



THE JEWISH GENEALOGY LEARNING CENTER

**A PROGRAM OF THE
JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE,
WARSAW, POLAND**

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AND
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Jewish Genealogy Learning Center is being created by the Jewish Historical Institute on its building site in Warsaw, Poland. The Genealogy Learning Center will be both a physical and virtual site where lay and scholarly users will have access to a central genealogical database, and a professionally trained staff to assist them. More than 70% of world Jewry comes from Poland, and the Jewish Historical Institute houses the largest repository of information on Polish Jewry. The Jewish Genealogy Center will make this information available to the growing public demand for it, both inside and outside of Poland. As an on-site facility, the Center's reach extends to international tourists and researchers with an interest in Polish Jewish history, Poles with an interest in Jewish culture and heritage, government agencies and municipalities, schools, university and study groups, including Polish Jews and their descendants. We seek multi-year funding support in the average aggregate amount of \$250,000 per year to create and launch the program. The Action Plan will include: organization and digitization of the collections; the creation of a computer learning center; and the management of the Center in its first year. (Please refer to budget attachment.)





BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Jewish Genealogy Learning Center (hereafter, the Center) is proposed as an integral and critically important addition to the institutional landscape of Polish Jewry. It is the brainchild of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, which holds the world's largest repository of information on Polish Jewry. Since 1947, the Institute has housed the vast material heritage of pre-WWII Jewry that was able to be salvaged, reclaimed, and preserved since the Central Jewish Historical Commission began its work in 1944, in Lublin, while the war was still raging. These holdings constitute artifacts, documents, photographs, and other forms of material culture housed under difficult and underfunded conditions, and have survived through the Communist era (1944-1989). Since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, Poland has undergone a sea change, from the institution of

electoral politics to economic enjoinment with the European Union. These changes in political economy have brought with them dimensions of social changes, and a newfound openness and access to information about the past. The Institute, having survived the decades of Communist censorship and enclosure, was freed to set its own agenda. This entailed enabling Polish Jews to reclaim their collective and individual histories; to provide researchers with access to archives; and to make use of its collections to illuminate the rich contributions of Polish Jewry to world history.

One of its first priorities was to create a genealogy service. In 1995, with support from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, the Institute set up a small scale genealogy project to field email queries. As more than 70% of world Jewry comes from Poland, the demand outside of Poland grew quickly. Inside of Poland, demand has likewise been growing since greater freedom of information and claims to Jewish identity by newly discovered Jews continue to increase. As a result, the extant genealogy project can no longer service the outpouring of interests in Jewish genealogy, family and social history, and the demand has far exceeded the capacity of the project



to provide state-of-the-art services in response to queries. These are unprecedented queries from individuals who are seeking to find out: Who am I? and Where do I come from?

STATEMENT OF NEED

The establishment of the Jewish Genealogy Learning Center will provide lay and scholarly researchers, international tourists, and newly identified Polish Jews with access to the largest Polish Jewish genealogical database in the world. As a program of the Jewish Historical Institute, the Center will provide critical services not otherwise readily available to a general public. In doing so, it will serve a diverse set of needs. Furthermore, the advent of digital technologies will make information more readily available in a variety of formats. The proposed Center will meet these growing needs, both inside and outside of Poland.

In Poland, where generational continuity was largely broken – primarily as a result of the Holocaust and secondarily, as a result of anti-Semitic policies in the postwar communist era - genealogists discovered that there is a tremendous attraction, a tremendous hook, in the family history as micro history. One family history invariably reflects the larger history of the





Jewish people. Having been cut off from a Jewish education, ritual and customs, genealogy is the pathway to retrieving Jewish knowledge. Requests come from Poles who have just discovered their Jewish roots, and for the first time feel safe to admit and acknowledge their Jewish heritage. On a practical level, people have to verify their Jewish identity for purposes ranging from Orthodox marriages to admissions into a Birthright program.

From outside of Poland – the largest Jewish Diaspora in the world – there is an enormous need for Jews to discover family genealogy, and a growing desire to visit the homes, towns and cities from where they and their ancestors came. Poland, together with the former Soviet Republics, constituted the Pale of Settlement that was home to most of European Jewry a century ago. By establishing the Jewish Genealogy and Learning Center there,



descendants and tourists will be able to access genealogy materials while preparing for their trip, and in so doing, will have a more enriching experience. When they are there, they can visit the Institute, where a professional team of archivists, historians, genealogists, and educators will assist them, and connect them to Jewish tour guides. These resources, in keeping with the Institute's mandate to serve the greater public, will be accessible to scholarly and lay researchers alike.

The Center addresses the institutional mission of the Jewish Historical Institute to provide grass-roots access to information relevant to family genealogy through the archival retrieval and recovery of social history. Given the future plans for the opening of a Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the Center will also bridge the more public face of the Museum with the research-oriented holdings of the Institute. In these ways, a larger purpose is also served that enables individuals to reconstitute their family histories and hold its place for present and future generations.



USERS

The Jewish Genealogy Learning Center promises to be the 21st century's destination site for popular and scholarly explorations of Eastern European Jewish heritage.

The main aims of the Center are:

- To make Polish-Jewish Heritage accessible to the non-academic public;
- To educate individuals and families about their family histories;
- To educate Jews about Poland's relationship to the Jewish people, and Poles about the Jewish contribution to Polish culture, society and history;
- To provide accurate and authentic information about Jews and Judaism to interested individuals and institutions and debunk false information;
- To coordinate grassroots efforts to preserve and protect heritage sites and artifacts, in cooperation with appropriate agencies and institutions.

In keeping with these aims, the expected users of the Center include:

- International tourists and researchers;
- Poles with an interest in Jewish culture and heritage;
- Government agencies, courts, local municipalities;
- Visiting school and university groups;
- Polish Jews and their descendants.

For Polish users, of particular relevance inside of Poland are the outcomes that surround sensitive issues of 'retrieval,' an idea that embodies various meanings and results. One result is in the newly self-discovered Jew whose identity and family history may have been suppressed for political reasons under repressive regimes. This issue, especially for Polish nationals, is one example that will require professionals with qualified cultural sensitivity training to assist visitors and researchers. In this way, the Center serves as a site beyond archival 'recovery,' by redressing the historical





record, and as a place where people can likewise meet on a common ground of mutual understanding and support. These services that the Center will provide are critical to social integration and participation in civic engagement. In these ways, the impact of the Center on civic life could have far-reaching results for both individuals in search of their Jewish roots, as well as a catalyst for healing and dialogue for Jews and Gentiles in Poland's new democracy and beyond.

PLAN OF ACTION

The digitized database of the Center will allow both on-site and off-site access to genealogical information for individuals and groups who may wish to retrieve pertinent information prior to their visit to Poland, and to otherwise assist them with locating their family roots. A professional staff of archivists, genealogists and other highly trained professionals will assist visitors and users at



every 'entry point' – via Internet access, and at the Center itself, located within the Institute's complex. The Center thereby becomes a critical node in the dissemination of information, as well as an interpretive site where learning components can be developed – such as interactive database modules, curricula and library materials, and other educational activities.

The first phase of the project (year 1) will be an electronic uploading of the relevant data, involving digitizing the appropriate documents, photographs, and records from the Institute's collections. In the second phase of the project (year 2), we will organize the computer learning center in one of the newer of the Institute's two buildings, as well as test and refine the database. By the third year, we will formally launch the Center, which will necessitate the Center's staffing, including a full-time manager. Final plans will include a fully indexed collection in broadly accessible languages, beginning with Polish, English and Hebrew translations for more broad base user accessibility.



SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Given the unique historical circumstances outlined with respect to Polish Jewry, current genealogy interest only promises to grow as people use these available resources as a way into their past. By expanding the genealogy project into its own physical structure as a Center, and by using the advances of digital technologies to create an online database, the Jewish Genealogy Center serves the mission of the Jewish Historical Institute: “to make people aware of the history that Poles and Jews share, and to help them overcome stereotypes.” For the thousands of Jews of Polish origin living outside of Poland, the Center will help them to not only uncover their individual histories, but will also help them to reunite with families who share that history from Poland. For newly-discovered Jews inside of Poland, the Center will help them to reclaim their heritage, and provide the material and cultural support they need to feel connected to their past, and to others.

As an ongoing gathering point for information and people, the Center can also be a place where stories, artifacts and family memorabilia can be shared and collected. These social gathering points – whether ‘virtual’ or in the visitor space of the Center itself – can likewise foster and preserve collective memories that are the wellspring of Jewish identity and cultural inheritance.

PROJECTED THREE-YEAR BUDGET

Year One – 2008

The first year will be characterized by preparatory work in anticipation of the Center's creation in a physical space of its own during Year Two (2008). This phase will involve:

- * purchase of staff computer hardware, software, office supplies;
- * development of database in Polish and English regarding cities, towns;
- * research: collection of basic information on each Jewish community, including locations, alternate nomenclature, brief history, historic sites and their condition, local history resources, notable figures/institutions;
- * indexing of key collections needed for database;
- * digitization of Documentation Department's photos and landmark documents;
- * computer software and hardware design for Center database and planning integration with existing JHI computer systems;
- * translations of texts;
- * architectural design for Center space;
- * technical design and contracting for building-to-building system linkage & high-speed Internet access;
- * creation of a website for Center promotion (to include an interactive map of Polish Jewish communities);
- * negotiation of copyrights, translation permissions as needed.

Anticipated Budget Requirements – Year One – 2008

Project personnel (coordination, research, consulting, translation, technical work):	\$170,000
Architectural design of Center space	\$ 6,000
Website and computer systems design	\$ 25,000
Computer system maintenance	\$ 10,000
Interactive Polish Jewish communities map (Internet accessible)	\$ 18,000
Computer equipment – first phase	\$ 12,000
Heavy-duty photocopier	\$ 12,000
Microfilm reader/printer	\$ 8,000
Administrative costs	\$ 7,000
Rental of Center space (retaining rights to gallery)	\$ 12,000
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TOTAL Year One	\$280,000

PROJECTED THREE-YEAR BUDGET

Year Two – 2009

Year Two will feature the creation of the Center in its physical home and the opening of the Center itself. This will be the most expensive year, due to start-up costs, but operating costs thereafter should be more modest. The focus in this year will be on physical plant, equipment and furnishings, while continuing the research, indexing, scanning, data backup and database creation efforts of the previous half-year. Translation of the database into Hebrew should be considered. In addition, once the Center is in place, visitor services (computer center, lectures, research guidance) and proactive collection of privately-held heritage materials (Kerem Ariel: “the repatriation of Polish Jewish memory”) will get under way.

Anticipated Budget Requirements – Year Two

Project personnel	
(coordination, research, consulting, translation, technical work):	\$170,000
Remodeling/Construction costs	\$ 30,000
Computer maintenance and software consulting	\$ 10,000
Computer equipment – second phase: Visitor Center (10 stations)	\$ 30,000
Office supplies	\$ 12,000
Furniture for staff and visitor work stations, seminar room	\$ 10,000
Administration/Maintenance	\$ 7,000
Rental of Center space	\$ 12,000
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TOTAL Year Two	\$281,000

PROJECTED THREE-YEAR BUDGET

Years Three & Four – 2010/2011

Year Three will be the first full year of the Center's running operations. While it is difficult to forecast how the Center will have developed in the interim or, at this stage, what effect the opening of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews will have on visitor flow and how the Institute and Museum and their collections will interact, general costs can be foreseen. It is also anticipated that certain publications will be developed and issued by the Center with/for the Institute.

Anticipated Budget Requirements – Years Three & Four

Project personnel (coordination, research, consulting, translation):	\$150,000
Publications	\$ 15,000
Computer maintenance and software consulting	\$ 10,000
Office supplies	\$ 12,000
Administration/Maintenance	\$ 7,000
Rental of Center space	\$ 12,000
Nat'l conference of local Jewish heritage activists (Year Three)	\$ 15,000

TOTAL Year Three (& Year Four)	\$221,000
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TOTAL Four-Year Budget	\$1,000,300
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GENEALOGY INQUIRY FORM

THE JEWISH GENEALOGY LEARNING CENTER at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw may be able to trace your family's genealogy and help you find out the current status of your family's home town in Poland. Simply fill in as much detail as you are able to, below, tear off this page and mail to:

**Jewish Genealogy Learning Center, Jewish Historical Institute,
ul. Tlomackie 3/5, 00-090 Warsaw, Poland**

Or send this information via email to:

Yale J. Reisner, Director, Jewish Genealogy Learning Center <yechielwarsaw@yahoo.com>

(Use additional sheets of paper as necessary.)

Name of Polish relative at birth _____

Date of birth _____

Name at end of war _____

Family—names, dates of birth, education and relationship to you

Place of birth (city or town, country) _____

Street address _____

Synagogue name and address if applicable _____

Family occupations, titles and addresses if applicable

Affiliations, names and addresses if applicable (such as schools, businesses, community or social groups) _____

PERSON SUBMITTING INQUIRY

Name _____

Address _____

Email address _____