*

Please accept our deepest condolences. I think I know how you and your whole family feel, having experienced such a deep loss just 2 years ago when my own dear mother died. Please be strong...

—*Fella & Gideon Carmi*

I am so sorry, we all are. He was beloved of all of us, an inspiration to us, I was privileged to meet him at Pesach...

He has earned his place in Olam Haba, his right to rest with his loved ones who suffered so much. Those that he leaves behind must grieve for him, you will miss him so badly but you will also cherish the memory of a man who did so much for so many people.

—*Jeremy Freedman*

My deepest sympathies go out to you and your family. May your father be in peace. May your memories of time spent with him last an eternity. Sincerely yours,

—*Abbee Corb-Cinotti*

...While I never met him, I have appreciated the love and admiration you had for him. I'm sure he was very proud to have such a loving and caring daughter like yourself.... My thoughts are with you.

—*Harold Boll*

Words are always inadequate at times like these, but please know that we are with you in spirit and hope that time will heal the hurt. The memories of our parents are things to be treasured.

—*Tony and Itske Stern*

Though you bear the greatest loss, all of us have lost a wonderful person, and a pillar of our small community devoted to bringing the past back to life. His contributions will forever be remembered and cherished.

—*Steve Tadelis*

I and wife Dorothy and all my family extend sympathy and condolences on the passing of your father, Meir Zelig Holtzman. I had looked forward to meeting him. A lovely man.

—*David Rothbart*

I was truly saddened to learn of the passing of your father of blessed memory. I am sure that he had great naches from your efforts and that you have been spurred on in your tasks because of it.

No matter when it happens, and I was blessed to have my father with me until I was 55, it comes as a shock. We are never ready for it and because of that, my heart goes out to you. You, as all of us do, will continue to think of him every day. But the hurt will subside and the good memories will remain. May you and your family be blessed by those memories and know no further sorrow.

—*Stanley Diamond*

You lost your beloved father and we, Gombiners and their offsprings, lost our irreplaceable connection with our past and heritage. You will have to continue with his mission of preserving our heritage. You are not alone, all Gombiners are with you.

—*Jonathan Rigbi*

I am saddened to read what you felt unavoidable. Please accept me to associate to your pain.

I have not known your father, but I am sure he was proud of the whole history/genealogy/tradition

—*continued next page*



work that you have done for him, with him, about him, showing clearly that he will not be forgotten.

—*Jean-Pierre Stroweis*

My deepest sympathy to you and your family at this time of bereavement.

—*Gayle Frankel Sokoloff*

May God comfort you together with the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

—*Sheila and Marty Guyer*

My deepest sympathy to you on the loss of your father. Having lost my father last year, I know only too well the pain in your heart... I know that a light shone in your father's eyes whenever he looked upon you and that he was very proud of you...

—*Gail Weiss Salomon*

I am very sorry to hear your sad news and wish you and all your family Long Life. Your father was obviously not only very dear to you but a wonderful man.

—*Lawrence Guyer*

You have lost your very dear father, and we have lost a pillar of our guiding generation. May his Yizkor be an ever enduring guiding light to us all—from near and afar, and continued generation to generations. Amen

—*Robert Tachna*

You have my deepest and heartfelt sympathies. This is a difficult time—take care of yourself. And if knowing that you honored your father always was something that others knew is a comfort, then remember that. Your father is in my prayers.

—*Mary McCole-Blaukopf*

There is so little we can do to help you bear your sorrow... Our deepest sympathy on the loss of your father. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

—*Etsuko and Sam Guyer*

My mother and I share in your grief and send you our deepest sympathy. Surely his memory will inspire your days as his presence did before. Heartfelt best wishes,

—*Marek Kanter*

We are all so very, very sad to hear of the loss of your father. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

—*Craig Weinstein*

My father called me and was disturbed to tell me the news about your father. I know my father shares in sending our deepest sympathy at your loss. Words can never really help at such a time. But you will be in our hearts and prayers as we enter our temple tomorrow.

—*Jeffrey Wruble*

This is a difficult time, I understand exactly how you feel. The traditional words “my deepest sympathy” are very weak, it seems to me. But on the other hand I cannot find anything that would express empathy in a really meaningful way.

—*Daniel Wagner*

My deepest sympathy to you and all your family. Your father must have been very proud of you and all the work you continue to do to ensure that the memories of so many people are never forgotten. I hope things get easier for all of you soon, and you find comfort and eventually joy in those memories of the times you shared with your father.

—*Roni Seibel Liebowitz*

I am extremely sorry to hear the news about your beloved father's death. Please accept my deepest sympathy.

—*Hinda Zlotnik*

Przyjmij Wyrazy Mojego Najszczęśliwego Współczucia z Powodu Śmierci Twojego Ojca. W tym Trudnym dla Ciebie Czasie Życzę Ci Siły i Wiary w Nasze Życie. Bo Życ Trzeba Dalej Twój

—*Tomek Wisniewski*

I believe he loved life, and it loved him, because he knew to stay strong and was a real *gever*. Let us think that his soul became quiet... Death is never fair, and nobody is looking for justice in it. You will overcome it. The gone soul does not suffer anymore and all the sorrow is left for us, still alive.

—*Alex Chudinov*

# MEIR ZELIG HOLTMAN, Z”L

*Continued from page 7*

yourself to the service of the country and the Kibbutz, a realizing pioneer, dealing for many years with pioneering work, fully believing that this was the right way to build the renewed Land of Israel on the principles of justice and equality.

You built a splendid home in Kibbutz Evron. Children were born, pride of your life. In the hospital, on your deathbed, you told us once that you love your children and that you love life. And life shined to you and so have your children and grandchildren, which you adored with endless love.

In Kibbutz Evron you planted your roots, deep in the ground, although life’s realities took you far away for many years. Now you are returning to your real home, to the land of the Galilee which you made blossom, you and your generation of pioneers.

After the premature passing of our beloved mother Rywcia, you rehabilitated yourself and married dear Lotka, who was like a mother to us. Lotka always looked after you and cared for you with devotion and love until the bitter end. Even in the worst days of the burning heat waves of the last summer, she came and went daily to be at your side in the hospital.

You had a good life together. Be strong, Lotka. We tightly embrace you with our heart but the decree from Heaven is irreversible. It is man’s destiny not to live forever and everybody returns to the realm of his fathers at some time. And to our dismay it happened also to our father who was so healthy, so active, the dreamer of dreams and lover of people. Our only consolation is that you had a full, healthy life, a life of action and creativity, work and faith.

You aged with Lotka in serenity, and an old age, which did not shame your youth. You lived a good and healthy life at the side of Lotka, a faithful and dedicated partner.

Until the end you believed in the Kibbutz, in the collective ideal and mutual help, but the system betrayed you. . .

Even in the last difficult and terrible days near the end of your life, you turned to us your blue eyes, so blue and beautiful as no other, beautiful as the azure skies of this land which you loved so much, tender soft eyes, beseeching us not to leave you alone in this your final hour. And, indeed, we did everything in our power to extend our hand to you and hold you back from the abyss into which you were sinking, but we were powerless.

And now, our dearest and beloved father, while you are on the way to your last journey, know that we love you with all our hearts and miss you infinitely now, already. Your love and your legacy will be with us forever, wherever we go.

Rest in peace, at the side of our beloved mother Rywcia.

**We shall remember you always with great love until our last day.**

# CEMETERY PROJECT UPDATE

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by Jeremy Freedman

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On Sunday 15 November 1998 I found myself once again in Gombin. Having survived the first 44 years of my life without setting foot in the village where my great-grandparents once played, I was now making my fourth visit in 20 months. With Leon Zamosc for company, we were off to see the fruit of all of our endeavors — the cemetery fence had been erected just days earlier.

It was cold, dark and gloomy as we headed through the suburbs of Warsaw. We arrived at the home of the English teacher, Jerry Temanson, at 7pm. Our host was hundreds of miles away, in the south of Poland, recovering from open heart surgery, he would return home the next day. In the meanwhile Anna Temanson, her sister, Sebastian (our Interpreter now majoring in International Relations at a college in Plock) and his parents all made us extremely welcome.

Monday was pure magic. It was as cold as ever, the vista was an unremitting grey, there was a light sprinkling of snow which reflected the dullness of the sky and a few flakes were falling. We went to the cemetery and had our first view of the gate and fence. From the outside we saw a handsome grey metal fence finished off by a gate hung on red brick. A plaque in Polish recorded that the cemetery was destroyed during WWII and that the gate and cemetery fence were erected by the GJHGS and the Nissenbaum Foundation in 1998.

I do not know exactly how to describe how a fence changes a cemetery. Sebastian says it gives it “definition.” To that you can add words like “authority,” “status” and even “dignity.” But it goes further. When you build a house in a field, the space inside the house is still the same space as used to be

in the open air. But it has undergone a qualitative change. It is not simply that it is now boxed in by walls, ceilings, floors. Nor that the wind does not reach it and the central heating system has warmed it. The atmosphere has been altered, the mood has modified, it is a different place.

Perhaps you will say that this only applies to spaces that are fully boxed-in, that a fence does not have the same effect? When I first visited the cemetery 18 months ago it was desolate, exposed and vulnerable. Today the desolation is reduced by the restored definition the fence gives. The exposure is diminished, a degree of privacy now attaches to the location. The integrity of the site, too, is enhanced - football matches and vodka orgies will now be discouraged, if not entirely frustrated.

While it is true the fence achieves that effect in the physical dimension, it has also changed the “feel” of the place. If you happen on that cemetery for the first time (as I hope many people will in August 1999), although your heart will hardly fill with rejoicing, you may yet feel that those whose mortal remains were interred with the words: *Al m'komo yavo v'shalom* (may he come to his place in peace), are now resting in a place to which a degree of *shalom* (peace) has at last returned.

It is appropriate that I should finish with a tribute to the Nissenbaum Family and the Nissenbaum Foundation. Mr. Nissenbaum has devoted the past 20 years and a sizeable amount of money to the preservation of Jewish relics in Poland. In the process, he and his colleagues have acquired an expertise and modus operandi without which we would have struggled to execute this project. The assistance we have received is inestimable and we have been given assurances of further help and cooperation in our future endeavors. Our thanks to him and his team.

# CHELMNO MONUMENT: STATUS REPORT

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by Leon Zamosc

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During the third week of October, I went on another trip to Poland with Jeremy Freedman. We inspected the work that had been done at the Gombin Jewish cemetery, paid visits to the notables and our contacts in the town, and spent a day in Warsaw discussing the last stage of the project with the Nissenbaum Foundation. For the complete details about the status of the cemetery restoration, please see the report written by Jeremy for this issue of *B'nai Gombin*.

After Jeremy's departure, I stayed on for a couple of days to solve the problems that had been created by the untimely death of Jan Rassumowski, the artist who had started the work on the Gombin Memorial Monument for us. Readers may recall that in the previous issue of *B'nai Gombin* I reported that Rassumowski's colleague and friend Stanislaw Mystek was going to take responsibility for finishing the project. So I arranged a meeting with Mystek and Lucja Pawlicka-Nowak, the director of the Konin Museum.

My visit to Konin coincided with a day of ceremonies related to recent archaeological findings in Chelmno, including the discovery of human remains believed to be those of the Jews of the last Sondercommando and an enormous amount of personal ephemera, piles and piles of what had been belongings of people killed at Chelmno (everything the Germans considered not valuable, including mezuzot and other Judaica, glasses, medicine bottles, cutlery, etc). Participating in the ceremonies were Lucja Pawlicka-Nowak and her colleagues from the Museum, a minister and other Polish civil and religious notables, Israeli embassy representatives and rabbis and Jews from the Warsaw and Lodz

communities. The most emotional moment came with the funeral rites at the Chelmno forest site where the bones were buried near the main remembrance wall.

After the ceremonies we went to the museum in Konin where the new artist Mystek was awaiting for us. He had brought from Poznan the cast proofs of the shul semicircular plaque and the Hebrew and Yiddish tablets, the enlarged texts for the Polish and English plaques and the real-size designs for the Menorah and Star of David. Mystek had a file with all the Rassumowski drawings, paperwork and correspondence with us, and he was clearly on top of things. I learned that he had already been involved in the project with Rassumowski (it was he who had done the Hebrew and Yiddish plaques). He showed me an impressive album of pictures of his works and, in general, he impressed me as a responsible person. Mystek described the circumstances of Rassumowski's death, and we moved on to the renegotiation of the contract.

Mystek told me that the basic problem was that the money he had inherited from our advance to Rassumowski was not going to be enough to continue and finish the work. He needed a larger advance payment, and he also told me that the total final bill would have to be somewhat higher than the price we had agreed on with Rassumowski. The final result of the renegotiation can be summarized as follows: (1) Mystek will have the concrete components ready by late January, the metal plaques done by late February, and the entire work finished by mid-March; (2) We will advance him a larger proportion of the total cost; and (3) The final total cost of the monument will be about \$1,000 more than what had been agreed on with Rassumowski.

—CHELMNO continued page 15

# NEW YORK GOMBINERS CELEBRATE 75TH ANNIVERSARY

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by Noam Lupu

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“There’s an old saying: ‘The days pass slowly, but the years fly by.’ This really applies to our Gombiner society. In the early years, the day-to-day problems and challenges seemed never-ending, and suddenly 75 years have just flown by!”

These were just a sample of the words of Ben Kraut, President of The Gombiner Young Men’s Benevolent Association of New York, in a special scrapbook sent out on the occasion of the society’s 75th anniversary. On the weekend of August 28, 29 and 30, the New York Gombiner society celebrated 75 years since its founding, an event at the Raleigh Hotel. The celebration marks not only the past of the society, but is also a look ahead at the future of the Gombiner landsleit.

The Gombiner Young Men’s Benevolent Association of New York, which was founded in the 1920s to create a communal center for the Gom-

biners living in New York at the time. The society, which worked closely with other Gombiner societies in New Jersey, Chicago and Detroit, helped raise money to help the Jewish community of prewar Gombin. Among other projects after the war, the society provided aid for Gombiner survivors coming to the United States to begin a new life. But aside from money, the society also provided a sense of home and familiarity.

The Gombin Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society has already expressed to Mr. Kraut its congratulations on this momentous occasion, but wishes to reassert its admiration for the society’s dedication over 75 years. To Mr. Kraut, who follows a long line of Gombiner leaders and society presidents, we wish a Mazal Tov.

As the new millennium approaches and the world becomes ever smaller, we hope the Gombiners worldwide will be able to join in our community and gain this same feeling of home. Who knows where we will be in 75 years...

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## FAMILY MEMORIAL PLAQUES AT CHELMNO

As explained in the report on page 12, our Chelmno monument memorializes the Gombin Jews as a community. It does not include individual family names. But if you are interested in having a small individual plaque installed in memory of members of your family, it can be done at very low cost. A picture showing examples of these family plaques has been posted in the Gombin internet site (see last photo in <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lzamosc/chpict.html>). We will help you with information on how to get your plaque done locally where you live, and we will take care of bringing the plaque to Poland and having it installed at Chelmno even if you are unable to come with us to the dedication ceremony. For information please contact Leon Zamosc, tel. (619) 673-8754, in the evenings.

# IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM, LONDON

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by Jeremy Freedman

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The Imperial War Museum (IWM) was founded in 1917 to record the history of the Great War, subsequently extended to cover WWII. Today its scope covers the whole of 20th century conflict.

Its principal location is in South London, a mile or two from Westminster across the River Thames. It has outposts on a ship moored on that river, at a former airfield near Cambridge and elsewhere.

As survivors of the Shoah grow old and pass on, so Holocaust Denial increases among western neo-fascists. Simultaneously, Jewish organizations and democratic governments seek to commemorate pre-1940 Jewish Communities and record the awful events surrounding their destruction. Britain, never likely to be in the vanguard of this movement, yet ready to follow the lead set by its partners in the USA and Europe, is at last establishing its National Holocaust Exhibition as an extension of the IWM.

A year or so ago, when the GJHGS had just reprinted the Gombin Yizkor Book, I found myself charged with the duty (in furtherance of the objective of preserving the memory of the ancestral shtetl) of lodging copies in libraries, museums and other institutions in Britain. It seems to be a feature of the Yizkor Book genre that British Jews contributed little to them, rather they were generated in Israel and USA. I was not surprised to find that there were virtually no collections of them here and that (except for serious students of 20th century Jewish History) few people knew about them.

A certain academic told me that the IWM was planning a Holocaust Exhibition and suggested I contact them to see if they would like a copy of the book. Their initial response was enthusiastic, they told me that they were considering focussing on a

specific shtetl. They invited me to visit them to show them some of the available Gombin materials. In the event, they were not so much interested in the Yizkor Book as in Sam Rafel's film.

After a period of silence lasting some months I was approached by October Films, an independent film production company engaged by the IWM. Their brief was to prepare the permanent film exhibits for the Holocaust Exhibition, one of which would include contemporary footage of prewar Jewish life in Poland. They were excited by the Rafel film for a number of reasons: it contains some excellent images, it is in surprisingly good condition, it has never been commercially exploited.

Various negotiations ensued:

- Getting the original 16mm film transferred to video — With the help of Harold Boll this was done at IWM expense in North America.
- The extent of the IWM License — Educational, nonexclusive, with a copy lodged at IWM for future researchers to view, but not to be used without our permission.
- What we get out of it — \$850 towards our memorial projects and a high quality video master

The real benefit is an intangible one. Dedicated as we are to preserving the memory of our families, the shtetl, our people and their way of life, placing Rafel's film at the IWM is a big promotional step. For the next 20 years or longer, schoolchildren, students, tourists and visitors of all descriptions will see on the big screen a number of the scenes that Sam filmed 60 years ago. Recognition of Gombin, the filmmaker and our Society will be achieved through the credits and by a plaque affixed to the wall. One more Yizkor goal will have been scored.

—CHELMNO from page 12

The new contract was signed on the spot, and one week later Mystek received the advance payment.

With Lucja Pawlika-Nowak, I discussed the dedication ceremony of the Gombin Memorial at Chelmno. We will provide all the relevant information in *B'nai Gombin* as soon as all the details of the program are confirmed. For now, I will only anticipate that the event will be jointly sponsored by the Gombin Society and the Konin museum, which will take responsibility for all the arrangements and invitations to authorities, public personalities, members of the Polish Jewish communities, etc. The Museum will prepare a guided visit for our group, including not only the Chelmno site but also the Konin cemetery, where many Jews from Gombin are buried in a mass grave with other prisoners from the Konin labor camp. It was also agreed that we will be able to dedicate a plaque at the site of that mass grave at the Konin cemetery.

Finally, I would like to remind readers that our monument at Chelmno is a collective memorial to the Gombin Jewish community. Since some of us are also interested in installing individual plaques in memory of our families, I discussed arrangements for this with Lucja Pawlicka-Nowak. She said that the Museum will do everything necessary to facilitate the placement of small family plaques on the main remembrance wall at Chelmno. The texts would not require special approval, and we would be able to bring the plaques with us and have them affixed on the wall on the same day of the dedication ceremony. It was suggested to me that the plaques should be thin, engraved (not cast), made of golden or silver aluminium, or some other cheap material that would be unattractive to metal thieves. The plaques should have small holes in the corners to facilitate the job of the worker who will be there drilling and bolting them to the wall.

## LETTERS, ETC.

### LAST GOMBINER RABBI

The rabbi from Rypin, Rabbi Natan Nute Nutkevich, a man with a character as clear as crystal, tolerant to others' opinions and others views, he won the love and admiration of masses of refugees for whom he was the representative in the Warsaw Ghetto.

He was the representative of Jewish Rypin and a member of the "Refugees Center". He was a modest man, and a good activist who collected large sums of money to the benefit of the aid to the refugees. He himself lived under most miserable and poor conditions, dedicating his life to the benefit of the public.

During the transportations, he was caught on the Umshlagplatz. He knew what awaited him in Treblinka. He jumped off the wagon that was heading to Treblinka. A Ukrainian armed guard screamed at him to go back to the train, but his answer was brave:

"You may shoot me, but I am not going back."  
The Ukrainian shot him on the spot.

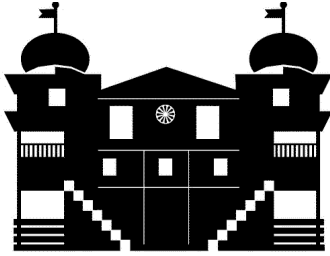
He opposed the murderers who pushed him inside the wagon. He was shot and his grave is unknown. Probably he found eternal peace in one of the tens of mass graves of Warsaw Ghetto.

*courtesy Ada Holtzman*

### LOOKING FOR VADASLOFSKI

My grandfather came to England from Gombin in approximately 1907. His name was Lew Vadaslofski. He changed his name to Lew Lewis. His younger brother Meir came to England approximately 4 years later. He also became Lewis. Are there any Vadaslofski's left? Contact me please at <Laurence.Scodie@btinternet.com>.

*Guestbook comments from Laurence Scodie*



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