



MUSEUM
OF THE
HISTORY
OF POLISH
JEWS
NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL

MHPJ NEWSLETTER

NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL

September 2007 No. 9



Museum of the History of Polish Jews Groundbreaking Ceremony

CONTENT

NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Victor Markowicz
CHAIRMAN

Sigmund A. Rolat
CHAIRMAN

Stephen D. Solender
PRESIDENT

Michael Berkowicz
TREASURER / CHAIR NY REGION

David Goldman
CHAIR CORPORATE FUNDRAISING INITIATIVE

CONTACTS

NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

Stephen D. Solender
130 East 59th St, New York, NY 10022
Tel. 212 584-3300
Fax 212 836-1387
solenders@ujafedny.org
info@mhpjnac.org
www.mhpjnac.org

Lori Sherman
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
lsherman@mhpjnac.org

MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

4/6 Warecka Street
00-040 Warsaw, Poland
Tel. +48 22 833-0021
Fax +48 22 832-2043
museum@jewishmuseum.org.pl
www.jewishmuseum.org.pl



**Museum of the History of Polish
Jews Groundbreaking Ceremony**



Corporate Commitments



On the Congressional Record



**A New Poland, A New Paradigm:
Tad Taube in Ha'aretz**



**Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange
for High School Students
Inaugurated**



Chris Schwarz — In Memoriam



**Become a Supporter
of the Museum**

Cover Page: First row, left to right: Museum Director Jerzy Halbersztadt, President Lech Kaczynski, Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz.

Second Row, left to right: Rabbi Meir Lau and NAC Chairman Victor Markowicz.

In the background: left to right, United States Ambassador Victor Ashe and Israel Ambassador David Peleg.

Museum of the History of Polish Jews Groundbreaking Ceremony



Right to left: Jerzy Halbersztadt, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, Project Chairman Marian Turski and Victor Markowicz.

The official Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews was held on June 26th, 2007, marking the culmination of a decade's work to establish an educational and cultural center commemorating a thousand years of Polish-Jewish history. Hundreds of guests braved the pouring rain as the ceremony began with a speech by the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczynski. The President spoke of the great sense of hope the project embodies, explaining that the Museum "offers a tremendous opportunity to overcome a mutual lack of understanding and to achieve deeper reconciliation." He highlighted the bonds that link the two nations: "...it goes without saying that the history of Polish Jews is part of the history of my country."

The Minister of Culture and National Heritage Kazimierz Michal Ujazdowski commended the project's contribution to shaping future generations: "This Museum not only repays a debt of gratitude towards generations past, but it will also carry forth a vibrant educational message for young people."



Warsaw Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz explained how the Museum would exemplify, as well as itself become, an important part of Warsaw's history. Richard von Weizsacker, former President of Germany, reflected on the burden of history that the Museum will shoulder, as did Marian Turski, Chairman of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute. Special White House representative Tevi D. Troy spoke on behalf of US President George W. Bush, thanking the Museum creators.

The speech by Tel Aviv's Chief Rabbi, Meir Lau, made an emotional appeal as to the importance of the Museum project: "After 62 years, I come to pay tribute to courage. To thank and express our admiration and appreciation for the initiative, for the good will, for the idea to tell the story of the millions of Jews, who lived here about one thousand years, and were a part of the history of this great country and this great nation – Poland."

Museum Director Jerzy Halbersztadt concluded the remarks before the signing of the Groundbreaking document.





As the sun broke through the clouds, the document was cemented into an unearthed fragment of the “Non-existent City” – the foundations of the former Jewish district razed by the Nazis during World War II.

Other meetings complemented the main ceremony. On the day prior, Minister Anna Fotyga hosted a welcoming event for guests. Honored guests were received at a breakfast hosted by President Kaczynski. General Director of the National Opera Janusz Pietkiewicz organized a special concert by the Wiener Philharmoniker, while the public was invited to an outdoor screening of the film “Five Cities” at the Museum site.



Groundbreaking-related events continued in Krakow during the city's Jewish Culture Festival. Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, head of the Museum's core exhibition planning team, gave a lecture entitled “Building a Modern Museum”. The team, according to the professor, is “developing [the Museum's] content by posing difficult questions and not eschewing complex issues to initiate a dialogue that will continue for a long time after visitors leave the Museum itself.” ■



Photo 1: Dignitaries at the Groundbreaking Ceremony.

Photo 2: Right to left: Jerzy Halbersztadt, NAC Chairman Sigmund Rolat, Victor Markowicz, Marian Turski, Tad Taube and President Lech Kaczynski.

Photo 3: Dignitaries at the Groundbreaking Ceremony



Corporate Commitments

Behind the scenes of the public support on display during its Groundbreaking ceremonies, the development of corporate backing for the Museum continues apace. Following on the successful launch of the corporate support campaign last December at the Warsaw residence of U.S. Ambassador and Mrs. Victor Ashe, a second event was held at the National Opera House prior to the concert performance by the Wiener Philharmoniker.

Each member of the Corporate Committee has offered leadership and generous support to the Museum project. Some of the remarkable contributors include:

- The Warsaw office of **Weil, Gotshal and Manges** for extensive in-kind legal support.
- **KPMG Poland** for underwriting the institutional audit.
- **Eurozet** for Groundbreaking sponsorship.
- **AIG Polska** and **American International Group** for Groundbreaking sponsorship.
- **Boeing International** for supporting educational and outreach initiatives at the Ohel, the temporary installation on the Museum site.

The Museum and the North American Council are also pleased to welcome three new corporate sponsors who lent generous support to the Groundbreaking: **Axel Springer Poland**, **West LB** and **Ronson Development Corporation**. ■

On the Congressional Record

On June 14, 2007, the Florida Congressional Representative Alcee L. Hastings spoke to his colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives "in praise of the Museum of Polish Jews in Warsaw, Poland." The following are excerpts.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my support for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, Poland.

Last month, I had the opportunity to travel to Poland, and I was deeply inspired by my meeting with Jerzy Halbersztadt, the Executive Director of the Museum, and Ewa Wierzyńska, the Deputy Director. I commend them for their extraordinary hard work and vision in bringing this museum to life. A groundbreaking ceremony for the museum, located in the heart of the pre-World War II Jewish district, will be held on June 26th. I also commend the municipality of Warsaw and the Government of Poland for supporting the establishment of this important institution.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews will enhance understanding of Jewish history and cultural roots at a time when anti-Semitism is growing throughout Europe. As a former President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and now as Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I am heartened by the educational role this museum can play in fulfilling the goals that the OSCE participating States have undertaken in the field of combating anti-Semitism.

Madam Speaker, it is estimated that eighty percent of all Jews and over 9 million Americans trace some of their ancestry to the Polish Jewish community. This museum has the potential to touch the lives of our own citizens in deeply personal ways. I look forward to visiting it myself. ■



Congressman Alcee L. Hastings



A New Poland, A New Paradigm: Tad Taube in Ha'aretz

by Tad Taube

Below are excerpts from an op-ed piece which ran in Ha'aretz on July 19, 2007. Tad Taube is chairman of Taube Philanthropies, president of the Koret Foundation, and a major donor to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

The troubled relationship between Jews and Poland – burdened by historical anti-Semitism and events of the Holocaust – is at a potentially positive turning point. Ironically, it has fallen on Israel to join in leading the way forward.

That presents difficulties for Israel, since much of the worst Nazi brutality toward Jews during the Holocaust took place on Polish soil. Despite the bravery and decency of Poles who sought to protect Jews, some Poles succumbed to overt or passive cooperation with the Nazi killing machine.

Poland today is a far cry from the Poland of World War II. Jewish life in Poland is experiencing a rebirth – modest, perhaps, when compared to pre-Holocaust Jewish life, when Poland's Jewish population was 3 million, but significant nonetheless.

Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz and Wroclaw all boast newly thriving Jewish communities. Polish universities have steadily increased Jewish studies programs and the government has set aside \$27 million to fund the new \$80 million museum in Warsaw to document Jewish history and culture in Poland. A growing list of Jewish writers is being translated into Polish and Krakow's annual Jewish culture festival attracts 20,000 or more.

On the diplomatic front, ties between Poland and Israel have never been stronger. Poland was the second ex-Soviet bloc nation to re-establish official relations with the Jewish state. Military ties between the two nations have also solidified, as have investments and other private business endeavors. Israeli diplomats readily acknowledge that Poland is the most pro-Israeli country in the European Union.

Poland, as its president, Lech Kaczynski, has said, is today “a friend of Israel”.

This good will is largely shared by Polish civil society. Poland has few anti-Israeli hecklers, slanderous media, or boycott organizers. Shock and outrage over a recent neo-Nazi demonstration in Krakow was expressed not only by Jewish tourists who were subject to anti-Semitic and anti-Israel slurs, but also by many Poles, who staged a spontaneous counter-demonstration. Programs which sponsor Israeli teen visits to Poland, such as March of the Living, need to have their emphasis reordered to focus much less on death in Nazi-operated extermination camps and much more on 800 years of Jewish history and culture.

None of what I write should be misunderstood as a declaration that anti-Semitism has been completely eradicated in Poland. It remains a reality, but where is it not? More to the point is official Poland's attempts to come to grips with its history and make amends to the extent possible.

The horrors of the Holocaust cannot be overlooked or minimized. At the same time, life must move forward. It is time for Jews – Israelis in particular – to be open to Poland's desire for reconciliation and friendship. It is not enough to feed Israeli youth a steady diet of death, destruction, and historical anti-Semitism. Israel's educational leaders and March of the Living organizers need to incorporate the new Poland into their thinking. ■



President Lech Kaczynski and Tad Taube

Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange for High School Students Inaugurated

Following the success of the MHPJ's first Polish-Israeli Youth Exchange (PIYE) at the university level last fall, the program recently inaugurated its first exchange for high school students. Between July 17th and 26th, 2007, a group of twelve Israeli students from Tel Aviv-area high schools came to Poland to live and spend time with twelve of their Polish peers, learning first-hand about life in Poland.



Over the course of a ten-day stay – five in Warsaw and five in Krakow – the students participated in a series of workshops focused on issues common to Polish and Jewish history. Time was taken in both cities to tour the many historical sites. On Friday evening, they enjoyed the hospitality of the Jewish Community of Warsaw at a specially arranged Shabbat dinner.

The most emotional part of the trip was the visit to the concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Students toured the camps together, and then had the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings.

The bond created among the students was evident in the warmth expressed during a farewell party. It was no teary departure, however, as the Israeli students were scheduled to receive their new friends in their own country in late August – a visit that undoubtedly cemented life-long relationships and provides solid foundations on which to build a common future and an ongoing dialogue. ■

It was not only great fun, but also a great lesson. I am sure that through our itinerary in Poland and in Israel we will gain precious memories for the rest of our lives.

Filip Dzimwasha

Chris Schwarz

On July 29th, 2007, a great friend and supporter of both the Museum and of Polish Jews as a whole passed away. Chris Schwarz, 59, succumbed to cancer at his home in Krakow. His was a life that will be much remembered by those who knew him, and that bequeaths a legacy to many who did not.

Having first arrived in Krakow shortly after the fall of communism in Poland, Mr. Schwarz became enamored with the Jewish heritage of the city, and then the nation. A freelance photographer, he set to documenting Jewish sites in Galicia, the historical region of East Central Europe now divided between Poland and Ukraine that had been a homeland to Jews since medieval times. To house his photographs, Mr. Schwarz opened the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow three years ago.



The Galicia Museum became a Jewish Community Center of sorts during a time when the city and nation saw a renewed interest in its Jewish heritage. Along with seminars, classes and concerts, this museum also served as host to MHPJ-related events during Krakow's annual Jewish Culture Festival. An avid supporter of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the mission it represents, Mr. Schwarz will be greatly missed by the wide-ranging community of people who are intent on the preservation and furtherance of Poland's Jewish heritage and community. ■



About The North American Council

The North American Council of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews serves to support the educational mission and fundraising efforts for the Museum. It is comprised of a Board of Directors, staff members and a volunteer Committee of Support. For further information please contact Lori Sherman, 212-584-3300 or email Lsherman@mhpjnac.org ■

Become a Supporter of the Museum

Please help us maintain the momentum we have achieved on the path to building the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Become a supporter of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews today. The Museum project needs your financial support more than ever in order to finance the permanent exhibit, temporary exhibits, education and outreach programs, and to maintain ongoing operations. To donate online go to www.mhpjnac.org/Donate-info.htm or call 212-584-3300.

Please let us know if you would like to host a parlor meeting devoted to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews for your friends and family members. Call Stephen Solender at 212-836-1806 or email solenders@ujafedny.org ■

Please forward the newsletter to your friends. To be added to our email list, please contact us at newsletter@mhpjnac.org For more information about the Museum of the History of Polish Jews North American Council or to send your comments e-mail info@mhpjnac.org To subscribe just send us a return e-mail with "SUBSCRIBE" in subject line. To unsubscribe please send e-mail with "UNSUBSCRIBE" in subject line.

SUPPORT

