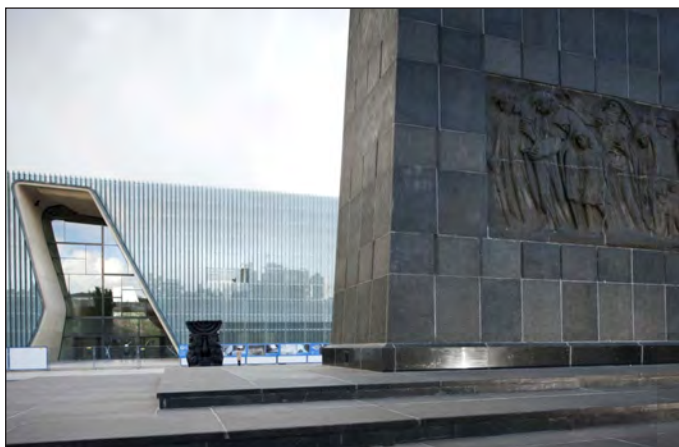


The Museum of the History of Polish Jews



Since the fall of communism in 1989, the Jewish Community in Poland has been gradually re-emerging and today is enjoying a revitalisation. Some estimates put the size of the Jewish community as high as 30,000.

With a new democratic and more liberal Poland, people who had previously hidden their Jewish identity are now acknowledging themselves as Jews and, every day, more people are discovering their true background which had hitherto been hidden from them for numerous reasons.

As well as in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław and Łódź, Jewish communities are now active in many other cities around Poland. In Częstochowa, Lublin, Gdańsk, Poznań, Bielsko Biała, Katowice

and many other places, Jewish communal activity has re-emerged and is growing.

But, unlike us in Australia with a Jewish communal infrastructure that is the envy of the Jewish diaspora around the world, every little bit of Yiddishkeit and every stage of growth in Jewish communal life in Poland is still a struggle.

One of our major tasks will be to support and promote *The Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, constructed on the site of the ghetto in Warsaw and due to officially open in early

2014. Naturally, much has been established to memorialise the horrific events and consequences of the Holocaust. However, this Museum will be dedicated to documenting Jewish life in Poland over 700



years – before and after World War II. Jews contributed much to Polish society over the centuries – in science, medicine, law, literature, as artists and as educators. This rich history must be preserved, and for that reason, this Museum is vitally important.

For more information go to: <http://www.jewishmuseum.org.pl/en>

Polish Government appoints new Ambassador and Consul General.



His Excellency Mr Paweł Milewski has been appointed as the new Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Australia. A career diplomat, Ambassador Milewski's last position was as Deputy Director of the Department of Asia and Pacific, in Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassador Milewski served six years at the Polish Embassy in Beijing. He is fluent in English and Mandarin and holds a Masters degree from Poznan's

Adam Mickiewicz University. He is married, with two children, Ambassador Milewski has expressed a desire to work closely with ASPJ and, in wishing him every success in his new posting, we look forward to a mutually fruitful relationship.



Ms Regina Jurkowska has been appointed as the new Consul-General, based in Sydney. Also a career diplomat, she comes from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she served as Deputy Director of the Department of Cooperation with the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad.

Ms Jurkowska has worked at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Institute of Culture in Warsaw. She is a graduate of the ELTE University in Budapest in Hungarian Philology and has also studied at the Academy of National Defence in Warsaw.

She is married, with three daughters.

The ASPJ enjoyed an excellent relationship with her predecessor, Daniel Groman. We look forward to continuing and further developing that excellent relationship with Ms Jurkowska.

FOCUS ON

Fay Sussman

Musical journey to make peace with the past



(l-r) Daniel Weltlinger – violin; Fay Sussman – Lead Vocals; Emily-Rose Sarkova – accordion and back up Yiddish vocals; and John Maddox – Bass

In June 2013, Yiddish singer Fay Sussman took Klezmer and Yiddish music to rural Poland. With her band, the Klezmer Divas, she toured small communities where once Jewish populations and culture had flourished. The band was warmly received and she met a growing movement of young Poles working to preserve and re-establish the Jewish heritage of the villages.

A committed Human Rights activist, Fay is turning her journey into a documentary about reconciliation between Jews and Poles, particularly through the third generation. She hopes an overlapping music heritage will help the new generation come to terms with the horrors of the Holocaust and lead to a genuine attempt at peace and understanding on both sides.

Fay was born in Poland in 1946 and, until recently, vowed never to return – a common sentiment amongst survivor families who suffered under Nazi rule. Australia has the largest population of Holocaust Survivors after Israel. Many of them and their children hold painful memories and anger toward Poland, where the Nazi murder machine built its worst extermination camps.

The film Fay wants to make looks at attempts by individuals to respect each other's pain and move forward towards tolerance and healing. Poland is one of the few countries in Europe trying to reconcile with its history of horror on its home soil. She wants to explore what can be achieved by individuals who want to find a way forward after genocide and how the young deal with the trauma of their inherited past.

For more information about Fay's Journey go to: <http://faysussman.com/journey.php>

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

President:

Izydor Marmur

Vice-Presidents:

Bernard Korbman, OAM

Andrew Rajcher

Treasurer:

Andrew Rajcher

Secretary:

Lena Fiszman

Members:

Moshe Fiszman

Krysia Kinst

Sophie Maj

Ezra May

David Prince

Peter Schnall

Telephone: +61 (0)3 9523 9573

Facsimile: +61 (0)3 9528 2082

Website: www.polishjews.org.au

Email: lfiszman@bigpond.net.au

Mailing Address:

PO Box 56, Elsternwick, Vic., 3185

From the President

In the past few months ASPJ has been continuing work on creating awareness of our cause, nurturing existing friendships and developing strong new bonds.

Polish Ambassador His Excellency Andrzej Jaroszynski and Consul General Daniel Gromann have been extremely supportive of our efforts to connect with the Polish community. We value and appreciate the help and advice they have given us. As their tenure in Australia came to an end and they are leaving our shores, we thank them sincerely and wish them best of luck in their future endeavours.

We welcome His Excellency Pawel Milewski, the new ambassador of the Republic of Poland, and look forward to working with him and the embassy in the near future.

His Excellency Yuval Rotem, the Israeli ambassador, is also leaving our shores. We are sorry to see him go and extend our best wishes for the future.

Congratulations to Adam Drahan on being elected the new president of Polish Community Council of Victoria.

At the beginning of June, Professor Pawel Śpiewak, one of the best known Polish public intellectuals, visited Melbourne as a guest of the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs (AIPA). He gave two lectures on Jewish relations, which were attended by many ASPJ members.

Pawel Bramson's visit, shortly after, has been received with interest in the Melbourne Jewish community as well as among members of the Melbourne Polish community. At a function held at the Glen Eira Town Hall, the movie about Pawel's journey to his Jewish roots, *The moon is Jewish*, was shown, followed by questions from the audience. The Bramsons also visited The Jewish Holocaust Centre and a number of Jewish schools.

Both visitors are members of a growing and vibrant Jewish community in Poland and from them we have learned that there is a significant revival of Jewish life and culture there. We are exploring ideas for creating stronger ties and relationships between members of that community and ours.

We would like to hear feedback and suggestions from our members and welcome your active participation.

Izi Marmur

A Journey to Poland

We recently visited Poland with Sam's sister and her husband, travelling from Warsaw to Radzyn, Siedlce and Treblinka in the east, and then to Wroclaw and Ziebice in the south-west, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Cracow. Sam's parents were born in Radzyn and fled to Russia at the beginning of the Second World War and Sam was born in Ziebice after the war.

We wanted to learn more about relatives who disappeared during the Holocaust, and managed to find hand-written records of Sam's uncle, aunt and three cousins in a municipal office in Siedlce, just minutes before closing time. Just as moving was finding the house in Ziebice where Sam spent the first two years of his life. The street names had changed and most of the old buildings were gone, but we found the house based on Sam's sister's clear memory as a six-year-old.

We had different reactions at Treblinka and Auschwitz. Treblinka, where most of Sam's family was murdered by the Nazis, was stark, deserted and silent. The hundreds of jagged stones set in concrete, each with the name of a Jewish community that had been destroyed, were surrounded by grass, wildflowers and beautiful trees, and the lack of buildings, signage and explanation left room for silent contemplation. In contrast Auschwitz felt overly commercialised, with large groups following the many guides as we were herded through the barracks and crematoria. We felt angry watching people posing for photos in front of well-known



L-r Ruth Mushin, Sam Helfenbaum, Sam's Brother-in-law and sister

signs and buildings, but also felt that perhaps if those people left having learnt something, it was all worthwhile.

The concentration camps and the remnants of Jewish Warsaw and Cracow are stark and confronting memorials, but the past was everywhere. Walking over the cobblestones in Warsaw, we wondered who had walked there before us, and in Treblinka we felt the presence of those who had been murdered there. We wondered how many Jewish people had hidden in the forests, and when we met older people, we wondered what they had been doing during the war.

We felt a disconnect between the horror that was and the beauty of the old towns of Warsaw, Wroclaw and Cracow, the beautiful forests, blue skies and summer sunshine, and the unfailingly pleasant people we met. Our journey challenged the preconceived ideas we had, and opened our eyes to the complexity of modern Poland.

Ruth Mushin & Sam Helfenbaum

Are Polish Jewish relations frozen in the past?

By Dr Alexander Naraniecki



Prof. Alexander Naraniecki

Too often in the past it was acceptable to say "I have my opinions and perspective and you have yours". Even when talking to academics about Jewish and Polish issues after moving to Melbourne in 2011, I found this was often the case. This view, I believe is detrimental to those who identify themselves as Pole, Jew or both. I agree with the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schuldrich, who said Polish-Jewish relations were "frozen" in the past.

Melbournians have both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to forming attitudes on Polish-Jewish matters. The tyranny of distance can lead to the parochialism that is sometimes characteristic of Melbourne. As a result, attitudes change slowly. How Melbournians think Poles and Jews are living their lives in Poland is often radically different from the reality. On the other

hand, there are also unique opportunities in Melbourne that are only recently being explored by organizations such as ASPJ. Melbourne is unique in that it has a relatively large community of Holocaust survivors and their descendants as well as a large community of Poles whose lives and families have been scarred by the Nazi invasion, through internment in concentration camps, forced labour or the Russian Gulag.

Opportunities for dialogue and interaction are higher here than anywhere else in the world. As such both communities have a particular responsibility for engagement. Why does it matter? I believe it matters, from a moral perspective and at the level of individual persons, to examine the attitudes and beliefs handed down through the generations. The memories of sufferings and hardship are not something that only concerns one community, 'my tribe'. To be good citizens, we need to be sensitive to the experiences and memories of other groups in our society, even if their perspectives differ from ours. Only by talking to people from different communities can we gain new insights, challenge our traditional beliefs and come to view the experiences of others with sympathy. Ignoring the views of another because of their religious background can cause emotional distress to that person. This distress can also affect third generation Poles and Jews equally. We need to open our minds and hearts to hear the stories of 'the other'. Is it right to cause further harm to these generations by dismissing the stories of their parents or grandparents as unimportant? Each person, in their day to day life must decide what attitude to take: The attitude of the closed mind which ignores the stranger thereby harming them socially, or the open, impartial attitude which seeks to understand and empathise with the stories of others. In our utterances and in our thoughts, we are responsible for the wellbeing of others by the way we value their memories.

MEMBERSHIP

Even though the name of our Society is indicative of our general identity, our membership policy is intended to be as inclusive as possible.

Naturally, we encourage all Jews whose roots lie in Poland to become a Member and join in our activities.

However, even if you are not Jewish but are interested in Polish-Jewish relations, history and/or dialogue, we also encourage you to join us and invite you to apply for Associate Membership.

Even though Membership is open to Jews aged sixteen years and over, we also encourage young members under the age of sixteen who are interested in their heritage and history, to become an Associate Member.

Coming to Melbourne in 2014



Konstanty Gebert

- Columnist at *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland's biggest daily
- Founder of *Midrasz*, Poland's Jewish intellectual monthly
- Author of eleven books on subjects including Torah commentary, post-war Polish Jewry, and the wars of Israel
- Head of the Warsaw office of the European Council on Foreign Relations, a pan-European think-tank

News From Poland

10th Singer Festival of Jewish Culture



This year's Festival took place over eight days, between 24th August and 1st September 2013 in Warsaw.

All Saints' Church (on the edge of what was the Warsaw Ghetto) served as an unusual venue for trumpet virtuoso, Tomasz Stanko, supported by the Kroke band and musicians from the USA.

Cantor Yaacov Lemmer performed in the Nożyk Synagogue, while the

Festival also featured Israeli cantor Dudu Fisher, known from his performance in *Les Miserables* staged on Broadway, and the Canadian jazz pianist and composer Ron Davis.

By popular demand, Joshua Nelson returned for his second Festival in a row.

The Jewish Theatre of Bucharest staged *Yentl* based on Sz. Anski's *The Dybbuk Between Two Worlds*, adapted by Szmuel Shohat for Habima, the National Theatre from Israel.

Warsaw's Singer Festival continues to demonstrate the richness of Jewish culture and how it can still fully embrace the contemporary world.

For more information go to: festivalsingera.pl/

11th Warsaw Jewish Film Festival

This year's Warsaw Jewish Film Festival will take place 25th to 31st October 2013.

For the first time, the Festival will be organised with its new partner – the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.



A highlight of this year's Festival will be a special screening of *Ocaleni* (Survivors), a documentary directed by the Museum's Joanna Król and Karolina Dzieciółowska, which follows the work of two Museum volunteers, Jadwiga Rytłowa and Janina Goldhar, who collect the testimonies from Holocaust survivors in Israel.

This year's Festival will also feature a retrospective of acclaimed director and writer, Tadeusz David Konwicki. His films include adaptations of works by Czesław Miłosz and Adam Mickiewicz.

For more information go to: www.wjff.pl/en/ (in English)

Holocaust Education Centre to be built at Treblinka



During a ceremony on 2nd August 2013 commemorating the 70th anniversary of the uprising at the Nazi's most notorious death camp in which almost 800,000 Jews perished, a foundation stone was laid for the future Treblinka Holocaust Education Centre.

During the rebellion only 200 people managed to escape from the camp and about 100 of them lived to see the end of the war.

The Centre will be designed by architect Orit Willenberg, daughter of ninety-year-old Samuel Willenberg (left), the last living survivor of Treblinka and a participant in the uprising. Willenberg has written of his experiences in his memoirs entitled *Revolt in Treblinka*, a book already translated into many languages.