

THE SECTION FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF JEWISH HISTORICAL SITES

This section is involved in the collection and publication of information about historical sites of Jewish material culture related to Jewish towns and neighborhoods, synagogues and cemeteries. Information includes descriptions, maps and photographs, films and sound recordings which illustrate the life of the Jews in Polish lands.

The collection of photographs from the years 1860–2007 includes approximately 40,000 items. Above all, the documentation comprises objects of Jewish culture that have survived, such as photographs of headstones from approximately 400 cemeteries, photographs of approximately 320 synagogues and houses of prayer that still exist in Poland today, as well as photographs of



mural paintings in approximately twenty synagogues.

One of the Section's tasks is also to collect documentation about historical sites that have been destroyed. It has one of the largest collections of photographs of wooden synagogues in Poland, which has recently expanded to include photographs from the period of the First World War, documenting almost 30 synagogues in prewar Poland's former borderlands (*Kresy*) and in central Poland.

The photographic documentation of the social life of Polish Jews includes both original family photographs, as well as reproductions



from periodicals. There are also photographs of Jewish political and social activists from 1918-1950. From the period of the Second World War, there are for example photographs taken by German propaganda teams, as well as a few photographs taken by Jews themselves.

RESEARCH AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Jewish Historical Institute is both an academic and educational institution whose role is to educate people about the millennium of Jewish history in Polish lands. Weekly academic seminars take place at the Institute, as well as national and international conferences. The Institute participates in several academic programs run jointly by Polish and foreign institutions.

Thirteen historians research all periods of Polish-Jewish history, from the Middle Ages to the period after the Second World War. The Institute nevertheless tries to focus its research on the period for which it has the greatest volume of archival materials – the Holocaust and the first years after the war.

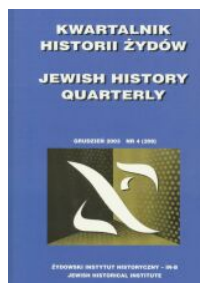
The Institute regularly publishes its academic journal *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów/Jewish History Quarterly* (which is a continuation of the journal published from 1950-2000 under the name *Biuletyn ŻIH*). 2001, the *Kwartalnik* has also published texts in English and German.

The JHI's educational activities began in 1992, when week-long summer courses were launched for high school teachers, teaching methodologists and lecturers from teacher training colleges. It was called the "Summer School of History and Culture of the Polish Jews." Over the next few years, the educational activities offered to teachers were broadened to include museum visits for schoolchildren and public lectures as well. The aim was to acquaint a broader segment of society with the history and culture of the Polish Jews. The main educational aims of the Institute are to discuss all aspects of the Holocaust, to debunk myths and stereotypes, to show the common historical heritage of Jews and Poles, to analyze the genesis and manifestations of anti-Semitism as a problem in Poland today, and also to suggest methods for teaching in this field.

In recent years, special emphasis has been placed on the Institute's educational activities in the field of advancing knowledge about the Holocaust in Polish schools.

Since 2000, the Institute has run an "Open University" – a regular monthly series of public lectures on the history of the Jews, their religion and customs, and on Polish-Jewish relations.

Classes are also organized for school groups, which are conducted by the museum staff and the research section, who help young people to become acquainted with the history, art and religious traditions of Polish Jews.



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The Jewish Historical Institute is the only institution in Poland focused entirely on the study of the history and culture of Polish Jews. It is the largest depository of Jewish-related archival documents, books, journals, and museum objects. The preservation of collections which document the past richness of Jewish experience in Poland is a starting point for expanding and making them meaningful to the public. In democratic Poland there has been enormous demand for reliable information about Jews and their life, their role in Polish history and culture. Filling in the blanks in public consciousness and correcting harmful distortions are guiding principles of the work done at JHI, be it reference service, research projects, education, exhibits, or publishing.

The Institute is located in the building of the former Main Judaic Library, built during the years 1928-1936. The building housed library space, reading rooms, large auditorium and exhibition rooms. The Institute for Judaic Studies was also located in the new building. Opened on February 9, 1928, the Institute became the first academic and educational center in Europe to include both theological and lay subjects side by side, both historical and social sciences.

The war and German occupation meant a stop to the activities at Main Judaic Library and the Institute for Judaic Studies. In November and December 1939, Germans removed the library collections. The building, soon included in the ghetto, at that time housed the Jewish Social Self-Help organization. Literary evenings were held here, as well as theater productions, events for children, and symphony concerts – the first of which took place on November 25, 1940. The clandestine *Oneg Shabbat* (Joy of Sabbath) group, which was founded by the historian Emanuel Ringelblum, also met here.

In 1946, Warsaw government officials gave the half-ruined building to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce - CKŻP), which had been founded in late November 1944 in Lublin, in the part of Poland that had already been liberated. CKŻP's first decision was to call into being the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna - CZKH). Its members began trying to preserve material traces of the past: books, archival materials, religious objects, paintings and sculptures. At the same time, evidence of Nazi crimes was also collected. All of the materials collected were deposited in the Jewish Historical Institute in the building on Tłomackie Street, rebuilt and reopened in May 1947 through the efforts of Jewish foreign organizations.



This is how JHI came to fulfill the role of guardian of the richest collection of objects of Jewish culture that survived the Holocaust. At the same time, it became the only Jewish academic institution in Poland, and, until recently, the only institution of its kind in East Central Europe.

The Institute is comprised of five main sections: the archive, library, museum, academic research and education division, section dealing with documentation of historical sites, and genealogical research section. The Institute also has its own laboratories for paper conservation and for the microfilming of archival materials. The Jewish Historical Institute Association is the corporate body responsible for the building and the Institute's holdings. The Institute falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, and is financed principally with funds from the Ministry of Science.

ARCHIVES

The Archives of the JHI is one of the most important repositories of primary source materials for the study of the history of Jews in Poland, particularly for the period of the Second World War and the Holocaust. The Archives contain a total of approximately 700 running meters of documents, including materials from the postwar period and those surviving from some of the prewar Jewish communities.

The main part of the collection consists of materials collected by the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CZKH). Thanks to this organization, with the cooperation of all Jewish organizations and the help of many private individuals, it was possible to find and save many various materials and documents related to the culture and history of the Polish Jews. The most important task of the Commission was to collect documentation regarding the Holocaust (currently approximately 60% of the Jewish Historical Institute's collections). This documentation was used as evidence in war crimes trials, including the largest, in Nuremberg.

A particularly valuable part of the Jewish Historical Institute's collections is the unique clandestine Warsaw Ghetto Archive, known by the name of the man who created it, the **Ringelblum Archive**. This outstanding historian formed and directed a group whose main task was to document what life was like in the Warsaw ghetto – the largest ghetto in occupied Europe. The group also recorded any information they received from refugees and those transferred from other areas of occupied Poland, as well as documented the occupying power's policies and all aspects of life and death in the ghettos and camps.

Ringelblum's collaborators hid the Archive's collections on August 3, 1942 (in ten tin boxes), and in late February 1943 (in two large metal milk containers) beneath the basement of the school at 68 Nowolipki Street. The third set of materials was hidden the night before the ghetto uprising broke out, i.e., April 19, 1943, on the premises of the brush-making workshop at 34 Świętojerska Street. The Archive's materials, hidden on Nowolipki Street, were found in the ruins of the ghetto in September 1946 and December 1950. The third part has not yet been found.

In 1999, the Archive was added to the UNESCO "Memory of the World" register, which includes the most important examples of documentary heritage.

In 1997, the Jewish Historical Institute launched the publication of a monumental series of materials from the Ringelblum Archive. To date, three volumes of this series have been published.



SECTION FOR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

The section helps Jews from all over the world search for their roots in Poland. People who turn to the section for help still have hope that their family members are alive, as do those who have just recently discovered their own Jewish roots, and who now wish to learn more about their ancestors. Thanks to the Institute's archival resources and databases, it sometimes proves possible, even many years later, to find that information. In many cases, the Project's efforts have led to the reunion of family members who have been scattered all over the world.

LIBRARY

The JHI Library is the only library in Poland specializing exclusively in Jewish subject matter. It is the largest collection in Poland on Jewish history, culture and religion. The library continues the tradition of the largest prewar Jewish library in Poland – the Main Judaic Library. The library's current collection is based on volumes that were collected during the years 1944-1949 in the Central Jewish Library, including fragments that were recovered from the Main Judaic Library, the libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Wrocław and the Yeshiva (religious studies college) of the Sages of Lublin, as well as other private and public Jewish libraries. The collection of manuscripts and old prints includes items from libraries and archives in Warsaw, Berlin, Vienna, Prague and Wrocław that were looted by the Germans and hidden in Lower Silesia, and then found again after 1945. The library currently holds over 80,000 volumes and is the only one in Poland to have a separate catalogue of books and journals in Hebrew and Yiddish, in their original alphabet.



MUSEUM



The Institute's important Judaica collection includes over 11,000 objects. There are items from synagogues and an excellent collection of Jewish painting, sculpture and graphics. There are also historical mementos, for the most part objects from the ghettos and camps, including the emblems of discrimination, such as armbands and patches with the Star of David, signs, notices and food ration cards. The bulk of the museum's collection is comprised of items acquired just after the war. There are two permanent exhibitions on display in the Institute's main building. The first of these is of Jewish art, both religious and secular. It shows the rich spiritual and artistic life of Polish Jews. The second exhibition is devoted to the history of the Warsaw ghetto and its destruction.

