

**We're going digital,  
virtual, global, and  
interactive.**

# **The Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center**

**of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw**



**Join us as we step into  
the future of the past!**

**[www.jhi.pl/genealogia](http://www.jhi.pl/genealogia)**



YALE J. REISNER, DIRECTOR

## Welcome to the Future of Polish Jewish Genealogy

THIS IS A SPECIAL MOMENT at the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center, a place of exploration and the occasional miracle, where Jews with Polish roots and Poles with Jewish roots can discover their family histories.

By the time you read this, our Center will have taken its first step into the new, virtual world of genealogical services. The launch of the homepage of our new interactive web presence [www.jhi.pl/genealogia](http://www.jhi.pl/genealogia) is the beginning of an exciting journey. We intend to take many more steps into this universe

of global reach, 24/7 accessibility, interactivity, and instantaneous access to vast collections of information about Jewish persons and families in Eastern Europe.

You can help us in our journey. But first we'd like to tell you exactly who we are, what we do, where we want to go, and what we need to reach our destination. This report will give you the basics, and for more information you can go to our homepage.

**More than 70 percent of the world's Jews have Polish roots, and we at the Genealogy Center are dedicated to helping them trace their heritage, recover it, and celebrate it.**

At the back of this report we have provided the steps for developing and funding the potential of our digital and virtual services and collections. After you read about us and our plans, please look carefully at our needs and consider where you might be able to offer support.

Finally, while we are excited about going virtual, we will always keep the human touch and continue to provide personal services by email, phone, and in person. If you should happen to be in Warsaw, come over and say hello. We're always glad to meet our friends and supporters.

—Yale J. Reisner and Anna Przybyszewska Drozd



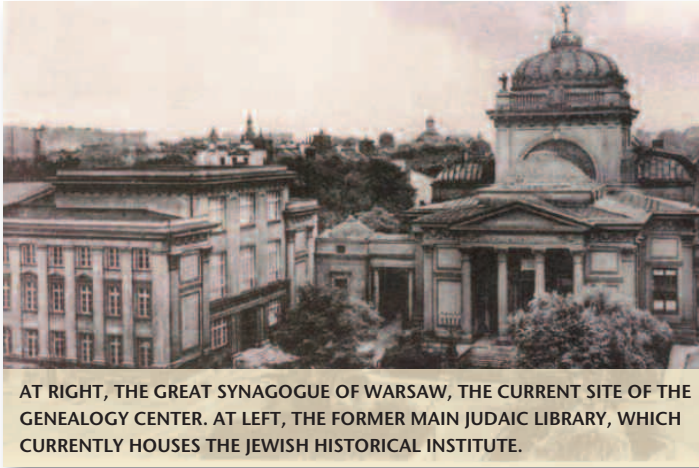
ANNA PRZYBYSZEWSKA DROZD,  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR



ALEKSANDRA DYBKOWSKA, GENEALOGY CENTER ASSISTANT.

## Who We Are

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 archival and historical 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.



AT RIGHT, THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE OF WARSAW, THE CURRENT SITE OF THE GENEALOGY CENTER. AT LEFT, THE FORMER MAIN JUDAIC LIBRARY, WHICH CURRENTLY HOUSES THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE.

The Genealogy Center is located on the former site of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw, destroyed by the Germans in 1943. It was once the second largest synagogue in Europe and could seat some 2,200 worshippers. In homage to the institution that once stood on the site, the Genealogy Center has joined a collaborative project to commemorate the synagogue in a seven-minute film featuring a woman who attended it. The exhibit and film now grace the Genealogy Center's waiting area and have been drawing much comment. More components are being planned.



AN EXHIBIT COMMEMORATING THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE OF WARSAW GRACES THE GENEALOGY CENTER'S WAITING AREA.

Director Yale J. Reisner and Associate Director Anna Przybyszewska Drozd are assisted by Aleksandra Dybkowska, who recently joined the staff after graduating from City College of New York with a B.A. thesis on the preservation of Jewish heritage in Poland. She is now finishing her M.A. from Lancaster University and the Graduate School for Social Research in Warsaw.

## What We Do

WE ANSWER all kinds of genealogical questions from people in Poland and across the globe. Most of them contact us by email or phone, while others are able to 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 in their search. And we are always available to offer friendly, expert assistance by email, by phone, or in person.

Rising interest from younger generations and increasing openness on the part of older generations are important elements in a growing quest for information about Polish Jewish history and genealogy. Jews throughout the global diaspora, as well as the descendants of Polish Jews living in Poland who are just now discovering their ancestral roots, write or call to ask questions like, Who am I? Where do I come from?

Most of the approximately two thousand queries received annually arrive by email and are answered in the same way. Every week people visit the offices in person, close to a thousand visitors each year. Most of them come from the United States, Israel, and Poland, but there are also substantial numbers from Western Europe, Latin America, and Australia.

Many of the inquiries spring from curiosity about



ANNA PRZYBYSZEWSKA DROZD ASSISTING ONE OF THE THOUSAND-PLUS VISITORS PER YEAR WHO COME IN PERSON TO THE OFFICES OF THE GENEALOGY CENTER.

personal heritage or a desire to locate an ancestral town or family members from decades past. Sometimes, however, they concern restitution of property lost during or after World War II. An Israeli woman asked the Genealogy Center's staff if they could help her find documents establishing her eligibility for German compensation payments. The court accepted the Center's expert opinion as constituting due diligence and ruled that the woman was indeed entitled to compensation. Soon thereafter she called crying tears of joy to thank us for our efforts.

The Genealogy Center's success in responding to these queries can be seen from the unsolicited emails and letters it receives. "It was a profound day that I

*Thank you so much for the time you spent with us in your office regarding our families, our ancestry and any possible follow-up. I can see that your task is enormous and you give so much care and thought to each case and story.*  
—Sandra W., Los Angeles

spent with all of you almost three weeks ago,” began one letter. “When I came into your office, I definitely was pessimistic about finding anything significant about my father’s family. After your research and TLC, I emerged with a family. Even if they are names in archives, they exist and I feel connected for the first time in my 63 years of life.”

## Outreach & Education

BECAUSE THE CENTER IS WELL-KNOWN among genealogy experts, we sometimes receive requests for interviews from the media. This year, Director Yale Reisner spoke at the annual meeting of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) in Paris. His talk, “Jewish Genealogy in Poland: An Applied Science,” was well attended. Later in the conference, he was interviewed on a Parisian Jewish radio show about the current state of Polish Jewry. To listen to an audio podcast of Yale speaking about the scope and work of the Jewish Genealogy Center, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/YaleSpeech>

In addition to our strictly genealogical tasks, we

meet with various groups interested in Polish Jewish heritage and history. Recent meetings have included an international adult group from the annual March of the Living, a party of Canadian MOL educators-in-training, and “Witnesses in Uniform,” a group of Israeli Army officers.

We have also assisted in the training of guides for the Taube Jewish Heritage Tour program run by the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland (*see box, below*). The Tours are custom-crafted educational explorations introducing individuals, families, and organizations to Poland and to Polish Jewry. In response to a growing demand for such a tour experience, the Taube Center established Mi Dor Le Dor (Heb.: From Generation to Generation). This is an intensive course in Jewish history and contemporary Jewish affairs for young Jewish educators and guides. Jewish visitors often ask family-related questions, and therefore we at the Genealogy Center were invited to address the Mi Dor Le Dor trainees about how to research family roots, available resources, and the most common questions that might arise during a heritage tour.

### Jewish Heritage Tourism in Poland

THE TAUBE JEWISH HERITAGE TOUR PROGRAM offers tailor-made study tours for individuals, families and groups from around the world seeking to discover their personal histories, explore a collective past and participate in the continuing revival of Jewish life in Poland. The tours integrate sites of Polish Jewish heritage and memory with visits to family homes and to Jewish institutions, and include special sessions and meetings with individuals dedicated to Jewish heritage preservation and those contributing to contemporary Polish Jewish life and culture.



THE JEWISH GENEALOGY & FAMILY HERITAGE CENTER AND TAUBE JEWISH HERITAGE TOURS PARTNER TO OFFER FAMILY HERITAGE TOURS AND VISITS IN WHAT WAS ONCE GREATER POLAND.

CONTACT: Taube Jewish Heritage Tours, c/o Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland  
ul. Tłomackie 3/5, 00-090 Warsaw, Poland      Tel: +48-22-831-1021      [centrumtaubego@centrumtaubego.org](mailto:centrumtaubego@centrumtaubego.org)

## Our Journey into the Virtual Future Has Begun

THE GENEALOGY CENTER HAS LAUNCHED the first component of its interactive web presence. To see it, go to [www.jhi.pl/genealogia](http://www.jhi.pl/genealogia). When it is fully developed, the interactive web presence will offer an array of new options and resources. It will provide Polish Jewish genealogy on demand, day or night, with instantaneous access to the digital archives of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute.

Current plans call for the Jewish Historical Institute to put its integrated database online by the end of 2012. This will initially include archival sources and selected material from the Genealogy Center's database. A user-friendly interface will allow a user to input a name or place and receive relevant information instantly from all departments of the Institute.

*I send you many blessings with all my heart and soul for finding my childhood friend! You rarely meet such wonderful people in your life.*

*—Malgorzata T.,  
Warsaw*

Electronic bulletin boards and other web-based social networking functions will enable users to connect and interact with associates and family members from around the world. Users will be able to access the Genealogy Center either through our webpage or through a Facebook page, each having a portal for submitting queries. The two pages will be linked and, through the links, users will be able to move quickly to our email address (for asking specific questions), the FAQs (frequently asked questions), or the Jewish Historical Institute's resources. Family researchers will have the option of posting their findings revealed through archival research. These contributions will become a permanent part of the collective record of a shared Jewish history and heritage.

The Genealogy Center will, of course, continue to serve as a hub for people involved in family research, local history, and Jewish heritage preservation in Poland and Eastern Europe. Soon, however, users will be able to conduct their own searches by going directly to the genealogical and historical sources via digital databases. They will have the extraordinary opportunity to explore archival collections touching on all significant aspects of Polish and Eastern European Jewish history, culture, and heritage.

Finally, the interactivity of the web presence will help the Genealogy Center to serve more people more efficiently. By enabling visitors to explore the archives online, it will permit us to spend our (very finite) time on the most specialized and challenging searches.



THE NEW DATABASE WILL INTEGRATE THE VAST COLLECTIONS OF THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE WITH UNIQUE GENEALOGY RESOURCES.

## Who Will Use It?

THE INTERACTIVE WEB PRESENCE will provide access to a wide array of individuals, groups, and organizations. It will expand the network of those involved in Jewish family research in Poland and will also provide an educational platform about Poland's relationship with the Jewish people and the Jewish contribution to Polish culture, society, and history.

Jews and others around the world who might not be able to visit Warsaw will, for the first time, have access to the large and unique collections of the Institute. Righteous Gentiles seeking to learn the ultimate fate of the Jews whose lives they saved, Poles of the 1968 generation who want to resume contact with their friends and colleagues scattered throughout the world, and non-Jews who want to know more about Jewish history and culture—these are among the many who will now have instant access to the services of the Genealogy Center.



ACCESS TO ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHS THROUGH THE NEW DATABASE MAY TRIGGER MEMORIES AND UNEARTH SURPRISING CONNECTIONS.



### HELP US STEP INTO THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

*Please contribute to our journey.*

**BY CHECK** payable to:  
Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture  
Memo line: Genealogy, Warsaw  
**MAIL TO:** Shana Penn, Executive Director,  
Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture,  
121 Steuart Street, San Francisco, CA 94105  
**OR DONATE DIRECTLY ON OUR NEW WEBSITE USING PAYPAL**

FOR INFORMATION ON WIRE TRANSFERS  
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# THE JEWISH GENEALOGY & FAMILY HERITAGE CENTER THANKS ITS DONORS FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT

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Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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