

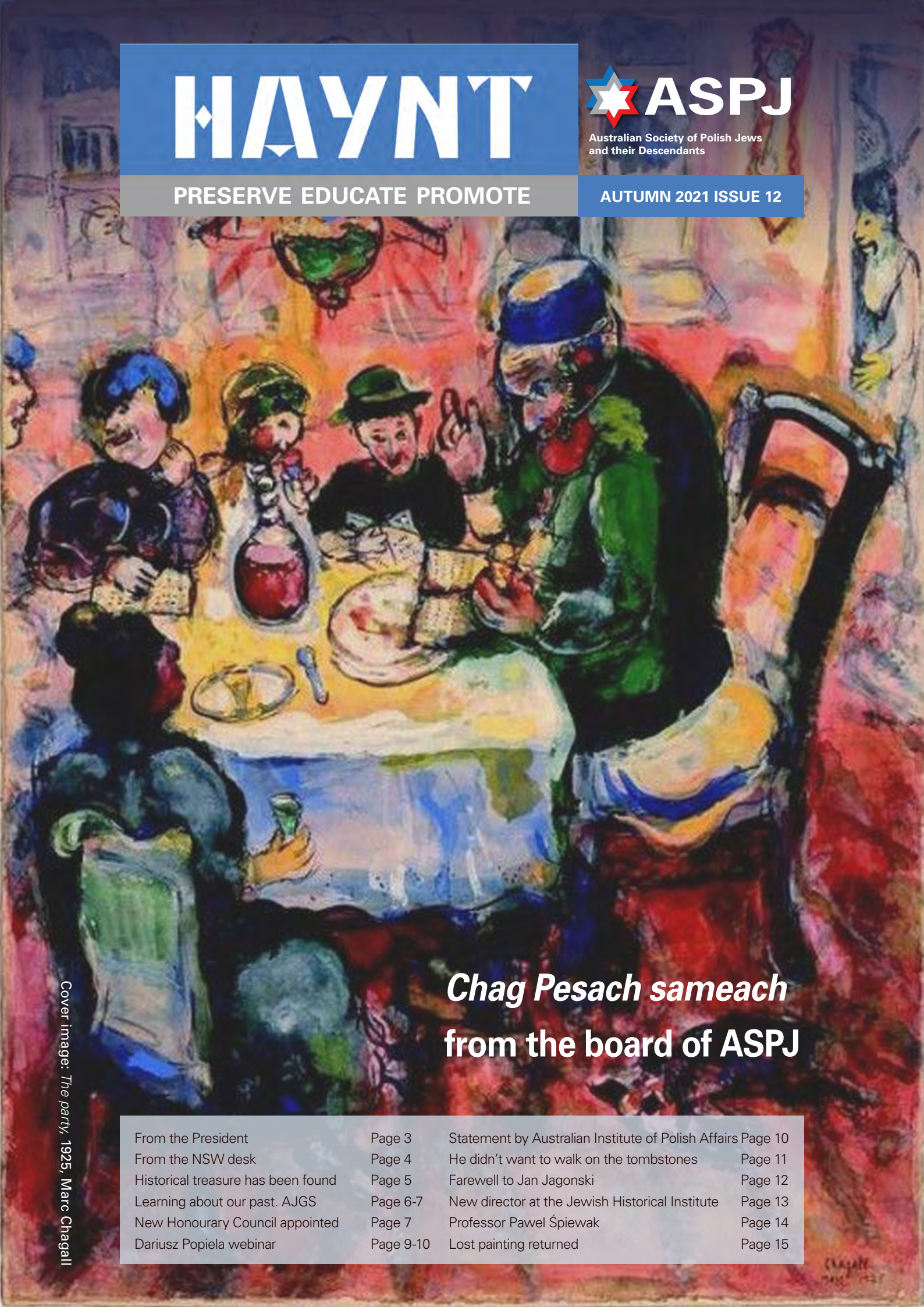
HAYNT



Australian Society of Polish Jews
and their Descendants

PRESERVE EDUCATE PROMOTE

AUTUMN 2021 ISSUE 12



Chag Pesach sameach from the board of ASPJ

Cover image: *The party, 1925*, Marc Chagall

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PRESERVE EDUCATE PROMOTE

“Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants is dedicated to preserving and promoting the historical and cultural heritage of Jewish life in Poland and to fostering understanding between current and future generations of the Polish and Jewish communities”

The ASPJ coordinates with the established Jewish and Polish communal bodies, religious leadership, governmental, parliamentary and diplomatic bodies, as well as historical, cultural and educational organisations in both Australia and Poland.

Polish–Jewish dialogue in Poland today is growing, particularly among the post-communist, educated young. There is a growing understanding and acceptance of the past, both the good and the bad. A new spirit of positive cooperation has emerged. Young Catholic Poles, more than ever before, are expressing an interest in the Jewish history of their country. This dialogue and interest needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

We organise educational and cultural events that cover the broad range of Polish–Jewish relations.

Our *Haynt* magazine is published three times a year, showcasing cultural, social and political articles of interest to Polish and Jewish communities.

ASPJ is a resource for educational material and offers a speaker service in a variety of topics relating to Polish–Jewish relations.

The Henryk Slawik Award is bestowed by the ASPJ to a person or institution that helps foster a deeper understanding of Polish–Jewish history and relations.

ASPJ Oration invites national or international speakers who can address complex and relevant issues regarding Polish–Jewish concerns.

Based in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia, we invite all people, Jewish and non-Jewish, whose roots lie in Poland, to join our organisation.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of ASPJ or its members.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



Ezra May
President ASPJ

Welcome to the second edition of Haynt for 2021.

Thankfully it appears that after what seemed a long, dark continuous Covid-impacted 2020, we are now on our way to returning to a more normal, albeit Covidsafe, existence.

As outlined in previous editions of Haynt, Covid significantly impacted the Australian Society of Polish Jews and Their Descendants (ASPJ) with our original suite of planned 2020 events & functions almost entirely postponed or cancelled.

Facing that challenge, the ASPJ proved itself to be an agile organisation and pivoted towards hosting online webinars. These webinars featuring: Poland Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich; Michael Rubinfeld, Director of FestivALT; and Dariusz Popiela, a current Polish Olympian and founder of 'People, not Numbers' have proved very successful and drawn significant viewer numbers both locally and internationally.

Additionally, our partnership entered in 2020 with FestivALT – an independent arts collective that produces acclaimed Jewish art and activism, based in Kraków, Poland – has satisfyingly produced a number of successfully collaborated online events and tours specifically curated for an Australian audience.

Another highlight for the ASPJ was my interview with Jonathon Ornstein of JCC Krakow, in December 2020, as part of his online interview series. This interview was viewed by over 1,000 people.

These ASPJ webinars and interviews are able to be viewed via our Facebook page and website and I encourage those who may have missed them to do so.

Given the success of our ASPJ webinars and our online partnership with FestivALT, we will continue to host these in 2021 and beyond. The changed environment we live in, as well as the increased accessibility of both local and international guests and viewers, are compelling reasons to continue to do so. We have an outstanding line-up of guests who have accepted invitations and we are excited by the opportunities ahead of us.

The ASPJ also excitedly looks forward to resuming in-person attended public functions, especially our headline ASPJ Henryk Slawik Award in late 2021, as well as resuming our ASPJ Oration in early 2022. We also are now planning the launch of our NSW chapter of the ASPJ around October 2021.

One constant for us has been the publication of Haynt, which remains a richly interesting & educational magazine. Many thanks to all our contributors and especially to Izi Marmur for his exceptional production efforts. They are much appreciated.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at both our upcoming online and especially in-person functions in 2021.

Wishing everyone a safe & happy Passover.

FROM THE NEW SOUTH WALES DESK



Estelle Rozinski
Co-Vice President

It's almost a year since the ASPJ's NSW launch was postponed.

While cancelling the event was disappointing, we learnt from your enthusiastic response that there was an interest and a need for a Polish-Jewish voice in Sydney.

In the "stillness" of the past year, we have been searching for a meaningful format that will best serve and engage our community. It is with special thanks to Karen Pakula for her eloquent interviews with Rabbi Michael Schudrich and Dariusz Popiela, to Ezra May for his incisive discussions with Jonathan Ornstein of JCC Krakow and to Michael Rubinfeld of FestivalAlt, that our Webinar program has provided us with part of the solution. Based on your positive response we hope to augment these webinars with

real-time soirees, COVID numbers permitting, to showcase the professional, artistic and academic talents of our Polish-Jewish community.

Meanwhile we have extended our network base with new ties to the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society and to Youth HEAR (Holocaust Education and Remembrance), an organisation dedicated to mitigating hate in society by connecting young Australians with the memory of the Holocaust through education, commemoration and cross-community collaboration.

Of particular interest to Jewish institutions and organisations, the Australian Jewish Historical Society is currently offering their expertise on how to archive your organisation's documents. For more information, please email archivist@ajhs.com.au

It is our plan, all things being equal and healthy, to launch ASPJ, NSW in October. Please watch these pages for further updates.

Chag Pesach Sameach

With warm regards,

Estelle Rozinski

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The advertisement features a background with a blue and red diagonal split. On the left, a Polish passport is shown with the text 'UNIA EUROPEJSKA RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA' and the Polish eagle emblem. On the right, the European Union flag with its twelve gold stars is visible. The Polaron logo is in the top right corner.

A "HISTORICAL TREASURE" HAS BEEN FOUND AND IS NOW ONLINE!

In Issue 11 of *"Haynt"* (Summer 2021), we published an article about how our ASPJ Treasurer and Webmaster, Andrew Rajcher, was searching for a particularly rare Yizkor Book relating to his family's home city in Poland, Częstochowa.

Andrew is also a Board member and Webmaster of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews & Their Descendants. In 2019, he began the Częstochowa and region YIZKOR BOOK PROJECT, with the aim of professionally translating into English all Yizkor Books relating to that region of Poland.

One of the first Yizkor Books to appear after World War II was "Ghettos - Warsaw, Częstochowa" written by Adam Zilbersztajn. It was published in December 1945 by Sifriat Ha'Poalim (Workers' Library) and comprises 122 pages. Because it was published so soon after the War, Professor Dariusz Stola, former Director of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, referred to it as a "historical treasure".

"We scoured the world to find a copy of this book, so that we could have it translated into English for the first time and to make that translation available on our website", said Andrew. "We approached the original publishing house in Israel and even they did not have a copy. We tried Yad Vashem and the National Library of Israel, but without success".

But then, the Chairman of the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel, Alon Goldman, came to the rescue! He discovered that a scan of the book was held by the Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheva. Unfortunately, the quality of the scan was not sufficient for it to be accurately translated.

"The University, in apologising for the quality of the scan, told Alon Goldman that the Moreshet Archive in Israel might very well have a copy of the book or a scan, at the very least", Andrew continued. "Of course,



why hadn't we thought of that before? It should have been obvious to us! If anyone would have a copy of this Yizkor Book, it would be the Archive!"

The Moreshet Archive is part of the Mordechai Anielewicz Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Centre. Before and during the War, the author, Adam Zilbersztajn, was an active member of Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair in Poland at the highest levels of the organisation.

Sure enough, the Moreshet Archive DID have a copy and agreed to provide a scan of quality good enough for the World Society's translator to work with.

"We do not know whether the author wrote the book's chapters near the dates to which he refers in chapter headings (e.g. "Warsaw 1941), or at War's end", said Andrew. "Either way, his memories give us yet another vision of the tragic events in both Częstochowa and Warsaw – one which would have still been very fresh in his memory.

"We have known about the existence of this book for a long time and, for a long time, we have endeavoured to obtain a copy or scan of the book for us to be able to have it professionally translated. This "historical treasure" has now been translated into English for the first time and is now available on the World Society of Częstochowa Jews' website.

"Our Częstochowa Yizkor Books Project has now succeeded in having six Yizkor Books professionally, completely and accurately translated into English – three about Częstochowa, two about Krzepice and one about Żarki. But our Project is still far from done – the work continues!"

To read the English translation of "Ghettos – Warsaw, Częstochowa" by Adam Zilbersztajn (1945), go to www.czestochowajews.org/history/yizkor-books/czewa-wawa-ghettos/

LEARNING ABOUT OUR PAST HELPS US UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT OURSELVES



Rieke Nash and Peter Nash



By Barbara Simon
President. AJGS

The AJGS mission is to encourage and assist those with Jewish ancestry to research their family histories, in the belief that learning about our past helps us understand more about ourselves.

The Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (AJGS) was formed 30 years ago by a small group of very enthusiastic people under the leadership of the indomitable Sophie Caplan. Sophie had already started to research her family and found others eager to learn about their family backgrounds.

The AJGS mission then, as now, is to encourage and assist those with Jewish ancestry to research their family histories.

In time, Sophie handed over the leadership of AJGS to Rieke Nash, whose Polish background, knowledge

of Polish language and passion for genealogy made her a valuable leader. Rieke made significant contributions and lead major transcription and indexing efforts for the international genealogy websites JewishGen: <https://www.jewishgen.org/> and JRI Poland: <https://jri-poland.org/index.htm> leading major transcription and indexing efforts, particularly for Polish localities.

Rieke was always eager to help anyone who wanted to learn about their family. Her unexpected death a few short years ago left us all wishing we could have better

preserved the invaluable information she kept in her head.

When AJGS began, there was no Internet, so the only way to get information was to write a letter to an archive or distant family member, post it (in an actual mailbox) and patiently wait, hoping that someone would reply and provide answers to your many questions.

The other way to research at that time was to get on a plane, visit "the old country", and try to find the places where birth, death and marriage records were kept. This often took considerable time and money. If you were very lucky and did find records, they were often written in a language or script that you may not understand or was difficult to read. Only the truly dedicated took on this challenge.

Then there were the conferences, mostly overseas, where you had the opportunity to meet like-minded people and share experiences.

Today much has changed in the practice of genealogy. The internet now brings the world to your fingertips, with a treasure trove of guidance, data and information online from archives and enthusiasts around the globe. Every day new datasets are being posted.

The challenge, however, is still about mining the data to find what you're looking for; that little piece of family history gold.

AJGS has a dedicated group of members, fellow researchers, who are happy to help you on your road to discovery. The knowledge members have acquired has been able to help break through many a brick wall or point researchers in the right direction.

The AJGS website – <https://www.ajgs.org.au> – is updated regularly, and our members receive a monthly newsletter with details of workshops run by AJGS and other societies around Australia, together with details of upcoming conferences and publications that may be of interest.

AJGS also produces a quarterly magazine, *Kosher Koala*, which contains interesting feature articles and family stories, together with reports of interesting news and developments around the genealogical world.

As we adapt to a world of virtual workshops, AJGS has been holding monthly meetings online, with fascinating speakers and topics. In recent months

we've held a Genealogical Detective Session for people wanting help to solve a family Mystery; Estelle Rozinski told us all about the Missing Mezuzot Project; and Peter Philippsohn, president of the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), gave us a comprehensive tour of the AJHS website.

Our next major workshop, to be held in April both at Waverley Library and via zoom, will explore the many features of My Heritage, [LINK: <https://www.myheritage.com/>] – a subscription website where you can create your tree online and access archives to research your family history.

AJGS always welcomes new members. Membership is free this year. To join, simply download and fill out the membership form [LINK: <https://www.ajgs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MEMBERSHIP-FORM-2020-21.docx.zip>] from the AJGS website. [LINK: <https://www.ajgs.org.au/>]

Please contact AJGS President, Barbara Simon, [LINK: <mailto:president@ajgs.org.au>] if you have any questions.

NEW HONOURARY CONSUL GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND IN VICTORIA



Mr. Andrzej Soszyński is a Polish-Australian dual national. He received a certificate in Accounting and Financial Management from the Queensland Institute of Technology in 1982, while in 1998 he completed Marketing & Management at the Macquarie Graduate School of Management in Sydney. Currently retired,

he spent his professional career working at Caltex Australia, where for the last 20 years he occupied various managerial posts. Andrzej Soszyński is also a past president of the Polish Association in Hobart, prior to moving to Victoria in 1995. Mr. Soszyński has been an active member of the Polish community in Melbourne. In 1997 he served as Chairman and in 2016 as a member of the Steering Committee of "PolArt" – the biggest Polish culture festival on the southern hemisphere, which in those years took place in Melbourne.

With vast managerial experience, long-term engagement in the life of the Polish community, as well as good understanding of local business community, Mr. Andrzej Soszyński is well positioned to represent Polish interests in Melbourne and the whole state of Victoria.

Mr. Andrzej Soszyński began his mission on 16 February 2021.



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WEBINAR: DARIUSZ POPIELA, POLISH OLYMPIAN AND CHAMPION MEMORY-KEEPER



By Karen Pakula
Board member ASPJ NSW

Since 2018, in towns and cities near his home in Nowy Sącz in the south of Poland, Olympic kayaker Dariusz Popiela has led a campaign to name and commemorate Jews who perished during the Holocaust, so many of them buried in mass graves where they have lain anonymously for decades. His project, 'People, Not Numbers', has already identified more than 2,500 Shoah victims. It is, he says, a way to defy the murderers' plans to erase their memory.

An eight-times national champion, Popiela appeared in conversation on ASPJ's new webinar series to discuss the work that is garnering him respect across the globe. In Poland itself, his reputation as a dedicated memory-keeper was cemented with a special mention in the 2018 POLIN Museum awards, while a documentary is also on its way.

Speaking from training camp in Reunion Island, he recalled the genesis of 'People, Not Numbers': after paddling one day on the Dunajec River near Krościenko,

he stopped to explore an old Jewish cemetery and found it forgotten and swamped in undergrowth. He returned with tools to clean the site and was so disquieted and ashamed at the desolation, he vowed to bring the memory of the region's Jews back to life.

For the Krościenko memorial he identified 246 victims – all murdered during a single action on April 28, 1942. It was just the first monument in what's become a grim annual ritual. The following year, the names of 1,776 souls – nearly the entire Jewish ghetto of Grybów – were etched in stone. Last year, in Czarny Dunajec, he located 494 more. He is still at work on a memorial for Nowy Targ later this year and there are more to come. Despite his demanding training and competition schedule, he plans to continue his

mission around the region, though he hopes that 'People, Not Numbers' will eventually launch in other parts of Poland.

Popiela is acutely aware of the neglect of Jewish cemeteries across the country. To begin with, he explained, many villages and towns have few Jews, if any, to maintain them. But behind the neglect is also ignorance. Many Poles today are unaware of what happened to the Jewish population – schoolchildren, he said, receive just one 45-minute lesson about the Holocaust – and this has led to a disinterest in Jewish heritage in general. Also, Popiela explained that some in the Polish community believe the responsibility of custodianship lies with Israel, the Jewish state. To these doubters he emphasises that Poland's Jewish history is part of the country's own history, that Jews in Poland were not Israelis but fellow Poles and thus their legacy is Poland's responsibility.

In all, however, the reaction of the local community to 'People, Not Numbers' is mostly positive, Popiela said, especially once a parish priest gets on board, though some are still suspicious that victims' descendants will make a property claim.

Education is key to Popiela's mission. His most effective lesson for schoolchildren is an excursion to Belzec death camp, where much of the Jewish population from the region perished. There, the children are shown the name of their town on a remembrance plaque, which brings home the message: Jews were neighbours and friends, an intrinsic piece of a shared story that is 1,000 years old.

Popiela is involved in every aspect of the project, which is staffed by volunteers. To identify the missing, he combs through archives himself and collaborates with other local memory-keepers, including historian Dr Karolina Panz, whose discovery of 1942 Judenrat lists of inhabitants of the Podhale region were crucial to his

research. With his family, he established the not-for-profit Centrum foundation, which raises money that goes directly into 'People, Not Numbers'. To learn more, go to <https://centrumfundacja.pl/en> or the 'People, Not Numbers' Facebook page.

COVID restrictions notwithstanding, Dariusz Popiela will deliver the ASPJ Oration in Melbourne in 2022. For more information, go to our website at www.polishjews.org.au. If you would like to view the webinar, it is available at www.polishjews.org.au, along with previous webinars with Poland's chief rabbi, Michael Schudrich, and the co-director of FestivalAlt, Michael Rubinfeld.

STATEMENT BY THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF POLISH AFFAIRS



By Assoc. Prof. Gosia Klatt

President of Australian Institute of Polish Affairs.
12 February 2021

In view of the recently concluded trial in Poland of two Holocaust historians: Prof. Barbara Engelking and Prof. Jan Grabowski, as well as the prosecutorial investigation

into articles written by Polish journalist Katarzyna Markusz, the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs would like to make the following statement:

There is increasing evidence of attempts by Polish government authorities, and some public institutions that rely on government funding, to use various forms of repression against historians and journalists who, using available evidence, try to give a truthful account of the situation of Jews in Poland, and their relations with Poles, during the Second World War.

The recent civil trial against professors Engeling and Grabowski and the prosecutorial investigation of articles written by Katarzyna Markusz, are the latest examples of this deeply worrying trend.

We join the Open Letter signed by Polish intellectuals and Polish-Jewish representatives, including Michael Schudrich, the current Chief Rabbi of Poland, in stating categorically that the Court should not be where historical truth is determined. We condemn such attempts by Polish authorities and express solidarity with people who are subject to these repressive methods, methods which aim to suppress freedom of academic expression.

The State must not be the arbitrator in historical debates as it inevitably leads, sooner or later, to the incitement of hatred. We unequivocally condemn attempts to victimise those who search for historical truth.

HE DIDN'T WANT TO WALK ON THE TOMBSTONES



Robert Augustyniak (left) and Prof. Jan Jagielski (right) are looking at the last matzevah dug out in the yard at Traugutta Street in Grodzisk Mazowiecki.

Wyborcza.pl Warsaw

December 8, 2009

(This old article seems relevant today.)

Translated from Polish.

All of Grodzisk knew about the matzevot in the backyard at Traugutt. People trampled on them, cars drove on them, no one reacted. 'It's a great shame' says Robert Augustyniak.

Thanks to him, Jewish tombstones were returned to the cemetery yesterday.

He introduces himself briefly as 'a resident of Grodzisk, a social worker.' Born in 1973, he works for a courier company in Okęcie. 'My family has lived in Grodzisk Mazowiecki for generations' he emphasises. He does not recall who he heard from that in one of the yards near the Jewish cemetery there are matzevot in the ground.

The Grodzisk Jewish cemetery was established in the mid-18th century. At the beginning, Jews from Warsaw were also buried there (before the Jewish Cemetery in Bródno was established). The last funerals took place in 1941.

Then there was only devastation. Some of the matzevot were taken by the Germans to pave the roads. However, the greatest destruction of the cemetery took place after the war. In 1953, at the request of the Office for Religious Affairs, the wall was pulled down, and almost the entire area of the cemetery was allocated to

the Peasant Self-Help warehouse. In the place where tombstones were torn out, a building materials and pesticide warehouse was built. Thus, among others, the grave of the famous tzadik Elimelech Szapira, father of the preacher of the Warsaw ghetto, disappeared.

Today, the site is a metal scrap yard and some warehouses. The former cemetery gate from 1922 sits among piles of rusty pipes, metal rods and radiators.

Once a large Jewish cemetery, only a small area with partially preserved tombstones survived.

Everyone knew about it.

Rumors about the presence of matzevot in the yard have been circulating around Grodzisk for a long time. 'I finally decided to check on them,' says Robert Augustyniak. He started his search around May and June. He found stone slabs with Hebrew inscriptions next to a two-story house at ul. Traugutt. After the war, this building was used by the secret police. There, captured Home Army soldiers and scouts were detained.

Then a kindergarten was established in the house, and today it houses tenants. The matzevot were hidden under a layer of earth and grass, right next to the sheds and toilets.

'I'm not their discoverer. I just made public what everyone knew and considered something natural,' explains Augustyniak.

He informed the Jewish Community Council in Warsaw about his find. It was the JCCW who supervised the excavation of tombstones and their transfer to the cemetery. The action was authorised by the Grodzisk Mazowiecki council. Mayor Grzegorz Benedykciński provided workers and cars to transport the plates.

Jan Jagielski from the Jewish Historical Institute was present and estimated that there are about ten tombstones. Counting is difficult because all sandstone slabs are in shattered pieces. A shattered white marble tablet had fallen off one of the tombstones.

The tombstones have been erected in the second half of the 19th century. Two of them show a carved candlestick, which means that they stood on women's graves. 'And the plate with the carved book is a fragment of a tombstone of a male scholar in literature,' explained Jan Jagielski.

FAREWELL TO JAN JAGIELSKI (1937-2021)



Jan Jagielski

By Izydor Marmur.
Co-Vice President ASPJ.

Jan Jagielski was born on 13 October 1937 to a non-Jewish family in Toruń, Poland and passed away on 17 February 2021.

He graduated from geochemical studies at the University of Warsaw and worked as a researcher at the Industrial Chemistry Research Institute in Warsaw.

Over the years of being at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, where he was employed in 1991, he was well respected and well liked head of the Heritage Documentation Department.

He was a social activist and an author of numerous publications on the traces of the historical presence of Jews in Poland he became an indisputable authority on the subject.

Jan also gained popularity as a guide through "Jewish Warsaw". He led groups through the area of the former ghetto and each year, on 1 November, he escorted visitors around the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street.

He co-founded the Social Committee for the Protection of Jewish Cemeteries and Monuments at the Society for the Protection of Monuments, where from 1994 he was the chairman of the Board. He initiated the action of restoring Jewish cemeteries in small towns

'It was natural that, while traveling around these places, I looked at the cemeteries, looked at whether they were neglected or not. Someone said that he was from that place and what was happening there. I was collecting Jewish materials' – recalled Jagielski in one of the interviews .

He also sat on the Board of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute, which played a key role in the creation of POLIN Museum.

Jan Jagielski's work has been appreciated by many. In 2005, he was awarded the Jan Karski and Pola Nireński Prize and, in 2008, he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of the Rebirth of Poland, presented to him by President of Poland Lech Kaczyński.

He was the doyen and teacher of all those who have been researching the material heritage of Jews in Poland in recent decades. He will be missed by many.

MONIKA KRAWCZYK APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

By Danuta Matloh.

Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

Monika Krawczyk becomes the successor of prof. Paweł Śpiewak, who served as the Director of the JHI from 2011 to 2020. On behalf of the Minister of Culture, National Heritage and Sport, Jarosław Sellin, the secretary of state at the Ministry, presented the new director.

'We will implement a very ambitious program that focuses on dialogue and discovering of the many threads of the history of Polish Jews, which may not have been thoroughly researched yet. Of course, we will not neglect the issues that interest everyone the most, i.e. the history of World War II,' said Monika Krawczyk. And she added, 'The Jewish Historical Institute will undertake more extensive research on topics such as the spirituality of Polish Jews.'

The new director of the Jewish Historical Institute is an advocate. In the years 2004–2019 she was the Managing Director of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage.



Monika Krawczyk



From January to September 2019, she was the Chair of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, currently a member of the Union's Board.

She conducted a number of projects concerning Polish-Jewish relations and the protection of Jewish heritage.

In 2015-2017, she was a member of the Consultative Council at the Mazowieckie Provincial Conservator of Monuments and in 2014–2018 she participated in the work of the Social Council at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Monika Krawczyk was awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta for her contribution to the protection of cultural heritage (2010) and the Honorary Medal "Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto" of the Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims of the Second World War – for cultivating the memory of Jewish ghetto fighters and victims of the Holocaust (2011). In 2019, she received the annual Award of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage.

PROF. PAWEŁ ŚPIEWAK: DO NOT CLOSE THE EXPERIENCE IN A TIME CAPSULE



By Professor Paweł Śpiewak

An extract from a Jewish Historical Institute article
21.12.2020

“The collections of the Jewish Historical Institute should be exhibited, so that anyone who visits us may say: there are treasures. We moved the Institute from the era of typewriting to the Internet era. We open up with exhibitions, lectures, film and theater screenings, trying to attract especially the residents of Warsaw. This is the way to the future.”

Olga Drenda talks to the director of the Jewish Historical Institute, professor Paweł Śpiewak.

Professor Paweł Śpiewak: I became the director of the Jewish Historical Institute almost by accident. Previously I had not considered such a possibility. I had no managerial ambitions. I knew something about the JHI, had a good understanding of the existing Jewish community, learned about Jewish traditions, wrote commentaries on the Torah for “Tygodnik Powszechny”, but did not desire that I can take up a managerial career and work for the so-called Jewish street.

It was not and is not an easy street. I had not considered such a way of life. I imagined that for the rest of my life I would be a rebellious academician – writing essays, articles and books, like the proverbial shoemaker, working for someone who knocks and

brings to order an article for a more or less popular weekly. My anvil, my computer, was full of such contracts.

I had – as the saying goes – various adventures in my career (I have been a member of Polish Parliament for two years, an exciting waste of life) and the fact a new opportunity may appear was not unimaginable for me. The idea of directorship intrigued and surprised me. There was something adventurous, new and risky about it.

I was introduced by Minister Bogdan Zdrojewski to an institution that looked dilapidated from the outside. I made the reconstruction of the space a priority. What is most beautiful, i.e. the architecture typical of the 1930s, resembling the interior of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia or the YIVO building in Vilnius, was then obscured. The building of the current Jewish Historical Institute, as one of the few community ghetto buildings, survived the war. It remained a strong sign of presence and memory of the Central Judaic Library (there was no trace of it) and of the Judaic Institute. During the war it performed important functions. It was here that Emanuel Ringelblum – the patron of the Institute since 2009 – and a large group of his associates came to work every day.

The building has something extraordinary about it: traces of fire on the floor. As in the picture from Hiroshima. The nation died, only a trace of the fire remained. When the Great Synagogue was blown up in May 1943, a fire penetrated the building and burnt the ceilings and stone. The temperature must have been enormous.

I feel that this is an extremely important sign that I think of in biblical terms. In one of the midrashim we read that God wrote the Tablets of Moses with white and black fire; I treat this trace as a sign of what is most important in our Jewish history. Our covenant table and our fate are written in fire. Not to be erased. Unforgettable.

To Read the full interview please go to:
<https://jhi.pl/en/articles/pawel-spiewak-do-not-close-the-experience-in-a-time-capsule,2195>

LOST PAINTING BY POLISH-JEWISH ARTIST RETURNS TO POLAND

By Daniel Tilles.

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A valuable work by a leading 19th century Polish-Jewish artist – which for decades was thought to be lost – will once again be displayed in Poland after being discovered in storage in New York.

The painting, an oil-on-canvas self-portrait by Maurycy Gottlieb, was recently purchased at auction by an anonymous buyer for 2.7 million zloty (\$950 thousand). He has now deposited it at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, where it will be shown in public for the first time in over a century.

Gottlieb was known as one of the most talented students of Poland's most renowned painter, Jan Matejko. Though he died at the age of just 23 in 1879, Gottlieb left behind a large number of works, many of which interwove Polish and Jewish themes.

One piece thought to have been lost was his Self-portrait in Polish nobleman's dress (1874). It had been owned by a Jakob Felsen in Vienna until 1936, before going to another private collection in the United States.

But the painting's subsequent whereabouts were a 'mystery' for decades, says POLIN. Then, in 2009, Juliusz Windorbski, head of Warsaw auction house Desa Unicum, came across it in storage in New York, where it had been bought by an American collector at auction some years earlier.

After years of effort, Windorbski persuaded the owner to return it to Poland. It was auctioned in Warsaw last year, selling for 2.65 million zloty to an unidentified Polish collector.

The owner has now given it as a 'long-term deposit' to the museum, says POLIN spokeswoman Marta Dziejulska. After conservation and digitisation, the painting will go on public display in the second half of 2021.

Gottlieb already features in the museum's permanent exhibition, which tells the story of Jews' 1,000 years of history in Polish lands. He is included in a section devoted to assimilationist tendencies among Polish Jews in 1772–1914, the period when Poland was



partitioned between Russia, Austria and Prussia.

'I am a Pole and a Jew and, if God allows, I want to work for both,' wrote Gottlieb in a letter. "How gladly I would eliminate the hatred...How gladly I would reconcile Poles with Jews. After all, the history of both nations is one of suffering.'

Gottlieb's self-portrait, and his choice of clothing in it, exemplifies his identity, says Renata Piątkowska, chief curator at POLIN: 'it was a kind of declaration. Gottlieb identified Poland with the nobility and that is why he chose this costume, to prove his belonging to the Polish nation.'

'The history of the life and work of Maurycy Gottlieb shows how important this process [of assimilation] was for many Polish Jews...[and] for Polish society,' continues Piątkowska. 'Like everyone else (under the partitions), they found themselves in a new situation, when Jews ceased to be a separate caste and became part of Polish society.'

Gottlieb was born in what is now Drohobych in Ukraine, but was then part of the Austrian partition. He grew up speaking and studying in German, only starting to use Polish when studying under Matejko in Kraków, says Piątkowska.

His time at the city's Academy of Fine Arts was, however, blighted by the antisemitic attitude of colleagues (though not Matejko), leading him to leave to study in Munich. He later returned to Kraków, where, after his premature death, he was buried in the city's New Jewish Cemetery.



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