

Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland



TAUBE
FOUNDATION
FOR JEWISH LIFE
AND CULTURE

A PEOPLEHOOD PROGRAM
OF THE TAUBE FOUNDATION FOR
JEWISH LIFE & CULTURE

Message from the Chairman and Executive Director



Tad Taube
Chairman
Taube Foundation for
Jewish Life & Culture



Shana Penn
Executive Director
Taube Foundation for
Jewish Life & Culture

How does one bring Judaism back to a community that had been denied so much and for so long? How does one encourage a new generation of young Polish Jews, intent on joining the job market in the new European Union, to develop cultural ties to their roots and religion?

In response to these questions, the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture created the Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland (JHIP) to support the key cultural, educational and communal programs that are strategically addressing these issues and meeting the diverse and complex needs of re-emerging Jewish communities. This Initiative reinforces the Taube Foundation's broader purpose of sustaining Jewish life in the Diaspora.

Founded in 2003, the JHIP nurtures the revival of Jewish life in Poland, furthers awareness of this resurgence among Jews and non-Jews, and fosters positive interest in Poland and Polish Jews among Jews worldwide.

In so doing, the JHIP deepens the Jewish world's understanding of Peoplehood as viewed through the historical role of Polish Jews in the life and culture of Jewish people everywhere.

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Bringing to life 1,000 years of Jewish heritage

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews



The Museum of the History of Polish Jews will present the thousand-year history of Jewish civilization in Poland, the epicenter of world Jewry for centuries prior to the Holocaust and the ancestral home of the majority of Jews today. We are the heirs of this rich heritage, which encompasses one of the longest, most vital periods in Jewish history. The profound sense of Jewish connection and belonging that this Museum will invoke will be an inspiration for generations to come.

At present, construction of the Museum is nearing completion on the sacred ground of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The City of Warsaw donated the land, and both the City and the Ministry of Culture are bearing the capital costs for the entire building complex, well over \$70 million. In addition, they have a long-term, multi-million dollar commitment to the Museum's annual operating budget. Designed by the Finnish architectural firm Rainer Mahlamäki and Ilmari Lahdelma, the Museum is scheduled to open on the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April 19, 2013. Now, finally, the legacy of East European Jewry can be explored in the very place where this history unfolded.

When completed, this stunning, state-of-the-art Jewish museum will be on a par with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Israel's Yad Vashem. The key difference is that the Museum of the History of Polish Jews will extend the historical narrative beyond the Holocaust to encompass an epic Jewish history that even today shapes contemporary Israeli and American Jewish life.



Using source materials, knowledge, experience and intuition to help individuals and families piece together the puzzle of their Jewish identities and roots

Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center

The scene has repeated itself hundreds of times. Sometimes a pony-tailed teenager shows up, other times a middle-aged housewife, occasionally an entire family. The location is the crowded, book-lined office of the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center at the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The conversation invariably starts like this: “I’m sorry to bother you, but I was just going through my grandmother’s papers a few weeks after she died, and I found something that makes me think that perhaps she was Jewish.” Other times, it’s a deathbed confession. Still other times, a letter or e-mail arrives from someone completely unknown and triggers the quest.



We all know that thousands of Jews handed their infants over the walls of the Warsaw or Łódź ghetto to be taken in and protected by kindly neighbors. The vast majority of these parents never came home. We also know that some Polish Jews who survived the horrors of the Holocaust decided to try and bury their Jewish heritage. Yet, in thousands of cases, the truth has come out and many Polish families – as well as Jewish families abroad – have turned to the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center to help them uncover documents, contact long-lost relatives or research their ancestral home.

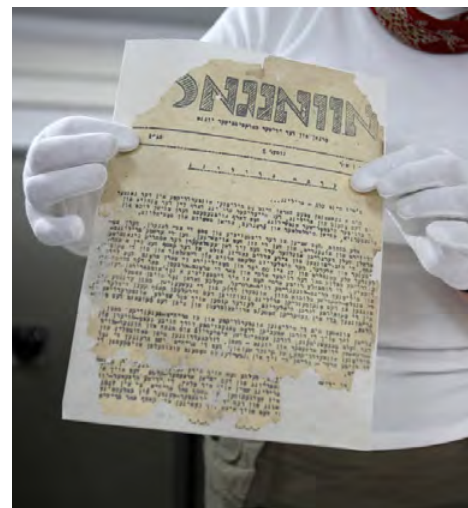
The Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center helps people explore their Jewish roots, find their place in history and begin a complex yet exciting journey to reclaim their Jewish identities.

The Genealogy Center has now entered a new phase of development: the building of an interactive website that will facilitate guided genealogical research with online consultations for lay people and scholars in Poland and worldwide.



The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute

Jews have lived on Polish lands for close to a millennium, and the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw has established itself as the premier address for collecting, archiving, researching and exhibiting a world-class collection of art, artifacts, publications and documents relating to Polish Jewry. As heir to the traditions of the pre-war Institute for Judaic Studies and post-war Central Jewish Historical Commission, both of which had been housed in the same location, the Jewish Historical Institute opened in 1947 and soon became the sole beacon of light for scholars and historians under Communism. The Institute is also home to the Emanuel Ringelblum Archives, a collection of nearly 30,000 documents collected by a group of doomed historians in the wartime Warsaw Ghetto and buried by them in milk canisters and boxes in the ultimately justified hope that they would be discovered after the war. For historians, the Jewish Historical Institute offers a library of nearly 600,000 volumes in a dozen languages, a collection of priceless photographs from every corner of Poland and archives of personal letters, synagogue documents, newspapers, blueprints and literary manuscripts. Everything in its collections is catalogued and stored using the newest state-of-the-art technology. The Institute also offers tourists the opportunity to view historical and artistic exhibitions in its two large halls, as well as to attend public lectures in Polish, English and German. The Institute's educational department works with schools all over Poland, helping teachers develop "best practice" methods for introducing Jewish history to their classes, while the publishing division produces monographs, guides and historical studies. The Taube Foundation supports the Institute's core programs and supplements the annual subsidies provided by the Polish Ministry of Culture. We also support fellowship and publishing programs. The first Fellowship, in Yiddish research, was awarded in January 2004.



Taube Jewish Heritage Tours: Experience the New Poland

“Pure ‘Freilach!’ That’s the best way to sum up our trip to Poland.” The Yiddish word for joy is not exactly one you’d expect to hear when describing Jewish travel to Poland — a country most people associate with the Holocaust. But Howard and Judy Sacks’ memory of their trip during the Jewish Culture Festival is testament to the fact that there is something new and very different going on in Poland.



The couple is part of a new breed of travelers flocking to Poland to explore firsthand the remarkable resurgence of native Jewish life and culture there. Their travel needs are served by Taube Jewish Heritage Tours, a program of the Warsaw-based Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland. Under the direction of educator Helise Lieberman, Taube Tours offers a series of customized heritage and specialty tours enabling visitors to discover Poland’s past and present on terms most meaningful to them.

Growing interest in touring modern Poland is clearly part of a larger trend. Poland has emerged as Europe’s newest popular destination, with a quarter of a million Americans visiting each year and the *Los Angeles Times* ranking Warsaw as number three on a list of 29 destinations to visit. But there is something more going on here too, something distinctly Jewish.

With Taube Jewish Heritage Tours, visitors can explore their past, engage in today’s Jewish revival, renew their Jewish identity, bear witness to the Holocaust, dialogue with Poland’s leaders, meet their Jewish contemporaries, experience history in the making and help rebuild Jewish life. Options range from all-inclusive 8- to 14-day heritage tours that touch on all aspects of Jewish history to short specialty tours that supplement other travel plans. Taube Tours also provides publications and other informational resources on historical and contemporary Jewish themes.

For more information, contact: Helise E. Lieberman, Director, Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland; hlieberman@taubephilanthropies.org; tel. +48 517 431 923



Feedback from Recent Taube Jewish Heritage Tours

Osher Marin Jewish Community Center

The Osher Marin Jewish Community Center group, from California's North Bay, spent seven days in summer 2011 exploring the revival of Jewish life and culture in Warsaw and Kraków. A highlight was attending a standing-room-only Shabbat dinner organized by the Kraków JCC.



"It was profound and moving to experience the present flourishing of interest in Jewish culture in Poland. The people we met through the Taube Foundation and the events at the Jewish Culture Festival were all fantastic!"

NCSJ Student Leadership Program

In March 2011, NCSJ, an advocate for Jewish communities in the successor states of the former Soviet Union, in collaboration with the Stanford University and Moscow Hillels, led a group of young adults on an 8-day seminar in both Moscow and Warsaw to experience Jewish religious and organizational life, the revival of Jewish identity, modes of battling anti-Semitism, and the process of building democracy.

"In Jewish day school and at home, I was never taught to think of Poland as more than a cemetery for millions of Jews. To see a functioning, modern European society was a nice shock to the system, and I left optimistic about Poland. It was especially nice to spend time with people from the Jewish community and to really feel their energy and optimism."

Bureau of Jewish Education's Shalhevet Program

Shalhevet – meaning "flame" in Hebrew— is unique among educational teen travel programs to Poland and Israel. It is built around a comprehensive curriculum that educates participants prior to the trip and includes extensive follow-up upon return. Underlying every stage of the program is a focus on the interconnectedness of the worldwide Jewish community. During their two-week Spring 2011 tour to Poland and Israel, Shalhevet's curriculum was brought to life, and the teen participants engaged with their Polish and Israeli peers.



"My favorite part of the trip was visiting Krakow. I was able to see a different side of Poland and focus on things that give more hope, like the JCC, and it was also really interesting to talk to the Jewish teens and learn more about their reality."

"It's good to have a balance of remembrance and optimism for the future."

All singing, all dancing, all eating:
Jewish culture at its liveliest

Kraków Jewish Culture Festival

There is nothing like it anywhere in the world. Each year for a full week at the end of June, the old Jewish quarter of Kraków turns itself into a mega-celebration of Jewish culture. Over 25,000 visitors from all continents spend their days crowding into cooking classes, lectures, Yiddish poetry readings and art exhibits. At night, on stages set up in public squares, klezmer musicians from all over the world fill the summer air with the sounds of Yiddish singing and impassioned playing.

The Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland is proud to act as the principal American patron of the Jewish Culture Festival, because this isn't the history you study in a book – this is Jewish culture you taste, marvel at and dance to. And, while fun seems to be the principal noun during this cultural week, the operative verb is learning.

The Festival seeks support for a series of workshops and seminars in Jewish cultural studies. This proposed week-long program is responsive to the public's demand for increased educational offerings on issues in contemporary Jewish culture by leading writers and scholars from Israel and the United States.

The 21st annual Jewish Culture Festival was held under the honorary patronage of Polish President Bronisław Komorowski, who, in his preface to the 2011 Catalogue of Events, noted: "I was particularly pleased to see that the Festival's program includes the showing of the film *Irena Sendler: In the Name of their Mothers*, and the ceremony of the **presentation of the Irena Sendler Memorial Award by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture**. My warmest congratulations go to those awarded. Let me note that memory of the Polish Righteous is and will continue to be an element shaping our shared historical memory."



Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich

The organized Jewish community, the Gmina, creates a nurturing space for people to explore Jewish traditions and to practice Judaism. In his role as Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Michael Schudrich leads the community in solving a bewildering array of social issues and problems – from deeply traumatized Holocaust survivors, who wanted their children to be Jewish but feared the consequences, to their “second generation” children, who usually shared these fears, but combined them with often ambivalent efforts to practice Judaism in the uncongenial circumstances in which Jews found themselves for decades after the war.



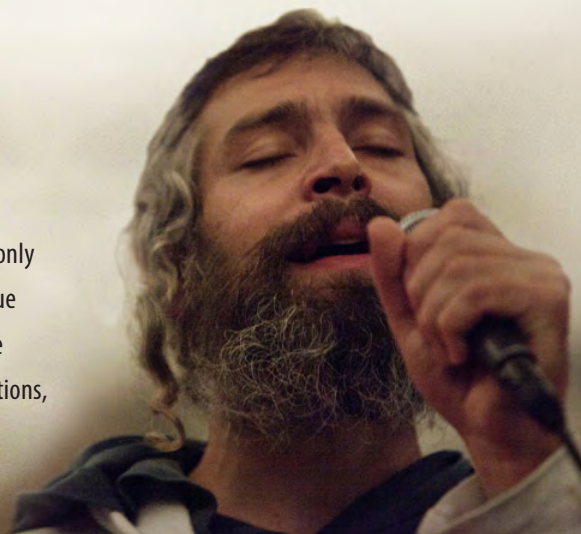
Rabbi Schudrich has been willing to work with Jews such as they are, regardless of their often doubtful *halachic* status, confused identities and resistance to anyone who might tell them how they should be living their lives. Rabbi Schudrich wisely attempts no such thing – seeking instead to help Jews of all ages and backgrounds live their lives more Jewishly should they choose that path. He reaches out

to Jewish families making their first tentative steps back towards religion. His mandate extends to synagogue congregations across the country, from Warsaw and Łódź to Wrocław and Kraków.

The Chief Rabbi’s Office seeks support for a Virtual Visitors’ Center that would describe all the Jewish organizations in the country and enable both the local population and tourists to learn about and take part in contemporary Jewish life in Poland.

Matisyahu Receives Koret Taube Jewish Peoplehood Award In Warsaw

Matisyahu, the legendary Hasidic reggae musician, fuses religious observance and Judaism’s hazzan style of prayer with a contemporary mix of rap, beat-box and hip-hop. On June 19, the Taube and Koret Foundations presented him with the Inaugural Jewish Peoplehood Award during a standing-room-only performance in the Nożyk Synagogue, Warsaw’s only synagogue to survive Nazi occupation. Matisyahu’s music and message are fostering pride in Jewish identity and heritage for new generations, making a uniquely Jewish contribution to global culture.



Warsaw Jewish Cemetery



The Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, a 200-year-old historic landmark containing 250,000 graves and an estimated 200,000 tombstones on its 83 acres, is one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Europe. The Taube Foundation supports the restoration and preservation of these grounds and gravesites, which, for decades, had been tragically neglected and inaccessible to visitors – many of whom had ancestors buried there. The history of the cemetery alone gives cause for preserving its legacy for the future.

Unfortunately, part of that history includes the destruction of the cemetery records by the German occupiers; many graves were also destroyed under Communism or during decades of neglect. Despite the extensive damage in the past, historians, genealogists and preservation specialists are working today to restore what can be recaptured from the gravestones, including their inscriptions in Polish and Hebrew, Russian and Yiddish. They are also working with landscape professionals to clean up and restore overgrown and damaged plots.

The rich history of the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery spans the period of the 18th- and early 19th-century Jewish Reform movements as well as Orthodox traditions. The Cemetery also contains the gravesites of 20th-century Jews, including famous rabbis, Chassidic rebbes and Torah sages, as well as non-Orthodox financiers and industrialists, scholars and writers, doctors and lawyers, politicians, actors and educators, in addition to members of secular Zionist and socialist movements. Individual gravestones bearing family names and, at times, biographical information, hold important keys to the social history of Jewish settlement and migration, as well as genealogical information linking the past to present and future generations.

Information gleaned from gravesites will soon be available on a new website and at an on-site Learning Center providing computer kiosks for visitor access. By making information available on the web, the database also serves the needs of off-site scholars, researchers and future visitors. The significance of this project is in every way in keeping with other current efforts to reclaim and preserve the Jewish past of Poland as a key element of Poland's history as a nation and of Jewish peoplehood as well. The database of the Cemetery will in time be linked to the database of the Jewish Genealogy & Family Heritage Center. These institutional and digital linkages, not previously possible, will provide inter-connected resources that open new vistas for the research and recovery of Jewish heritage.





Jewish Community Centers in Kraków and Warsaw

The Kraków Jewish Community Center (JCC) has shown amazing growth in membership and event attendance since its 2008 opening. Director Jonathan Ornstein reports, “Jews from different ages and backgrounds enter the center through a variety of ways, but our programming enables all members — young and old, those who are more religious and those who are more secular, established Krakówians and those who are newly arrived — to share a common, welcoming experience.” In particular, the Shabbat dinners, with an average of 70 people attending, are a focal point of the community. The JCC Shabbat experience connects those who attend with the community and their heritage. These events therefore enable the community as a whole to strengthen and renew itself. Though mainly attended by members of the local Jewish population, the JCC warmly welcomes visitors, many of whom are on their way to or from Auschwitz and are amazed find to a living, growing community in a town so close to the most infamous of the Nazi death camps.

In Warsaw, on Sukkot, a new JCC opened, which will serve as a focal point for gathering the diverse community of the Jews of Warsaw, Poland’s capital and largest city. It will provide cultural and educational activities for all ages within the community on a regular basis. Thus far, the JCC Warsaw has organized Sukkot, a pluralistic event focused on families with young children, with over 100 participants. In the near future, the JCC Warsaw plans to bring Limmud to the daily calendar of Jewish Warsaw, featuring public forums in contemporary Jewish arts and literature. Weekly Shabbat programs will bring together young families for educational and community building activities. In addition there will be Hanukkah celebrations and other holiday activities and a museum program for young adults, including workshops with artists and other famous local experts who will lead young people in explorations of significant figures in Jewish cultural and scientific history.

Congratulations to both JCCs on their timely and dynamic growth.



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PEOPLEHOOD IS BUILDING A JEWISH COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE

In today's interconnected world, Facebook is now the third largest country on the planet. That means today's teenagers hardly know what a city limit is, much less a national border. More than ever before, Jews are connecting with each other, sharing ideas and best practices with each other — creating networks and communities that work for them and their children.

And they're not thinking about borders.

A Jewish community without walls is what Jewish Peoplehood is all about. With programs that support community life, Jewish culture and Jewish studies, we at the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture are expanding our reach, shrinking borders, and bringing us all closer together.



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121 Stuart Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

www.taubephilanthropies.org