

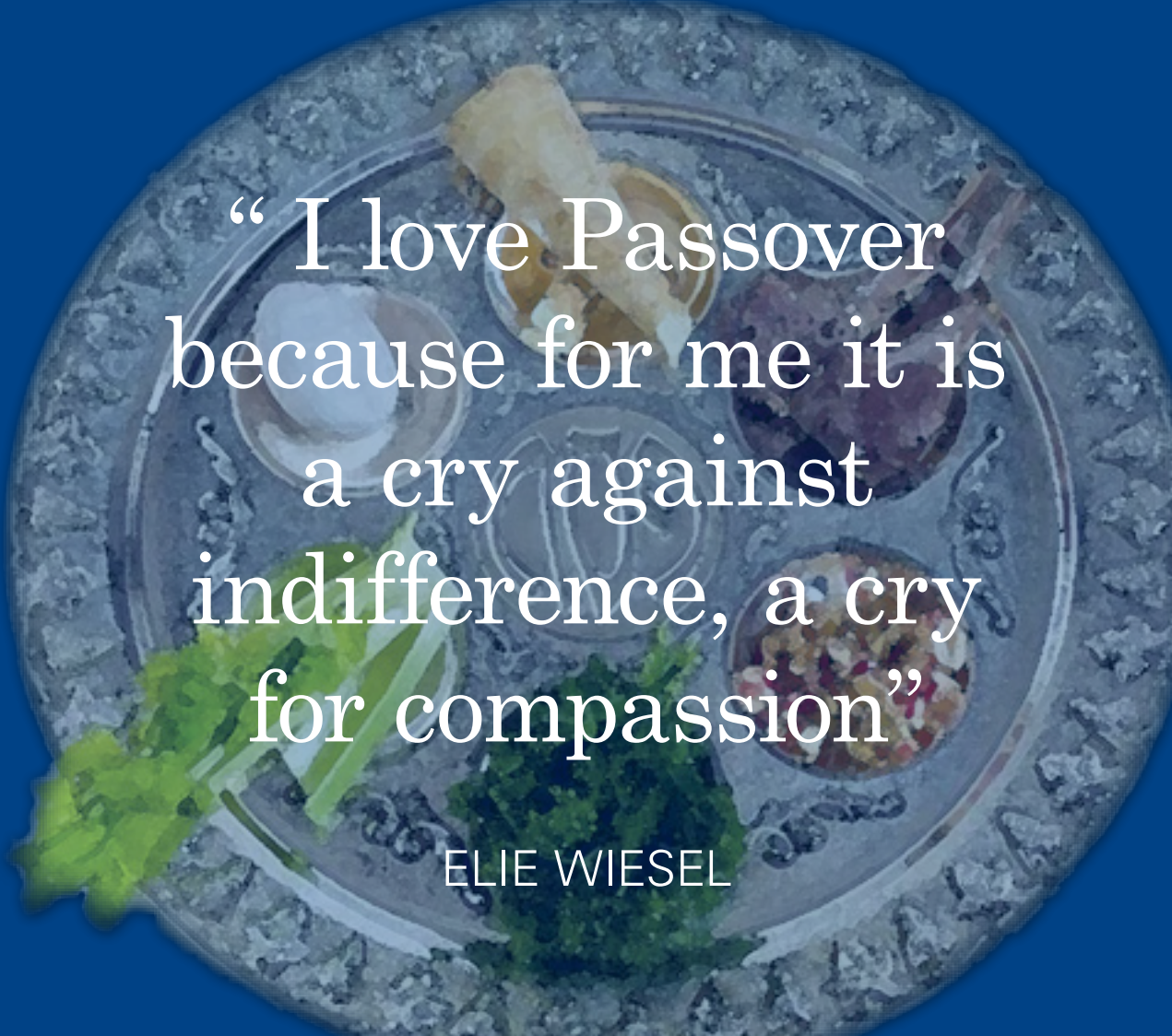
HAYNT

PRESERVE EDUCATE PROMOTE



Australian Society of Polish Jews
and their Descendants

AUTUMN 2024 ISSUE 19



“I love Passover
because for me it is
a cry against
indifference, a cry
for compassion”

ELIE WIESEL

Happy Passover
Szczęśliwej Paschy
Ziessen Pesach
חג פסח שמח

Eliezer “Elie” Wiesel was a noted Holocaust survivor, award-winning novelist, journalist, human rights activist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

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 two 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, 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

Shalom, dzień dobry and welcome to our first edition of Haynt for 2024.

Although we had high hopes in our prior Rosh Hashana/ Jewish New Year edition in September last year, for an upcoming happy & peaceful period for all. Little did we know what was about to occur. And now six months later, we are still very much living with the ongoing trauma of the October 7 massacre in Israel and the subsequent war, with all its tragic challenges, consequences & losses, for the release of the hostages and elimination of the threat of further violence.

The accompanying surge in anti-Semitism both overt & perhaps more sinisterly covert, here in Australia and throughout the world has been unexpected and shocking for many. Unfortunately the ASPJ itself has not been immune with some members subjected to doxing and public vilification. As we are all aware this increased social tension has caused much strain on interfaith and multicultural engagement between sections of the Australian community. However, most pleasingly, at our November 2023 function, Polmission: Passports's Secrets, the ASPJ was honoured to have the newly appointed Ambassador of the Republic of Poland His Excellency Mr Maciej Chmielinski together with the First Secretary of the Embassy, Mr Łukasz Graban attend. We were also very pleased to host Consuls from 12 countries, whose attendance was very much appreciated as an expression of support for Israel and the local Jewish community.

The ASPJ also had the opportunity to meet Ambassador Benjamin Hayes prior to his deployment to Warsaw in late January 2024 as Ambassador to Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania. The ASPJ also thanks the prior Ambassador Lloyd Brodrick on his contribution since 2019, particular for his care and sensitivity to Polish Jewish relations and the great friendship extended to the ASPJ throughout his term.

Pleasingly, in March 2024, the ASPJ hosted a webinar, organised by Estelle Rozinski of our NSW branch, of

Unsent Postcards: Last Signs of Life from Lodz Ghetto. So far this webinar has been viewed over 500 times on our Facebook & youtube platforms – which is an excellent response and shows the large potential reach of the ASPJ.

The ASPJ's Statement of Purpose is: To preserve and promote the historical and cultural heritage of Jewish life in Poland and to foster understanding between current and future generations of the Polish and Jewish communities.

The ASPJ Board is busy finalising an eclectic range of further high-class functions & events for the remainder of 2024 that align with the full spectrum of the historical and cultural heritage of Jewish life in Poland and engaging with the Polish community.

As we are about to celebrate the Festival of Pesach – Passover, one can only hope that globally and individually we all experience its central themes of liberation & freedom. We now also stand on the precipice of periods of reflection and gratitude in the calendar. As in the coming weeks we have Yom HaShoah – Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day and the following week Yom HaZikaron – Memorial Day for Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terror, immediately followed by Yom HaAtzmatut – Israel Independence Day. As well in Australia we also commemorate ANZAC Day. All of these days should cause us to pause and reflect not only on the tremendous debt we owe the sacrifice of so many of the generations before us to ensure that people, all peoples, can live today in peace, friendship & tolerance. But the terrible suffering and devastation that can result when we don't.

It is our fervent hope that Australia will remain the welcoming land of opportunity. A country of religious freedom & protection, where people & communities of different religions, race, ethnicities all live together without hate or fear in a vibrant, prosperous multicultural community that benefits us all.

Enjoy this latest edition of Haynt and thanks to our editor Izi Marmur for all his effort in producing another excellent edition.

Ezra May

From the New South Wales desk



Estelle Rozinski
Co-Vice President

Dear Friends,

The last six months have passed in what feels like a hermetically sealed jar where we watched our world shift and change. It is hard to remember a world before October 7 as we move forward into 2024.

On Monday 26 February 2024, we launched this year's ASPJ events with a compelling talk by Sarah Grandke, visiting Research Fellow at the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM), and historian, Johanna Schmied.

Grandke developed a special interest in Polish Jewish history while on exchange at Lodz University during her undergraduate degree. Her passion led to the extraordinary discovery in 2018, of approximately 22,100 postcards, relatively untouched, in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto archive. Grandke, together with Schmied, selected 400 of these postcards destined for Hamburg. Each was examined and curated into a poignant exhibition "Unsent Postcards" which was shown at the documentation centre "denk.mal Hannoverscher Bahnhof" in Hamburg in 2022. The exhibition provided insight into the complex mail and censorship restrictions that existed within the Litzmannstadt Ghetto. Grandke and Schmied's talk probed into the subject matter of these postcards and why they were withheld by the censors, never leaving the ghetto.

Some 500 people viewed this talk, nationally and internationally. It is still available for viewing on the ASPJ website: <https://www.polishjews.org.au>

Special thanks to Eva Hussain and Stephanie Gogos of Polaron for their support in this event.

NOTE: ASPJ is currently researching ways in which to bring the "Unsent Postcards" exhibit to Australia. If you would like to be involved in some way, please

contact me through the ASPJ email below.

The last six months have consolidated friendships both personal and professional, including members of the Polish community. Here are a couple of events where ASPJ has been involved:

Thursday 7-8 December 2023: Dr Kasia Williams, Professor of European Studies at Australian National University, together with colleagues from Lodz University, facilitated an online workshop with POLIN museum in Warsaw. The workshop titled, "Between Worlds: Performing Polish-Jewish Continuities and Encounters" attracted scholars, artists, and cultural actors, among them Australian invitees, Galit Klas, Co-artistic Director of Kadimah Yiddish Theatre, and Ian Maxwell, an academic from the University of Sydney. Their brief was to discuss the significance of Jewish theatre and its broader transnational contexts throughout the Polish-Jewish diaspora. Later that morning, Klas and I participated in a roundtable session in which we shared our respective art forms and their roles in the post-Holocaust narrative.

Thursday 18 January 2024, ASPJ Board Member Lucy Taksa and Sarah Grandke were hosted at the Polish Club in Ashfield by Dr. Robert Czernkowski, Sydney Co-ordinator of the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs (AIPA). To their surprise, they discovered a small exhibit dedicated to the Anders Army there.

On a more personal note, we wish Robert Czernkowski a speedy recovery from his recent surgery and heartfelt congratulations to the extraordinary Max Henner on his 104th Birthday, bis 120 because sto lat came and went!

With warm wishes and prayers for a Pesach of hope, peace and freedom,

Estelle Rozinski

ASPJ Co-Vice President NSW

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My last laundry load is in good hands with you.

(Last) signs of life from the Litzmannstadt (Łódź) Ghetto



By Sarah Grandke and Johanna Schmied

On 25 October 1941, the merchant Maximilian Nagel from Hamburg was deported to the Litzmannstadt ghetto. The above quote comes from one of seven postcards Nagel wrote during his forced stay in Litzmannstadt. All the cards written on the same day (10 December 1941) were addressed to acquaintances and friends of the 58-year-old, including one to the Chin family.

Postcards were temporarily the only legal way of contacting people outside the ghetto. Consequently, the post was Nagel's only link to his previous life in Hamburg. Maximilian Nagel's comment that his last laundry was in good hands with the Chin family implies that he feared he would not be able to return to his hometown. The Chin family was not only well acquainted with Maximilian Nagel, they also ran a laundry. Nagel was obviously there frequently before his deportation and had regular contact with the family.

The postcards of the Hamburg merchant Nagel are part of a collection of around 22,100 postcards from the Litzmannstadt ghetto, which are now held in

the State Archives in Łódź, Poland. Since 2012, this source corpus has been available in digitised, freely accessible form on the website of the State Archives in Łódź. The majority of these cards are addressed to the places of origin of those who had been deported to the ghetto from Germany, Vienna, Prague and Luxembourg since October 1941. The postcards are mainly dated between November 1941 and February 1942. Since 2019, the collection of unsent postcards in the Łódź State Archives has been examined for the first time from a Hamburg perspective by Sarah Grandke and Johanna Schmied as part of research for the 'denk.mal Hannoverscher Bahnhof' documentation centre and made accessible to the public in Hamburg and online in 2022.

The complex postal system in the Litzmannstadt ghetto

After the German occupation of the Polish industrial metropolis of Łódź on 8 September 1939, the German Reichspost was responsible for the city's civilian postal traffic. This initially affected the non-Jewish Polish and Jewish population equally. With the order to form a ghetto on 8 February 1940, the Jewish population was excluded from using the

postal services of the German Reichspost. De facto, this meant that around 40 per cent of the entire city population was affected by the restrictions. In February 1940, at the same time as the ghetto was formed, a 'Jewish post office' was established by Jewish administration, where mail addressed to the ghetto was collected and forwarded. The post office had the task of providing postal services to the approximately 160,000 Jews from the now renamed city of Litzmannstadt and the surrounding Warthegau region.

From November 1941, the 'new arrivals', i.e. those deported from the 'West', were allowed to ask acquaintances outside the ghetto for money. The historian Avraham Barkai pointed out that it was precisely these money transfers requested by post that made up a considerable proportion of the means of payment flowing into the ghetto from outside. This was therefore also an important source of income for the German ghetto administration.

This is an English translation of an extract from the article currently being published by Sarah Grandke and Johanna Schmied, '(Letzte)Lebenszeichen - Vom Recherchieren und Ausstellen „Hamburger Postkarten“ aus dem Ghetto Litzmannstadt, 'in Isolation-Konzentration-Isolation. Regionale Studien zur Verfolgung der jüdischen Bevölkerung, published by Erinnerungsort Alter Schlachthof, Düsseldorf. BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE AAJS

No free writing: Censorship and mail restrictions

The 20,000 people who were deported from Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and Bohemia and Moravia to the Litzmannstadt ghetto from October 1941 onwards were initially completely excluded from using the postal service. This postal ban was only lifted on 4 December 1941, but in conjunction with strict conditions. Just a few days after the ban was loosened, the post offices in the Litzmannstadt ghetto recorded sales of 20,000 postcards. This high demand illustrates how great the need was for the deportees to send a sign of life to relatives and friends outside the ghetto. For those who arrived in the ghetto from October 1941 onwards, only postcards were allowed to be sent. Personal messages were allowed, but any description of the harsh conditions of their place of detention was forbidden. The postcards had to be written in German and, according to the German ghetto administration, had to be written clearly and legibly. Any supposedly illegible writing, soiling and cards that were too densely written on were not permitted



to be sent. The censorship office of the Jewish administration had to check every outgoing postcard. Messages that did not meet the strict requirements were not even allowed to be forwarded to the German Reichspost. When a postcard was handed in at the post office or via a letterbox, it was hoped that it would reach the person addressed. This must also have been the case for Maximilian Nagel.

(Re)discovered signs of life

In analysing the 396 'Hamburg-Litzmannstadt postcards', it is striking how varied their messages were.

Some of the cards only contain a brief request for money, while others use every last millimetre of space. In many cases, several people or families signed, although this was forbidden. A message from 21-year-old Hanna Meyer shows how great the need was to inform relatives about the exact conditions in the ghetto: *You should finally have a sign of life from me. I'm healthy, but that is all. (...) The stress was too much for our dear Gertrud, she was hospitalised after we had been here for two days and (...) died. Her nerves didn't want to go on.*

Presumably, the specific descriptions of the shock after arriving in the ghetto were the reason for withholding the postcard. Torn from their previous lives, the deportees found themselves in a place that was completely unknown to them and in a hostile environment. In dirty collective accommodation and without adequate sanitary facilities, the people had to live in very cramped conditions while organising their (non-)daily lives. Language barriers and mutual prejudices made living together in the forced Polish-German-Jewish ghetto community very difficult. Alongside fears and despair, homesickness is an

important theme in the postcards.

My thoughts are always in Hamburg, the longing is indescribable, Meyer continued. There are many accounts of concern and fear for relatives and acquaintances in Germany. The postcard of Susanne Zirker shows how specific the knowledge of further deportations was. Postcards also helped her to keep in touch with relatives and friends in Hamburg. However, she addressed a card to her friend Eva Burchard not to Hamburg but directly to the Minsk ghetto. Eva Burchard and her family were deported there in November 1941, around two and a half weeks after Zirker's own deportation to Litzmannstadt. Zirker even describes how she heard about her friend's new location:

I found out from Mrs Feldstein [a roommate in the Litzmannstadt ghetto] that you had gone to Minsk. Zirker assumed that her friend Eva's destination must be similar to her own. However, it was not possible for the friends to get in touch. In the 'Minsk Special Ghetto', all postal correspondence was forbidden, as was sending cards from Litzmannstadt to other occupied territories.

Writing a postcard was clearly a matter of survival for the deportees - at least at times. Not just because

it was the only way to ask for money to be sent. Rather, the postcards provided emotional support in a completely hostile environment.

A sneak insight into the 2022 exhibition can be found via: <https://hannoverscher-bahnhof.gedenkstaetten-hamburg.de/en/#c4018>



Sarah Grandke is a PhD candidate and currently Visiting Research Fellow at the Sydney Jewish Museum and was from 2018 to 2023 curator at the Dokumentationszentrum "denk.mal Hannoverscher

Bahnhof" in Hamburg. Grandke presented a paper on her doctoral research titled, '(Re)Creation of Memory: Jewish and Christian Displaced Persons as memory activists after World War II' at the, AAJS 2024 Annual Conference in Sydney.

At the end of February, Sarah Grandke and Johanna Schmied were delighted to have been invited by the Australian Society of Polish Jews and their Descendants to an online discussion about their research.

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Israeli poet Lea Goldberg



Lea Goldberg was one of the greatest Israeli poets. Born to a Jewish family in Lithuania in 1911, she spent her early years in eastern Europe and studied in universities in Berlin and Bonn. In 1935 she immigrated to Israel, where she became a revered literary figure.

One of the themes in her prolific body of poetry is the longing for the landscapes of her childhood and the ambivalent feelings of belonging. Her poem 'Oraninm' expresses this beautifully.

Here is the original poem in Hebrew and one of the many translations available online. It might resonate with many who have migrated to a new country and still feel nostalgic about the one they left behind.

The Israeli singer Achinoam Nini (known also as Noa) composed music to this poem and named it 'Ilanot'. The song is also available online.

ארנים
לאה גולדברג

כאן לא אשמע את קול הקוקייה.
כאן לא יחבש העץ מצנפת שלג,
אבל בצל הארנים האלה
כל ילדותי שקמה לתחייה.

צלצול המכתים: היה הנה –
אקרא מולדת למרחב השלג,
לקרח ירקרק פובל הפלג,
ללשון השיר בארץ נכריה.

אולי רק צפרי-מסע יודעות –
כשהן תלויות בין ארץ ושמים –
את זה הכאב של שתי המולדות.

אתכם אני נשתלתי פעמים,
אתכם אני צמחתי, ארנים,
ושרשי בשני נופים שונים.

Pines
By Leah Goldberg

*Here I will not hear the cuckoo's call.
Here the tree will not wear a cape of snow.
But it is here in the shade of these pines
my whole childhood reawakens.*

*The chime of the needles: Once upon a time –
I called the snow-space homeland,
and the green ice at the river's edge -
was the poem's grammar in a foreign land.*

*Perhaps only migrating birds know -
suspended between earth and sky -
the heartache of two homelands.*

*With you I was transplanted twice,
with you, pine trees, I grew -
roots in two disparate landscapes.*

Bronka in Wanderland: an Exodus story as Japan, Australia and Poland created a pathway to survival

PERSONAL STATEMENT AND DECLARATION.			
Name of Ship.	Class Travelled.	Date of Arrival.	Port of Landing.
Nestor		16.11.42	
1. Surname GOLDMAN	2. Christian name BRONISLAWA		
3. Place of birth—Town WARSAW	Country POLAND	4. Date of birth 13-VI-1922	
5. Nationality POLISH	6. Race EUROPEAN		
7. Particulars of passport or permit held—			
(a) Number 4976/38	(b) Where issued WARSAW		
(c) Date of issue 13-VI-1938	(d) If issued by a British Consul, state place and date of issue—		
(e) By whom issued POLISH AUTHORITIES	<i>[Signature]</i>		
8. Married or single SINGLE			
9. If accompanied by wife and/or children under the age of 16 years, give particulars of each—			
Wife _____			
Children—(1) _____			
(2) _____			
(3) _____			
10. Last permanent address abroad SHANGHAI CHINA			
11. Occupation or profession CLARCK		12. Intended occupation in Australia _____	
13. Personal description—Height _____ Hair FAIR Eyes BROWN Marks _____			
14. (a) Do you intend to settle in Australia? FOR THE DURATION OF THE WAR			
(b) If temporary business visit, state intended duration _____			

Bronka Goldman arrival document, Melbourne, 1942
(NAA A12508, 50/796 Item 7248336)

By Andrew Jakubowicz
and Jacki Neuman

Context

Polish Jewry and Australian governments have had a complex and often contradictory relationship. In 1938 the Australian government refused to accept any refugees from central Europe following the Evian conference on Jewish refugees after the German/Austrian *Anschluss*. Its delegate declared that Australia did not have a racial problem and was not inclined to import one in the form of Jews. In 1939 an Australian public servant sent to examine the issues affecting Polish Jews and their desire to flee the emerging fascism of pre-war Poland and the threats of Nazi Germany found that they were of “the poorest type apart from Blackfellas”. However, at the prompting of the USA Australia finally agreed to open up some 15,000 refugee places over the coming years. About 7,500 were issued in the period until the outbreak of the War.

In September 1939 Poland was attacked from the west by Nazi Germany and the east by Soviet Russia. In effect the two aspiring empires were seeking to reinstate the partition and eradication of the Polish state that was achieved in 1795 by the Prussian, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. Poland only became an independent state again in 1918, and went on to cement its borders after defeating the USSR at the battle of Warsaw in 1920. One of its strongest alliances was with Japan, with which it shared the location as a “book-end” to the USSR; both had fought wars with the new Soviet state. Even if the government in Poland had been dissolved by the victorious invaders, Japan continued to

recognise the government of Poland (in exile) and support its embassy in Tokyo.

In 1939 Australia established its first two foreign legations, in Washington and Tokyo. However Counsellor Keith Officer and ambassador Sir John Latham only arrived in the Japanese capital late in 1940. They were soon approached by the Polish ambassador for the exile government, Tadeusz Romer, to collaborate in a plan to provide wartime refuge to some of hundreds of Polish refugees arriving in Japan from the USSR. On the outbreak of War Australia had refused to accept any further refugees from Poland, nor even allow them transit to Shanghai, on the grounds they had families living in an enemy occupied area.

Romer had become aware of a ruse developed in July 1940 by two consuls in Kaunas Lithuania – for Japan Sugihara Chiune and the Netherlands Jan Zwartendijk- to provide transit visas through Japan and entry statements for Curacao and Surinam, for some of the Polish citizens, most of Jewish faith,

caught in Lithuania after its incorporation into the USSR. By the end of 1940 some were arriving in Kobe from Vladivostok, with short term transit visas and in effect useless Curacao entry stamps. Romer, seeing them trapped in Japan with more arriving and a Japanese government anxious to move them on, sought help from Allied governments – Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

In Canberra the United Australia Party government resisted the approach (urged on by Army Minister Percy Spender), approving only with reluctance when threatened with exposure for being seen as churlish before the British and other allies. By April 1941 Latham had managed to get this reluctant acceptance from his government for 66 visas.

Vilnius September 193–January 1941

Bronislawa (Bronka) Goldman's Polish passport was issued to her in Warsaw just after she turned sixteen, in the shadow of the *Anschluss* marking the Nazi takeover of Austria in early 1938. She was seventeen in September 1939 when she escaped



Bronka Goldman, c. 1940 (Jacki Neuman)

from a Warsaw under Nazi bombardment, travelling on foot into eastern Poland then north towards Vilna near the Polish/Lithuanian border where her family had property. Her father Izaak was a prosperous

businessman whose wife had died in childbirth and he had raised Bronka after her older sisters had married. Maryla (Marysia) had married Szymon (Simon) Glass, one of four sons of another wealthy Warsaw family. Felicija, an actress, was married to Henryk Szapiro, a film director, with whom she had two sons. Bronka's voyage over the following two years from Warsaw to Melbourne uncovers many of the details of Poland's increasingly complex relationship with Australia, and the critical role that Australia would play in the survival of many of the Polish Jews who escaped through the east.

During the invasion of Poland, USSR seized Vilna and reverting it to its Lithuanian name of Vilnius returned it to the Lithuanian government soon after. In the city Bronka found herself no longer a citizen of Poland that had ceased to exist, but rather a displaced person despite carrying a Polish passport. She was now a refugee, with war across the borders.

In July 1940 Bronka and Izaak, whom with Henryk had joined her there, travelled with many other of the 10,000 or so Polish Jewish refugees in Vilnius, to the city of Kaunas where the diplomatic legations were based. There in late July she and her father (and her sister and the husband's family of three brothers and their father) secured Sugihara transit visas for Japan and the Zwartendijk Curacao stamps. She would have been cleared by the NKVD in Vilnius before receiving her transit and exit permit for the USSR.

As the situation worsened under Soviet control and warnings were given to foreigners to leave or take Soviet citizenship, the mass movement to the east accelerated amongst the refugees. Bronka was separated from her father at Vilnius station and left without him for Moscow from where the Trans-Siberian railway to the Pacific coast would depart early in February. Her sister and the Glass families had already taken that route and would arrive in Kobe, Japan three weeks before her. She met up with her father again in the icy slush of Moscow after days of anxious and dreadful waiting. He gave her his signed authority to operate all of his accounts and properties; she joined the train going east, while he returned to Warsaw with Henryk to be with the remaining family in what the Nazis had determined to be the Warsaw Ghetto.

Tokio February–June 1941

While she had a transit visa good for no more than

six weeks, in truth Bronka, like at least half the Sugihara list refugees and all her sister's husband's family, had no real onward destination. Once in Japan, Bronka made her way to Tokyo, acquiring some Japanese among her other languages. Armed with these skills she approached the embassy and offered her administrative services, which were rapidly accepted. A letter of introduction has her identified as a competent linguist, who had previously been attached to the Polish embassy in Tokyo. If this is so this would have been where she may have first crossed the paths of the Australian diplomats, and where she took on quasi-official status.

The terms of the Australian visas were quite strict – preference would go to people who would be self-supporting and should not include men who could serve in the Polish forces (they would be sent to Canada for military induction where a Polish contingent was being established from the refugees and pilots were being trained). Forty three families were chosen, comprising 83 people including wives and children. Many in fact did not fit the criteria, as Romer was bent on getting out intellectuals, professionals and people with entrepreneurial skills, which were very different to the Australian priorities.

The Glass family, the father, his sons and their families, comprised nine of the 83, and five of the 43 heads of family. Only one woman on her own was chosen, and she had funds and was over twenty-one. Marysia was visaed with Simon, but Bronka was not on the list.

With the Nazi invasion of Russia in June 1941, the Japanese had finally agreed to the German demand they cut off relations with the Polish government, and Romer was given his instructions to close the embassy and leave. Fortunately, Officer was able to negotiate the transfer of the lease and Australia took over the Polish embassy, a property it then bought in 1952 and still owns today.

Shanghai June–December 1941

Simon Glass and other members of his family moved to Shanghai having secured their Australian visas (probably later in April) in the face of pressure to leave Japan after their short-term transit visas were exhausted. Possibly they were thinking that shipping from Shanghai to Australia would be easier to access. In fact shipping from Shanghai was not so easy to find even with Australian visas and they moved back to Japan after some months in

Shanghai to take passage on Japanese ships bound for Australia.

Simon sailed on the *Kasima Maru* in July, though Marysia was not with him: she remained in Shanghai (her passport had been extended by the Polish embassy in Tokyo in March). Bronka arrived in Shanghai after May 1941 (the month her passport was extended in Tokyo), staying with the Glass family at the Peace Hotel. After the others returned to Japan she moved with Marysia to an apartment on Rue Lafayette in the French Concession.

These two young women, essentially on their own in the city after the men had left, then confronted the challenge of getting away. For Marysia, with her husband gone to Japan, and then sailing for Australia in July, the next year would be a challenge for survival and escape, with her eye on Australia. She also had her younger sister, not yet twenty, to look after. Bronka proved a very effective survivor on her own. She had managed to escape to Lithuania and survive there for 15 months, traverse Russia, survive in Japan, travel to Shanghai, find work with the Polish authorities in both Tokyo and Shanghai, and was now on the lookout to escape with her sister to Australia.

The last major group of refugee Poles arrived in Shanghai in September 1941, shipped from Kobe by the Japanese to the only international port to which the Japanese had access, and from which shipping was still leaving for the wider world. However there were no new visas being issued by the Australians in Tokyo and none at all to refugees in Shanghai, so anyone wanting to head for Australia like Bronka, would need a visa to somewhere else (she still had the almost useless Curacao stamp).

In October 1941 Tadeusz Romer arrived in Shanghai, having been expelled from Tokyo. He was soon to be the designated Free Polish Minister to the USSR now that the USSR recognised the exile Polish government, with the invasion of 1939 put to one side (the USSR claiming it had not been a rerun of 1795). In the meantime he began to reorganise the Polish consulate in Shanghai. The register of Polish citizens in Shanghai that had been opened at the consulate in 1934 was now filling with the names of the new arrivals fleeing Japan and Manchuria. Increasingly they were Jewish refugees, with the details of their origins, passports and family details listed by hand in the ledger. Marysia was the only member of the Glass family registered there, adjacent to the entry for Bronka.

War in the Pacific 1941–1942

On December 7 1941 the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbour in American Hawaii and the next day defeated the few Allied military forces in Shanghai. Within days they had occupied the International Concession, with the French Concession already taken over in 1940 by the Vichy power, an ally of Germany and Japan. Officer and his colleagues remained in the new Australian Embassy, and there received the Declaration of War from the Japanese in December, Latham having earlier returned to Australia following a bout of illness. Officer was now the senior Australian official associated with the Polish refugees.

In Tokyo, the remaining Australian diplomats were placed under civilian internment. In Shanghai Romer escalated his action to support the Polish wartime refugees, and ensure they could survive. The community organisation of Polish Residents of China that had existed since the Polish government created Polish representative bodies in China after the establishment of the Polish Republic in the 1920s, was extended to include the new arrivals, with some of their leaders appointed to the Residents' committee. A new co-operative lending association was also established, funnelling funds from the Polish government to small enterprises in the community.

Romer reasserted to the Japanese that the Poles were not stateless (as the Nazis claimed) but rather part of the Allied front against fascism, even while re-iterating that Poland and Japan were long-term friends and allies. To some extent and for some time the Poles were better treated than the truly stateless German and Austrian Jews, though local feeling among the Japanese "Jew experts" towards them was clouded by the racist views of some of the Germanic Jews about the lesser status of OstJuden (Jews from the East – reminiscent of Garrett's "poor types"), a view reciprocated by the religious Poles' disdainful view of the Germans as lacking in religiosity and Orthodoxy.

Early in 1942 the Japanese began interning the British, Americans and other enemy civilians, confining them to camps established around the city. While most of the Germans and Austrians were living in the old Japanese area of Hongkew, apart from those well enough off to afford accommodation in the International or French concessions, few if any of the Poles were living there as yet. Of the thousand or so Polish Jews,

the single largest group comprised over three hundred rabbis and Yeshivah students, most from Mir in eastern Poland (which had become part of the Bylorussian SSR). Many of them were billeted in a synagogue in the International Concession. Ultimately Mir became the only Polish Yeshivah to survive the War almost intact. The main Polish Jewish food kitchen was in the French Concession, where there were many small businesses and employment opportunities – especially with the significant Russian Jewish community who were not affected by Japanese restrictions.

For the urban, modern and educated young Poles such as Bronka and Marysia, the year in Shanghai was initially a period of freedom and peace, mixed with uncertainty and apprehension. On 1 June 1942, as what was proving to be a difficult period of illness and increasing poverty deepened, Romer organised for a further register of his country's Jewish citizens in Shanghai. He knew that his time was limited and he wanted everything to be as well-organised as possible prior to his departure – also he wanted to know more about his "flock" and which of them would benefit from the next steps he was taking. The Return showed 764 men and 208 women, totalling 972 names, with Maryla (office worker) at 221 and Bronislaw (student) at 222.

A week later in Warsaw Bronka's father and her brother-in-law Henryk were taken by the Germans from their lodgings in Ul. Panska in the Ghetto and shot to death in the street. Henryk's wife Felicija and two young sons Bronislaw and Stefan are thought to have perished in the Treblinka death camp.

The Exchange July–August 1942

Commencing early in 1942 and realised in late July a civilian prisoner exchange, including diplomats (officials and semi-officials) and enemy civilians ("non-officials"), was arranged between Japan and the Allies. The exchange included Japanese civilians and diplomats in Australia, and the Australians in Japan (including a number of China-based religious personnel) and the Poles in Shanghai.

Romer allocated the 54 Polish places available for people in Japan and Shanghai to his staff and their families, and to 34 of the Jewish refugees, representing, he wrote, each of the main political groups among them – including Zionists, Rabbinicals, Agudas Israel, Bundists and War Veterans. Their leadership roles allowed them to be

considered as quasi-official and thus a priority. They would accompany him to London by ship, where they would be able to advocate for their groups to the Polish Government in exile there – while he would continue to the USSR as ambassador. Amongst this group the two young women stand out; Romer would have made hard decisions to include them and leave out other senior figures anxious to leave Shanghai.

Marysia already had an Australian visa, but there is no record of Bronka yet having one. Bronka was a semi-official, and Marysia her family member.

In summer two exchange ships sailed from Japan for Laurencó Marques in Portuguese East Africa. Romer with Bronka and Marysia would join the second ship travelling west, the *Kamakura Maru*, in Shanghai. The ship left Yokohama on 12 August, then sailed for Kobe, and Shanghai. In Shanghai on 14 August it was joined by the *Tatuta Maru* (aka *Tatsuta Maru*) and together they headed west. The *Tatuta Maru* carried the Australian diplomatic officials, and it is possible that Romer and Officer were once more in contact if only briefly in Shanghai. The *Kamakura Maru* then voyaged on to pick up more passengers in Saigon and Singapore. Meanwhile in Melbourne Australia the *SS City of Canterbury* embarked nearly 900 Japanese officials and civilians for transfer to the Japanese ships at Laurencó Marques.

Africa Australia August–November 1942

The *Tatuta Maru* with the Australian diplomats arrived in Laurencó Marques on 27 August. Officer immediately headed south to Pretoria, leaving his staff to await a slower transfer; he then headed back to Australia from Capetown to prepare for his next posting. On 6 September the *Kamakura Maru* arrived there and transferred its passengers to the *Canterbury* sailing south for the Cape and then north to the UK; the passengers for Australia transferred in Durban to the *SS Nestor* for the trip to Melbourne. There were three Polish Jews among the nearly ninety mainly British and Australian passengers from east Asia on the *Nestor* list – Bronka, Marysia and Klemens Zyngol. Zyngol, a long-time resident of Japan, had been involved with the Polish Red Cross in Japan, leading the refugee support program for the embassy, and Romer had declared him an official to help get him out of Japan and into Australia. Was Bronka assigned a similar status for the exchange because of her role as a clerk at the Embassy back in Tokyo? However, where did she

get her visa?

Romer later reported of that group, “While still in Africa I managed to obtain the right of entry to Australia for three of them”. Marysia was covered by her husband’s visa, and was listed in the Australian record documenting Simon’s arrival in 1941 as “wife has not arrived”. Richard Krygier who had worked for Zyngol in Tokyo on expediting the refugee flow and knew Romer well, and had been on the *MV Ruys* en route to Canada when he was landed in Sydney for the duration in late 1941, said that while he was attached to the Polish consulate in Sydney he had helped Zyngol to gain entry to Australia.

Bronka though remains more of a mystery. Her personal statement made to the Customs officer in Melbourne on arrival in mid-November 1942 describes her as a “clerk”, with an intention to stay “for the duration of the war”. In the section “If visaed by a British Consul, state place and date of visa”, Bronka has not entered any information. Rather the Customs official in Melbourne has written “I(J?) and P officer Durban”, and across the form “Allowed to land for the Duration D(epartment) of I(nterior?), SS192 6/11/42.” Given the form was presented on arrival on 16 November, this mistaken date suggests a slightly flustered and inattentive official trying to deal with a messy problem. Possibly there was no visa – just a young confident woman brushing aside his concerns. Maybe there was a stamp from the British Consul in Durban in the passport which has long been lost (though the number should have been transposed onto the form), or one of the Australian diplomats on board whom she knew from Tokyo attested to her bona fides, perhaps on the authority of Keith Officer and at the behest of Romer.

Bronka, not knowing that much of her family had been murdered in Poland by the Nazis, remained alone in Melbourne at the age of twenty. Through another of her sisters she had an introduction from M. Shatin, director of Warner Bros. in Japan, to Peter Russo, a Japanese linguist and specialist writer on Japanese affairs at the *Melbourne Herald*. Russo recommended her to W. Macmahon Ball, Controller of Overseas Broadcasting at the Department of Information, describing her as a “competent linguist”, recently attached to the Polish Embassy Staff in Tokyo, and eager to “apply her talents in the most constructive way possible”. Her temporary address from the outset was given as care of the Polish Consulate in Sydney, though she

stayed working in Melbourne for a year or so even after Marysia travelled to Sydney to re-join Simon.

Moving on to Sydney, Bronka would eventually meet and marry Ferdynand (Fred) Perlberger, who had arrived in Brisbane on the *MV Ruys* from Japan via Hong Kong and Batavia with his brother Jacek (Jack) in September 1941. She had first met Jack when they were the last passengers struggling into the door of the train from Vilnius for Moscow in January 1941.

By the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 a different if Cold war was in the offing and Bronka, like thousands of other refugees from the Soviets who were White, was allowed to remain in Australia. Bronka's wandering demonstrates how different global and local interactions, leavened with personal Chutzpah and unpredictable circumstances, produced opportunities for survival within the overarching catastrophe. Later Polish Jewish refugees from Shanghai (after August 1945) would have an even more difficult path, with their access to Australia closed off by the Australian government late in 1947

(see https://www.polishjews.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022_autumn.pdf p17).

Afterword

Keith Officer went on further diplomatic assignment, to the USSR later in 1942, where he served as counsellor at the Australian legation in the city assigned for foreign missions, Kuibyshev/Samara, the same city as Romer. Romer quit the USSR following the April 1943 Nazi revelation to the world of the 1940 Soviet massacre of Polish officials at Katyn, and the Soviet rejection of demands from the Poles that the Red Cross investigate the allegations. He became Foreign Minister in the London government.

Following agreement by the UK and the USA and at the suggestion of the Australian Minister in London, Officer implemented an arrangement with the Soviets for Australia to represent the Polish interest

in the USSR, somewhat to the bemusement of the uncomprehending Australian media. Many of the 400,000 displaced Poles to whom he was trying to deliver aid were Jews, some of whom have their own application folders in the Australian Archives. On his return to Moscow to set up the Australian Embassy there, he is said to have borrowed some of the furniture of the departed Polish legation. After the War he was posted to the Australian Legation in Nanking and capped an illustrious career as Ambassador to France.

The relationship between the Polish government representatives and the Australian government would continue throughout the War, and into the years immediately afterwards, while Free Poland continued to exist. The collaboration between the Joint Distribution Committee and the HICEM, Jewish welfare bodies in Sydney and Melbourne (though often antagonistic to each other), and Polish consuls in Australia and representatives in London, marks a period of intense though often frustrating attempts to secure the rescue of refugees on the one hand, while navigating Australia's prejudices and preferences on the other.

Jacki Neuman is Bronka Goldman's youngest and only surviving daughter. Andrew Jakubowicz is the son of Polish Jewish refugees, who spent the war years in Shanghai and came to Australia in 1946 nominated by Marylka (Maria) Weyland, his mother's sister and close friend of Marysia Glass and Bronka Goldman. She had arrived on the *MV Ruys* in late November 1941, halted by Pearl Harbour in Sydney "for the Duration" en route to Canada.

Readers who are participants in, relatives or descendants of the 1941 and 1946/47 Polish Jewish immigration to Australia from Japan and Shanghai, are invited to contact Andrew who is writing a book about this period.

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Full references are available for this article from the author.

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of POLIN Museum



POLIN Museum at night

It is difficult to believe that 10 years have passed since the Grand Opening of POLIN. We were moved and proud. The dream we shared for so many years had finally come true. Almost 70 years after the Holocaust, during the Grand Opening, Marian Turski declared, "We are here. Mir zenen do," quoting the words of the Warsaw Ghetto partisans.

Since that moment, POLIN Museum has become one of the most important museums of its kind in the world, with more than 60 Polish and international awards, among the most prestigious the 2016 European Museum of the Year Award. Now one of the top three visitor attractions in Warsaw, POLIN has welcomed over 4.5 million visitors to date.

Please join us in celebrating the 10th anniversary of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews on September 27-29, 2024. The anniversary program includes, among others, a specially composed anniversary concert, a presentation of POLIN's

ambitious plans for the next decade and tours of the newly opened gallery on contemporary Jewish life in Poland.

We Are Here for you. Join us in Warsaw to celebrate our first ten years.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the first and only museum dedicated to the memory and history of Polish Jews over the course of a millennium. Facing the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, POLIN Museum is located on the site of the Warsaw ghetto and prewar Jewish neighborhood. Winner of the 2015 European Museum of the Year Award, POLIN Museum has welcomed more than 4.5 million visitors since its Grand Opening in 2014. By raising historical awareness and fostering dialogue in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect, POLIN Museum seeks to counteract antisemitism, discrimination, and exclusion.

Portal of the Polish diaspora in Victoria



Justyna Tarnowska.



Justyna Tarnowska – graduated with a master’s degree in Polish Studies (2007) and a postgraduate degree in glottodidactics (2010) from the University of Warsaw. Coordinator of nationwide educational projects at the Center for Citizenship Education (2012–2017) and charity projects at the “Wiosna” Association (Szlachetna Paczka project, 2009–2014). Polish language teacher at the Centre for Adult Education in Melbourne (2018–2019). Since 2018, she has been involved with the Polish Community Council of Victoria and the Polish Community Care Services “PolCare”, where she implements projects for the development of the Polish community. She edits publications produced by the Victorian federation (including poetry volumes of Polish seniors, quarterly newsletters). Currently coordinating the process of preparing a chronicle of the Federation of Polish Organisations in Victoria from 1993 to 2022.

Justyna Tarnowska is the founder and editor of the ‘Portal of the Polish community in Victoria’, an information service for the Victorian Polish community, launched in January 2019 under the aegis of the Federation of Polish Organisations in Victoria. The purpose of the Portal is to collect and

share contacts to Polish-speaking professionals and service providers. It also provides information on Polish events and disseminates stories of individuals and organisations involved in building and developing the Polish community. An important aspect of the Portal’s development is its collaboration with the Polish media in Australia, as well as around the world.

The editorial team – participates in conferences organised by the World Association of Polonia Media, as well as in projects improving the competences of citizen journalists (including the ‘Academy of Polonia Citizen Journalists’ project implemented by the Society of Friends of the Catholic University of Lublin in 2021).

Website

<https://portalpolonii.com.au/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/PortalPolonii>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@PortalPoloniiWiktoriiAustralia>

Lithuanian Life Saving Cross Awarded to Maria Janina Zagala (nee Zienowicz) – September 2023

By Wojciech Zagala

On 26th September 2023, my family and I participated in a solemn ceremony in Vilnius, Lithuania, during which the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėdas, posthumously awarded my mother, Janina Zagala (nee Zienowicz), the Life Saving Cross of the Lithuanian Republic.

The Cross is a decoration awarded to persons who, despite the danger to themselves, performed acts of bravery in saving the lives of Lithuanians abroad or in Lithuania.

The Cross was instituted in 1930. A total of 44 Crosses were awarded before the Soviet occupation in 1940. After WWII, it was re-instated in 1991 following the declaration of the Republic of Lithuania. More than 345 Crosses have been awarded, primarily to Lithuanians who helped Jews to safety during the Second World War. In three years, between 1941 and 1944, about 90 per cent of Lithuanian Jews – about 200 thousand people – were killed. The ceremony of awarding the Cross is held on the National Memorial Day for the Genocide of Lithuanian Jews, which coincides with the day of the abolishment of the Vilnius Ghetto, 23rd September 1943.

The ceremony was held in the Presidential Palace and began with singing the songs in Yiddish, which originated in the Vilnius Ghetto. The President delivered a speech calling for the memory of the Holocaust never to recede and that “evil, no



Maria Janina Zagala's award is accepted by son Wojciech Zagala

matter how great or fierce, is neither eternal nor omnipotent". After President Gitanas Nausėdas' speech, the representatives of the families received, in turn, the decoration and the diploma. Altogether, 38 Life Saving Crosses were awarded in this edition, all except one posthumously.

My mother, Janina, a Polish Christian, was a person of extraordinary strength of character, and nothing demonstrates this better than her activities during the Second World War. Janina saved two Jewish families on the night of 9th September 1941, when the whole community of more than 1000 Butrimonys Jews were murdered. Only one person survived the extermination. Janina took two families of three adults and three children to safety. The children were young; Benjamin was ten months old, Joseph (Wilhelm Fink) was four, and Renana was five. The children were secretly transported to



Zofija and Jan Kukolewski's awards are accepted by daughters Marija Dzikevich, Galina Sliusarchik and granddaughters

Zienowicz's home in Vilnius. Due to her resolute action, bravely taking the families through the checkpoints of the Lithuanian police, both families survived. In Vilnius, three children stayed with Janina's sister Helena while their fathers were hidden by the Kukolewski family in Angelniki on the way to Vilnius. The children became a part of Janina's now extended family; she gave them a new identity and was looking for ways to feed them till the end of the war.

Since 1943, she also worked for the Polish underground. In 1945, she fled Vilnius, avoiding arrest by Soviet NKVD. After this time, the children remained exclusively in the care of her sister Helena. What Janina did was an act arising from her firm humanitarian and religious views. Since then, the decision to aid the exterminated Jews has weighed heavily on her future life. She forever worried about her sister's well-being, who remained in Lithuania. In 1959, all three rescued children and, by now, young adults, left Lithuania and came to Janina in Poland. Renana and Benjamin shortly migrated to Israel. Joseph (Wilhelm) stayed in Poland till the end of his life.

Together with Janina, members of the Kukolewski family were also recognised at the ceremony. They

had hidden the fathers of the families that Janina rescued in their house next to Rudnicki Forrest. Rescued children were represented by Pawel Zienowicz, the son of Joseph Zienowicz (Wilhelm Fink), who received a commemorative diploma from the President.

The fact that my mother received the Life Saving Cross of the Lithuanian Republic surprised us. After all, it has been 23 years since her passing and more than 20 years since she received the Yad Vashem Award given posthumously to her sister Helena. With this, we thought that personal recognition would never happen to Janina.

However, due to the efforts of Danutė Selčinskaja, who is heading the Project for Commemoration of the Rescuers of Jews at Vilna Gaon Museum of Jewish History, and the Polish journalist Ilona Lewandowska, every year new histories of the rescues come to light and go through the extensive vetting process. The righteous may no longer be with us, but the memory of their heroism shall endure in the communities and be a part of the proud family tradition.



Pawel Zienowicz, son of the rescued Wilhelm Zienowicz, accepts the Jerzy Ordos award.

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Campaign



Young volunteers distributing daffodils

How can you get involved in the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising?

By joining our online campaign, you will be among countless individuals around the world, who will be remembering the events of the Uprising. Participation is very simple, and there are several ways to commemorate. The simplest way is to make our official daffodil, take a selfie for your social media profiles and use our hashtags:

#RememberingTogether,
#WarsawGhettoUprisingCampaign.

More information on the campaign and instructions how to make your own daffodil:

What is the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Campaign? <https://www.polin.pl/en/Warsawghettoupriasing>

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out on 19 April 1943 and it was the largest and most heroic act of armed resistance by the Jews during World War Two. Exactly 70 years later, in 2013, POLIN Museum launched the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Campaign to raise awareness about this important event. Every year on 19 April, hundreds of volunteers across Poland and around the world encourage people to commemorate the anniversary by wearing a paper daffodil. From its inception, the Campaign has been accompanied by the slogan Remembering Together which emphasizes the power of community and the importance of solidarity.

Why the daffodil?

Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, used to receive a bouquet of yellow daffodils from an anonymous person every year on 19 April. He would lay them at the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in memory of those who fought and died. The paper daffodils, which people wear on this day, are inspired by this custom. Edelman, who remained in Poland after the war, passed away in 2009.



Mr. Marian Turski. Chairman of the Museum Council for POLIN Museum

Australia's new Ambassador to Poland, the Czech Republic & Lithuania



ASPJ President Ezra May with Australia's Ambassador to Poland Benjamin Hayes

ASPJ congratulates Australia's new Ambassador-designate to Poland, the Czech Republic & Lithuania.

On 20 January 2024, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong announced the appointment of Mr Benjamin Hayes as Australia's next Ambassador to the Republic of Poland, with accreditation also as non-resident Ambassador to the Czech Republic and the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr Hayes is a senior career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and was most

recently Assistant Secretary, AUKUS International Engagement Branch. He has also served in several senior roles in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Defence.

Prior to his appointment, Ambassador-designate Hayes, together with the Assistant Director of the Northern and Central Europe Section, Europe Division, DFAT, met with ASPJ President Ezra May, where a pleasant, valuable & encouraging discussion was held canvassing many issues with a particular focus on Polish-Jewish relations.

This was reinforced by Ambassador Hayes, within one week of arriving in Warsaw, attending a Shabbat lunch in the Krakow JCC, prior to the formal commemorative event in Oswiecim the following day for the 79th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

Australia's support and attendance at these functions, together with the other international representatives present, was very much appreciated by the local Polish Jewish and international Jewish community, especially given current international events.

The ASPJ remains tremendously confident Ambassador Hayes will serve with distinction and advance Australia's interests and diplomatic and cultural links with sensitivity on matters affecting Polish-Jewish relations and looks forward to continuing the warm relationship throughout his tenure as Ambassador.

Best wishes and Congratulations to Syrena Polish House on their 40th anniversary



(Post)-JEWISH... Shtetl Opatów Through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt



Arrival of Mayer's work at the Museum

On May 17, 2024 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw will open an exhibition, **(post)-JEWISH... Shtetl Opatów Through the Eyes of Mayer Kirshenblatt**. The exhibition juxtaposes the shtetl as recalled in detail by memory of artist Mayer Kirshenblatt (1934–2009) with the “post-war” town it became during and after the Holocaust.

How did the shtetl become a “post-Jewish” town? Before the Holocaust, there were thousands of shtetlekh, towns where Jews made up a significant proportion of the population or even a majority, across Eastern Europe. Today, their cemeteries, synagogues, mikves, and other communal buildings may still stand, silent witnesses to once vibrant Jewish communities, but not a single Jew remains.

Curators Justyna Koszarska-Szulc and Natalia Romik, with the support of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, have documented the process by which what remained of the shtetl after the war was systematically dismantled to produce today’s “post-Jewish” town. They searched the town archive, talked with local historians devoted to recovering the town’s Jewish past, visited a collector of all things Jewish, and used non-invasive archeological techniques to map the mikve, which still exists in the basement of what is today a candy factory. They salvaged the wood from a Polish and Jewish school that was about to be demolished and have used that wood to construct the exhibition.

Born in Opatów (Apt in Yiddish), Mayer left for Canada in 1934. Self-taught, he began to paint what he

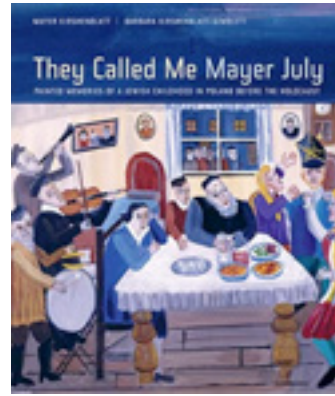
remembered at the age of 73, creating almost 300 paintings during the last 20 years of his life, everything from the marketplace, the 500-year-old synagogue, the cemetery, the holidays, the trades, and so much more. The exhibition features about 70 of his original paintings. The exhibition closes on 16 December, 2024 and will travel. For information about the traveling exhibition, contact Joanna Fikus, jfikus@polin.pl.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the visionary gifts of lead funder Tad Taube and Taube Philanthropies and CBRAT Foundation in loving memory of Joseph and Miriam Ratner.

Mayer Kirshenblatt

Lest future generations know more about how Jews died than how they lived, Mayer Kirshenblatt has made it his mission to remember the world of his childhood in images and words. Born in Opatów (Apt in Yiddish) in 1916, Mayer left for Canada in 1934 at the age of seventeen. He had always told his family stories about growing up in Poland before the Holocaust. After his family begged him to paint what he could remember, Mayer finally picked up his brush in 1989 at the age of 73. To his amazement, the town of his childhood emerged in living color. Painting by painting, story by story, he had recreated the entire world of his youth.

This exhibition and award-winning companion book *They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust*



(2007) – the Polish translation appeared in 2023 – are the result of four decades of conversations between the artist and his daughter Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, an acclaimed scholar of East European Jewish culture. Astonished by her father’s gift for

storytelling and his extraordinary memory, Barbara began recording Mayer’s recollections in 1967. She knew from their conversations that he possessed “an unusual visual intelligence.” She found his way of knowing the world – his insatiable curiosity, powers of observation, and detailed memory – breathtaking.

The paintings and stories capture the curiosity of a boy who was fascinated by the world in which he lived, unaware of the tragedy to come. He passed away in 2009 at the age of 93 and was one of the last to have first-hand experience of Jewish life in Poland before the Holocaust.

For additional information:

<https://www.polin.pl/en/postjewish-shtetl-opatow-through-eyes-mayer-kirshenblatt>

Polmission: Passport's Secrets



The Ambassador of Poland His Excellency Mr Maciej Chmielinski;

By Ezra May

On 2 November 2023, the ASPJ, in the presence of: the Ambassador of Poland His Excellency Mr Maciej Chmielinski; Deputy Leader of the State Opposition Mr David Southwick MP; Consuls General & Honorary Consuls of the following 12 countries: Austria, Bhutan, Botswana, Croatia, Czechia, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, New Zealand, Spain & Sri Lanka; the Presidents of the JCCV & PCCV; as well as other dignitaries and guests, screened *Polmission: Passports' Secrets* at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.



ASPJ president Ezra May and the Ambassador of Poland His Excellency Mr Maciej Chmielinski.

The evening began with ASPJ president Ezra May welcoming those in attendance, particularly the newly appointed Ambassador, who the ASPJ was honoured to host at his only engagement on his first trip to Melbourne.

Ezra May then related how the underlying central message of the movie, of people not remaining silent but taking action to assist others in need, was unfortunately, no longer just an interesting or inspiring historical story. Given the threats and harassment faced by Israel and Jewish communities worldwide, including Australia, it was now as relevant and required as ever for good people to stand up and not tolerate segments of the population under threat.

Ambassador Chmielinski then provided an overview of the long intertwined history of Jews in Poland and highlighted some of the efforts undertaken by some Polish diplomats to save Jews in the Holocaust. On behalf of the President of Poland, the Ambassador then presented Mrs Rachel Kelman the Cross of Siberian Exiles, in recognition of the World War 2 experiences of her parents.

Mrs Rachel Kelman responded by recounting a brief overview of her parents experience of being exiled



Members of the Polish and Jewish community at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum



Mrs Rachel Kelman presented with the Cross of Siberian Exiles



Audience at the film screening



Standing together in support of Israel and the Victorian Jewish community



Exhibition accompanying the film

to Siberia by the Russians as Polish Jews before her father was conscripted to the Russian Army and killed in action liberating Poland.

The film *Polmission: Passports' Secrets* was then screened, unravelling the activities of Polish diplomats and members of the Polish Underground, who in cooperation with other governments,

contributed to saving over 3,000 Jews from Nazi occupied Europe by issuing and facilitating passports and travel documents.

The evening concluded with remarks from David Southwick MP emphasising the need for other communities to stand up when Israel and the Victorian Jewish community was under threat.

New Acting Director of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw Dr. Michał Trębacz PhD.



Dr Michał Trębacz, PhD



The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.
March 20, 2024.

Michał Trębacz, PhD, is a member of the European Association for Jewish Studies (EAJS) and the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES). From 2017, he was the head of the Research Department at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. He supervised the content of the Global Education Outreach Program, the aim of which was to build academic infrastructure for the development of Jewish studies in Poland and around the world. He lectured on the twentieth-century history of Polish Jews at universities in Germany, Israel and the USA. He also collaborated with the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris. He participated in and conducted many research projects on the history of Jews in Poland. He is the author of over 40 articles. He published, among others, in *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały*, *Jewish History Quarterly* and *Polityka*.

יידישער **JEWISH**
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אינסטיטוט **INSTITUTE**

Founded in 1947 the Jewish Historical Institute, also known as the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, is a public cultural and research institution in Warsaw, Poland, chiefly dealing with the history of Jews in Poland and Jewish culture.

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