

G a z e t a

Newsletter of the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies
1583 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 547-7701

Vol.9 No.3 Winter 2000-01

Fay and Julian Bussgang, Editors

Letter from the President

Dear Members and Friends:

Once more I would like to start my letter with a short report on another trip to Poland a few weeks ago. I find myself very much involved in Jewish affairs while there. I was present in the Jewish Theater at a ceremony of the Society of Tolerance rewarding those who were outstanding in that field. The people whom I knew among those selected were Father Musiał and Prof. Józef Gierowski.

The affair was well attended with guests from all over Poland, including Joachim Russek and Konstanty Gebert. Gebert told me that the Lauder Foundation has cut their support, and he will no longer edit the magazine *Midrasz*. So far the magazine is still coming out, but they worry that it will not be able to continue much longer.

I also visited Professor Tych at the Jewish Historical Institute and admired his achievements there. He gets quite a lot of funds from German institutions for buying the latest computer and other equipment but is short of money for salaries and the running of the institute. His term as director is up this spring, but everyone I talked to hopes that he will continue longer.

Antony Polonsky, Genia Shrut, Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, and Jerzy Tomaszewski of our board attended a meeting of the Institute of Polish-Jewish Studies in London, hosted by the Polish Embassy there and the Littman Library. Antony was presented with a leather bound volume 13 of *POLIN* by Sir Sigmund Sternberg. The new volume will be distributed soon to those who paid their dues for 2001.

We also have for sale the recently published comprehensive index of the first twelve volumes of *POLIN* at a special member's price of \$20. I would like here to remind those members who have paid their 2000 dues and did not receive volume XII to contact Dr. Jana Prot at Tel/Fax 781-861-7693 or by e-mail <JanaProt@aol.com>

We had a meeting with Jan Gross on October 29 who spoke about his book *Sąsiedzi* (*Neighbors*), which deals with the Jedwabne massacre. I must admit that I was horrified once more to hear about that awful barbarian event. Polish reviews do not deny the fact that it was done by Poles but feel that Jan Gross did not do enough research in German sources to find out who really was behind it.

It was a pleasure to hear Ezra Mendelsohn at Brandeis speak on the Jewish Pantheon of Maurycy Gottlieb. The talk was most informative and interesting.

As for future events we are planning, Prof. Andrzej Paczkowski from Warsaw will be talking on the 13th of March at 4 PM at Brandeis on "Nazism and Communism in the experiences and memory of the Poles".

We are also participating in the organization at Brandeis in early March of a season of films by Andrzej Wajda containing Jewish themes. *Pan Tadeusz* will be shown by the Harvard film archive during the season.

Hope all of you had a cheerful Chanukah with your children and grandchildren.

Wishing you all a very Happy New Year,

Irene E. Pipes

Renew Your Membership for 2001

POLIN: Volume 13
On the Holocaust and Its Aftermath
Antony Polonsky, Editor

Few issues have divided Poles and Jews more deeply than an assessment of what happened immediately before and after the Holocaust. Polish and Jewish historians often take an opposite view on this issue.

The common Jewish viewpoint is that the prewar nationalistic movement and the growing anti-Semitism after the death of Piłsudski in 1935 predisposed the Polish population against the Jews and made Hitler's job easier.

The common Polish viewpoint is that Poles themselves were victims of Nazism and lost as many people as Jews, and that preoccupied with their own horrible experiences and with the threat of death when sheltering Jews, could do no more than they did to rescue Jews.

The clincher for Jews is the aftermath—what happened to the 300,000 Polish Jews (out of three million), who somehow survived, when they tried to reestablish themselves in Poland after the war.

Volume 13 of *POLIN* is dedicated precisely to these emotional and controversial topics. It contains several significant articles on these issues, as well as testimony of Rudolf Reder, one of a handful of Bełżec survivors and eyewitness account of the consequences of the 1906 pogrom in Siedlce. Also included are biographical sketches of Abraham Joshua Heschel, brought up in Poland, who later became a prominent religious leader in the U.S., and of Ludwik Rajchman, founder of UNICEF.

Copies of Volume 13 of *POLIN* will be distributed shortly to all paid-up members of AAPJS. We highly recommend this volume of *POLIN* to all those interested in Polish-Jewish studies. It also makes an excellent gift for a temple or local library.

Miłosz Recalls Jewish Tales of Wilno

The New York Review of 2 November carries an article by Czesław Miłosz, "Miłosz's ABC," translated from Polish into English by Madeline Levine.

Born in 1911, Miłosz, winner of the Nobel prize in literature in 1980, reminisces in the article about his childhood near Wilno (Vilnius), where the land owners spoke Polish and the village population, Lithuanian. In the city itself, the Jewish masses spoke Yiddish, while the Jewish intelligentsia spoke Russian.

In the narrow alleys of the Jewish quarter near the tower of St. John, the hot topics of conversation included the struggles of the Gaon against the Hasidic movement. ("The Gaon", Elijah Vilna [1720-97], was the leading Jewish scholar in the city and an outspoken opponent of Hasidism.)

Another topic dealt with the memory of Count Walentyn Potocki, a Polish nobleman who converted to Judaism in Amsterdam. Refusing to renounce his new faith, he was burned at the stake in the 18th century in Wilno. Potocki, often called, the "Ger Tzaddik" (righteous convert), is buried in the Jewish cemetery of Wilno where his grave used to be a place of pilgrimage. In 1977 the story of Potocki, *Avraham Ben Avraham*, was published by Rabbi Selig Schachnowitz.

Miłosz reminds us also of another secret tale, that of Officer Gradé. During the retreat of Napoleon's army, a pious Jewish family hid Gradé from the Russians. Gradé also adopted Judaism, intending to marry the daughter of the family, and had himself circumcised. One of his descendants was the prominent Yiddish language writer and poet, Chaim Grade. Chaim Grade (b. Wilno, 1910) is known for combining deep roots in Judaism with worldly realism and philosophical symbolism. He survived the war and died in the United States.

Premiere of *Dybbuk* in Washington

The premiere of the new production of the movie, *Dybbuk*, directed by Agnieszka Holland, was presented recently in Washington, DC. Among Holland's well-known movies are such masterpieces as *Europa Europa*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Oliver*.

The film is based on a famous Yiddish folktale of a yeshiva student and a young woman whom he wishes to marry, but whose father intervenes. The young man dies, but his wandering soul settles in his beloved and will not leave her.

The new *Dybbuk* was featured by the Jewish Film Festival at the Cecile Goldman Theater with the cooperation of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland. In this connection, the Polish Ambassador, Przemysław Grudziński, held a special reception for Holland.

Conference in London

A one-day conference, "The Holocaust in Poland and Its Aftermath: Current Reflections and Debates," was held at the Polish Embassy in London on November 23. Ben Helfgott of London, chairman of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies, chaired the event. The conference was cosponsored by the Polish Embassy, the hosting organization, the Polish Cultural Institute, the Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of London, and the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, publishers of *POLIN*. The organizers were Jonathan Webber of Oxford University and Connie Webber of the Littman Library. Associated with the Conference was a reception launching Volume 13 of *POLIN*, which last year won the Jewish Book of the Year Award.

Attending from the U.S. were AAPJS Board Members Ms. Genia Shrut and Dr. Richard Fenigson, as well as Professor Antony Polonsky of Brandeis University, the keynote speaker and editor of *POLIN*.

Speakers from Poland included Prof. Monika Adamczyk-Grabowska of Lublin; Prof. Zdzisław Mach of Kraków; Dr. Bożena Szaynok of Wrocław, known for her studies of the Kielce pogrom; Prof. Jerzy Tomaszewski of Warsaw University; and Professor Feliks Tych, Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

Rafael Scharf of London gave his reminiscences as an octogenarian, and Robin O'Neil, a retired detective who is researching Holocaust crimes, spoke about "Bełżec, The Forgotten Death Camp".

The Jews of Warsaw

Two documentaries on Jewish topics were recently shown at the Polish Consulate General in New York.

The film "Hanukkah, a Double Time" includes interviews with people returning home after many years and with people who have more recently discovered their Jewish ancestry. Included are interviews with Konstanty Gebert, former editor of *Midrasz*, Helena Datner, leader of the Warsaw Jewish community, and young journalists who are active in the Warsaw community. The film was shot during Hanukkah 1997 and 1998.

The other documentary entitled "The Jews of Warsaw" traces the history of Jews in the capital city of Poland. File photos are intertwined with contemporary pictures. The film consists of five sections: History, Faith, Theater, Growing-up, and Concern.

The filmmaker, Daniel Strehlau of Warsaw, is currently spending a year in the United States as the Kościuszko Scholar. He studied theology and filmmaking, and was active as a member of the Warsaw Jewish youth Association "Jiddele."

Jan Gross Speaks in Cambridge

Professor Jan Gross of Columbia University came to speak at an AAPJS event held at Harvard Hillel in Cambridge on 29 October 2000.

Gross drew on his recent work *Sąsiedzi* (Neighbors) to describe the events leading up to the murder of 1600 Jews in the town of Jedwabne in northwestern Poland in June and July 1941. Professor Gross dispassionately presented the evidence he assembled from the records of the Polish courts containing testimony of the perpetrators themselves and their families.

Dr. Gross raised an important point; he argues that Jedwabne demonstrates that Polish people can no longer maintain that the Jewish population of Poland was annihilated only by Germans with assistance by Ukrainians and Lithuanians. He expressed the opinion that in light of new evidence, the role of Polish neighbors has to be reexamined. The accounts of Jewish survivors, who blame some of their neighbors for denunciations and even murders and assaults, cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. They must be thoroughly investigated in order to get at the truth.

The Pianist

The Polish press reports that Władysław Szpilman, pianist and composer, born 5 December 1911 in Sosnowiec, Poland, died in Warsaw on 6 July 2000, leaving two sons and his wife, Halina Grzecznarowska.

Szpilman became known not just for his wonderful music but also for his autobiography, *The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939–1945* (Picador, St. Martin's). The Los Angeles Times named this book as one of the Best Nonfiction Books of 1999.

Szpilman's memoir was judged to be a significant contribution to the literature of remembrance, a document of lasting historical and human value. Key elements, based on fresh recollections, were assembled in 1945 under the title *Death of a City*. Published in Poland in 1946, it was banned by Stalinist authorities, probably because it contains accounts of collaboration of some Latvians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and even Jews.

Szpilman describes his survival in the Warsaw Ghetto, as the noose gradually tightened and conditions worsened. He depicts corpses being piled up and his family being deported to their deaths. He decided to join the Jewish resistance and went into hiding. Music was always in his mind even when he was desperate to the point of contemplating suicide.

The scene in his book that has drawn the most attention is that of a German officer, Lieutenant Wilm Hosenfeld, a devout Catholic, who upon hearing Szpilman play Chopin's nocturne in the midst of Warsaw's ruins, saved the hounded musician from certain death.

After the war, Szpilman continued his career as concert pianist and composer in Warsaw. He sought to find the German officer in order to help him, but Hosenfeld had died in a Russian POW camp. Szpilman located Hosenfeld's diary, and *The Pianist* includes excerpts from it containing a forceful condemnation of Hitler and his own countrymen. The drama of Szpilman's experiences is a tribute to human feelings being displayed by an individual in the midst of brutal oppressors.

Film director Roman Polansky announced plans to make a film in Poland about Szpilman and his Holocaust experiences. Polansky stated, "It was Szpilman's music that allowed him to survive the Holocaust."

Letter of Polish Bishops

We have been asked to expand on the letter of the Polish bishops mentioned in the fall issue of *Gazeta*. The Council for Religious Dialogue of the Polish Episcopate issued the letter in August in connection with the Year 2000 Jubilee, and the Plenary Conference of the Polish Episcopate endorsed it. Polish bishops consider themselves committed to a free dialogue with everyone, including those who are not Christians.

The letter declares that with the observance of the Jubilee, the Church undertook the clearing up of matters of the past and reconciliation in order to shape a better future. The letter then asserts that the Church's thoughts first turn toward Jews because of the many close bonds between the two religions, so clearly expressed in "Nostra Aetate" and in the 1986 speech of Pope John Paul II delivered in the Great Synagogue of Rome.

The letter reiterates that the Primate of Poland has asked for forgiveness for any past anti-Semitism and declares that the Polish Church will join in this effort. It is noted that the memory of the Holocaust that afflicted the Jewish people is particularly on the Church's mind as the generation of witnesses is dying off. The Polish people must remember their sin of indifference when these events were happening, and the Church must deepen Christian solidarity with Jews to fight anti-Semitism. It is hoped that in turn anti-Polish attitudes among Jews will also be overcome. Mutual respect should be the goal.

The letter also expresses the Church's wish to reconcile with other religions, this being particularly important because of the trend toward secularization as well as the persecution of Christians in some Moslem countries. The Polish Church wants good relations with people of all denominations in Poland. It quotes Pope John Paul II, "We should seek what unites us, as it certainly is bigger than what still may separate us".

The Polish situation is described as special because of the history of the country. As a result of its having been included in the Communist block, many people abandoned the Church. The letter concludes that those who believe, or do not believe and those of other faiths should all join and live in harmony. It affirms that these words were written not for political motives but to enhance tolerance, as we are all children of one God.

Jewish Communal Property

In 1997 Poland passed a law whereby claims can be made for restitution of communal properties of Jewish religious congregations. The deadline for filing is 2002.

Property was returned to the Catholic Church already in 1991, immediately after the fall of Communism. The Lutherans, the largest Protestant group in Poland, were able to file claims as early as 1993. Having had many properties in what was once Prussia or the eastern region of prewar Germany, the Lutherans filed over one thousand claims and recovered many of their assets.

Before the war, Poland had over three million Polish citizens, and Jews constituted 10% of the Polish population. Jewish community properties in cities, towns, and villages abounded. Those that were not destroyed were used after the war for government offices, cinemas, libraries, and archives.

Today, Poland numbers perhaps 50,000 Jews; the actual number is not known, because not all Jews are affiliated with the Jewish communities, and many, from mixed marriages, may not consider themselves Jewish. Only a handful of Jewish congregations exist, in the larger cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Bielsko-Biały, Gdańsk, Legnica, Łódź, Szczecin, Katowice, and Lublin.

A special foundation has been set up to assist the Polish communities in making claims. Ronald S. Lauder serves as its chair and has arranged for legal assistance. The other members of the foundation are five Jewish community leaders in Poland and five Jews from abroad with an interest in Poland—Rabbi Chaskel Besser of the Lauder Foundation, Kalman Sultanik of the World Jewish Congress, Saul Kagan of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Herbert Block from the Joint Distribution Committee, and Aryeh Edilist from the World Jewish Restitution organization in Israel.

Some five hundred claims for school and synagogue buildings and cemeteries have already been filed. The process is slow because documentation has to be submitted, and in smaller towns, this is quite difficult.

The Story of the Bialy

Bialys are traditional Jewish, crusty rolls with onion-filled soft centers. For those interested where bialys came from, there is now a good source, a book called *The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a lost World*, (Broadway Books), by Mimi Sheraton. Sheraton did extensive research on the bread and the city of Białystok.

Iłona Karmel-Zucker

Iłona Karmel, author of two early books about the Holocaust, passed away on 30 November 2000 in Belmont, Ma. She was a retired senior lecturer in the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies at MIT.

Born in Kraków, Karmel survived the war under very difficult circumstances, including stays in concentration camps. Shortly after she was liberated, she was hit by a tank that severely injured her legs. She managed to make her way to Sweden where she received proper medical attention. Once in the United States, she attended Radcliffe College, where she studied writing with Archibald MacLeish.

In 1953 her autobiographical novel, *Stephania* (Houghton Mifflin), appeared, which brought her a book prize and instant acclaim. In 1989 she published *The Estate of Memory* (she herself referred to it as “*Spadek Pamięci*”), again as a novel, but reaching back into her own horrendous war experiences. The great import of her remarkable two novels has been to focus attention on the lives of women in concentration camps—issues of sexuality, survival, growth, and cooperation even in the midst of horrors. Her books help us understand the psychological experiences of women during the war.

In 1986 the department at MIT renamed a competition for the best creative writing in her honor, and she was asked to chair the competition.

Iłona Karmel was married to the late Francis J. (Hans) Zucker. They had no children.

Jewish Culture in Poland and Jewish-Polish Relations

Volume II of the book *The Jews in Poland*, edited by Sławomir Kaprański, was recently issued in Kraków. The book was published by the Judaica Foundation of the Center for Jewish Culture in Kraków. Volume I was published by the Center in 1991.

The book honors Rafał Scharf, who just celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday. Scharf, who lives in London, has dedicated himself to documenting Polish-Jewish life before the war. He has given special attention to Kraków, for which he has great affection, visiting it almost every year. An interview with Scharf providing some of his personal reminiscences is one of the main features.

'Beit Warszawa' Invites a Female Rabbi

Last year, a few Jews from the U.S. and other foreign Jews, who are now stationed in Warsaw, joined with a handful of young Polish Jews to form "Beit Warszawa", a liberal Jewish community in Warsaw. They began by organizing a few Onegs in people's homes. Then, for High Holidays, they imported a female rabbi from the U.S., Rabbi Cynthia Culpepper, to lead the holiday services in a rented hall. Rabbi Culpepper is a conservative rabbi from Montgomery, Alabama and is known as a very powerful speaker.

One of the organizers, Cliff Aron, reports to us that they now list nearly 200 people and their monthly Onegs are attended by 50-60 participants.

In a special JTA news report from Warsaw, Ruth Gruber remarks that having a female rabbi leading services is a first for Poland. The group organized the more liberal congregation, similar to "Beit Praga" in the Czech Republic, in order to hold more modern services. They objected to the Nożyk Synagogue's practice of seating men and women separately.

The Orthodox Nożyk Synagogue is the only synagogue in Warsaw to have survived the war. Its rabbi is now Rabbi Michael Schudrich, who for many years guided the activities of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Poland. Rabbi Schudrich, who has close ties with the Jewish community in Poland, recently agreed to return to Warsaw from the U.S.

Two schools of thought exist—one, that it is unfortunate to have the small Jewish community in Warsaw divided, the other, that a variety of expressions of Judaism can attract and retain the loyalty of diverse Jewish groups.

It must be remembered that before the war 'Progressive' synagogues flourished in Warsaw and in the other major cities of Poland, and *Haskalah* (the so-called Jewish enlightenment and modernity movement) was steadily gaining ground (see, for example, *POLIN*, Vol. 11). Also, today, most of the young surviving Jews in Poland have little affiliation with strict Orthodoxy. Yet, until now, the bulk of financial and emotional support for Polish Jews has come from Orthodox Jewry.

Dialogue with the Jewish Diaspora

Agnieszka Magdziak-Miszewska holds the special position as adviser to the Polish Prime Minister on dialogue with the Jewish Diaspora.

In a November interview with *Znak* magazine, Magdziak-Miszewska acknowledged that in Poland there is still a problem with disseminating information about the Holocaust. Textbooks used in schools have stressed the suffering of Polish people under the occupation and made little mention of the fate of Polish Jews. Although the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the deportations from the ghettos to the camps are discussed, the Holocaust as a comprehensive event is not adequately treated.

Magdziak-Miszewska is committed to helping bring more awareness and better dialogue between young people on both sides. Thus, in the last two years, the Polish Government has encouraged proper preparation of Jewish participants in the annual March of the Living, and Polish youth have joined the march.

Polish-Jewish Victims in Katyń

Katyń is the town in the USSR, east of Smolensk, where, from 3 April to 12 May 1940, thousands of Polish military officers, who were Soviet prisoners-of-war, were brutally murdered. The horrible crime came to light in April 1943 when the Germans, who had invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, uncovered the mass graves.

At first, there were denials of the crime from Stalin, but in 1990, after Mikhail Gorbachev became the First Secretary of the USSR, the NKVD admitted that 4,421 Polish officers were executed in the Katyń forest, and in total, almost 22,000 officers were systematically killed. To the people of Poland, Katyń symbolizes the greatest crime of Communism during the war.

Among the prisoners-of-war, who became victims were also Jewish officers of the Polish Army. The chair of the Association of Polish-Jewish Veterans in Israel, Benjamin Meirtchak, assembled four precious volumes entitled *Jewish Military Casualties in the Polish Armies in World War II*. In his Volume IV (Tel Aviv 1997) he lists the names of Jewish officers executed by the Soviets. Meirtchak was able to identify 224 killed in the Katyń Forest, 185 in Kharkov, 18 in Miednoye – altogether 427 Polish-Jewish officers. There were undoubtedly many more, but not all the victims, who may have been Jewish, could be identified as Jewish.

Board Member Profile Professor Ruth Wisse

Dr. Ruth Wisse is Harvard's first professor of Yiddish Literature. She was appointed to this position in 1993.

Dr. Wisse was born Ruth Roskies in Czerniowce (Czernovitz), Romania, now in the Ukraine. Her family came to Czerniowce from Poland, where her mother, Masha Roskies, was a performer and singer in the Wilno Jewish Theater. The family left Romania in 1940 for Montreal, Canada.

In Montreal Wisse attended the Yiddish Folkschule (Jewish People's School), learning both Yiddish and Hebrew. She then entered McGill University, graduating in English literature in 1957.

Following further studies of Yiddish literature at YIVO in New York and at Columbia University, Wisse returned to Montreal, earning a Ph.D. degree at McGill. Her thesis topic was "The Shlemiel as Hero in Yiddish and American Fiction". She went on to teach at McGill in the Department of Jewish Studies where she introduced, for the first time at a Canadian University, the teaching of Yiddish literature. Before she came to Harvard, she held the Jewish Community Chair at McGill.

Her recent course at Harvard is entitled "Literature and Politics: the Case of Zionism." One of her better known students was Aaron Lansky, who became the founder and director of the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Professor Wisse is married to Leonard Wisse, a lawyer, and has three grown children. Her brother, Professor David G. Roskies, teaches Jewish literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Wisse and her brother produced a video about the life of their mother, Masha Roskies that was shown recently at the Vilna Shul in Boston.

Building Bridges

Avenue of the Righteous is a Chicago-based Holocaust organization dedicated to honoring the local Righteous Gentiles on a plot behind the Evanston Town Hall. Thus far, about a dozen Midwesterners have honored. President of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation is Lisa Derman, a Holocaust survivor herself, who was rescued on two occasions by Righteous Poles and is dedicated to improving communication between Jews and Poles.

The Polish American Association and American Jewish Committee are among the several Chicago organizations that organized an Interfaith Coalition to Honor Polish Rescuers. Six months ago, they launched an additional activity called Building Bridges. Working with Facing History and Ourselves, and Congregation Am Shalom of Glencoe, Illinois, they organized a weekend of historical, spiritual and personal sharing between Polish and Jewish teenagers.

The first event was an outing of 25 Polish and 14 Jewish kids at Camp Duncan in Ingleside, Illinois. Father John Cusick and Herman Schaalman discussed brotherhood. The group ate ethnic foods, engaged in small discussion groups, and developed a community. The young people played stereotyping and scapegoating scenarios with the aid of Imagination Theatre helping them break down geographic, social and cultural barriers. Follow-up events are planned.

Jewish Education in Poland

Jewish educators in Poland convened in Warsaw in November to review and plan Jewish education in Poland for the first time since the war. Thirty educators and Jewish community leaders attended. Presenters included Agata Patalas and Helena Datner of the JDC (Joint Jewish Distribution Committee) Pedagogical Center, and Lucyna Rojzen-Siedlecka, Director of the Lauder Day School in Wroclaw.

Each speaker reported on his or her current programs. A discussion to formulate future plans followed. The participants decided to establish a commission for regular meetings about Jewish education as well as a "Lehrhaus" center as a resource of Jewish educational materials.

Lauder Foundation Cuts Budget in Poland

The Lauder Foundation of New York announced significant budget cuts for its activities in Poland in 2001.

In recent years the Foundation has served as a major source of support for many Jewish organizations in Poland. The cuts are expected to have a significant impact and curtail many Jewish activities that the Lauder Foundation had revived.

Umschlagplatz

The monument at Umschlagplatz is one of the few remaining sites commemorating the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. It serves as a memorial to Jews who were transported from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Nazi death camps. The proposal to build cooperative housing adjacent to the Umschlagplatz memorial has generated considerable controversy and objections from the Jewish community of Warsaw.

On November 17, Gołda Tanzer, chair of the Shalom Foundation organized a press conference to protest the plan for the new buildings. In addition to Ms. Tanzer, speakers included Szymon Szurmiej, president of TSK° (Jewish Social and Cultural Association), Sigmund Nissenbaum, chair of the Nissenbaum Foundation, and representatives of the city government, who all spoke in support of preservation of the memorial site.

Why crowd housing blocks into the area? Although a housing shortage may exist in Warsaw, as it does in most cities, the elimination of a site that preserves the memory of the vibrant presence of Jews in Warsaw and their tragic disappearance is sure to inflict more unnecessary pain. The new apartment housing will generate gain to just a few lucky prospective residents.

Restoration of Jewish properties has been exceedingly limited in Poland. It would stand to reason that the few memorial places should not now be eliminated.

Some of the prospective tenants and developers also attended the meeting and engaged in a lively discussion of what they described as their plight.

Jewish Students Help the Elderly

The Polish Union of Jewish Students (PUS°) is a national organization gathering Jewish university students in various regions of Poland. At their annual October meeting, PUS° announced a new Seidele Project.

The goal of the project is to have the Jewish students, under the direction of Jewish Community's social workers, volunteer their time to help lonely elderly people. The project is part of the new endeavor by the Jewish community of Poland to mobilize their own volunteers for self-help and reduce the financial dependence on foreign assistance.

Legislation to Restitute Properties

On January 11, 2001, the Polish Sejm (Parliament) passed a bill dealing with the return of nationalized properties to their original owners. The bill follows several years of debate on how to resolve this difficult issue.

According to preliminary reports, under the proposed legislation, claimants must have been citizens of Poland at the time of appropriation, and must have remained citizens and residents of Poland as of December 31, 1999. Eligible claimants are to receive 50% of the value of their property in kind and government bonds. The bill will become law, if it becomes approved by the Polish Senate and signed by the President of Poland.

Disregarding the obvious questions why only 50% of the valuation is to be used and what will be the rules for establishing the valuation, the bill appears blatantly and deliberately designed to avoid restitution to those who were dispossessed, but no longer live in Poland. After years of deliberation, the Sejm does not appear to have proposed a fair treatment of those who were forced to leave first, the occupied Poland, and then, the Communist Poland.

Polish Jewry Memorial Forest in Jerusalem

The Polish Jewry Memorial Forest in Jerusalem was established five years ago by the Federation of Polish Jews and the Jewish National Fund. To plant trees in memory of relatives, contact the Jewish National Fund, 42 East 69th Street, New York, NY 10021, or call 800-542-TREE. The web site is <www.jnf.org>.

Prof. Mendelsohn on Maurycy Gottlieb

Art historian Professor Ezra Mendelsohn of Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave a talk at Brandeis University about the brilliant Polish-Jewish painter Maurycy Gottlieb. Gottlieb was one of the first Jewish painters in Poland to depict people, as the interdictions of the Second Commandment were thought to forbid making images.

Gottlieb, born in 1856, was the son of Izaak Gottlieb, an oil refinery owner in Drohobycz. Growing up in a well-to-do family, Maurycy was able to devote himself to art at a relatively young age. Although having studied painting in Lwów, Vienna, Munich, and Italy, he was probably most influenced by the famous Polish painter Jan Matejko, his teacher in Kraków. Gottlieb died at the young age of twenty-three of a throat infection, shortly after the ending of his romance with Laura Rosenfeld.

Professor Mendelsohn discussed the main theme of some of the well-known Gottlieb paintings—a Jew at the crossroads, both Polish and Jewish, Orthodox and modern. Mendelsohn showed slides of “Shylock and Jessica,” depicting the Orthodox father bidding farewell to his daughter who is about to elope; “Uriel Acosta (Gabriel de Costa),” the Maranno philosopher with his beloved; “Nathan the Wise and Recha,” with Nathan embracing his adopted Christian daughter (from Lessing's play *Esterka and King Casimir the Great*); “The Trial of Christ before the Sanhedrin,” with Kaifash and Pontius Pilate; and “Christ Teaching at Kafarnaum.” Many of these paintings show the interaction between a Jew and a non-Jew.

In 1991 almost one hundred of Gottlieb's paintings were exhibited in Israel.

Agnieszka Sabar in an article about Maurycy Gottlieb in the Polish-Jewish magazine *Midrasz* (November 2000), quotes, from a Gottlieb letter to a friend, “I am a Pole and a Jew, and God willing, I want to work for both.”

"Ashes and Diamonds", 1958 (108 min.)
Saturday, March 3, 7:30 PM
"Samson", 1961 (117 min.)
Sunday, March 4, 3:00 PM
"Landscape After a Battle", 1970 (108 min.)
Thursday, March 8, 7:00 PM
"The Wedding", 1973 (110 min.)
Saturday, March 10, 7:30 PM
"The Promised Land", 1975 (179 min.)
Sunday, March 11, 3:00 PM
"Korczak", 1990 (113 min.)
Sunday, March 11, 7:00 PM
"Holy Week", 1995 (94 min.)

Wajda Film Festival at Brandeis

In March, the Brandeis University Film Department will be presenting jointly with the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies a series of films by the noted Polish film director Wajda. The films selected for showing at Brandeis are those involving Jewish themes. Other Wajda films are to be presented this Spring by the Harvard University Film Archives at times to be yet announced.

The Brandeis schedule is as follows:

Thursday, March 1, 7 PM

To: American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies

1583 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

I would like to be a member and receive an annual subscription to *Gazeta* and *POLIN*

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

I would like to subscribe only to *Gazeta* \$25 Additional Contribution _____

I am not a member or subscriber but am interested in your activities

I would like additional information about your organization

Other _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ e-mail _____

A Torah for Israel

Poland's Foreign Minister, Władysław Bartoszewski, visited Israel from 27–30 November. His visit was in honor of the tenth anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel severed in 1967 and reestablished in 1990.

While in Israel, the Foreign Minister presented to the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Meir Lau, a Torah scroll preserved during the war by a Polish family.

Rabbi Israel Meir Lau was born in 1937 in Piotrków. Both his parents perished during the Holocaust. At the age of seven, he escaped death at the Buchenwald Camp by hiding among a heap of dead bodies. He immigrated to Israel in 1946.

Bartoszewski is an honorary citizen of the State of Israel, a righteous gentile, and chairman of the Poland-Israeli Friendship Society. During the war, Bartoszewski was a leader of *egota*, the Polish underground organization formed to assist Jews.

Confusion Over a Swiss Name

A Polish woman who grew up in America and then married a German-Swiss man, describes in the *Warsaw Voice* (Warsaw's English language weekly) the various types of prejudice she has encountered. Growing up Polish in America, she was called "Polak" as an insult. After marriage her name became Barbara Schwitz, and she was often taken for a Jew. Again she encountered prejudice in New York and even more so when she came to Warsaw.

She describes the fact that in Poland she has met many decent people who reminisce with sadness over the tragedy of the Jews, but she has seen a lot of nasty graffiti as well, which sometimes does not get wiped off. She also recalls one Warsaw janitor who told her proudly that his building had no Jews, "No Jews, no problems".

Although Ms. Schwitz feels more hope for the future in Poland, she still sees a great deal of what she describes as "blind prejudice".

Remu

Rabbi Moshe Isserles, whose family originally came from Regensburg in Bavaria, was born around 1520 in Kraków (sources vary). He first studied with Rabbi Shalom Shahne of Lublin, his father-in-law. He then returned to Kraków, where still as a young man, he became the chief rabbi of the city and founded a yeshiva that achieved great renown. He died in 1572.

Isserles, who took the name Remu, became the most famous scholar of the Talmud in Poland, and wrote many works still used as references to this day. Remu contributed to the formulation of the Ashkenasy Jewish identity as compared to the Sephardic tradition from Spanish lands.

In Kazimierz, the old Jewish section of Kraków, the Remu synagogue is still an active functioning synagogue. Behind it is a small cemetery where Remu is buried. Religious Jews have for many years visited the rabbi's grave on the anniversary of his death on Lag BaOmer.