

JEWISH
GENEALOGY
AT JHI



Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center

of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw
www.jhi.pl/genealogia

2013 year-end report

Welcome to the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center

Thanks to your support we help people around the world to reconnect with their families' heritage. This report will introduce you to who we are and what we do. For more information simply go to www.jhi.pl/genealogia



CO-DIRECTOR ANNA PRZYBYSZEWSKA DROZD (FOREGROUND) AND ALEKSANDRA DYBKOWSKA (BACKGROUND) ASSIST SOME OF THE THOUSAND-PHYS VISITORS PER YEAR WHO COME IN PERSON TO THE OFFICES OF THE GENEALOGY CENTER.

Helping Jews discover their Polish roots and Poles discover their Jewish roots.

2013 has been a year full of new experiences resulting from going virtual. In addition to answering your requests by email and on the spot, we tried to meet your expectations for useful articles on genealogy-related subjects. However, we will always keep the human touch and continue to provide personal services in person and by email. Should you happen to be in

Warsaw, come over and say hello. We're always glad to meet our friends and supporters.

Based in Warsaw, the Genealogy Center is a department of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), which holds the world's largest collection of archival and other materials about Poland's Jewish history. Here we provide our services through expert advice, research, attentive discussions with our clients, and the careful reading and interpretation of old and more recent documents from Poland's centuries-long Jewish presence.

Yale J. Reisner and Anna Przybyszewska Drozd are assisted by Aleksandra Dybkowska and Szymon Gebert in genealogical research and consultations; Aleksandra Sajdak is our Facebook manager.

What We Do

We answer all kinds of genealogy-related questions from people in Poland and across the globe. Most of them contact us by email or phone, while others visit us in person. Can we help a young Polish woman recover her newly discovered Jewish background? Yes, certainly. Can we provide a speaker for a tour group soon to arrive in Warsaw? We can do that, too. Can we help long-lost relatives from different parts of the world reunite after decades of separation? From time to time, we do. How can we assist local and international Jewish communal organizations seeking family-related information? We can locate and analyze

documents for them and point them in the most productive directions. And we are always available to offer friendly, expert assistance in person, by email, or by phone.

Internships

Last year we accepted three interns: Adam Gelman was an exceptional one; we first met him when he showed up to search for family roots. At that time he was interning at the Galicia Jewish Museum in



INTERN ADAM GELMAN (LEFT) AND STAFF MEMBER ALEKSANDRA DYBKOWSKA (STANDING) HELP GUESTS RESEARCH THEIR FAMILIES.

Kraków. Once he noticed how effective and important our work was, he decided to stay for a month. Being a young genealogist himself, Adam consulted with some of our clients both via email and in the office. Back at Brandeis University, Adam continues working with us. Currently he is writing an article about American genealogical records.

Thanks to Warsaw's Collegium Civitas we were able to work cooperatively with another intern, Stephanie, a Carroll College graduate fascinated with Jewish history in Poland. We have accepted new ap-

plications from Collegium Civitas for internship programs for this coming summer.

We also initiated a cooperative working relationship with the Synopsis Foundation project, aimed at offering professional workplace activities to persons with autism. Our first intern through that program was Oskar, who studies History at Warsaw University, and his successful internship at our Center resulted in us signing a part-time contract with him for archiving tasks.

Archiving

Archiving of our resources became one of our priorities. Because we document each research result, visit, and all correspondence, there are dozens of boxes filled with thousands of papers dating back to 1995, which need to be organized, catalogued, and scanned. All these types of information on Polish Jewish families need to be integrated into our database to make our research more comprehensive and effective. Oskar — our archiving technician—began organizing, paginating, cataloging, and digitizing these records.

This year the process will continue but on a much more comprehensive scale.

Not only have you helped me learn about my family's past, but you've led me to the discovery of a vast family that is still alive and thriving in Poland today. Without your assistance, this would never have been possible. My grandmother went to her grave thinking the entire family in Poland had been killed.

—Corinne

Website and Facebook

The statistics provided by our IT specialists show a growing interest in our website from both new and returning visitors. The first year of activity showed that www.jhi.pl/genealogia is a popular link for people interested in their Jewish genealogy, especially, those looking for their Jewish roots in Poland. Our site helps users interact with us in a productive way once they have learned the basics found in our articles, such as “Searching for Roots” at www.jhi.pl/en/genealogy/genealogy_stories/6. These articles impart general knowledge about genealogical research and, through carefully chosen stories, help searchers understand that each case requires a unique approach. Additionally, we have started presenting unfinished stories, in which searches are in progress. By presenting these stories through our website and especially our Facebook page, we increase our chances of finding even more specific clues and connections.

For the past 12 months we have been gaining ex-

perience in using Facebook, learning how to create posts that can result in a dialogue. Recently, a visiting Israeli man sang for us a famous partisan song he remembered from elementary school in Poland. We immediately posted this on our Facebook page, which resulted in a cascade of shares, likes, and comments. Also, through Facebook we can post photos of our guests along with the names of families and towns they are searching for, which builds up an additional database searchable via Google.

Thank you again for opening my eyes to the Polish heritage of my family. After talking with you yesterday, and after exploring the Genealogy section of the Jewish Historical Institute's website this morning, I begin to understand the scope of your mission.
—Rosalyn, Los Angeles



IN ONE OF OUR NEW INITIATIVES, WE CONDUCTED A GENEALOGY WORKSHOP WITH KINDERGARTENERS AT LAUDER MORASHA SCHOOL IN WARSAW.

Highlights

We constantly keep our eyes out for opportunities that we sense can turn into helpful discoveries or create new liaisons. For example, this past year we:

- Began cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Department of Foreigners aimed at preparing a guidebook on citizenship matters, which concern many of our clients.
- Started offering our clients help in requesting records from the archives in exchange for their donations.



A 2013 VISIT FROM THE BALTIMORE AREA HILLEL.

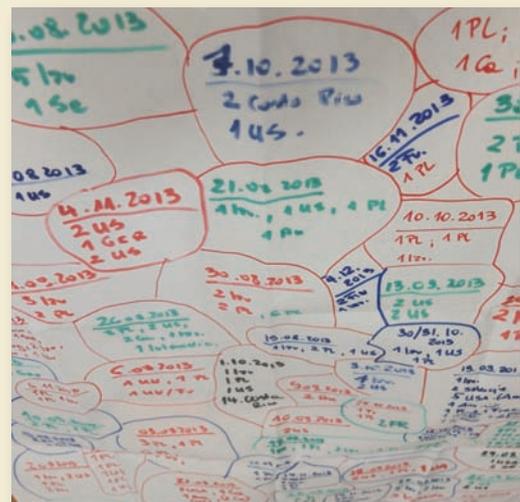
• Developed a very successful genealogy workshop for the Jewish kindergarten of the Lauder Morasha School in Warsaw. These workshops may be continued in cooperation with the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

• Opened preliminary discussions with the International Jewish Genealogical Conference on organizing their 2018 Conference in Warsaw, in cooperation with the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland.

Who Walks In? And from Where?

Poland	302	The Netherlands	6
USA	296	Belarus	2
Israel	249	Columbia	2
Canada	69	Russia	2
Australia	43	Spain	2
France	34	Belgium	1
South Africa	24	Ecuador	1
Germany	20	Hungary	1
Sweden	18	Ireland	1
United Kingdom	15	Switzerland	1
Argentina	15	Ukraine	1
Austria	8		
Mexico	7	TOTAL	1,120

Visitors to our Warsaw Office, 2013



COUNTING OUR GUESTS, MARCH-JULY 2013

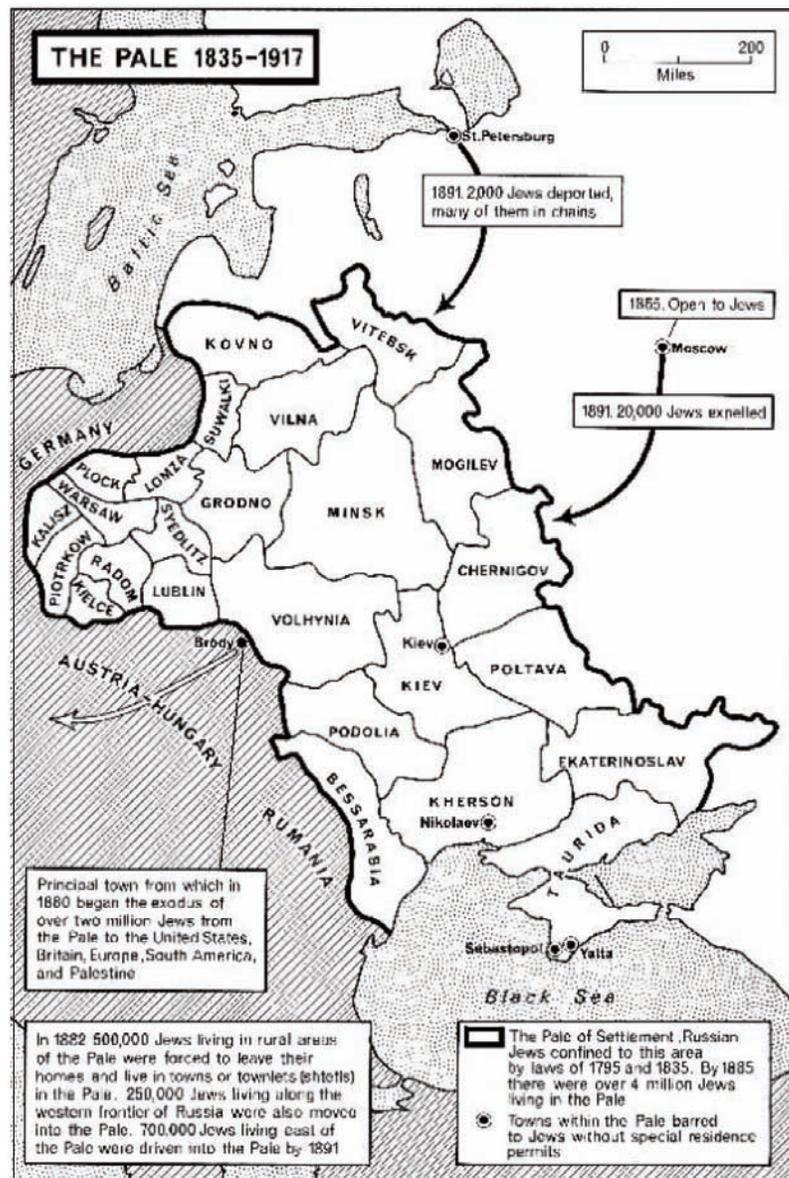
Common Question: Am I a Russian Jew or a Polish Jew?

Most Jews worldwide who understand themselves to have come from Russia have roots in the large Eastern region of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was annexed by Russia during the Polish partitions.

The Russian Empire itself had always banned Jewish settlement. Except for a minority of merchant families granted special privileges to live in St. Petersburg or Moscow, Russian Jews were from historically Polish lands and were originally welcomed to live on these lands as a result of the unique political and economic structure and climate of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, not of Russia.

When Catherine the Great acquired the eastern lands of Poland in the late 18th century, however, she became ruler over the world's largest population of Jews, Polish Jews. Her solution was to ban Jews from moving outside of a zone known as the Pale of Settlement, an act that created increasing impoverishment, lack of employment, extreme overcrowding, and limited access to professions or to higher (secular) education.

The suffering of Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement was compounded by the cruel policy of forced conscription of young boys into the Czar's army and by politically motivated pogroms, most notably following the assassination of Czar Nicholas in 1882, which precipitated the mass emigration of "Russian" Jews to the United States at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.



RUSSIAN PALE OF SETTLEMENT, THE TERRITORIES OF POLAND ACQUIRED BY RUSSIA DURING THE PARTITIONS, AND WITHIN WHICH JEWS IN RUSSIA WERE FORCED TO REMAIN. THE PALE IN ITS FULL FORM BEGAN IN 1835 AND DID NOT END UNTIL THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION DURING WORLD WAR I.

(MAP COURTESY JEWISH VIRTUAL LIBRARY)

(Excerpted from Field Guide to Jewish Warsaw and Krakow © 2012, page 83. Published by the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland.)

Special Donor Feature

Susan and Moses Libitzky



SUSAN AND MOSES LIBITZKY, STANDING BEHIND MOSES'S MOTHER, EVA (IN YELLOW SHIRT), TRAVELED TO POLAND WITH THREE GENERATIONS OF THEIR FAMILY IN JUNE 2013. EVA IS HOLDING A COPY OF HER MEMOIR, "OUT ON A LEDGE: ENDURING THE ŁÓDŹ GHETTO, AUSCHWITZ AND BEYOND." IN THE FOREGROUND ARE MEMBERS OF THE TAUBE CENTER STAFF AND PARTICIPANTS IN THE MI DOR LE DOR JEWISH HERITAGE EDUCATORS PROGRAM.

Susan and Moses Libitzky of Piedmont, California, are long-term major supporters of the Genealogy Center. Having first visited us in Warsaw in 2007, the Libitzkys have been instrumental in helping us expand into the virtual world. Last summer, the Libitzkys returned to Poland with three generations of their extended family, including Moses's 89-year-old mother, Eva. Their 10-day tour was crafted by the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland. Susan reflected, "Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren experienced what life was like as Eva and her parents struggled to survive. Her bravery and resilience were an inspiration as we laughed and cried, tracing her footsteps and hearing her extraordinary stories. We are all so grateful for her willingness to share this rich family history."

Steps On Our Journey

THE GENEALOGY CENTER'S INTERACTIVE web presence is being launched in phases, as funding becomes available. Start-up grants from the Kronhill Pletka Foundation and the Koret Foundation helped design and launch the website.

Achieving the ambitious goals of this project will require help from friends of the Genealogy Center. During the next 12 months the most pressing needs are for new staff:

- **PROGRAMMER.** The Institute has created an improved data-entry standard for its database, and we must develop a program that will make our database compatible with it. This is a high-priority project.

SUPPORT GOAL: \$12,000

- **WEBMASTER** for the genealogy website to keep our pages current and to field incoming queries from all over the world.

SUPPORT GOAL: \$16,000

- **MANAGER/TECHNICIAN** for the Database of Polish Towns, Cities, and Villages. The Genealogy Center has compiled information on 2,800+ locations in today's Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Kaliningrad district of Russia, all of which are or were part of the Polish Republic. The manager will oversee creation of the database and assist in its compilation.

SUPPORT GOAL: \$20,000

HELP US STEP INTO THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

BY CHECK PAYABLE TO: Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture **MEMO LINE:** Genealogy Center

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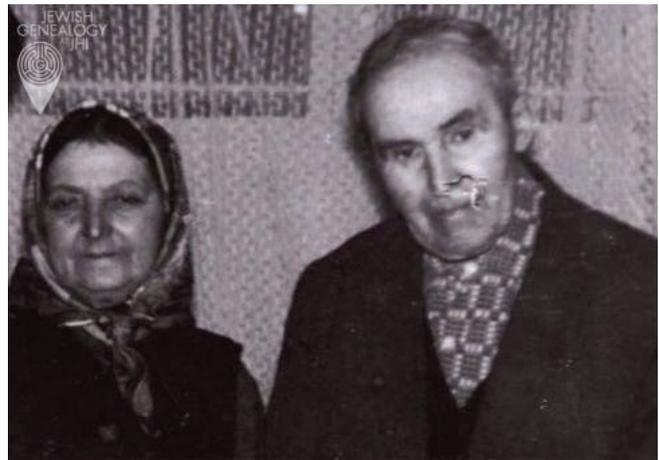
familyheritage@jhi.pl

Two of the Many Stories from Our Archives

They called me their “Yiddishe papa”

“My Mom, Michalina, was baking big loafs of bread every day and secretly carried them to the woods. She bathed the little ones, and sewed them new clothes. During the cold winter months, children of the runaways spent the nights in the house. My Mom would then feed, wash, hug, and put them to bed. It was the happiest years of her life. She was saving shivering little beings, looking in their sad eyes, she put them to sleep. My God! How much she wept telling us these horrible war-time stories.” This is how Jadwiga Kuriata writes about her mother, three years after her death, in a letter that we received from her. “I’m longing to meet the children, or grandchildren of our Jews.”

This story took place in the village of Pyplo, Volyn region (now Ukraine), in the years 1942 to 1944. After the Germans captured these lands, Jews escaping the massacres in the nearby towns of Ludwipol, Rokitno, and Korzec hid in the local woods. Without food or shelter, they waited. They must have been aware that each day someone could have tipped off the Germans about their hideout, but this is not what happened. A group of them met a farmer from Pyplo, Mikolaj Kuriata, and his family, which included his daughter Michalina. Soon, 50 Jews found shelter in the Kuriatas’ barn, family house, and nearby woods. Even though, as Kuriata testified in 1949, “other Jews were against [me] taking such a



MIKOŁAJ KURIATA, RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS, WITH HIS WIFE, DEONIZJA

number,” they all safely survived the war. Living in the forest, they were fed and clothed by the Kuriata family. Those who had the strength did simple work.

In the testimony given by Mikolaj Kuriata, we found a fragment that makes this story even more remarkable. “Cousins of mine, neighbours even, knew that I was helping them, but reacted favorably to that, and even helped me, providing food, or warning of incoming danger. My charges called me their Yiddishe papa.”

He also explained after the war that not only all the people of Pyplo knew of the Jews in hiding, but also the local Communist partisans. No one ever informed the Germans.

Although the story of these particular witnesses to the cruelty of war ended well, the Kuriata family is left with a certain bitterness. In her letter to the Jewish Historical Institute, Jad-



AT LEFT, MICHALINA, MOTHER OF JADWIGA, WHO WROTE US THE LETTER. SHE IS SEATED WITH DEONIZJA KURIATA, JADWIGA’S GRANDMOTHER.

wiga Kuriata concludes: "My dear Mom passed away three years ago. She was still waiting, till the very end, for maybe one of the rescued Jews to come and visit her. She didn't live to see that. Pity..."

The last trace of the rescuees ends in the 1960s, when a few of them shared their stories with Yad Vashem, asking to grant Mikolaj Kuriata the title of Righteous Among the Nations, which was conferred in 1968.

Does anyone know what happened to the Jews rescued by the Kuriatas from Pyplo?

The last letter from Będzin

"When you receive this letter, there will not be on this soil a single Jewish soul." This was part of a copy of a letter we received from the grandson of a Warsaw doctor, who together with many of Warsaw's inhabitants, departed the city after the decimation of the 1944 Rising of Warsaw and eventually settled in the Czech Republic, either during or after the war.

We don't know how the copy of the letter got into the doctor's hands. The grandson found it among other personal documents of his grandfather years later.

The letter was signed by leaders of the Jewish Combat Organization (ŻOB) on the 17th of July 1943, several days before the final liquidation of the ghettos in Będzin and Sosnowiec (Środula): Frumka Płotnicka, Herszl Szpringer, Izrael Kozuch, Szlomo Lerner, and Cwi Brandes.

The letter was addressed to representatives of ŻOB's parent organization (who at that time were already in Palestine) and is a chilling first-hand report of events in occupied Poland. All of the authors lost their lives with the fall of the uprising,

which started in August 1943, repelling the attacks of the Germans in the bunker at 24 Podsiadły St. in Będzin.

There are slight differences between our copy of the letter and the version published in the *Book of Remembrance of Zagłębie*. However, we do not know whether the differences in the two copies result from differences in the original text, or if they were introduced by translation.

Text of the letter:

17.07.1943

To Wania, Mendel, Zev

Dear Friends,

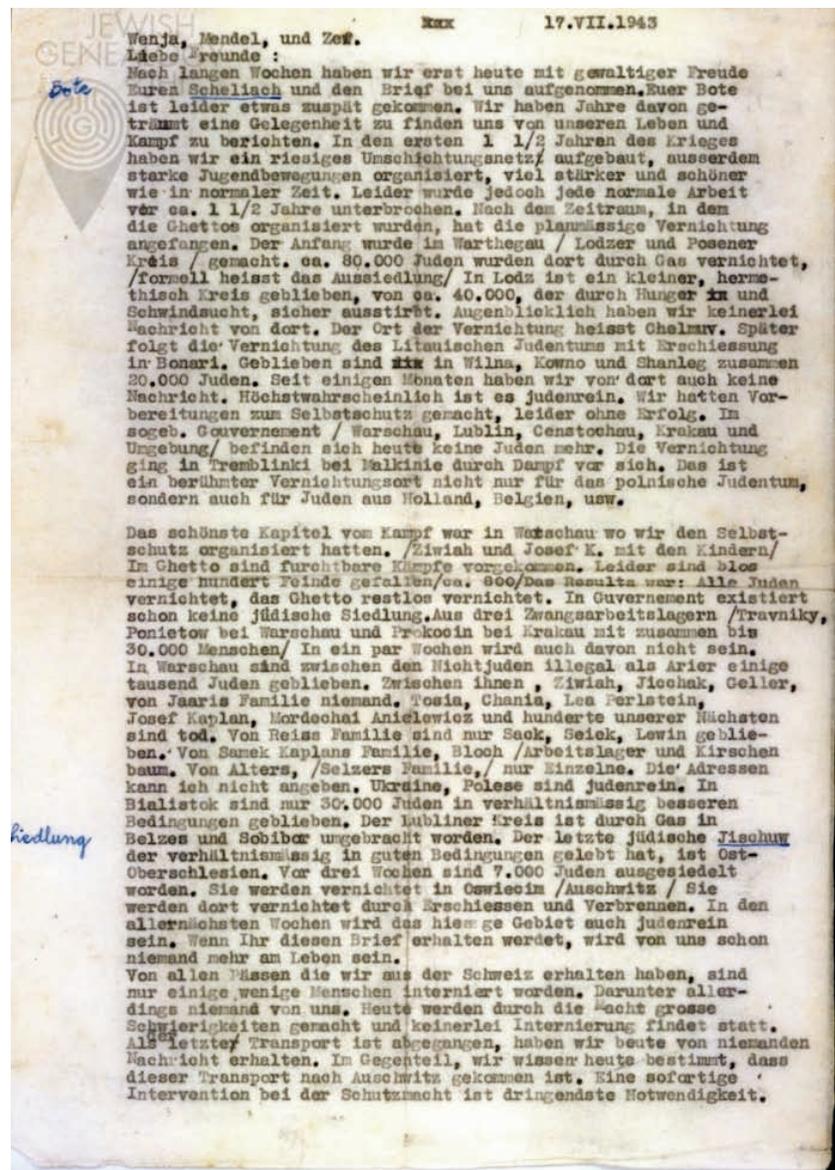
Only today with great joy, we received after long weeks of waiting, your Sheliah [messenger] with the letter. Unfortunately, he has been a little late in coming. For years we have dreamed of an opportunity to tell you about our life and our fight.

During the first 1.5 years of the war, we established a big structure, apart from that, we organized a youth movement that was stronger and better than in normal times. Unfortunately then our work of 1.5 years was torn asunder. Following the organization of the ghettos, a systematic plan of extermination began. It began in Warthegau, in the districts of Łódź and Poznań. About 80,000 Jews were poisoned by gas (officially it was known as evacuation). In Łódź, there was a small, closed, and sealed community that numbered some 40,000 who were undoubtedly dying from hunger and tuberculosis. At the moment, we don't have any information from there. This place of destruction is called Chelmno (Kulmhof). After this, came the extermination of the Lithuanian Jews who were shot to death in Ponar. Altogether, about 20,000 Jews remained in Vilna, Kovno and

Shavl. For several months now, we have had no word from there either. It appears that they have been made "Judenrein." We prepared our defenses, but unfortunately they've been unsuccessful. In the area known as "Government," Warsaw, Lublin, Czestochowa, Kraków and the surroundings, there are no Jews at all. The extermination was carried out by gas in Treblinka near Malkinia. This is an infamous place of destruction, not only for the Jews of Poland, but also for the Jews of Holland, Belgium, and so forth.

Our finest chapter was in Warsaw, where we organized the defense. Tzvia (Lubotkin) and Josef (Kaplan), the children [the reference is to the various Zionist youth movements.] Terrible battles took place in the ghetto. Sadly, only several hundred of the enemy were killed – some 800. The result was that all the Jews were killed; the ghetto was destroyed and not a trace of it remained. In the "Government" region there is no longer a Jewish settlement. Out of three labor camps, Trebnik, Poniatov and Prokochim, together numbering up to 30,000 people. In a few weeks time there will be nobody left. In Warsaw a few thousand people survived among the gentiles in an illicit manner, as Aryans. Among them being Cywia (Lubotkin), Icchak (Zukerman), and Galer (Eliezer), from the Ya'ari family [the reference is to Meir Ya'ari from the leaders of the Kibbutz Artzi movement, affiliated with Hashomer Hatzair], nobody survived. Tosia (Altman), Chentzia (Plotnicka), Leja Perlstein, Jozef Kaplan, Mordechaj Anielewicz, and hundreds of our people are dead. From the Reiss family, Enszel ("Poalei Zion"); only one Sack (Jozef)

survived; Grajak (Shalom) and Levin (Lejser). From the Samak (Kaplan) family only Bloch (Eliezer Lipka), who was in the labor camp, survived, and Kirszenbaum (Menachem). From the Alter family (Victor), only a few survived. I cannot give you the addresses. The Ukraine and Polesia are "Judenrein." In Bialystok about 20,000 Jews survived in slightly better conditions. Those from the Lublin district were completely exterminated in Belzec and Sobibor. The last Jewish settlement, which had existed under relatively better conditions, was Upper Eastern Silesia. Some three weeks ago 7,000 Jews were exiled. They are being killed in Auschwitz. They



are being shot and incinerated. In the coming weeks, our district will be without Jews. When you receive this letter, none of us will be alive.

Based on the information we received through Switzerland, only a few people were arrested [sent to the detention camp for foreign citizens]. None of us were among them. These days, the authorities are making it difficult and are no longer placing people in detention camps. To date, we have not received any word from any of those who were sent in the last dispatch. On the contrary, today we know for certain that they were sent to Auschwitz. Immediate intervention by the

patron government is of the strictest urgency.

We are not sending you the requested material, since you will be able to receive the pictures and the facts from Natan (Szwalbe) and from Zilev (Dr. Abraham Zilbersztajn).

I personally visited all the districts I have written about and witnessed all the acts of extermination. Herszl (Szpringer) is still with us; however, do not write to this address, since he is at odds with "Shiltonovitz" [the authorities]. For myself, I am also not living with him ["Shiltonovitz"] in complete tranquility. We are looking for a way to reach Hungary and request your help with this, in any way possible.

Do whatever you can. I doubt if you can help us in time, since we are nearing our final days. All the youth movements together number no more than a few hundred people, including our kibbutz members and the children's kibbutz, unofficial kibbutzim. Our hope of reaching the homeland (Eretz Yisrael) has not been realized, to our deepest regret.

Warmest regards to the Letben family (Yitzhak Tebenkin), Eliezer (Gravitski), Benderski (P. Benduri), Ya'ari (Meir), Kolodeni (Kol Moshe), Goldstein (Yitzhak), Pinkas (Lubianiker-Lavon), and all the relatives. We are writing this letter in great haste, since the messenger has no time. We haven't the strength or the patience to write everything to you, what was most important and what we wanted most.

We send heartfelt greetings.

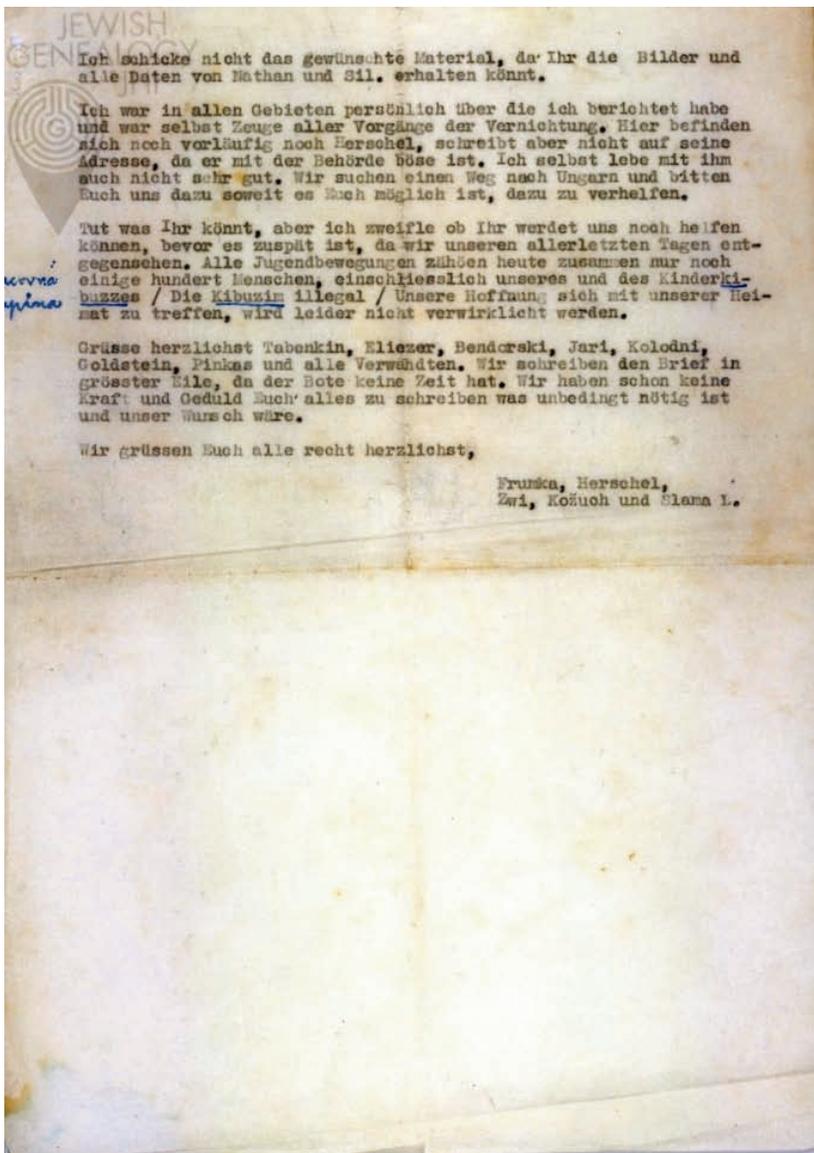
Frumke (Plotnicka)

Herszl (Szpringer)

Tzvi (Brandes)

Kozhuch (Israel)

Szlomo (Lerner)



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