

# Gazeta

Newsletter of the American Association for Polish Jewish Studies

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1583 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617)547-7701 Fay Bussgang, Genia Shrut, Editors

## The American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies

The American Association for Polish Jewish Studies (AAPJS) is a sister organization of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies in London and Oxford, England. Both organizations emerged out of an International Conference on Polish-Jewish Studies held at Oxford in 1984. These organizations were established to:

- preserve the unique heritage of Polish Jewry;
- foster research into the history and culture of Polish Jewry on an interdisciplinary and international basis;
- make the results of this research available to the public by means of lectures, seminars, conferences, publications and documentary films; and
- focus the attention of the European and American public on what is most significant and precious in the legacy of Polish Jewry.

The Institute in Oxford publishes *POLIN*, a yearbook containing articles on Polish-Jewish issues. *POLIN* provides a forum for the growing number of scholars who seek authoritative historical and cultural material on Polish Jewry. Five volumes have already been published, and Volume 6 will be ready for distribution very soon. There are also eleven other books published and edited by the Institute under the guidance of Antony Polonsky. Some of these are scholarly treatises; others are personal accounts and diaries.

In addition to helping publish and distribute books about Polish Jews, our organization has participated in conferences in the United States, Poland, and England. We helped finance a conference in Jerusalem in 1988, the largest held on every aspect of the history of Polish Jews. We are also closely associated with the centers of Polish Jewish Studies at the University of Warsaw and the University of Krakow.

## New England Branch of AAPJS Letter from the President

*Dear Members,*

*The New England American Association for Polish Jewish Studies is one of several branches in the United States. We sponsor lectures, discussions, social gatherings, and fund-raising events in the Boston area. Our board members are men and women of many interests and backgrounds. Some of us are Jews born in Poland or whose parents came from that part of the world. Others of us are non-Jewish Poles or Ukrainians who have an interest in better relations between Jews and non-Jews. We are all volunteers working together because we feel that what we are doing is important and interesting.*

*At the last meeting of the New England Board of the AAPJS, it was decided to distribute a newsletter every few months. Through it, we hope you will learn of our accomplishments, our current activities, and our future plans.*

*I trust you will continue to support our work, and we hope to welcome you at our meetings in the coming year.*

*Irene E. Pipes, President*

Members of the New England Board: Irene Pipes, President, Stanislaw Baranczak, Julian Bussgang, Murray Forbes, Baruch Frusztajer, Rabbi Ben-Zion Gold, Hans Guggenheim, Lilian Handlin, Alexandra Hawiger, Marek Laas, Hillel Levine, Ladislaw Matejka, Charles Merrill, Krzysztof Michalski, Halina Nelken, Shalom Newman, Janina Prot, Jehuda Reinhartz, Ihor Sevcenko, Eugenia Shrut, Klara Sklar, Roman Szporluk, Robert Trevisani, and Alexandra Watkins.

## New Members Welcome

If you would like to become a member of the AAPJS or make a contribution to help our work, please write or call the AAPJS Office. (Address and telephone number are listed in the heading.)

## **Polonsky Lectures in Boston and Western Massachusetts**

On October 24th, 1991, Professor Antony Polonsky, president of the Institute for Polish Jewish Studies in Oxford, England, gave a lecture in Longmeadow, MA. The topic of his talk was "Loving and Hating the Dead - Current Attitudes in Poland toward Polish-Jewish Relations." The lecture, arranged by Clara Sklar and sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Springfield, was well attended. Among those present were members of the Polish-American Citizens Club, the Polish Cultural Society, students and faculty members from the University of Massachusetts, and members of the State Legislature.

On October 27, Professor Polonsky spoke in Boston at the Levinson Kane Art Gallery on the same topic. This lecture, jointly sponsored by the American Association for Polish Jewish Studies and the American Jewish Committee, was also well attended. Each of the lectures was followed by a very stimulating Question-and-Answer period. (See adjacent summary of talk.)

## **Halina Nelken Gives Art Lecture in Los Angeles**

The Jewish Studies Institute at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles invited Halina Nelken, local eminent art historian and Holocaust survivor, to celebrate her new publication, *Images of a Lost World - Jewish Motifs in Polish Painting 1770-1945*, Oxford, 1991. On December 9, 1991 at the Wiesenthal Center, Ms. Nelken delivered a slide lecture entitled "Jews in the Struggle of Polish Independence".

Among those present were the Polish Consul and Cultural Attaché and several Polish Jews who had served with distinction in the Polish Army during World War II. The talk was followed by a lively discussion.

Halina Nelken presented a lecture on the same topic last year at the Cambridge, Massachusetts Public Library. She also organized a companion exhibit of Polish paintings which was seen by many Library visitors.

## **Board Member Receives New Position -**

Congratulations to our board member Professor Jehuda Reinharz, on becoming the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Brandeis University.

## **Talk by Antony Polonsky, "Loving and Hating the Dead - Current Attitudes of Poles towards Jews"**

*A summary of the talk given by Antony Polonsky in Boston and Longmeadow, MA:*

Dr. Polonsky stated that there are only 10,000 Jews left in Poland today, yet relations towards Jews create a great deal of emotion among Poles. Opinion is quite divided. On the one hand, a large proportion of Poles are quite hostile towards Jews. On the other hand, since the late 70's, there has been a revival of interest in Jewish studies, Jewish culture, and the history of the Jewish presence in pre-war Poland.

The following are the reasons Polonsky attributes to this revival: 1) a nostalgia for a mixed and thus richer, more encompassing culture, 2) a need for reconstructing a coherent history of what Poland was like before the Nazi and Soviet occupations, and 3) a need to come to terms with one's past.

With the advent of democracy in Poland, people have a greater sense of freedom. The hate groups have also become freer in expressing themselves. Anti-semitism has become more open, and advocates of anti-semitism, more vocal.

Under current circumstances, Polonsky sees the causes of anti-semitism as being the following: 1) With the sudden transition to a market economy, some people are suffering and therefore looking for scapegoats. 2) Some Poles associate the excesses of communism with Jews who became communist officials after the war upon their return from the Soviet Union. In particular, a few prominent functionaries of the Polish Secret Police who were Jewish are seen as having been responsible for the enforcement of communist sanctions against certain patriotic Poles who opposed the Government. Now, all the Jews who remained in Poland are being blamed.

The remark by Wałęsa, during the Presidential election, that candidates who were Jewish should own up to it and let the public know their true ethnic origin was not helpful. Wałęsa has since apologized for his remarks.

Polonsky concluded by saying that Poland is today at a crucial point in time. It either will become western oriented and pluralistic, and by inference, welcoming to the Jews, or it will become inward looking and chauvinistic, and hence, hostile towards Jews. The Polish attitude towards Jews will be the indicator of what kind of democratic society Poland will become.

## Future Events

Several interesting events are being planned for the spring and fall of 1992. Exact dates and invitations will be forthcoming.

The expected "Event of the Year" will be the appearance of Agnieszka Holland, the Polish-Jewish director of "*Europa Europa*", with Solomon Perel, the person who was the inspiration for this wonderful movie. "*Europa Europa*" is based on a true story, stranger than fiction, about a young Jew who escaped death by posing as a Hitler Youth. It has been at the center of a bitter dispute over a German film committee's decision not to nominate it for an Academy Award. More information about this exciting event will be coming soon.

This spring, as is our custom, there will be a program to launch the newest volume of *POLIN, A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*. Recently published by the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies in Oxford, Volume 6 will be ready for distribution soon to Subscribing Members, Sponsors, and Benefactors. Others may purchase it at the meeting.

Other speakers who will give presentations in Boston in the near future are Adam Michnik, Editor of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and His Excellency Jan Dowgiello, Polish Ambassador to Israel.

## Other Events of Interest to Our Readers

The International Culture Committee of Krakow is coordinating many events for the celebration of a European Culture Month. As part of this event, there will be a Jewish Cultural Festival held in Krakow from June 6-14, 1992. The stated purpose of the festival is "a recognition of culture and art of the Jewish nation with the particular stress put on the creative contribution of the Jews from Poland into the development of our civilization". The festival will include symposia, exhibitions, music and theater performances, and the showing of pre- and post-war films.

For further information, contact the International Cultural Center, 31-008 Krakow, Rynek Glowny, Fax (48-12) 21 85 71.

## Panel Discussion to be Held in Worcester - "Witnesses from the Lost World"

A panel discussion entitled "Witnesses from the Lost World", originally planned for April 1992 at Temple Beth Israel in Worcester, has been re-scheduled for September 1992. Speakers will include Rabbi Baruch Goldstein, Dr. Julian Bussgang, Dr. Halina Nelken, and Professor Ihor Sevchenko. The moderator will be Dr. Gershon Weisenberg, Worcester County Regional Director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The speakers will describe the Jewish community of pre-World War II Poland and recount their personal wartime experiences. The program is being organized by Mrs. Alexandra Watkins, Chairperson of the Outreach Committee of the American Association for Polish Jewish Studies and Dr. Weisenberg. The host will be Rabbi Jay Rosenbaum of the Beth Israel Congregation.

Rabbi Goldstein is the beloved Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Beth Israel. Born in Lublin, Poland, he was caught by the Germans and imprisoned in their concentration camps. Dr. Bussgang is a retired scientist-entrepreneur born in Lwów, Poland. Although he and his family fled to safety at the outset of the war, he enlisted in the free Polish Army to fight the Germans. Dr. Nelken, an art historian born in Krakow, was imprisoned in several concentration camps, including Auschwitz. Her *Diary of the Krakow Ghetto* was published in 1987. Professor Sevchenko teaches Byzantine History at Harvard University. He is a Ukrainian, born in Poland, who lived with his family in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw.

The speakers have had a remarkable variety of wartime experiences which they will share with the audience for a very meaningful and enlightening evening. After the initial presentation, the panelists will entertain questions from the audience.

The exact date and location will be announced later. For further information, please contact the office of the National Council of Christians and Jews in Worcester at (508) 753-1681.

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We hope you enjoy our first newsletter. We welcome your comments and suggestions. We would like to remind those of you who have not yet renewed your membership to do so; the Association needs your support to continue its work. Subscribing members and above receive the latest volume of *Polin*. To join, check the appropriate category of membership, and send your name and check to:

American Association for Polish Jewish Studies, 1583 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02138

Benefactor \_\_\_ \$1000    Sponsor \_\_\_ \$500    Subscribing Member \_\_\_ \$ 100    Member \_\_\_ \$50

Name and Address \_\_\_\_\_