

Guidebook for Jewish Cemetery Restoration:

Descendant's Guide to

Restoring Your Ancestors' Cemetery in Poland



Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland

PROLOGUE

Before WWII, there were over three million Jews and 1600 Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Some of the cemeteries were hundreds of years old and some held hundreds of thousands of graves. Presumably, they were all well cared for consistent with Jewish custom.

During WWII, many cemeteries were intentionally destroyed by the German army as part of the genocide. The constituent gravestones, buildings, walls, and fences were removed for use in construction such as roads and other structures. After the war, not only did this destruction continue, but in many instances, land was repurposed for public buildings, parking lots, sports fields, and farming. Time, natural decay, and encroachment of vegetation further eroded these sacred sites.

After WWII, very limited cemetery restoration started. This continued at a low level through the late 20th and early 21st centuries when a few individuals became concerned about the loss and began to organize. A bit later, perhaps with the advent of the internet, groups, as well as individuals, began to programmatically address the issue. Although these efforts have generally been successful, the rate of new project starts has been slow and as of this writing, nearly 1000 cemeteries still need to be restored and cared for.

But most importantly, there are no longer enough resident Jews to take care of the cemeteries where their ancestors were buried.

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Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland¹

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PREFACE

Dear Descendants,

We stand on the threshold of a crucial endeavor, one that calls upon us, the descendants, to reclaim and restore our ancestral Jewish cemeteries in Poland. It is with great pride and determination that we present to you this guidebook, written by descendants for descendants, with the hope of inspiring and empowering you to undertake this noble mission.

In recent years, we have witnessed an acceleration in cemetery restoration projects across Poland. Countless individuals, governments, and nongovernmental agencies have dedicated themselves to this cause, and we commend their tireless efforts. These individuals are the living treasures who have laid the foundation for our own endeavors, and their ongoing involvement remains invaluable to the larger process. However, it has become evident that the responsibility of restoring our ancestral cemeteries ultimately lies with us, the descendants.

Despite the progress made, the current rate of restoration is insufficient to address the ongoing loss and deterioration of over 1000 remaining restorable cemeteries. If we are to increase the pace of restoration, and especially if we are to assume greater leadership in this process, we must seek more efficient methods. Thus, we believe that a guidebook tailored specifically for descendants is the key to achieving our collective goal.

We have taken it upon ourselves, as descendants of Polish Jews engaged in the restoration of our respective ancestral family cemeteries, to compile this guidebook. Drawing from our firsthand experiences, ranging from tiny *shtetlach* to metropolitan areas, as well as insights shared by a diverse array of individuals and groups, we aim to provide a comprehensive resource.

While each restoration project is unique, influenced by historical, geographic, and cultural factors, we have identified universal themes and best practices that have proven effective. It is through these shared experiences that we offer guidance and support, facilitating your efforts to carry out projects in your ancestral towns in Poland.

We are the Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (FJCP), originally established to exchange lessons learned about cemetery restoration within our own circle. However, our vision has expanded, and we now seek to share our knowledge with a wider audience, as we strive to address the restoration needs of Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland.

Throughout this guidebook, we emphasize a fundamental principle: successful restoration, regardless of the definition, is contingent upon communities uniting. This collaboration primarily involves Jewish descendants working hand in hand with contemporary non-Jewish communities. By fostering these meaningful connections, we can collectively breathe life back into these sacred spaces and ensure their preservation for generations to come.

We urge you, fellow descendants, to embrace this opportunity to honor our ancestors, reclaim our heritage, and create a lasting legacy. Let this guidebook serve as a beacon of inspiration, guiding your steps on the path to restoring our ancestral Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Together, we can make a difference.

With warm regards,

Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland

ABOUT FRIENDS OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN POLAND

Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (FJCP) is a group of descendants and allies dedicated to restoring neglected Jewish cemeteries in present day Poland. We share experiences from our restoration projects and recruit other descendants to lead restoration of their own ancestral cemeteries.

We are an affiliate of Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization.

FJCP members meet monthly to advance cemetery restoration in Poland. We welcome anyone interested in restoring Jewish cemeteries to collaborate with us.

For further information, please write us at fjcp@jewishheritagepoland.org.

NOTE ON OUR WRITING CONVENTION

In this Guidebook, we adhere to two specific writing conventions:

Firstly, we italicize numerous foreign words, particularly those derived from Hebrew and Yiddish. Examples of such words include *matzevah* (gravestone), *mishpocha* (extended family), and *shtetl* (town). Additionally, we express plurals by transliterating them from the original language; for instance, *matzevot* represents the plural form of *matzevah*.

Secondly, we include diacritics when writing Polish words, rather than omitting them as is somewhat common. For example, we employ the full diacritics when referring to the city name Łódź, although it is occasionally written as Lodz. Both spellings are considered correct in written English. Hence, the town Łódź is phonetically pronounced as "woodge" and not "lodge." We have adopted this convention with the intention of encouraging our readers to strive for more accurate pronunciation.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK

This Guidebook is not intended to be read in a single sitting from cover to cover, or even in a linear page-by-page fashion, but rather to serve as a resource through the various stages of a cemetery restoration project.

Information we present should be useful for the broadest community of those interested in Jewish cemeteries, ranging from basic cultural interest, through those contemplating a restoration project, to those actually engaged in a project or at the post-restoration maintenance phase. Some recommendations should also be of help to those pursuing cultural or genealogical interests in Poland.

For those contemplating leading a restoration of your ancestral cemetery, we have included case studies so that you can get an idea of what it would be like to do your own project. We've included a diversity of possibilities based upon our experience and knowledge. That doesn't guarantee that your experience will be like any of ours, but does suggest a range of potential paths.

The Guidebook is not all-inclusive; we have provided as much detail as we think is reasonable for those considering a restoration project, committed to one, or possibly collaborating under someone else's leadership. We also suggest ways to pursue additional information and help.

Most readers should start with the "Summary." Beyond that, we provide a moderately in-depth guide on how to plan and carry out a project with more details on some topics in subsequent sections (e.g., how to care for *matzevot*, how to assure long-term maintenance). Finally, we provide what we think is important detail in the Appendix on everything from travel tips for those restoring ancestral cemeteries, through an overview of the various nonprofit agencies we suggest interacting with, and tips for learning the Polish language.

Please note that the URLs provided in this book were accurate at the time of publication. However, due to the dynamic nature of the internet, some links may have changed or become unavailable. For the most current information, please refer to the respective organization's website or perform a web search using the title or description of the resource.

We regard this Guidebook as a living product, will update it from time to time, endeavor to provide updated pertinent material on the FJCP website, and encourage you to share your comments and experiences with us.

I went to Poland to see Auschwitz. My sister, who accompanied me, had gone on to other places, visiting Sławatycze, the *shtetl* of our mother's parents. Her photos showed a neglected empty space that had been the Jewish cemetery. The anger and sadness I had experienced at Auschwitz merged with what I was feeling about the Sławatycze cemetery devoid of the *matzevot*. Imagining what must have happened in Sławatycze along with seeing and knowing what had happened at Auschwitz and doing nothing about the place that literally held our DNA in the ground and consciously choosing to turn a blind eye was simply wrong. I felt that we had to do something about the cemetery -- that I had to do something about the cemetery.

To have chosen to do nothing was to accept what Hitler and the Germans had done; to destroy all presence and memory of the Jews, to turn us and memory of us into dirt and ashes.

Four years later, with *landsmen* and *mishpocha* from Israel, Canada, England, and the US, I participated in a ceremony rededicating the cleaned and partially restored cemetery. We entered the grounds through a new brick-and wrought-iron gate we commissioned to mark and acknowledge the presence of the Jewish community that had existed in this village for over 300 years.

*Alan Metnick,
FJCP member*

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SUMMARY

This section provides an overview of the process to restore a Jewish cemetery in Poland; subsequent sections expand on this information and provide case studies.

Planning a cemetery restoration project

Embarking on a cemetery restoration project is a truly transformative journey, filled with challenges, excitement, and profound fulfillment. While a step-by-step manual may not be feasible due to the unique nature of each project, there are invaluable insights and guidelines that can be shared. The vision and perspectives of the project leader and fellow descendants, coupled with the distinct characteristics and scale of the cemetery, as well as the attitudes prevalent in the local community, all contribute to the project's individuality. Flexibility is key as the project unfolds, including listening, learning, and remaining receptive to potential adjustments along the way.

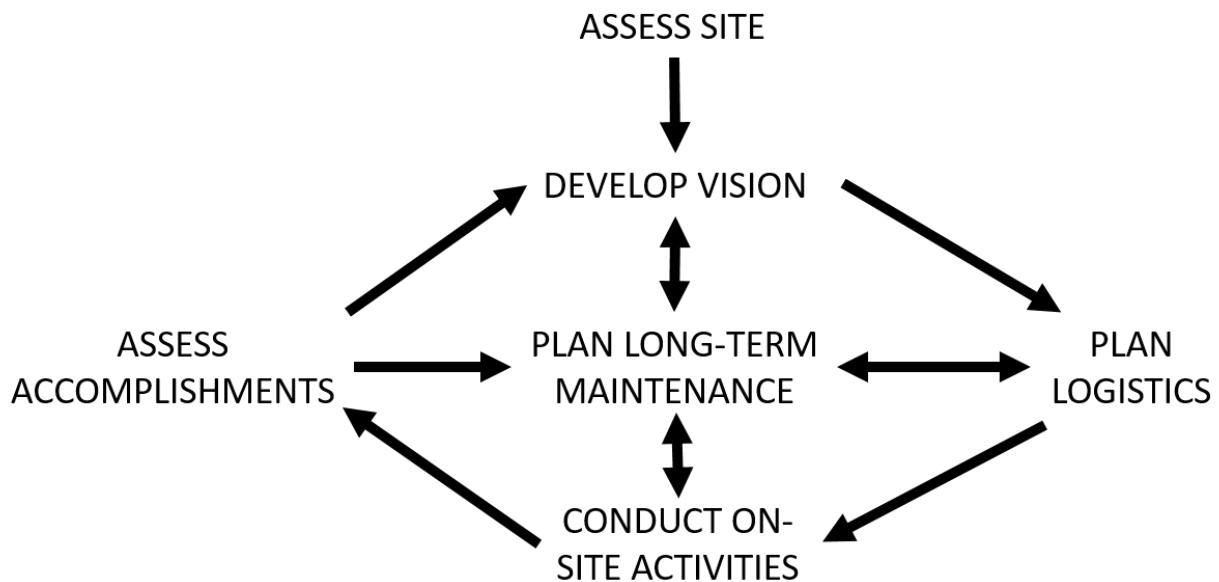
Before we proceed with the details of how to approach a Jewish Cemetery Restoration project in Poland, it is important to address three key points:

1. **Restoration:** The term "restoration" can be misleading when applied to an abandoned and potentially desecrated cemetery. It is unlikely that such a cemetery can be fully restored to its original state. Instead, all involved parties must determine the desired endpoint for the site, considering that it will naturally change over time regardless of any intervention. The primary objectives should include minimizing future deterioration, documenting and marking the site, and ensuring its integration into both Jewish and Polish cultural history.
2. **Cultural Reconciliation and Collaboration:** Cultural reconciliation may not be immediately obvious or apparent when considering cemetery restoration, but it plays a significant role in the process. It may not even be the best or even an appropriate term. Restoring cemeteries, whether individually or throughout Poland, goes beyond an isolated act of preservation. Engaging with the local community, including resident Poles, is an essential and unavoidable aspect of the restoration process. It is common for both descendants and resident Poles to have limited or no previous interactions with each other. In some cases, descendants discover Poles or their ancestors who risked everything to help Jews during the German occupation, earning the esteemed title of "Righteous Among the Nations" (<https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>). Since the long-term preservation of the cemetery is one of the restoration objectives, it is crucial to recognize Jewish cemeteries as shared cultural heritage under joint stewardship. There has been significant literature on the relationship between the Polish Jewish descendant diaspora and non-Jewish Poles, highlighting the importance of this process. Therefore, cemetery restoration not only benefits from reconciliation but also actively promotes it. We deal with this as a consideration as to how to build enduring relationships.
3. **Site visit:** There is no substitute for visiting the cemetery firsthand. Ideally, this should occur early in the planning process as it forms the foundation for subsequent steps. In fact, many projects initiated by members of the FJCP were motivated by their visits to ancestral cemeteries. A site visit can be conducted with the assistance of a guide, a Polish or international nonprofit organization; some adventurous descendants have even embarked on such visits independently.

Key steps

The various steps to any restoration project can be summarized below:

- Assess the site: Conduct an assessment of the cemetery, taking note of its current condition, including the state of gravestones, structures, and vegetation; identify any potential safety hazards or urgent restoration needs.
- Develop a vision for restoration: Collaborate with fellow descendants, regulatory authorities, and other potentially interested parties to establish a clear vision.
- Plan logistics: Create a plan outlining the necessary resources, materials, and labor required for the restoration project. Determine the budget, timeline, and potential sources of funding.
- Conduct on-site activities: Organize and coordinate restoration activities such as cleaning, clearing vegetation, repairing or resetting gravestones, restoring structures such as fences, and holding ceremonies.
- Plan for long-term maintenance: Develop a plan to ensure the continued upkeep and preservation of the restored cemetery.
- Assess accomplishments: Identify any areas that may require further attention.



Assess the site

Several things need to be done early on or perhaps better before the first site visit: (1) Where is the site and what are the approximate boundaries? (2) Who owns the site and is responsible for overseeing it? (3) What is the overall condition – are there *matzevot* easily visible, fences, gates, overgrowing vegetation, trash? (4) Has any sort of restoration work been previously done? Much of this can be done from the comfort of your own home with a few hours of internet search and a few emails to the appropriate authorities.

But before you even start with this, you should try to determine how much assistance you might need in Poland. Will you need someone who speaks Polish fluently and is familiar with Polish culture? Although officials you need to meet with in the larger cities generally speak languages beyond Polish

(e.g., English), in some small towns virtually no one speaks English. Some of us have had exceptional experiences with local guides or scholars, others have relied upon nonprofit organizations.

1. Where is it? Often, a Google or Google Maps search will provide the approximate location. Sometimes it is helpful to corroborate this with Web searches of sites like the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF) (<https://www.esjf-surveys.org/surveys-map/>, and others in the Appendix). In our experience, a site visit, including chatting with local residents, may be required to confirm the location. The intent is to find the cemetery for a first look; more precise details will be needed during later phases.

2. Who owns it? During the early project phases, this might be required because you may need to cross private property for access or the cemetery may be behind a locked gate. Importantly, the owner will need to approve and presumably collaborate on any project. While this may be challenging, information might be available on web at sites like the ESJF cited above. In some instances, you might need to ask The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŹ) (please see note about inquiries to FODŹ later on). Ownership may need further attention in a later phase.

3. What is the overall condition? A quick site visit is the best way to answer questions about *matzevot*, fencing, and overgrowing vegetation. This can range from a stroll through a city park to an Indiana Jones expedition through impenetrable vegetation and soft muddy ground. There are also many web resources with photographs of cemeteries and some of the *matzevot* that may provide limited information.

4. Has any sort of restoration work been done previously? This also can be accomplished through a web search and other investigation. For example, Friends of Jewish Heritage Poland (FJHP) lists active and previous restoration sites (<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/other-towns.html>). Some of the FJCP cemeteries had previous efforts to clear vegetation or perhaps other activities but were not followed up on. Sometimes finding the previous proponents can provide help in the current effort that might be helpful when planning long-term maintenance. Also, if previous efforts involved

vegetation clearing, you can get an idea of the regrowth rate. Previous projects may also have compiled a descendants list, made contact with the local officials or other things that might be of help.

Story from a first cemetery visit

The first time I went to my ancestral cemetery it was a cold, rainy, late October day. I warned both my wife and my guide to be prepared for rain and mud. I dressed warmly in Gore-Tex from head to toe. Alas, during the trek through the cemetery, my wife ruined her brand new Gucci boots and was soaked to the skin though her designer down jacket; my guide ruined his dress shoes...

Although I had “done all my homework” and came armed with maps and aerial photographs, it took a couple of hours to make sure we were in the right place. We knew we had found the cemetery when we found a few fragments of gravestones with Hebrew letters. This was well worth the price of my wife’s boots!

Bill Brostoff, Trzcianne

Develop a vision

What do you want the restored cemetery to look like when you're done; what are the possibilities?

Our respective cemeteries ranged from unmarked bits of forest with only the scantest evidence of a few *matzevot* to partly fenced areas with dozens to hundreds of partly intact *matzevot* and memorials. Each cemetery has its own range of possibilities. For smaller cemeteries, there are often nearby examples that may be either less impacted or have been partially restored. There are also examples on the internet with photographs and detailed descriptions.



Figure 1. The Jewish cemetery in Dąbrowa Białostocka is an example of a potential model for restoration. The undergrowth vegetation has been cleared and there is a fence, gate, and sign.

The basic components of a restoration project should include:

1. *Matzevot*: Ideally, as many *matzevot* as possible should be conserved. By this we mean that those which may have fallen would be placed upright (reset), and that any adjacent vegetation obscuring or threatening them would be removed. Ideally, *matzevot* should remain where found if it is reasonably certain they are associated with a burial; for *matzevot* that may have been removed from their original location and perhaps returned to the site; they should be placed in locations so as not to indicate a burial underneath. For example, *matzevot* may be used as part of a wall or memorial. The details of this are subject to Jewish law and covered in section 8.



Figure 2. Example of a fairly elaborate memorial in Przasnysz.

2. Signs/memorials: An essential action is to mark the site as a Jewish cemetery. Signs and memorials may include both a trilingual (Hebrew, Polish, and English) memorial to those buried and an informational sign. These may be very simple to elaborate depending on available funding and the wishes of the concerned parties. At the time of writing, the Polish government proposes to place historical markers at every Jewish cemetery, but there is no stated timeline. This is covered in detail in sections 9 and 10.

3. Fence and possible gate: The most important action of a restoration project is to mark the borders. This is consistent with Jewish tradition. Fences and gates can range from simple, just marking the corners, to very elaborate iron, stone, or concrete structures. Before fencing is installed, a formal delineation should be done such that the borders are marked to the satisfaction of all concerned, and so as not to disturb human remains. This is covered in detail in section 11.

4. Relationship with the local community: Developing a strategy to work with the local community holds immense significance in preserving and honoring shared cultural history. By engaging with the local residents, descendants can build bridges of understanding, empathy, and collaboration. This not

only facilitates the cemetery's physical restoration but also integrates it into the fabric of the local community, making it a living testament to the intertwined histories of both communities. By forging these connections and fostering a sense of ownership and pride, the restored cemetery is more likely to be sustained and cherished in the long term, safeguarding the memory of the Jewish heritage and fostering a sense of unity and respect among diverse communities. There are nonprofit agencies in Poland and the U.S. that may help, also some FJCP project leaders have met local residents who facilitated relationships with the local community. This is covered in detail in section 4.

5. Ceremonies: A formal ceremony, perhaps for the installation of an informational sign, formal memorial, or completion of a cleanup, is recommended not only for commemorating the cemetery by the descendants, but is also a key step in assuring that the town considers the cemetery part of a shared cultural heritage. In addition to the descendants, Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŻ) (if appropriate), the chief Rabbi (or his representative), the mayor and other city officials, school officials, church officials, television and print media, and the local inhabitants are invited. Some ceremonies have featured musical presentations by descendants and local musicians.



Figure 3. Ceremony for dedication of an informational sign in Przerośl including descendants, local dignitaries, and others.

While each of these will likely change as the project develops, having an initial vision is important in the planning process.

Plan logistics

The execution of various tasks involved in the restoration project will depend on the division of responsibilities between you, your team, and other individuals or organizations. Organizing everything required on-site for restoration, including things like vegetation clearing tools, first aid kits, and portable toilets, can be challenging. It may be more convenient to delegate this responsibility to others.

While detailed information on these aspects is provided in subsequent sections, there are a few preliminary tasks that need to be accomplished well before the start of fieldwork:



Figure 4. Dan Oren meeting with local officials in Markuszów.

Determine the key national and local people to meet: You may consider meeting with the Polish Rabbinate in Warsaw, and FODŻ or the local Jewish community if your ancestral cemetery is potentially under their jurisdiction. Arrange meetings with municipal officials, church officials; and if possible, school officials (especially the history teacher), the town historian, and the town folklorist. These are individuals you should be working with for the duration of your project and who will be important long after the cemetery is restored.

Identify the governing bodies overseeing the cemetery and ascertain if any permits or permissions are necessary. For example, certain work may be restricted until ownership is clarified, and vegetation cutting may be subject to seasonal restrictions to protect wildlife.

Establish support base of potential volunteers and collaborators

Restoring a cemetery may seem like a huge undertaking, but rest assured, you won't be doing it alone.

You will build various relationships with other descendants, local residents, local experts and activists, and national authorities in Poland. Ensuring a successful cemetery restoration project necessitates seeking out and nurturing such relationships with people and organizations that will become your support network. Possibly the most critical relationship is to acquire someone to facilitate your interaction with town officials and notables who can both guide you and interpret Polish culture, laws, traditions, politics, and other nuances.

Begin to think about funding. Apart from an initial reconnaissance visit, which you should expect to finance yourself, there are various funding sources and strategies available to accomplish the planned work. Relatives and descendants can contribute significantly to the project financially, and there are nonprofit agencies that offer competitive grants for activities like fencing.

Consider the extent of work. Determine whether your goals can be achieved within a week or if the project will require incremental efforts over several years. This will help in setting realistic expectations and planning accordingly.

To further document the cemetery, any or all of the following might be required or desired:

- Formal delineation of the cemetery to establish legal boundaries.
- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey to help document locations of burials or mass graves.
- Lidar (Light Detection and Ranging) survey providing a detailed contour map of the cemetery might also be helpful for identifying locations of mass graves and remnant structures.
- Historical aerial photographs which may provide information on historic conditions in the cemetery, such as existence and locations of buildings, fences, and general locations of graves.

Discovering a new collaborator

After completing an initial site visit in 2018 by a descendant of Goniądz, a descendant working on a nearby restoration project noticed that an informational sign had been placed near the cemetery. The person who erected the sign was found and not only became a key participant in a few clean-up activities but was also critical in engaging the local town. The project leader's plans were thus changed to take advantage of this.



Figure 5. Volunteers taking a break from cutting vegetation in Przerośl.

On-site restoration activities

Depending on how a particular project or project phase is planned, the work, such as vegetation clearing, removing debris, or documenting gravestones, can be done by a combination of you and your fellow descendants, volunteers, national or international nonprofit agencies, or contractors. In most instances, it is a combination. Ideally, these activities are conducted in close collaboration with the local populace. This phase can take place in as short as a few days in one year or perhaps a week or so spread over several years.

Plan for Long-term Preservation and Protection

Finally, it is essential to consider what type of long-term maintenance plan will be required so that the cemetery does not revert to its former state or is forgotten by descendants and the local populace. Possibly most importantly, vegetation needs to be cleared on a regular basis to minimize adverse impact to the *matzevot* and access to the cemetery. Improvements such as signs and gates need to be inspected and maintained as needed. Although the big city cemeteries (e.g., Warsaw, Łódź), receive attention and are regularly cared for (though still challenged by funding) the situation for smaller cemeteries, at the time of writing, is problematic. We are aware of one example of ongoing local long-term maintenance of small Jewish cemetery (e.g., Dąbrowa Białostocka) by current residents (in this case, by students of the local school in cooperation with the City, Municipal and Communal Cultural Center); we are not yet aware of any successful descendant-driven plans which could be used as templates. FJCP is currently working on this in collaboration with others. Another aspect which is problematic and has been paid scant attention is passing stewardship to successively younger generations of both descendants and the local community.

Assess Accomplishments

One cannot plan for every aspect of a cemetery restoration project; as the project develops, new opportunities or challenges become apparent and you may have to fine-tune the plan for the next increment of work and your vision.

1. Planning a Cemetery Restoration Project: Where do you start?

How to start your cemetery restoration project

You have found out that there is a neglected or abandoned cemetery in your ancestral town² and you are interested in visiting the cemetery, cleaning and clearing it, and restoring dignity to your ancestors buried there. You've never been to Poland, don't speak Polish, and are daunted by the whole idea. The authors have all been in your shoes. We started with a commitment, vision, and passion once we realized the state of the cemetery in the town our grandparents, great-grandparents, or ancestors came from. But where do you start?

Like many things in life, the planning phase of a cemetery restoration project may consume the bulk of your effort. Planning may take months or perhaps years to complete; the on the ground work may take only a few weeks. One of us spent a career restoring wetlands; in reflecting back, the planning phase of wetlands restoration represents around 90% of the time and effort.

Before delving into the specifics, or even to generalities, we must stress the importance of flexibility. No one can plan for every aspect of a cemetery restoration project; as the project develops, we encounter new opportunities or challenges and must update the plan. For example, one of us planned to install a stone memorial at her ancestral cemetery soon after an initial cleaning. Due to unforeseen events, this was not possible. Instead, the leader designed, arranged for, and installed an informational sign. The deviation in sequencing did not detract from the restoration plan. While there are certain things that need to be accomplished before others, and these should be clearly understood and laid out, deviations should be expected and part of your mindset through the whole process. Like painting a room, preparing for a bar or bat mitzvah, or planning for retirement, a sound but flexible plan pays off in the long run.

Another critical point at the outset is to understand that you won't be doing your project alone. Almost all aspects of cemetery restoration from start to finish will be done by working with others. This may involve family members, other descendants from your ancestral town, your own local communities, communities in Poland, various nongovernmental agencies, etc. Although we are aware of one pioneer in cemetery restoration who started on his own, all the subsequent projects we are aware of have involved extensive and diverse collaborations. Subsequent sections of this Guidebook focus on building relationships and working with project team members.

Planning first involves assembling data on the cemetery, including the history and the current situation, identifying and then cultivating relationships with the various groups – local and national authorities (in Poland) and experts, other descendants, and other potential restoration partners. Along with this first step is developing a vision for what the restored cemetery will look like, how it will fit in with the contemporary situation, and what its future will be. We offer the checklist below to begin collecting information and provide details in subsequent sections. The list is not intended to be followed in a strictly stepwise sequence because some later steps may feed back to earlier ones. For example, determining the location and boundaries of the cemetery (an early step) may need to be corroborated through relationships built (a later step).

² Presumably you have done a preliminary confirmation that there is no ongoing or previous restoration project at a website such as at <https://jewishheritagepoland.org/other-towns.html>.

CHECKLIST FOR CEMETERY RESTORATION

- Identify location of the cemetery
 - Approximate location (for early planning)
 - Legal boundaries (for on-site work and construction)
- Collect pertinent data
 - On-site collection
 - General condition
 - Need to clear vegetation, remove debris, etc.
 - Estimated number and condition of headstones
 - “Paper Chase”
 - Ownership, access issues
 - Other history
 - Maps, etc. to corroborate location
 - Other constraints or opportunities
- Establish relationships to facilitate project
 - Other descendants and project proponents including advisers
 - National officials in Poland as appropriate
 - Municipality, local concerned individuals
- Develop restoration plan
 - Vision for restored cemetery (=outcome of restoration)
 - On-site activities like clearing vegetation, dealing with headstones
 - Protection such as fence and gate
 - Information sign, formal memorial
 - Costs, funding sources, and contracting mechanisms
- Obtain permits and permissions to perform on-site work
- Design and carry out plan
 - Develop logistics
 - Contracting or volunteers
 - Equipment required
 - Support of day-to-day activities
- Design and implement a long-term maintenance plan

First things first...

Before fully embarking on the items in the checklist we recommend making initial contact with at least two organizations to help with the remaining steps³:

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŹ) is a Warsaw-based, Polish non-governmental agency whose mission is to facilitate the preservation of Jewish heritage, including synagogues, yeshivas, and cemeteries, not otherwise owned by the Jewish community. In some instances, FODŹ is or might become the legal owner of the cemetery. They may have considerable written and anecdotal information including files, maps, and other records of past activities of your ancestral town as

³ We provide more details and contact information in the Appendix.

well of knowledge of potential local restoration activists to help you with your project. In some instances, they may travel to the town and assess the cemetery, contact the local officials, and get the ball rolling. They can set in motion the process for obtaining permissions and permits. Thus, they can provide advice and help on all of the required steps.

The Polish Rabbinate is also a critical authority to contact and to work with from the project inception through the lifetime of the project. They have established the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC), that is responsible for preserving Polish Jewish cemeteries and they have issued guidelines which must be followed during any cemetery restoration effort. Their permission, which is usually very easy to obtain, is required for many aspects of cemetery restoration. Their team can also provide advice and help on many of the required steps and has published guidelines for cemetery restoration (see Appendix) which you should peruse as you progress with your project.

Two U.S.-based organizations that might be contacted early on are Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP) and Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (FJCP). They are both primarily comprised of descendants of Polish Jews restoring their respective ancestral cemeteries and helping others to do so. Members of both groups travel frequently to Poland and it might be valuable to meet them in Poland and possibly observe or participate in one of their restoration project activities. More information about both organizations is provided in the Appendix and elsewhere in the Guidebook.

2. Maps and Geospatial Data

Although it is likely that you already have some documentation of your family history which in fact led you to restore your ancestral cemetery, it is unlikely that you indeed have any maps. You, your project manager, or another leader will need a range of different types of maps as you proceed, some are obvious, some not.

In the earliest stages of your project, for example your first visit, you will likely need a basic map showing the location of the cemetery and perhaps a more detailed map showing the approximate boundaries so you can do a preliminary visit and assessment. Since most cemeteries in Poland are not yet marked as such, you will need to pick yours out of an otherwise homogeneous forest landscape, cultivated cleared area, or vacant city lot. Even armed with a good directional map, this can be quite a challenge without specific clues on the ground (e.g., *matzevot*) or help from local residents or others.

This first set of maps, which may be both historic and contemporary, are relatively easy to find online from a simple internet search on the name of the cemetery or even query of GoogleMaps or similar program. Our favorite maps are those done by the Germans during WWII (note that we discuss aerial photos taken by the Germans a bit later). These may be supplemented by satellite images of a specific area from both GoogleMaps and GoogleEarth. Being prepared with these on your first site visit is invaluable.

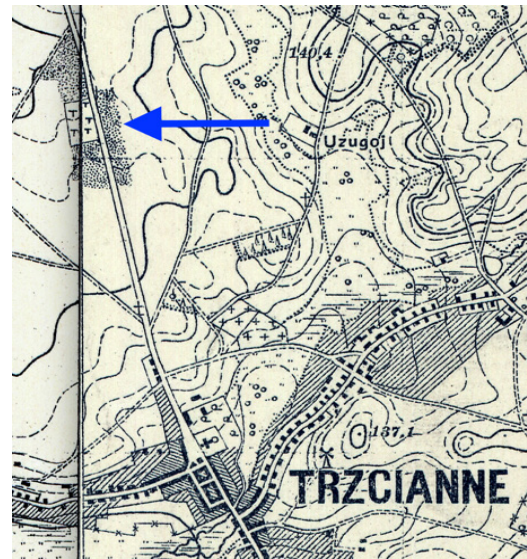


Figure 6. Example of WWII era map showing the location of the Jewish cemetery in relation to the shtetl. The various symbols on the map indicate the location of the Jewish cemetery, the Catholic cemetery, houses, trees, windmills, elevation contours, etc. The blue arrow was added to show the location of the Jewish cemetery in the heavily forested area.



Figure 7. Parcel map/aerial photo of the area surrounding the Trzciannie Jewish cemetery. Arrow indicates the the cemetery in parcel 347.

Other maps which may be available are parcel maps also known as cadastral maps (Figure 7). These maps are used to assess potential ownership. While these are helpful in initial stages of a project, they may be critical when proposing improvements to the cemetery site, such as building fences and gates. The maps above as well as others may also be obtained in some instances from FODŹ and the Rabbinical Commission. A compilation of cadastral maps for towns in historical Galicia is available at: <https://maps.geshergalicia.org/cadastral/>.

You should have reasonable expectations for these historic and other maps. They will clearly show the location and boundaries of your ancestral cemetery, but generally have no indication of where graves or

buildings are or were located. Thus, you likely will want to pursue more details.

Although the data above are the highest priority, there are at least two other sorts of “maps,” or more properly geospatial data, which may be of further help in some situations.

First is Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). GPR may be helpful in determining what lies below the surface, and can provide data on where graves, particularly mass graves, may be. There are several kinds of GPR which may be used, but details are beyond the scope of this manual and most of us rely upon the RCC to help (for a modest fee). GPR studies may also be done by nearby universities and private companies. Knowing the location of graves is important when planning construction (e.g., fences, gates, paths) in and around the cemetery to avoid disturbing human remains.

Second is LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging). LIDAR produces a 3-D surface contour map from lasers in aerial overflights. The contours may identify areas in the landscape which were disturbed, presumably for graves, in the past. The RCC may also help with this.

Another useful source of information is aerial photography taken by the Luftwaffe (German Air Corps) during WWII. More than 1.25 million German aerial photographic prints were seized at the end of World War II by the U.S. and made available in recent years. These photographs can sometimes provide historical images of where *matzevot*, fences, and other structures were. In some instances, these are very useful if they were taken at high resolution, in other instances they are of minor use. Our experience has been the range. For the Bagnówka cemetery in Białystok, images of the arrangement of *matzevot* and structures are very clear, but for some of our other projects the only new data were those of possible locations of larger structures, likely to be *ohallim* (structure built around one or more grave of someone of importance of the deceased such as important rabbis, *tzadikim*, or prominent Jewish community leaders). How do you get these photos? – See the Appendix.

The allies (primarily U.S.) also collected similar geospatial data which may be useful. These are available from the U.S. Library of Congress and Archives (See Appendix).

These maps (as well as other useful historical information pertaining the cemetery) may also be available in the municipality, regional, or national (Polish) archives, the local or regional museum, from the town folklorist/historian, local or university library, U.S. Archives, U.S. Library of Congress, or similar source (See Appendix).

Another method for not only acquiring maps but also property ownership is to commission a formal survey of the cemetery. Polish contractors may assemble a report containing all available maps of the cemetery and surrounding area, aerial photographs, plans, and importantly, documents pertaining to historical and previous ownership. Some contractors may even install survey markers in the corners of the property. They will exhaustively search Polish and U.S. archives for appropriate information and provide detailed explanation and photointerpretation. The cost for such a survey is somewhat in excess of \$US2000 based on such surveys and estimates in 2019 (current costs are likely higher due to inflation). FODŹ may arrange for these. The owner of the cemetery must generally provide permission to perform the survey.

These maps, plans, and surveys are not only important for finding the cemetery and its boundary but are also important for identifying neighbors in the event access needs to be arranged for restoration activities

or if permission needs to be obtained to build a fence. Further, precise maps may help in the event any sort of encroachment by an adjacent landowner is suspected.

Who owns the cemetery?

Determining the current owner of the cemetery is an essential aspect of any restoration project. While the original owner of the cemetery was unquestionably the local Jewish community, because of changes in governments and land use policies since WWII, the situation is sometimes complex and the details are beyond the scope of this Guidebook. In many instances FODŹ is or is the potential future owner (as of 2024 FODŹ owns just over 150 Jewish cemeteries), in other instances it is the local or regional Jewish community (which owns about 150 cemeteries), the State Forests (Lasy Państwowe) (over 50 cemeteries) or the local municipality. Moreover, National Heritage Board has an unpublished database of cemeteries. (Contact: nid@nid.pl).

3. Site Assessment

Assessing the site, or determining the current, pre-project, status of your ancestral cemetery is critical to restoration. It provides the baseline data you need to plan the various actions needed to restore the cemetery to your proposed endpoint. You will likely be assessing the site through the life of the project, discovering new things on each visit or as project partners share findings.

This section deals primarily with a first or follow-up visit to garner enough information to develop a vision and a project plan. But, with each subsequent visit you will doubtless find new data that will change the course of your initial restoration plan.

Historical information, such as old photographs and the Luftwaffe aerial images mentioned above may provide visual evidence of physical information that had been lost. For instance, if an *ohel* is visible in historical images, suspect remnants in a contemporary investigation may corroborate it.

In many instances, this phase can, and probably should, be started as a desktop activity, done largely from the web. Often a Google (or other search engine) or Wikipedia search will yield useful results. Further, various organizations, particularly FODŹ and the RCC may have files or anecdotal information. Don't neglect to see whether previous work has been done on the site; in some instance we know, descendants or the local community have cleaned and cleared the cemetery but not followed up in subsequent years. They may have made important observations that will help you. A few organizations have either examined or compiled data from the examination of others. Recommended starting sites are (detailed information on these and other organizations is provided in the Appendix):

JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR):

<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/tree/CemList.htm>

National Heritage Board of Poland/National Institute of Cultural:

<https://zabytek.pl/en/obiekty/?ciekawez=jewish-cemeteries>

Jewish cemeteries in Poland:

<http://cmentarze-zydowskie.pl/>

Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in Poland:

https://www.heritageabroad.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/survey_poland.pdf

International Jewish Cemetery Project:

<https://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/>

Virtual Shtetl:

www.sztetl.org.pl

Alternatively, you may want to have someone else do some or all of the preliminary assessment. FODŹ is known to do this for cemeteries potentially under their jurisdiction; further, there are local consultants and activists who may do this on a volunteer or fee basis.

But in all likelihood, you will want to visit the cemetery yourself and do your own assessment.

The intent of the first or preliminary assessment should be to gather information on:

- Vegetation: How overgrown is the cemetery? (needed to figure out what needs to be cleared)
- *Matzevot*: How many are visible, what is their condition? (to figure out plan to reset)
- Apparent boundary: Is there an abrupt change in land use or other indications?

- Fencing, wall, gates: Are there remnants that might be used to indicate the border, if so, should these be conserved?
- Apparent entrances: Is there an area that looks like it may have been used to access the cemetery?
- Different uses in parts of the cemetery: Is it possible that some sections of the cemetery were used for burial and others than held as reserve land?
- Structures: Are there buildings (or remnants) that may have been a burial house, caretaker's cottage, or *ohalim*?
- Land use in areas that adjoins the cemetery: This is potentially useful to indicate boundary, and factors to be taken into account in planning.
- Possible encroachment of adjacent property owners: Does it look like the adjacent users possibly have taken over part of the cemetery?
- Has any part of the cemetery been repurposed, e.g., as a dump site or a thoroughfare, with a road through or cutting into the area of the cemetery?
- Possible debris/trash, or other items that may have to be cleared to see the actual soil surface to look for *matzevot*.
- Safety hazards such as barbed wire or electric fence.

Don't worry, you may not answer all of these questions yet, but answering or addressing each of these is important in developing your restoration plan.

You should bring:

The first in-person assessment should ideally be done with...

- Maps or plans (not only to find the cemetery and boundaries, but also to indicate locations of items of interest)
- Guide/interpreter (we provide advice in the Appendix), particularly if you need help from local residents or authorities on directions
- Camera/smartphone (GPS switched on such that you can return to the specific area you photographed, Google Translate Polish language files downloaded so you can communicate with locals)
- Notebook, to record data, for example possibly locations of items of concern within the cemetery boundaries or questions you may have about what you saw but also to share with relatives, fellow descendants, and other partners who may contribute funding, volunteer labor, and other resources to your project. This only need be a few pages, but should be detailed enough to address concerns without having to go back.
- Proper clothing for trudging through thick vegetation and uneven ground, possibly a small first aid kit, and other items appropriate for working outside.
- Bag for trash
- Survey ribbon to mark locations of important discoveries for future visitors including *matzevot* and vegetation

For example, the results of an early assessment of the Przasnysz cemetery revealed concrete rubble, dumped tires, a road running through the cemetery, and a roadside pull out over location cutting the corner of the cemetery. A strategy for dealing with this was included in the project plan.

The results of a site assessment might take many different forms, a list, a formal report with photographs, maps, or some other form. One convenient way to summarize results is a combined site assessment and preliminary project plan. The example in Figure 8 was developed because the project leader produces such plans as part of his job. In most cases, a simple hand-drawn sketch is really all that is needed.

In addition to data collection, your preliminary site assessment will be useful for telling others about the project and your photographs can be used in fundraising.



Figure 8. Example of a combined site assessment and preliminary project plan. Note that providing a scale and precise area simplifies things like cost estimating for possible fences or vegetation maintenance. Note that this is far beyond the needs for any project.

4. Building Enduring Relationships

We have combined a seemingly disparate group of people and people-related tasks in this section because they are a critical part of any project. We have already stressed that it is nearly impossible to successfully complete a cemetery restoration project on your own. Even if you could generously fund and navigate all the activities, long-term success would be likely compromised unless you have established strong relationships with what might be regarded as a “team” of partners, advisors, supporters, and collaborators. This section considers these various individuals and groups and then provides a few examples of how these teams can work successfully together.

Your team members may include a broad diversity of individuals and organizations (see table) we talk more about this below. Your team will continue from the inception of the project through completion and the maintenance phase and likely change as the project proceeds. While building and engaging your team does require some thought and effort, it will also self-assemble naturally as you proceed. Even if you’re an introvert, your team can be built and managed without undue stress. In fact, most project leaders find this team building a very fulfilling, learning experience (see the story about one descendant’s transcendent experience in the Conclusion).

POTENTIAL RESTORATION PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS	
Relatives, Friends	Museums (national, regional, local)
Descendants from your ancestral town	Nonprofit organizations (your own country, international, local)
Polish government officials (national, regional, local)	The Church
Activists (regional, local)	Contemporary local residents (prominent citizens, ordinary folks)
School officials and (sometimes) students	

Descendants of your ancestral town

It’s likely that you’ve already built a family tree or are in the process of doing so and as a result you’ve found descendants from your ancestral town who aren’t known to be related to you, i.e., *landsmen*. But why bother with them? First, and perhaps most important, it’s their ancestral cemetery too, and they likely have an interest in the future of the cemetery and any genealogical data that can be garnered from as yet undocumented *matzevot*. Second is that they are likely donors not only of funds needed for restoration but also hands-on labor during the cleaning and clearing phase. Third is for networking; if you don’t know someone or something, maybe they do.

How do I find descendants from my ancestral town? Much like searching for relatives (see Appendix for a primer on Jewish genealogy), or fundraising and publicity covered in subsequent sections, you may either actively seek them out or create a presence so they find you and your project. There is no single method for doing this and you should also understand that you will continue identifying descendants over an extended period of time.

Following are possible starting points that may be undertaken both to find descendants or as part of an effort for publicity and fundraising.

JewishGen

JewishGen is an effective means of either searching or reaching out. First, there is an excellent search function; if you enter your ancestral town in the Communities Database (<https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/jgcd.php>), you will get a list of names associated with the town, and potential contact information. This requires some follow-up work. Second is the ability to send a message through the discussion group stating that you are initiating a cemetery restoration project and looking for descendants (<https://groups.jewishgen.org/g/main/topics>). Third, there are many other nooks and crannies in the website that are worth sleuthing out in search of family members or descendants from your ancestral village. Note that you may need to register with JewishGen and pay a nominal membership fee.

Web Searches

Searching Google or another web browser for your ancestral town's name may also help you identify descendants. For example, people ask questions in genealogy forums or write articles or books about the ancestral town or one or more families which will appear in web searches which will all result in search findings. However, for any but smaller towns, the amount of information may be so overwhelming as not to be useful but you may find other interesting and useful information.

Facebook

Facebook has many groups that focus on the former Jewish community of a particular town or region (including cemetery projects) and also Jewish genealogy. Search Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>) for the name of your ancestral town, join the group, and use it to add to your list of descendants. If there is no such Facebook group, consider starting one; our experience is that these groups are one of the most important sources for identifying and engaging descendants. Note that our various Facebook pages have not only attracted Jewish but also non-Jewish descendant participants for our projects. Consider joining a Facebook group, such as Jewish Genealogy Poland (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/JewishGenealogyPoland>), and inquiring about your ancestral town and cemetery. We present examples later in this Guidebook in the Publicity section.

Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland

As your project gets underway, we strongly recommend that you partner with the Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP) (details provided elsewhere), and work with them to create a focused cemetery restoration project page on their website for your town. This page will then show up in web searches of your ancestral town, provide a description of your proposed project, and become a valuable means of identifying descendants and facilitating fundraising. In our experience, even for the smallest former *shtetl*, FJHP may yield many new contacts a year. <https://jewishheritagepoland.org/>

You've got a list and checked it twice, now what?

As your project contact lists grow, comprised not only of descendants but also other interested individuals, you should create a "mailing list" to keep your network informed through email, as starting point for a Facebook Group, or a website. Your regular reminders will generate enthusiasm and a shared sense of purpose. Remember that not everyone has the same degree of computer literacy and you might need to rely on the phone or "snail mail" to update some members.

Authorities in Poland

This section describes the various national and regional authorities involved in regulating (sometimes referred to as governance) Jewish cemeteries. By regulating we mean those individuals and organizations who have the authority to oversee or control any aspect of the cemetery, its restoration, or maintenance.

Why are we writing about this here and why do we think they are part of your team? Beyond complying with their requirements and getting permits and permissions, they can be very helpful. These individuals and organizations will potentially advise, lead, and partner with you and your project and developing good relationships early on will go a long way toward a smoothly running project. So, developing good relationships with these authorities is a key part of any project. For example, they may find experienced and reputable contractors, provide technical information such as maps, handle technical studies such as ground penetrating radar, and also serve as a Poland-based face for your project.

In determining which entities you need to work with, the first question is “who owns the cemetery?” This is usually reasonably easy to answer and is covered elsewhere. So, presumably you have already determined the owner of your cemetery. In most cases, it is the local municipality, the Jewish Community, or The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŹ). The Forest Service also owns many cemeteries in Poland and is often very helpful. The Forest Service may, for example, provide road signs, informational signs, and temporary fences. Over the course of a restoration project, the ownership may change; most frequently from the municipality to FODŹ. The owner of the cemetery will obviously exert considerable but not exclusive regulatory duties.

The Rabbinate and the Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC)

The Rabbinate/RCC is a critical authority for all projects to work with over all stages of a project. They are responsible for preserving Polish Jewish cemeteries. They have published detailed guidelines for restoration work in cemeteries (<https://sztetl.org.pl/en/wytyczne-komisji-rabinicznej-do-spraw-cmentarzy>; see Appendix), provide general advice, help with local or regional contacts, participate in ceremonies, advise on how to deal with mass graves associated with individual cemeteries, and will work with you to determine whether a ground penetrating radar or Lidar survey would be helpful and then help with these. Their approval is required for various tasks such as resetting headstones or repainting inscriptions. The current Chief Rabbi, Michael Schudrich, is supported by a team of others. We recommend you contact Rabbi Schudrich or his representative at the inception of your project and arrange for a meeting on your first trip to Poland. Contact: komisja.rabiniczna@jewish.org.pl

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŹ)

FODŹ is also a critical authority to work with for projects under their ownership or future ownership. Their primary mission is to protect, restore, and commemorate the surviving sites and monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. This includes cemeteries, and matters concerning cemetery restoration. Many cemeteries in Poland are under the authority or owned by FODŹ; some are slated for such authority once title is transferred from the local municipality. FODŹ will provide ownership information, and, if requested, facilitate relationships by, for example, representing descendants during the restoration process including facilitating meetings and arranging for contractors (such as surveyors, stonemasons to construct monuments). If your ancestral cemetery is under the authority of FODŹ, or will be in the future, you should correspond with them early on in your project and schedule a meeting for your first visit to Poland. They may also provide advice for cemeteries which they neither own nor will own in the future. Contact: <https://fodz.pl/?d=3&l=en>

Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (UJRCP), Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich w RP (ZGWŻ)

The UJRCP owns some cemeteries in Poland and thus is responsible for much of what goes on in those cemeteries and permission must be given from the appropriate individuals for most work. They have limited funding to help with some aspects of restoration. Contact: <https://jewish.org.pl/>

Other national regulatory agencies

There are a few other entities which in all likelihood, you won't need to deal with directly, but should be aware of.

Register of Historical Monuments. It is important to determine whether the cemetery is included in the National Heritage Board of Poland for Preservation of Historical Sites, Register of Historical Monuments. This can be done either by asking FODŹ or searching the Board's website:

<https://zabytek.pl/en/mapa?sekcja=pomniki-historii>. If your ancestral cemetery is so regulated, then the consent of a regional curator is required to approve most restoration activities. For example, permission may be needed to repair things like fences or gates, or to trim trees or other vegetation. At present, there are about 250 Jewish cemeteries in Poland under their regulation. Dealing directly with them is often beyond the scope of what a descendant would independently do and is generally left to FODŹ (for FODŹ-administered cemeteries) or others.

Ministry of Climate and Environment. Environmental regulations may be in place for some sorts of activities in some cemeteries. In one instance we are familiar with, there are environmental work windows precluding vegetation clearing during certain times of the year to protect sensitive wildlife. Further, there are protected species of plants; the municipality should provide information on these if it is an issue. It is unlikely you will have to deal directly with them. <https://www.gov.pl/web/climate>

The Regulatory Commission. The commission, which consists of representatives of the government and Jewish communities in Poland, provides decisions on the ownership of property which was previously (i.e., pre-WWII) owned by the Jewish community. They may transfer ownership from the municipality to FODŹ or the appropriate Jewish Community. At the time of writing, there is a large backlog of cases. It is unlikely that you will be dealing directly with them; in many cases, FODŹ will represent the particular cemetery project in question.

Municipal and county authorities. In many instances, local governments hold title to Jewish cemeteries and thus you must work with them. Typically, they are cooperative with and very respectful of the cemeteries and descendants. They issue permits for placing monuments and informational signs, and may have restrictions on when and how vegetation clearing takes place. In our experience, when appropriately approached, they provide invaluable support. For example, they may dispose of cleared vegetation, provide portable toilets for work crews, and even provide workers or help to locate and contract a work crew. They sometimes often have records or knowledge of the cemetery and local Jewish population not otherwise available. It is important to work with them starting early on not only for compliance with regulations but also as a project partner throughout and after your project's life. This should involve in-person visits each time a project phase starts. However, in a small number of cases, they limit or restrict work.

Your country's embassy: At present, this is generally neither required nor encouraged. The U.S. embassy, while occasionally providing limited advice and help, has stated they needn't be notified unless something "goes wrong."

The next few pages describe individuals and organizations that are highly desirable to work with but you will have more discretion in engaging with them.

Experienced advisers & Cultural emissaries. Many projects use one or more experienced advisers to not only guide them in planning and on-site work but also to help avoid possible missteps and misunderstandings. It is a good idea to have someone with you as you meet with town officials and town notables who can both guide you and interpret. By interpret we mean not only interpret English and Polish, but also interpret Polish culture, laws, traditions, politics, and other nuances. For example, communication frequency and handling money may be different from what you may expect.

First amongst these is FODŹ and the Rabbinate/RCC which we've previously covered. We recommend that you not only contact them early in your project, but also arrange to visit with them well in advance of your travel to Poland and your first site visit.

Two other groups to get you started and facilitate contacts are:

Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP) is a U.S.-based nonprofit that provides valuable advice and services, formal introductions and interactions with the Rabbinate/RCC, FODŹ, and others, and may help facilitate publicity and fundraising on their website. FJHP will help build relationships with these and other groups and individuals, is an excellent advisor, and should be part of your network as you plan and execute your project.

Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (FJCP) may also be helpful, particularly if your project is in the vicinity of one of their projects. Some of our members spend a few weeks each year in Poland addressing the needs of their respective projects and would be very happy to meet with you, visit your project site, and provide introductions to potentially helpful individuals and organizations. They have monthly, or more frequent, Zoom meetings sharing lessons learned and would welcome you to join.

For many years and increasingly in the past decade, local Polish townspeople have taken leadership roles in preserving Jewish culture, including cemeteries. They are generally known as activists. This is advantageous because they know the social structure of the town, live nearby and can get things done more easily than descendants living thousands of miles away

Who are they? They are town and county officials, local teachers, the schoolmaster, local clergy, the town folklorist and/or historian, the museum curator, local heritage activists, and others who the townspeople consider to be notable citizens, e.g., doctors or educators. They may have tried to connect with descendants of the Jewish community. See text box for an example. We have worked with and encountered several such activists and they have been important in some of our projects, e.g., Tomek Wisniewski in the Białystok and surrounding towns, Marcin Mikołajczyk in Łomża, and Leora Tec in the Lublin region.

Local activists will help you with work on the ground, build relationships with other local officials and individuals who may be of help and perhaps more importantly, model support for your project. There are dozens of activists scattered through Poland. You can find local activists through several means, including asking these Warsaw-based organizations for suggestions: FODŹ, Forum for Dialogue, and the Polin Museum.

As you work restoring the cemetery, over time the cemetery may become a shared and cherished part of the town, or at least become important to your local partners, who are often town or regional leaders and well respected by the townspeople, which is important to your cemetery and the history of the former Jewish community being “adopted” by the townspeople.

A local activist’s motivation

My interest in the legacy of Polish Jews is a natural consequence of my educational activities in the area of my region’s history. As I was conducting classes on the history of Łomża, I realized that young people know almost nothing about the Jewish community that lived in our town before the war. They were completely surprised when I told them that the first evidence of the Jewish community in Łomża date back to the 15th century and that during the period between the world wars Jews constituted a significant part of our town’s population. Unfortunately, the history of the Jews of Łomża is completely unknown to most people. This is why, through my activism, I try to bring back the memory of Łomża’s multicultural traditions. I work at High School no. 3 in Łomża, where I teach history and social studies...

Marcin Mikołajczyk

There are many organizations that fund and/or otherwise support projects in Poland, including foundations such as The Lauder Foundation and The Nissenbaum Foundation.

The Matzevah Foundation is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization not only with a track record of successful restoration projects but also providing invaluable advice to projects they don’t lead. The Matzevah Foundation, specializes in team building and focuses as a primary mission on building relationships between Polish Jewish descendants and non-Jewish contemporary populations. Their forte is building bonds between the local community and the Jewish descendants. Sometimes this happens when they facilitate introductions to local folks who will continue to be partners. You should consider submitting an application to work with them for your project, or just emailing asking for input as you proceed.

The Forum for Dialogue may become an important part of your network. Their mission is to teach about Poland’s Jewish heritage. They can help by introducing you to activists in your ancestral town or the region.

In the Appendix, we provide additional information on organizations involved in Jewish heritage preservation.

Each project’s network of advisors and partners will be distinct, depending upon many factors, such as what country the descendant group is in, where your ancestral town is located, the size of the former Jewish community, the presence of a nearby contemporary Jewish community, and so on.

Once you have begun to establish these relationships, consider the idea of a establishing a committee with descendant and town members, to be responsible for decisions about the project or at least to ensure that

everyone is kept informed and up to date. Include your partners in email updates, newsletters, and in any social media groups, such as a Facebook group for those interested in the cemetery restoration project.

Why build these relationships? The more invested in the restoration outcome your partners are, the more likely they will end up taking more and more responsibility for aspects of the project, such as maintaining the cemetery. Because they are leaders or respected notables, they can serve as a liaison to other town residents. They can help you find local work crews to clear the cemetery, arrange for access to the cemetery through adjoining lots, help with the logistics involved in clearing the cemetery if you do some of the clearing work yourself, help you work with the neighboring property owners when it's time to demolish an old fence and erect a new fence, and so on.

How do you cultivate relationships with local notables and residents? One way is to meet with the town officials in person before the start of the project and continue to meet with them each year that you visit and/or work in the cemetery. Also, it is prudent to stay locally and support local businesses, hiring them to clear trees and brush, build fences, repair a wall, install landscaping, and any projects requiring stone masonry, e.g., for a monument in the cemetery.

The local school

Many projects have successfully partnered with the local school. Examples are sponsoring a writing contest about Jewish history of the local area, having students interview the oldest residents about the Jewish community, sponsoring a visit to the Polin Museum in Warsaw, and writing poems about the Jewish heritage of their town. This is best done, working with a local resident or activist, sometimes with input from Forum for Dialogue, who understands the townspeople and can help guide you in the best ways to build relationships. The project participants in Przerośl spent an evening with the high school teachers, students, and the headmaster. The students showed videos of what they had done working with Forum for Dialogue, performed a local dance for the restoration team, and peppered them with questions about Jewish traditions and their lives. It was a lovely and special way to acknowledge the shared human experiences and colored interactions in subsequent visits.

What if you run into resistance or roadblocks?

The amount of time needed to establish relationships with townspeople and officials varies from one project to the next and sometimes one year to the next. Further, some descendants expect quick responses from the various Poles involved in their project, but things may take longer than expected and they may wish to see, over time, if you are indeed serious about your proposed restoration project. When you encounter such challenges, you may have to be patient, nurture relationships, and perhaps demonstrate the benefit of your work to their interests. The best strategy is to find allies, as well as to establish a precise goal, such as putting up an informational sign, memorial, or fence.

In most cases the local community, however quickly or slowly, enthusiastically or reluctantly, will permit or even participate in Jewish cemetery restoration projects. However, we are aware of a few cases where the municipality and other authorities are against a project and will not allow it to proceed. One example is in Szczekociny, about 2009, where a public toilet had been built over a cemetery and the town would not allow restoration. A range of authorities tried to intercede, but to no avail. The project leader spent time on the site distributing brochures printed in Polish and talking to passersby until officials permitted removal of the toilet and restoration of the cemetery.

Your interpreter or cultural emissary will help you understand the culture and avoid mistakes which might waste time or hamper your project. They can set up meetings and ask the town officials for necessities, for example, having trash and brush hauled away as you clean and clear. These things need to be arranged ahead of time.

Keeping team members engaged with your project

As important as finding these partners is keeping them engaged with you and your project. This may mean regular emails providing project updates (especially before major activities), annual reports, or donations to their nonprofit, or museum. Some project leaders regularly send holiday and birthday greetings or gifts. Many project leaders bring gifts each time they visit. These may be inexpensive gifts from your hometown such as t-shirts or baseball caps.



Figure 9. In the case of Trzcianne Jewish Cemetery, in 2019 the municipality prevented continued restoration activities, though they scrupulously removed trash and trimmed vegetation at the entrance. In 2024, a newly-elected mayor, Ewa Piekutowska, met with FODŹ director, Piotr Puchta, and restoration project lead, Bill Brostoff, to discuss further work such as installation of an information sign.

In our experience, most Polish people are warm, hospitable, and generous. They may be more formal and slower to form relationships than you expect. You will build trust by treating your Polish partners with respect and not, for instance, trying to pay them (unless they work as hired tour guides), and not questioning them if they are slower than you expect to respond to email. It also needs to be said that local notables are likely to seek you out, as you plan your project versus you seeking them out. Regardless, over time, these people may well become your friends and fellow travelers on the journey.



Figure 10. Hatte Blejer (project leader), Steven Reece (TMF), and a Przerośl resident.

These are people who have something special in common with you. Their ancestors lived and worked alongside your ancestors. Jewish history is shared by Jewish descendants and by Poles. This point may not be intuitive. Jewish communities in Poland have a thousand-year history and despite hardships and horrific tragedies, Poland's Jewish history is inextricably interwoven with Polish history.

Examples of Team Building:

The next few pages present examples of successes in cultivating relationships. In reading through these, please keep in mind that there are no explicit instructions like, for instance, we provide on how to clean gravestones. Rather, the important thing is to use your own skills, your team's skills, and the local situation to move forward.

A chance encounter, networking with other descendants from a nearby *shtetl*, help from a regional activist: Goniądz.

In 2018, Myrna Teck visited Goniądz, where her *grandmother* lived until 1906, in northeastern Poland near Białystok, and discovered the sad and abandoned state of the Jewish cemetery. Working with her guide (Witold Wrzosinski), she found a few matzevot, but nothing beyond that to indicate that it was a Jewish cemetery, no sign, no gate, no fence. Nothing. A few months later that year, Bill Brostoff, a descendant from the nearby *shtetl* of Trzcianne and his guide Tomek Wisniewski, from Białystok, chanced upon a newly installed informational sign (Figure 11) at the entrance to the cemetery. Tomek quickly found that Arek Studniarek, a local activist had erected the sign and arranged a *shidduch* (match) with Myrna. In subsequent years, Arek, Tomek, and Myrna led cemetery cleanups involving local townspeople (Figure 12) and plantings of hundreds of daffodils as part of the Daffodil Project (see Appendix). Further, the cooperation led to an alliance with the mayor of Goniądz who supported these projects, including providing municipal workers to help with the cleanup, and encouraged continuing restoration of the cemetery.



Figure 11. Informational sign installed by a local activist in Goniądz.



Figure 12. Goniądz townspeople participating in a clean-up day in the Jewish cemetery.

Working with a nonprofit, chance encounters with committed local residents, and vigilant team building: Przerośl.

In 2012 Hattie Blejer visited the ancestral *shtetl* her great grandparents had emigrated from in 1891. She found that a veritable forest had swallowed up most of the cemetery, making it nearly impenetrable. Working with a cousin, she resolved to re-start a project to restore the cemetery that had originated

several years before. Using family trees and contacts for other descendants they recruited a group of volunteers.

Starting in 2017, she started working with The Matzevah Foundation (TMF). Small groups of descendants, American volunteers recruited by TMF, and local residents, all led by TMF, worked to restore the cemetery in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Many strong bonds were formed. This would not have been possible without Steven Reece's (TMF president) experience and dedication. Besides being an interpreter and cultural emissary, he was a teacher in the importance of the project becoming a joint effort between the town and the Jewish descendants.

Before their first trip to Poland the restoration team was approached by a notable townspeople, Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, whose family had lived in Przerośl for over three centuries alongside Jewish neighbors, with whom his ancestors had warm relationships. He greeted the descendants upon their arrival with the words "Welcome home!" As importantly he introduced the descendants to other townspeople who became supporters and partners, including the mayor; the deputy county commissioner; the town folklorist; the schoolmaster/town historian; and his own cousin Wiesław who joined the descendants in clearing brush several summers and each summer comes with stories and photographs related to the cemetery or the former Jewish community. Even before the team's first trip to Poland, Jan Wiktor was taking steps to help us meet and establish relationships with townspeople and local officials. Considering that Jan Wiktor's cousin, Bishop Sienkiewicz, was instrumental in the approval of the Jewish Cemetery in Przerośl, this is poignant and fitting.



Figure 13. Przerośl team, meeting with city officials.

Interestingly, Agata Liszewska, the daughter of a local resident but who now lives in France also participates in the annual cleanup and recently helped organize the dedication for an informational sign. Agata is notable to us because of her statement "I long for the days of a multicultural Poland to return."

By the third summer of the project, the municipality and the county each lent the descendant team workmen and tools to clear heavy brush. During the Pandemic in 2020, when descendants were forced to cancel that summer's work in the cemetery, the deputy county commissioner, who had become a supporter and partner, arranged for, and supervised a work crew clearing the cemetery.

Each summer, the Liszewski family greets the group of descendants with a tea and that week's fruit pastries, which Poland is famous for. And Professor Sienkiewicz hosts the descendants in his historic house on the square.

This dedicated and cohesive a team likely would not have been built if not for the dedication of the project lead who sends Christmas gifts to the local collaborators.

Just being there... Trzcianne: The project at Trzcianne has met with some resistance on the part of the local community at least as of late 2023. The project lead, Bill Brostoff, has enlisted Tomek Wisniewski, who had visited Trzcianne several times over the years and first served as a guide for him. Tomek, in trying to move the project forward, has brought in several colleagues and acquaintances to talk with representatives of the school, church, and the municipality. Bill also attended guest lectures of Zach Mazur of the Polin Museum in California in 2023 which led to considerable help and collaboration. During an annual tour of Bagnówka cemetery in Białystok led by Heidi Szpek, Bill by chance connected with Jarek Parzyszek, a college classmate of the former mayor. Jarek has graciously helped on the project both independently and collaborating with Tomek Wisniewski to date in a manner which will ultimately lead to success. (In late 2024, a new mayor met with FODŹ and Bill Brostoff to discuss restarting the project.)



Figure 14. Tomek Wisniewski and the town historian photographing a matzevah in the Trzcianne Jewish cemetery.

**A renowned rabbi and his famous descendant, a local scholar-activist, and two nonprofits:
Nowogród**



Figure 15. Mayor Palka (Wójt), of Nowogród, hosting descendant Jeff Miller and others for lunch.

Diligent genealogical work on descendants from his ancestral *shtetl* on the part of Jeff Miller revealed that a regionally famous rabbi, Rabbi Hirsch Peltreowicz, had an even more famous living descendant, Gwyneth Paltrow. Armed with this fact, and much hard work, Jeff built a team working with FODŹ, FJHP, and a local Jewish heritage activist, historian, and teacher, Marcin Mikołajczyk. Jeff got to know Marcin on a walking tour of the nearby larger town of Łomża. Marcin is part of Forum for Dialogue’s network of activists and had brought his school class to the Nowogród cemetery (see text box above). Further, Jeff met with the Forum for Dialogue in Warsaw. Later, Jeff, with the financial help of Gwyneth Paltrow; planning by FODŹ; fundraising, research, writing, design, and other support by FJHP; and help from the mayor installed an information sign on the site of the cemetery and was able to take major steps in advancing further plans for restoration.

Finding dedicated local activists on Facebook and a Polish nonprofit led to strong relationships with the mayor, school students, and eventually an award-winning project: Przasnysz

A carefully constructed Facebook page led Ed Janes to meet three sisters from Przasnysz. The passionate dedication of the sisters in preserving Jewish heritage was a primary driver of success for this project. They served as his cultural emissaries, introduced Ed to the mayor and other local officials and provided

advice and tremendous impetus for the still ongoing project. He was also fortunate in connecting with the Forum for Dialogue; they helped organize a cemetery cleanup for which they won an award for “Impact on Community.” The involvement with students also included a visit to the Polin Museum, a poetry writing project, and a school curriculum about Polish Jewish heritage. [the Facebook page is reprinted in the section on publicity, a film depicting the students is referenced in the Appendix]. One of the key strategies in promoting the project was to use before and after photographs to show the abysmal state of the cemetery and what could be done.



Figure 16. School student volunteers organized by Forum for Dialogue at Przasnysz cemetery.

An academic sabbatical, creating a nonprofit, teaming up with a Bishop, lots of schmoozing with individuals and nonprofit organizations, successful grant writing, and much hard work: Markuszów

Although Dan Oren visited Poland with his Polish-born mother to visit the cemetery and actually found an ancestral *matzevah*, it wasn’t until years later during an academic sabbatical that Professor Jonathan Webber, at Jagiellonian University in Krakow, encouraged him to restore his ancestral cemetery. Early on in his restoration planning, Dan created Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland to be the U.S. partner organization of FODŻ. He befriended Bishop Mieczysław Ciso (a now-retired Polish Catholic bishop formally in charge of Jewish-Catholic Dialogue) and also teamed up with the Matzevah Foundation. In a subsequent stage, this work led to partnership between FJHP, FODŻ and the European Fund for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe and the construction of a new wall at the cemetery.



Figure 17. Bishop Ciso, town officials, and descendants at a ceremony in Markuszów.

The good fortune of an ancestral cemetery favored by local activists, patience and persistence with long-distance correspondence and Zoom meetings, and membership in a Facebook group: Krynki
 In contrast to the other examples of both team building and restoration projects, Bob Silverstein started working with local and regional activists as well as descendants on line and by email before he ever set foot in Poland. He patiently spent many hours doing so over several years after the local community actually reached out to him to help facilitate cemetery restoration. His patient and persistent virtual team building paid off in terms of successful clean-ups in 2022 and 2023.

Chance encounters in a large cemetery, a spouse with an ideal skill set, and judicious publicity: Bagnówka (and other cemeteries) in Białystok

Amy and Josh Degen first visited Bagnówka cemetery in 2015. In subsequent visits, they were fortunate to encounter Heidi Szpek, an expert on Jewish cemeteries; and also Tomek Wisniewski, a regional activist and experienced cemetery restorationist. They soon formed a nonprofit organization with a

mission to restore the cemetery, established web pages and Facebook groups, GoFundMe campaigns, and networking with the large potential group of interested parties with an interest in Białystok. They painstakingly established relationships with the city officials and the Rabbinical Commission who have also provided invaluable support. Each year, they bring volunteers from the U.S. and nearby countries in Europe to help with hands-on work. Josh's skills as stonemason, landscape architect, and former small-town mayor, played an important role in their success.

Thus, from the examples above, it should be clear that there is no single path to success but passion, patience, and persistence.

5. Project Publicity – Getting the Word Out About Your Project

This section considers various ways to promote a cemetery restoration project and engage potential collaborators. While Section 3 deals with identifying other descendants from your ancestral town and engaging with current inhabitants, and Section 6 deals with fundraising; here, we provide an overview of strategies to identify and connect with collaborators through social media, public presentations, and other means not covered extensively elsewhere. The intent of doing so is to develop a network of supporters including relatives, descendants, community members, and others interested in the project. This network could range from those making monetary contributions to help offset costs, to helping with restoration activities on the site of the cemetery. We offer both outreach strategies, for actively seeking collaborators, and methods for establishing a presence so that those seeking information on an ancestral town can find you and your project.

Email

While email will be your primary mode of communication, there are several important activities in this category. First, create a list of email contacts to provide regular project updates. These contacts can be sourced from various channels, in part as described in previous sections (e.g., responses from email to Jewish genealogy researchers for your town indicating their interest in the restoration project [<https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Search.asp>]). A thoughtfully written email can result in financial contributions, potential volunteer labor for a clean-up or other restoration activities, interest in participating in a ceremony, or even assistance with tasks like building a website or creating a film. Ideally the email should discuss the current state of the cemetery, include current photographs, your intention to lead a restoration effort, and provide a reference to a site where further information is and donations can be made.

Facebook

There are at least three strategies to use Facebook. First, establish a Facebook Group or Page to share project updates, photographs, experiences, comments, and more. This will create an online presence that individuals interested in your town can find when they search by the place name. Most of the members of Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland have already created such groups; you can find an example at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2209703149352191>. Some groups are open; while others are private and restricted to folks we know and trust are committed to cemetery restoration. Additionally, consider hosting Facebook events on your page. To continuously engage members of your Facebook Group, we suggest providing regular updates (Figure 18). Second, you might also want to join and post project inquiries or updates on the Facebook groups “Friends of Jewish Cemetery Restoration in Eastern Europe” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/375182256478750>) or “Friends of Jewish Cemetery Restoration in Poland” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/234842860555240>). These groups are monitored and your posts to these sites will often be reposted elsewhere. Third is to join one of the larger Jewish Genealogy Facebook groups, such as “Tracing the Tribe: Jewish Genealogy on Facebook” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/20364215746/>) and inquire there about your ancestral *shtetl*.

Web pages

Some cemetery restoration projects have their own dedicated web pages or are listed on a website featuring multiple restoration projects. Similar to Facebook, these sites serve to establish an online presence for those searching for a particular town, provide project updates, and also serve as a way to develop a group of collaborators. We use these to provide regular project updates and other pertinent information. Good examples are Białystok (<http://bialystokcemeteryrestoration.org/>) and Sławatycze

(<https://slawatycze.wixsite.com/landsmanschaft>). These websites have been very effective in raising awareness among descendants and potential collaborators.

Many of our projects collaborate with Friends of Jewish Heritage Poland (FJHP) and as such are listed on their website (<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/index.html>). The individual town pages on the site describe the cemetery, the project, provide a link to the project leader, and offer a way to donate. Each town link is different and largely developed by the project leader. A good example is for the project in Markuszów (<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/markuszow.html>). The FJHP site has been the major source of new contacts for many of our projects.

Other: Additional social media platforms that can be explored include Twitter, Instagram, TripAdvisor, or starting your own blog. However, we don't have specific recommendations at present.

Newspapers, newsletters, other periodicals

Regional and national Jewish interest newspapers are also a good way of spreading the word about your project. Local Polish media outlets can also be potential avenues for publicity. Articles have been developed both by the reporters hearing about a particular project (from a public presentation, for example) or project proponents initiating contact. Two of the many recent examples include <https://www.jweekly.com/2020/08/26/one-berkeley-mans-quest-to-save-polands-jewish-cemeteries/>, and <https://www.jewishexponent.com/2017/08/16/restoration-trip-polish-cemetery-experience-lifetime-local-man/>. Various U.S. and international organizations also produce periodicals that are appropriate in raising awareness, for example the article published in B'nai B'rith Magazine (<https://www.bnaibrith.org/unfinished-business.html>). Synagogues, local Jewish Community Centers, local Jewish Genealogical Societies, and publish “newsletters” that serve as potential channels for generating publicity.

Presentations

Public presentations (e.g., PowerPoint), whether in- person or on-line (e.g., through Zoom) have proven successful in publicizing restoration projects. Examples include presentations for Synagogues, local Jewish Genealogical Societies (e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecRGuCFCo-w>), social clubs, local circle of friends, and local universities.

Conferences

The annual International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) hosts presentations about cemetery restoration projects and provides a productive venue for networking with others involved in similar endeavors, particularly in sessions of “Birds of a Feather” or “Special Interest Groups.” Information on upcoming conferences can be found at <https://www.iajgs.org/conferences/future-conferences/>.

In recent years, there have been regular conferences specifically considering the status and restoration of Jewish cemeteries, particularly in Poland (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WTxK4cSRYc>). While these are primarily intended for networking, there are potential opportunities to deliver presentations about a particular project.

Videos

Several projects have commissioned videos. While it may seem very ambitious to commission a video, particularly at an early project phase, some have been successful. Two professionally prepared videos that have gained significant traction include “A Town Called Brzostek”

(<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/atowncalledbrzostek>) and “Three minutes in Poland”

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1_vYrs9kng). Another video, created for Białystok/Bagnówka project has been successful in project publicity (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zqojR7Avoe>).

A few videos have also been produced for the smaller cemeteries by a Polish scholar (e.g., for Goniądz: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9JWAw1yZj4>).

If your project funds permit, there are fee-based filmmakers in Poland specializing in Jewish heritage subjects for descendants (e.g., <https://ancestral-tourism.com/services-s6106>). A local activist we are familiar with produces videos of cemeteries and restoration projects on a *pro bono* basis, for example a video of a cleanup like this one for Goniądz:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnRUDUsYvgc>

The key is promoting your project using the strategies suggested above, and casting a wide net to reach as many interested individuals as possible.

Friends of Jews from Przasnysz Poland

+ Invite
🔍
⋮

Edward Janes
Admin · November 23 at 8:51 PM · 🌐

⋮

The Work Continues.....

The effort to restore dignity to the Jewish cemetery of Przasnysz continues, *now in its eighth year*. Thanks to the generosity of our volunteers and supporters a major clean up has been completed at the site for the second year in a row. This year's major accomplishment was removing the tree overgrowth on Leszno St.; our contractor also cut all grass, shrubs, etc., and cleared the site of any trash. Since 2019 we have completed the following:

- Installed a perimeter fence to protect the property, prevent vehicular traffic from entering the cemetery thus reducing trash being dumped on the site.
- Removed concrete walls that divided / split the cemetery.
- Trimmed a number of very tall trees that were in need of maintenance.
- Removed construction rubble from an abandoned 1980's housing project
- Performed two major clean ups.
- Created a "No-Parking" zone on Leszno (directly in front of cemetery).

The pictures below with the *yellow background show the previous conditions and work*; **the photos without the yellow background show the work that was just completed**. It is clearly evident from the new pictures that the cemetery is now completely cleared and cleaned. It is also evident that a lot of the site does not much resemble a Jewish cemetery.

Our plans for next steps are to install large memorial boulders along Leszno St on the cemetery grounds; on the memorial boulders we envision installing information plaques that describe the thriving Jewish community that once lived in Przasnysz. We could also inscribe in the plaques the family names of the Jews that lived here; and who are certainly buried in these holy grounds. Note that all of our work is in accordance with Jewish law and the approval of Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich.

Please, please consider making a generous donation to "Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland" so that we may continue our work to restore dignity to our ancestral cemetery. Use the link below to access our donation page. If you have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to private message me. And finally, consider visiting Przasnysz to visit this important place; and to meet some of our local partners who have worked so hard to assist our efforts. [note, many of the recent pictures were provided by [Ewa Lukasiak](#)].

About

Group focus is on Jewish Genealogical matters in Przasnysz (Pushnitz) Poland with an emphasis on restoring the Jewish Cemetery in town.

- 🔒 **Private**
Only members can see who's in the group and what they post.
- 👁️ **Visible**
Anyone can find this group.
- 🚫 **May include flagged content**
Admins may allow some posts and comments to be visible in the group even if they're flagged by Facebook's systems. [Learn more](#)

Learn more

Rooms

Get the group together on video chat

Create a room to instantly connect to other members on video chat.

Create room

Figure 18. Example of an update to a long-standing Facebook Group.

We offer the following commentary in this last section on outreach

The Demographic Dilemma of Cemetery Restoration

The demographic challenge surrounding the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in Poland presents a pressing concern for the sustainability of this crucial cultural preservation effort. As the bulk of individuals passionate about this cause, including project leaders, volunteers, and donors, are near or over retirement age, there is a looming uncertainty about who will carry the torch into the future. Moreover, in smaller towns and villages, local individuals who hold memories of the Jewish presence are growing older, and their memories and invaluable insights may soon be lost as well.

In response to this demographic challenge, various strategies have been implemented, albeit with mixed success. Initiatives involving college students from the U.S., complete with scholarships (e.g., <https://www.jewishgen.org/Fellowship/>) have been launched, with the hope that younger generations will take up the mantle. "Roots tours" have been organized, aiming to connect individuals with their ancestral history and instill a sense of responsibility for preserving it.

There are encouraging examples, such as the involvement of a non-Jewish pre-teen in the Białystok restoration project who has not only become a passionate participant but has also learned to read the Hebrew on gravestones—a testament to the potential impact of early exposure and education. A few younger activists and volunteers have also emerged, offering a glimmer of hope. However, it remains unclear whether their numbers are sufficient to replace the aging cohort of leaders and participants.

Thus, as you engage partners, volunteers, and donors for your project we urge you to focus on actively involving the next generation. Beyond the immediate goal of preserving Jewish cemeteries, this effort represents a bridge between the past and the future, connecting generations and fostering a sense of cultural continuity. By engaging younger individuals through educational programs, community outreach, and meaningful experiences, there is the hope that the legacy of this cause will endure. The preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Poland is not merely a historical task but a living commitment to memory and heritage that must be passed on to ensure a sustainable and vibrant future for this vital cultural preservation effort.

6. Finances – How much will it cost and where will the money come from?

Estimating costs, raising funds, and managing money for a cemetery restoration project presents uncertainties and challenges but if you are flexible and patient may be done in a reasonably straightforward manner. The costs obviously depend on the nature of the cemetery (i.e., size, condition, location), necessary and optional tasks to be undertaken, use of volunteers (which can help reduce costs), and the project team's vision. The available funds will depend on your own willingness or capacity to contribute, as well as that of your relatives and other descendants, and potential donors, including nongovernmental organizations. This availability of funds may influence the level of ambition for the restoration project, but fortunately, most projects can easily scale up or down, and discretionary project components can be deferred until funds are indeed available. While there may be unanticipated expenses as a project develops, it is also very common for initial successes to encourage further donations of money and volunteers.

How do I identify my costs? We present a starting list below.

Potential expenses	Comments
Personal travel	Airfare to/from Poland, local transportation, per diem
Reconnaissance	Site assessment, formal survey, determining precise boundaries, etc.
Clearing vegetation and general cleaning	Initial cost is moderate, additive long-term costs may be one of the most expensive components
Fence/gate construction	Often the most expensive component
Memorial and signs	May vary tremendously in expense depending on vision and available funds
Dealing with <i>matzevot</i>	Material for cleaning surfaces, transcribing and documenting inscriptions
Rededication or other ceremony	May vary depending on size of potential participant group
Site improvements such as parking, footpaths through the cemetery	Discretionary: Depends on need, consider on site-by-site basis
Publicity	Cost is discretionary, a short video may involve modest funding
Fees for cooperating NGOs	May need to partially reimburse for travel/per diem for local or international participants, and fees for funding transfers to Poland
Volunteer stipends	May need to provide help with some transportation expenses and meals
Ongoing maintenance	Establishing a permanent endowment may cost roughly as much as the original restoration
Optional donations to non-governmental agencies	Recommended particularly if you get advice or help (see below for further discussion)

Cost estimating needs to be done on an iterative basis as priorities and project plans are developed. Typically, the project initiator, or a local activist, makes a reconnaissance visit to the site to assess the need. A preliminary budget can often be estimated in consultation with FODŹ (for FODŹ-owned cemeteries and sometimes those which may be under their jurisdiction), local authorities, or cultural ambassadors, and then adjusted as the amount of funds available becomes known. Inflation is a factor in Poland, and needs to be taken into account.

We provide an example of a budget below including the preliminary cost estimate and actual expenses for the completed components.

Case study: Budget for Nowogród Jewish Cemetery

Background: The cemetery is a medium size Jewish cemetery in Northeast Poland about 100 km (60 miles) from Białystok about 1.1 ha (2.7 ac) in extent. It is situated on a steep slope and hilltop in a residential area. At the time the project was conceived, the boundaries of the thickly vegetated site were only roughly known, there were a few *matzevot* not in the original locations, no discernable fence nor any monument or signage. The initial project goals were to determine the boundaries, in part so a fence could be erected, clear the vegetation, inventory the *matzevot*, and install a memorial and informational sign.

Initial cost estimate: The project proponent worked with FODŹ to estimate the costs to implement the goals. Costs are from 2019 in Polish zloty (zł), with 1 zł, equivalent to about US\$0.25.

	<u>zł</u>	<u>\$US</u>
Survey to determine boundary	2,500	625
Clear vegetation	11,000	2750
Install fence	180,000	45,000
Install information sign	3,500	875
TOTAL	<u>197,000</u>	<u>49,250</u>
Annual post-restoration maintenance	2,000	500

Status (2023)

- An informational sign was installed at a cost of: zł3600 (US\$900)
- Because fundraising was insufficient for a fence, the project leader, FODŹ, and the RCC are now considering planting a hedge around a portion of the perimeter, installing boulders at key points, or marking the corners.
- Based on a site visit in 2023 by several FJCP members, the project leader is currently soliciting bids to build a shallowly sloping path to the elevated portions of the cemetery to more broadly facilitate access.
- Diligent searching on the part of the project lead found a U.S.- based celebrity with a Nowogród connection; upon request, she made a substantial contribution, but not large enough for all of the proposed project components.

Funding

How do you pay for all this? Funding is sometimes a limiting factor for cemetery restoration projects. Descendants must keep this in mind as they consider the scope of their project proposal. It may be that an iterative approach to project implementation in accordance with fundraising success would help to manage expectations. By this we mean performing higher priority tasks with available funds while continuing to raise funds for the remainder of the tasks. Previous sections have described how to build relationships with various partners, and a subsequent section overviews publicity. All of the relationships and all of the publicity is fair game for fundraising. Below we talk about strategies you may use or adapt

for your situation. Remember that each situation is unique and there is no cookie-cutter approach to fundraising.

Fundraising, as an inexact process, can be a matter of luck, persistence, creativity, and the extent of one's ability to develop a network of committed descendants and local participants.

We write first about potential sources for funds and then some ways to enhance the chances of contributions from U.S.-based donors.

Potential funding sources include.

- Project leader
- Project leaders' relatives
- Other descendants
- Other interested parties
- Local community (Poland)
- Competitive grants from nongovernmental agencies, private firms, etc.
- Numerous private firms, nongovernmental agencies, individuals
- Volunteer labor/in-kind contributions (offsetting some costs) from relatives, other descendants, nongovernmental agencies, other interested parties, local community

You might be tempted to think that your relatives and fellow descendants would be quickly willing to underwrite the entire cost of restoring their ancestral cemetery. Alas, typically a small percent of these folks will substantially contribute although some of these may take some time to come around to seeing the value of your project and contribute after a project is underway and early successes are documented. *Remember that one of the basic tenets of fundraising is that donors fund you and not necessarily the project.*

Grants: If you or any of your team members are adept or willing grant writers, consider the following:

- The European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF) provides funding for some cemetery restoration activities; for Poland, we are aware that they provided funds to help construct a wall at the Markuszów Jewish cemetery. ESJF does not provide funding directly to American groups; rather, individuals interested in such support should ask the cemetery owner to contact them. FJHP and FODŻ can potentially be an intermediary in this process.
- The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is another potential source; they have previously provided limited funds some cemetery restoration projects in Poland.

Another new possibility is to partner with a local activist who is a member of Forum for Dialogue's network; they have recently begun training sessions for grant-writing for proposals commemorating Jewish heritage in Poland. The intent is also to build relationships between local communities in Poland and survivors and descendants.

A recommendation we have recently received is to contact your local Jewish cemetery or funeral home and ask whether they would like to help restore a Jewish cemetery in Poland. We have heard that some funding was obtained in exchange for pictures of a cemetery restoration project.

Other grant opportunities:

One recommendation we have received is to check Guidestar.org (www.guidestar.org/search) for appropriate charitable organizations in your geographic area or possible field of interest and then check to see whether they have grants to apply for or whether you can contact them directly for help. Regional Jewish Federations are results of a search like this and at least a possible source of funding.

Publicity/outreach: Your team building, as well as your publicity will also yield donors willing to contribute to your project. We list a few examples not covered elsewhere.

- Facebook pages of restoration projects, as we state elsewhere, have been successful in attracting followers who eventually become donors.
- Crowdsourcing: Some restoration projects have successfully used [Gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com), though we suggest that this is only practicable for larger projects
- Presentations in your community, synagogue, Jewish Community Center, or your local Jewish Federation, etc.

Ways to enhance your fundraising success for U.S.-based donors:

- Start or team up with an existing 501(c)(3). This provides the potential for donors to provide funds which are potentially tax deductible for U.S. citizens. Because of the effort and expense vs payoff, we only recommend starting your own 501(c)(3) for a larger cemetery project. The intent is to take advantage of tax-deductible donations for U.S. residents and other potential benefits. The Białystok project (a large project) is an example of a self-standing 501(c)(3): <https://bialystokcemeteryrestoration.org/>. Many projects have partnered with Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland also a 501(c)3 (<https://jewishheritagepoland.org>).
- At least one project (the Sławatycze restoration project) has teamed up with a local Jewish Federation to accept donations (a small project): <https://slawatycze.wixsite.com/landsmanschaft/donate>.
- Another inducement, for U.S. citizens over 70½ is that in some circumstances can make a direct contribution from their retirement account to 501(c)(3) organizations without needing to pay tax on the distributions.

Please consider donations to nonprofit organizations that help you and your project

It is a given that each project needs a certain amount of funding, and that the level of funding may determine the scope of the project. What isn't so evident is that your success and the success of other projects is dependent on work performed by numerous nonprofits and other organizations such as FODŹ, FJHP, TMF, JHI, and the Polin and Białystok Jewish Museums. Even though their work is for broader efforts than your specific cemetery, your success depends on work they have done in the past, and their ongoing and future work. Thus, we strongly urge you to make generous financial contributions to groups that helped or advised you (contact information is provided in the Appendix).

7. Cleaning and Clearing the Cemetery: Planning and doing the work

More planning... You've planned almost all aspects of your restoration, now it's time to make detailed plans for the on-the-ground work. This means primarily removing trash or other debris, trimming vegetation such that *matzevot* can be inventoried and not damaged by further growth, and, most importantly, improving the condition of the cemetery such that it appears to be respected and cared for. It's also important to keep in mind that the work on site will be visible to local residents and thus an opportunity to meet them.

It is more likely than not that you will make arrangements with someone else to handle at least some of the actual on-the-ground work, either through a volunteer organization, a contractor, or if you are fortunate, the municipality. You still may be the one responsible for arranging transportation and housing for the team, monitoring the contract and contractors, and perhaps more.

So, our final segment on team building considers working with volunteers and contractors, and how to blend them. While your project team may include all contractors or all volunteers, it is likely to be a mixture.

Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in cemetery restoration projects. Volunteers may include local townspeople (including prominent citizens, local government officials and employees, the church, and school students and officials), descendants of the former Jewish community, and others who you encounter as you build your network. Our volunteers have ranged in age from teenagers through those in their eighties.

How do I find volunteers?

We've talked about both team building and publicity in previous sections, but finding and vetting appropriate volunteers for the actual cleaning and clearing may require a slightly different approach. Volunteers may be recruited through various methods. One of our projects has been successful by combining cemetery restoration work with a "roots tours" in which the project leader arranged for visits to nearby and regional cultural sites and then spent a few days working on the cemetery. Some projects have established scholarships to attract students on summer break, others have covered the expenses of young descendants and relatives, who otherwise might not be able to participate. Collaborating with volunteer organizations (U.S., European, or international) provides valuable expertise and resources for successful restoration endeavors. We have also had local people stop by, see the work underway, and join us.

How do I work with the volunteers?

Care and feeding of volunteers is as varied as the cemetery projects. At one extreme, sponsors provide housing, meals, and transportation to and from the project site. Their transportation to and from Poland may also be subsidized. At the other extreme, volunteers just show up at the site on the duly appointed days. Lunch and snacks during work days may be provided, possibly packed by the hotel or brought in from a local restaurant or shop. Particularly if the cemetery is in a small village, arrangements for meals and lodging should be made well in advance. Volunteers should be told that they are at risk of getting dirty, sunburn, insect bites, and other things resulting from what is akin to a strenuous gardening or landscaping project. Well before their travel date they should be provided with a list of what they should bring. Depending on the particular project and task, this list might involve appropriate work shoes, a hat, long pants, sunscreen, insect repellent. Some projects require liability releases and information such as emergency contacts. Finally, it's important to encourage participation and to let potential volunteers know that whatever they are able to do is welcome and sufficient.

As a reminder, the act of cleaning and clearing the cemetery by volunteers is not the only important aspect of a restoration project. The blend of various volunteers results not only in bonding and building bridges with each other but also their physical presence models their commitment to the local community and thus increases the success of the project because all concerned take “ownership” of the project and the cemetery.

Contractors

By contractors, we mean paid professional workers who may clean debris from the cemetery, manage vegetation, or perform other tasks for payment. They typically work at different times than volunteers, since volunteers may find it more convenient to participate during summer vacations. It is essential to have someone responsible to monitor their activities both to ensure compliance with established Rabbinical Commission guidelines and other Jewish laws and traditions, and also to guarantee the proper completion of agreed upon work. While contractors may involve additional upfront expenses, considering factors like airfare and accommodation for volunteers, they can be cost effective or even cheaper than volunteers particularly if there are time constraints for a particular phase. Further, they may be able to complete the entire cemetery clearing and cleaning process in one step which might be problematic for volunteers. Moreover, their involvement both contributes to the local economy and sets the stage for regular post-restoration maintenance of the cemetery.

How do I find contractors?

FODŻ, the municipality, your local project advisor, or perhaps a descendant who has had a recent clean-up can provide a recommendation. In some instances, local officials or leaders are the best source to find a work crew. They are also likely to be best suited to supervise the work crew since they are local, speak Polish, and understand the culture; this means you will have already have established relationships and trust with them, since this is a big ask.

How do I work with contractors?

Make sure you have a written contract with the contractor. This is something you and other trusted contacts (e.g., FODŻ) should be comfortable with. It is important to make sure the contractor understands all of the requirements and constraints (e.g., what to cut, what not to cut). Whoever supervises the work crew should be briefed by authorities as appropriate for the particular cemetery, which may include FODŻ, the RCC, the local representative of the National Heritage Board of Poland, and the local government. Ideally, there should be some monitoring during work to assure that all is going well. Finally, before final payment is made, some sort of compliance should be clearly documented such as an observer visiting the site or detailed photographs provided.

A hybrid approach

Combining the efforts of contractors and volunteers, is a common and effective approach with the benefits of both approaches. Our members have worked with organizations like The Matzevah Foundation and JewishGen in collaboration with FJHP, bringing together descendant volunteers as well as student volunteers from Israel, France, and the United States. We have also had teams consisting of workers provided by the municipality, working alongside descendants, international, and local volunteers.

How long will it take and how much will it cost?

This varies from cemetery to cemetery. You may not know precisely until you are well underway, even if you have consulted with experts. The amount of time required depends on the nature and amount of debris that needs to be removed, the amount and nature of vegetation that needs to be dealt with, how this material will be disposed of, and how difficult it is to work in the particular cemetery. Many projects spend one or perhaps two weeks each time they visit, sometimes finishing only part of the cemetery. Costs for cleaning and dealing with vegetation ranges from perhaps a few hundred to a few thousand

złoty or U.S. dollars. This does not include other work such as building a fence or wall, installing a sign or monument, or a ceremony.

How do I put it all together?

Basic travel arrangements are discussed in the Appendix; though if you are working in a remote *shtetl*, you may be staying in an agro-tourist or similar type establishment, rather than a hotel, close to the site of your project. Although rental vehicles suitable to transport a group can sometimes be obtained in smaller towns, it is sometimes simpler to arrange for this in Warsaw or another gateway city so you can arrange transportation to the site and local transportation at the same time.

It’s unlikely that you will be the one primarily responsible for tools. We provide a starting list below which should be adjusted for each project. If you are intent on handling this aspect on your own, or are interested in more details, we suggest you review “Tools for Trimming, Clearing, and Maintaining Vegetation” at <https://jewishheritageguide.net/en/resources/ref/clearing>. This site contains links to specific operation of various hand and power tools including safety protocols.

Suggested items for cleaning and clearing activities	
Loppers (e.g., pruning shears)	First aid kit
Gloves (both heavy duty work gloves, and surgical-type or dishwashing gloves for cleaning <i>matzevot</i>)	Sunscreen
Hand saws	Insect repellent
Wheel barrow (or similar)	Drinking water
Trash bags	Water for cleaning <i>matzevot</i> and equipment
Scrapers and brushes (for <i>matzevot</i>)	Brush cutters (Weedwackers) (and replacement parts)
Chain saw	Tarps to place equipment on or protect it from rain
Coolers/ice for beverages and snacks	Dumpster or means to dispose of trash and cleared vegetation
Shovels ⁴	Portable toilet
Scythe, or similar manual tools	Camp chairs for the participants (as needed)

Where do the tools come from? The Matzevah Foundation provides tools for its’ various projects. Sometimes the municipality will provide many of the tools needed.

You should also plan your team dynamics and relationship building in advance. Whether the work is being entirely contracted or done by volunteers, you should closely coordinate with the local municipality (before and during the work), ideally the church (this is a good time to ask them if they will persuade local citizens to return any *matzevot*), and the school if the school is in session. If school is still in session, it would be helpful to meet with the schoolmaster, teachers, and older students. Presumably you’ve contacted them before, but if not, it’s never too late. Volunteers should be reminded that as important an aspect that their cleaning and clearing is, integrating the cemetery and its care into the cultural stewardship of the town is equally important for success in the long run. They should be encouraged to use their time to bond with the local community with the intent that over time the cemetery becomes a shared and cherished part of the town’s shared cultural heritage.

⁴ Note that while digging is not allowed in a cemetery, there are some actions necessitating a shovel such as placing sand, gravel, or soil under a reset *matzevah*.

Safety briefings should be held before the project starts, particularly reminding personnel to wear proper clothing for the task at hand in the particular cemetery (e.g., appropriate shoes), not leaning on *matzevot*, and tool and task-specific safety concerns (e.g., large weedwacker and chain saw operation). It is also important to immediately point out possible safety infractions as soon as they occur. Leadership on this should be provided by the project lead or some other restoration expert. Most of this is common sense, but a reminder can't hurt.

Note on the use of herbicides

We are aware that herbicides have been occasionally used to control vegetation in Polish Jewish Cemeteries. We generally don't recommend them for several reasons. First, is that they may adversely affect the *matzevot* discoloring or damaging them. Second is that (even if legally permitted), they would need to be applied well in advance of any work to preclude possible human contact such as would occur during cleaning and clearing. Third, is that as of this writing, some commonly used herbicides (e.g., glyphosate) may be prohibited in the European Union in the near future due to well-documented adverse effects on humans and wildlife. In the event you are considering such use, consult with the Rabbinate.

Examples:

Przerośl: A blend of descendant, local and nonprofit organization volunteers, followed up by city-provided workers

The Przerośl project started with volunteers (both Jewish and non-Jewish), including The Matzevah Foundation (TMF) leadership and volunteers. The team of 10-12 adults, including additional city workers, was able to clear about one fifth of the 0.5-hectare (1.2 acre) cemetery in about a week. Importantly, TMF provided tools. Some of the volunteers were part of a "roots tour" in which they visited their ancestral towns in the region and then helped on the restoration project for a few days. Some years, the project leads paid for young relatives and other descendants to participate. As the project proceeded in subsequent years and as relationships were established, the city and county took interest and provided several workers at no charge. During the Pandemic in 2020, the Deputy County Commissioner, who had become a supporter, hired and supervised a work crew who finished clearing the cemetery, paid for by the project leader. In 2023, in preparation for a ceremony, this same supporter again hired a work crew to maintain the cemetery as well as to mow the area where the ceremony would be held. This was also paid for by the project leader. This type of arrangement was the result of mutual trust and friendship built up over several years.

FODŹ provided oversight, including assurances that the RCC guidelines and other regulations were complied with. The project leader and participants also provided some funding for TMF, primarily van rental for transporting TMF personnel and tools from Warsaw and food and lodging during the work week.

Białystok (Bagnówka): Volunteers from the U.S., E.U, and nearby

The Białystok restoration project is being carried out primarily through actively-solicited volunteer labor. Travel and local expenses of some of the volunteers have been partially covered by project funds. Volunteers range from local residents who stopped by to see what was happening and are now regular restoration participants, through those elsewhere in the EU who come to help every year, to U.S. college students and other descendants. The team is selected based upon qualifications and on-site work supervised by the project leaders. Volunteers are provided with safety and other directions, provide emergency contact information, and sign liability releases for the project leaders. The team has some of its own equipment which is stored locally, and rents heavy equipment and a portable toilet as needed.

Funding is provided by a U.S.-based NGO set up by the project leads to solicit funds and use them for project work.

Markuszów: Volunteers and nonprofits

The Markuszów project has engaged volunteers from a local Polish volunteer association Ogrodnicy Pamięci, Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and/or The Matzevah Foundation for multiple cleanings in this cemetery. One of the delightful outcomes of this multi-year, multi-organizational process of cleaning or visiting the cemetery and building an ongoing relationship with the local community leadership is that the town leadership has proudly begun to maintain the cleaning of the cemetery on its own.

8. Matzevot

This section considers how your restoration project should deal with *matzevot*. Although each project may have different types, numbers, compositions (e.g., limestone, sandstone, granite, and marble) and conditions of *matzevot*, there are still many universal factors to consider for what is one of the most important components of a restoration project.

The first task is an overall assessment: roughly how many *matzevot* are there, are they likely in their original location, do they need uprighting (e.g., resetting), and do they need extensive cleaning of overgrowth? This presumably will be addressed in the preliminary reconnaissance of the cemetery, but may be updated as vegetation is cleared and more detailed examination of the grounds is done.

Although there is considerable guidance on dealing with various aspects of *matzevot*, it is best done by experts, those with some experience, and then only after specific permission from the Rabbinic Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (RCC), Provincial Monument Conservator (WUOZ - Wojewódzki Urząd Ochrony Zabytków), and other appropriate authorities. The chief concerns are disturbing human remains during the resetting process, damaging the headstone itself during cleaning or resetting, and placing *matzevot* in inappropriate locations.

The guidance in this section is a synthesis of our experience, the shared experience of others, and a review of the extensive body of knowledge. Although the expectation is that you will be relying upon or collaborating with experts, we provide some details so as to know what to expect.

Because of the risk of disturbing remains, you should be prepared to stop work at a location where you unearth possible human remains, and immediately contact the RCC to determine whether they are human remains and what to do. You can work elsewhere in the cemetery in the meantime.

Location, location, location

Are the locations of extant *matzevot* in their likely original position? An essential part of restoration guidance is that they must be in their original position. According to Jewish tradition, the deceased named on the stone is the owner.

Clues indicating they are so include a more or less linear arrangement even though they may be toppled, they are not haphazardly piled up to indicate they may have been placed back after removal, or a logical pattern such as rows of all-female or all-male, or possibly family members being placed adjacent (generally after the late 19th century when family names were included). Further, in some instances *matzevot* were oriented toward Jerusalem. Sometimes, toppled upright portions and horizontal crypts or other supports can be matched based on surface contours and similar clues. We do urge caution since we are aware of instances (e.g., Oswiecim) in which *matzevot* have been placed in linear arrangements with no knowledge of their original location.

In the event *matzevot* are not in their original locations or there are fragments it



Figure 19. Lapidarium in the Suwalki Jewish cemetery.

is sometimes suggested that they be used to construct a lapidarium (sculpture of gravestone remnants) or incorporated into a fence (Figure 19).

There are many instances in which *matzevot* previously removed from the cemetery have been returned and deliberately arranged, these often get left as is rather than properly repositioning them. If this is the case for your restoration project, out of respect for descendants with an interest in a particular headstone, we advise that you document this and possibly so indicate, perhaps on any informational sign you place at the cemetery. There are also instances in which *matzevot* are placed in a location in a cemetery which has been documented to be not previously used for burials. These should also be discreetly marked, with permission of the Rabbinical Commission, that the original burial location is unknown.

Cleaning

Cleaning may be done to better read the complete inscription and to prevent certain biological growths from damaging the inscription or possibly structural integrity.

Plans for cleaning should be done well in advance to make sure the proper tools (e.g., brushes, scrapers, cleaning products, rinse buckets, and water) are available. Risks of improper cleaning activities include breaking the *matzevah* due to physical mishandling, damaging the surface due to too harsh cleaning or improper cleaning agents, or long-term damage that obliterates lettering or the physical integrity.

The first step of cleaning should be done judiciously using a broad plastic scraper in a near horizontal position to gently remove as much growth as possible. The second step is to use a gentle fiber (may be natural or plastic, but definitely not metal) brush to continue removing growth, particularly from the inset areas of the inscription. The third step is to gently wet the entire surface and continue the process. In the event more cleaning is needed, either of two cleaning products might be used. Orvus Quilt/Horse Soap/Shampoo (as of this writing, this is available in Poland by mail order, but check in advance of your project) or D/2 (<https://d2bio.com/>, at the time of this writing, this is not available in Poland). Orvus is more widely available as of this writing. The cleaning product should be used as recommended on the package, with cleaning starting from the lower portion and gradually working upward. Cleaning is typically done to the point of being able to read all of the inscription. After using cleaning products, the stone is gently rinsed with water to remove remnant products and growth. *Note that as of August 2023, the recommendation provided by experts at the University of Bialystok in Poland is not to use anything but water to gently clean matzevot because of the risk not only to some types of matzevot but also to toxicity to sensitive plant species (regulated by law).* We will follow up on this as more expert guidance becomes available.

If *matzevot* have toppled and are closer to horizontal than vertical, they are best cleaned in that position rather than after being reset.

Certain species of lichens and cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) produce acids which very slowly dissolve many types of stone. The previous recommendation was that they be disposed of in the cemetery but not adjacent to the stones as they are important components of the natural ecosystem and in some instances, Jewish cemeteries are the only place in Poland some species protected by law grow. However, we recently learned from experts in the field that this strategy does not work. Thus, there is some uncertainty and controversy in how best to balance these critical conservation issues; FJCP is investigating the situation and will provide updates.

Resetting

Depending on the weight and shape of individual *matzevot*, they may be reset by any of four or so methods. *Please keep in mind that resetting by any method is prohibited without specific permission from the RCC and even then should be performed by individuals with experience and expertise.*

First is to carefully assure the base is free and will pivot freely as that stone is rotated/lifted by hand. In this and other cases, the area underneath should be clear enough so as not to impede rotation. Risks include disturbing underlying human remains, damaging the stone itself, and personal injury.

Second is to use a pivot (a long steel or wood rod) along with two ropes placed horizontally to support the *matzevah* as it is rotated upward. This typically takes two or three people.

Third is to use a tripod and pulley in the same manner.

Fourth, which requires special expertise and special permission involves using heavy equipment (e.g., an excavator) to lift and replace the individual stones. The risk and the justification for this usually being prohibited is the high risk of disturbing remains during ingress and egress of the equipment. In the one instance we are aware of permission being granted, the areas with paths between rows of burials were clearly mapped out beforehand.

Each of these methods is explained in various websites cited at the end of the section.

Matzevot should not be reset in a perfectly vertical position, but rather at a very slight angle to allow water to drain from the surface. To assure that stones are set as stably as reasonable, it may be that small rocks, gravel, or sand needs to be strategically positioned underneath.

Dealing with broken *matzevot* portions which you are certain belong together: In some situations, fragments of stones are found lying near each other, and based upon shape, composition of stone, inscriptions, etc., it may be determined that they were indeed from the same headstone. They may be repaired using specific bonding agents, but this must be approved beforehand by the RCC, and the methods coordinated with other authorities and experts.

Painting or repainting inscriptions is generally not encouraged. One risk is incorrect interpretation of text. In some instances, if it can be determined that the inscriptions were indeed originally painted, then appropriate paint and techniques can be used with permission from the RCC. Historical color photographs of some painted headstones are presented in *The Lost World of Small-Town Jewish Cemeteries*, by Tomek Wisniewski.

How many *matzevot* can I clean and reset in a day?

Not including the amount of time to set up and repack equipment, small teams can generally expect to clean and reset a few a day by hand. Using more sophisticated equipment and with larger teams, perhaps the rate can be a few dozen per day. This is a very rough estimate and will of course depend on the size and condition of the *matzevot*, the particular cemetery, and the team.

How do I (how should I) transcribe and document data on *matzevot*?

For many project leaders, the drive to restore their ancestral cemetery is out of respect and consideration for their ancestors. Inherent in that is documenting and sharing data from the headstones to the maximum extent possible. This is something you may do yourself, collaborate with others on, or rely on experts. There is considerable guidance for interpreting inscriptions and sharing data in the references at the end of the section.

Other considerations when cleaning, restoring and resetting *matzevot*:

- Under no circumstance should “rubblings” (creating an image by placing paper on the headstone and rubbing it with chalk, charcoal, wax, or other substance) be made of the *matzevot*. While this had been occasionally done in some times in the past, the risk of damage is too high and is now prohibited. Thus, we encourage detailed photographs of *matzevot* at multiple steps of the restoration process. Be sure to check the photos for adequate quality before moving on. If photographic system permits (most people use smart phones now), it is very helpful to turn on the GPS such that the location can be precisely documented. [GPS is used by some of the online applications for documenting graves, e.g., Billion Graves.]
- Preserving the *matzevot* with surface protectants or similar. There has been some experimental work with this in Poland, but as yet, the results are inconclusive. Thus, we recommend against it until it has been demonstrated safe and the RCC has weighed in.
- Do not use bleach or vinegar to clean the *matzevot*, or strong water flow such as a pressure washer, as they may impair the structural integrity.

References for understanding and documenting data on *matzevot*:

- Reading Hebrew Tombstones (JewishGen): <https://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/tombstones.html>.
- Foundation for Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries (FDJC): FDJC, working with Jewish Records Indexing – Poland (JRI-P), has photographed and transcribed gravestones in Poland and provides the information on its website; these *matzevot* indices are also accessible via JewishGen. Importantly, they will (for a small fee), come into a cemetery just after vegetation is cleared and photograph, transcribe, and document all of the headstones.

Further detailed advice on caring for *matzevot*:

- The Guide: Stone Conservation, Documentation, and Care: A Guide to Jewish Cemetery Preservation in Western Ukraine. <https://jewishheritageguide.net/en/guide/stone>. This provides an encyclopedic summary including case studies and a further detailed reference list.
- Best practices -- based upon work by the Białystok Restoration Project: <http://www.jewishepitaphs.org/best-practices-summercamp-2019/>

You may find other advice based upon searching the internet for dealing with gravestones; their recommendations must be carefully considered before use as they are typically focused on gravestones and cemeteries in parts of the world other than Poland. Relying on such guidelines may adversely affect *matzevot*, the cemetery, and run afoul of RCC guidance and local or national regulations.

9. Monuments

This section discusses various means to memorialize and acknowledge the Jewish families and individuals who are buried in the cemetery and the Jewish community that was once a vital part of the town. These items typically are refined from initial concepts in the visioning and planning process, though sometimes they are early steps. Most often, they are done after an initial clean-up or possibly other activity. However, there may be extenuating reasons to do these earlier. Monuments are permanent, usually stone or other solid material (e.g., metal), typically indicating the site is a Jewish cemetery with brief text honoring those buried in the cemetery or local residents who perished in the Holocaust.

Depending on the wishes of the project leader, project collaborators, the local community, and available funds, these may range from simple and modest to very elaborate showpieces. Many of the recently installed monuments in the smaller cemeteries are roughly in the shape of a *matzevah*. (Figures 20, 21; see also Figure 17). In other instances, the descendants have commissioned an artist to create a more elaborate monument, such as the monument symbolizing or “Ten Commandments” (Figure 2). The project leader together with other concerned participants is encouraged to peruse examples of monuments not only in nearby restored cemeteries, but also by doing a web search of other cemeteries for an appropriate array of examples.

While the project leader generally proposes the concept including draft text, design, and budget; other stakeholders will collaborate to various degrees by providing feedback, translations from English into Polish and Hebrew (as needed) and contracting logistics. In some instances, a committee of descendants and local residents develops the design. The Rabbinate should be consulted during the process to assure compliance with Jewish law and tradition, and, if needed, to double check Hebrew text. Recently, monuments have included a QR code containing further information about the cemetery and contact information for descendants and the restoration project.

One critical design element in our opinion for both monuments and informational signs is to have a substantial horizontal base providing a level and safe area for visitors to place and light memorial candles.

The location of the monument needs to be carefully considered. Not only should it be within the boundaries of the cemetery, but also should not be over buried remains. Further, any heavy installation equipment should also not pass over buried remains. Thus, such monuments are often placed at the entrance to the cemetery or contiguous with a fence; presumably there were not burials there. This is one situation where ground penetrating radar may provide helpful information to rule out such constraints.

Permits or approvals from the municipality, the Regional Curator of Historical Monuments, and possibly others may be required. In situations where FODŹ is the owner or potential owner of the site, they provide considerable help. There is typically a small fee for the permit.

The cost of such monuments is an important part of project budgeting. A relatively simple monument commissioned in Poland may cost in the range of US\$3000-4000 (zł12000-16000), to many times that for an elaborate one. The metal plaque may be provided by the National Heritage Board (NID) of Poland and may also contribute toward the stone base.



Figure 20. Simple memorial installed at Trzcianne Jewish Cemetery in 2018.



Figure 21. Memorial (metal on granite) at Tuszyn Jewish cemetery in 2022.

10. Informational Signs

We have observed an increasing number of informational signs in recent years overviewing the history of the community and often including maps, photographs, and other documents. The content of the sign, which is something that should be collaboratively planned, might include the history of the town, surnames of families formerly living there, historical photos of Jewish points of interest in the town such as the old synagogue, famous descendants, or photos of people from the previous Jewish community.

These signs have been conceived and installed by various sources. FODŹ has been very helpful in several instances, collaborating on the text, and arranging for printing, permitting, and installation. While most recently deployed signs have included QR codes (including detailed information in multiple languages and a way to contact the project leader) as a design element another approach might be just to use a plaque placed on the wall or fence with a QR code to link to what you might have had on such a sign. The QR code leads to a webpage listing the various partners, the history of the town and Jewish community. Like much else in the restoration process, such signs should be produced and permitted in collaboration with the regional authorities. There are instances where local activists installed informational signs unbeknownst to either national authorities or the descendant community. Besides an informational sign in the cemetery, there are simple directional signs indicating the location of a nearby Jewish cemetery.

The cost of information signs is also an important part of project budgeting. In our experience, such signs constructed of wood may cost from US\$1000-4000 (zł4000-16000); presumably simpler signs cost less and more elaborate ones cost more.



Figure 22. Sign at Nowogród cemetery including photographs of a Rabbi who served the community and a synagogue, historical information and a QR code linking to a website with more information.



Figure 23. Information sign at Markuszów Jewish cemetery on the perimeter wall. The QR code links to information about the town, the Jewish history, the cemetery itself, the restoration partners, and a way to donate funds toward further restoration and maintenance:

<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/markuszow-plaque.html>.



Figure 24. Sign at Tuszyn Jewish cemetery listing Jewish surnames. Installed due to the effort of local school teacher Robert Kobylarczyk and paid for by the POLIN museum/Polish government project which is currently working to install similar signs at Jewish cemeteries all across Poland.



Figure 25. Listing of Jewish family names at Trzcianne Jewish cemetery on polycarbonate structures. The concept and design are that of Tomek Wisniewski in collaboration with supporters in Białystok and descendants.

An important design element, particularly for cemeteries where an informational sign is erected before a monument is a substantial horizontal base (presumably concrete) providing a level and safe area for visitors to place and light memorial candles (see Figure 3 for the newly-installed sign at the Przerośl Jewish cemetery with a concrete base).

11. Fences and gates

Before WWII all Jewish cemeteries had a perimeter fence or wall. The reason for a fence or some means of physically and visually delimiting the boundary is twofold. The first, to be consistent with *Halakha* (Jewish law) and tradition. The second is to limit access.

In their unrestored states, some Jewish cemeteries have remnants of fences which may be seen around the boundaries (Figure 26) or in other instances scattered within the cemetery (Figure 27). In some instances, the remnants are sufficient as is or with minor repair. In other instances, new fences or major repairs may be needed.



Figure 26. Remnants of original fence at Przerośl. This will be left in place as is.



Figure 27. Likely remnants of a stone wall (though possibly an ohel) at Trzcianne. The rubble will need to be removed and a fence or other boundary marker installed.

Creating, restoring, or replacing a fence may be one of the most expensive parts of a restoration project. So, how do you design and plan for a fence?

Collaboration, permissions, and permits

Like many other aspects of a restoration project, this one should be planned and carried out in collaboration with your teams of other descendants, advisers, FODŻ (as appropriate), the Rabbinical Commission, WUOZ - Wojewódzki Urząd Konserwacji Zabytków (Provincial Monument Conservator) and most importantly, the local government, which will need to authorize a construction permit. The local government is critical because the contemporary residents will be the ones seeing the fence, the most obvious part of your project, on a regular basis. At least one community has requested that the design of the fence not alter the view of passersby so they can still see the forest-like aspect of the cemetery. You'll also need permission from adjacent landowners. In the case of Sławatycze, the project needed permission from seven different landowners for the fencing project. Fortunately, most projects aren't that complicated.

We suggest you start planning by visiting nearby Jewish cemeteries to see the range of possibilities. Figures 28 and 29 show two examples of recently constructed fences, a judicious web search will yield many other examples. Obviously, your plan will have to be tempered by your budget.

In some cases, building a fence is not possible due to cost, or if the cemetery boundaries are uncertain (thus risking disturbing graves). Moreover, in isolated locations or forest, even the highest fence will not provide full protection. So, you may consider marking the borders. For example, FODŹ suggests the possibility of installing stone pillars, perhaps 1.3 m (4 ft high), with words “Jewish cemetery” in Polish, Hebrew, and English. Such pillars should be placed every 20-30 meters (yards). At the very least, boundaries could be marked by boulders placed in corners and possibly along the perimeter. More traditional fences may be made of wood, metal, concrete, or even a plant hedge.



Figure 28. Wooden fence at Knyszyn Jewish cemetery



Figure 29. Markuszów Jewish Cemetery - new fence and wall around part of the cemetery; the remainder will be delimited with a plant hedge.

What about a gate?

Many, if not all, cemeteries had gates and today some of those gates are locked to keep visitors out unless they contact the keeper of the gate key.



Figure 30. Gate at Sochaczew



Figure 31. Gate and informational sign at Sławatycze Jewish cemetery with descendants and local officials participating in a ceremony.

Who does the actual work?

In all cases we are aware of, a contractor does the work. FODŻ may help arrange this for some cemeteries, the municipality or others may arrange it for yours. Monitoring contract performance is especially important for this particular task as we have heard of more than one instance of a less than acceptable contract compliance.

Are there special funding sources for fences and gates?

ESJF has helped fund several fence construction projects in Poland through competitive grants.

We started out this section by stating that one of the functions of a gate and fence is for protection. A non-tangible function of a fence and gate, like monuments and informational signs, is to signal the presence of the former Jewish community. The design and construction of the fence, if collaboratively carried out will go a long way toward promoting local interest in the cemetery and hence protection against being defiled. Further, it is important to ensure community buy-in by having local workers such as contractors, stone masons, and landscapers involved.

12. Commemorative ceremonies

Many projects hold ceremonies, in conjunction with a monument or informational sign being installed, or after a clean-up.

Ceremonies are an important part of a restoration project because they provide an opportunity for descendants, project volunteers, and the local inhabitants to get to know each other and jointly regard the Jewish cemetery as part of a shared cultural heritage.

Planning for the ceremony should include the Rabbinate, FODŹ (if appropriate), the local authorities (who may need to make arrangements for parking, a portapotty, trash pickup, etc.), and other members of your team. It may be helpful to have a Zoom meeting beforehand to facilitate coordination. The ceremony date should be made several months in advance so descendants can make arrangements for travel. We suggest you invite as many people as possible: the local authorities, the townspeople, the local priest as well as the regional or national bishop, the school headmaster and teachers, Polish friends from other areas, descendants, and Polish (national, regional, and local) and international media. Certainly it would be appropriate to invite representatives from one or more embassies such as the U.S. or Israeli Embassy.



Figure 32. Dedication ceremony at Przerośl Jewish cemetery with descendants, local officials and residents.

There should be a few speakers, such as the project leader, the mayor, a Jewish religious leader presumably from the Rabbinical Commission but also possibly another, the local or regional priest, a representative from FODŹ (if appropriate), and possibly other important individuals. Each should be allocated up to five minutes to speak (with the expectation that many will exceed this). FODŹ may provide an emcee. You also should have a translator (Polish-English and English-Polish). Music performed by local musicians or descendants is appropriate and welcome. Some ceremonies have served light refreshments either provided by the descendants, the town, or both working together. Some celebrations have included Jewish prayers.

A printed program, in Polish and English, is also a good idea, see figure 33 for an example. We also suggest you provide *kippot*, pebbles to be put on a monument or gravestone, and water for ritual ablution after the ceremony.

You should consider making a video of the ceremony and upload it to YouTube or other site. This will provide an opportunity for descendants and others interested in the project who could not attend in person, to view it. Unfortunately, real-time sharing is risky at present because of the chance of limited bandwidth, particularly in rural areas of Poland, and also because the time difference between the site of the ceremony and interested descendants particularly in the U.S. In the video for the project restoring the Jewish cemetery in Brzostek (<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/atowncalledbrzostek>), there is a segment showing a successful ceremony in which many more guests participated than initially anticipated. A recent video of a ceremony at Czyżew is <https://youtu.be/p2WgBbTLHjs?si=bCTi1OGSp6SCpsB6>. Another video sharing part of a ceremony as well as the cleanup and restoration for Markuszów is <https://vimeo.com/704369061/ab5c731d92>.

The cost for any sort of ceremony should be factored into the proposed budget. At the least, the cost could just include your cost of transportation to Poland and the site. In our experience, more elaborate ceremonies with music, printed programs, community receptions, and logistics may cost in the range of US\$3000 (zł12000).

Other commemorations

There are many other ways descendants and the local community have worked to commemorate the former Jewish community and the cemetery. For example, artist Mark Podwal describes “Kaddish for Dąbrowa” (<https://www.markpodwal.com/series/kaddish-for-dabrowa-bialostocka>) as a visual diary of his journey to Dąbrowa Białostocka a shtetl in northeastern Poland where his mother was born. The booklet was published in English and Polish in 2018. Other sections of this Guidebook describe websites and videos describing their ancestral *shtetl*.






<p>Dziękuję bardzo, thank you:</p> <p>Gminie Przerośl, The Village of Przerośl Dr. Steven Reece and The Matzevah Foundation, Fundacja Maceva USA Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego w Polsce, Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Fundacja Przyjaciół Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego w Polsce Friends of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, Fundacja Przyjaciół Cmentarzy Żydowskich w Polsce</p>  <p>With gratitude to Mayor Marcin Brzozowski, Rafał Bukowski, the Liszewski family, especially Agata Liszewska, Kazimierz Lecończuk, Wiesław Podziwiski, Ewa Rynkiewicz and Jarosław Rynkiewicz (RIP) and our long-time special supporter prof. Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz.</p> <p>Z wyrazami wdzięczności za wsparcie dla Wójta Marcina Brzozowskiego, Rafała Bukowskiego, Rodziny Liszewskich, w tym dla Agaty Liszewskiej, Kazimierza Lecończuka, Wiesława Podziwskiego, S.P. Jarosława Rynkiewicza (podziękowania na ręce zony Pani Ewy Rynkiewicz) oraz dla wspierającego nas od początku projektu Prof. Jana Wiktora Sienkiewicza.</p>  <p><i>Photos courtesy Steven Reece • Autor zdjęć: Steven Reece</i></p>	<h1>Remembering Przerośl</h1>  <h2>Wspomnienie Żydów z Przerośli</h2> <p>AUG 09 2023</p> <p>12 PM, WEDNESDAY, 9 AUGUST 2023 12:00, ŚRODA 9 SIERPIEŃ 2023</p>
 <h3>Ceremonia na cmentarzu żydowskim w Przerośli</h3> <p>Pamięci tych, którzy niegdyś tu żyli i tutaj zostali pochowani.</p> <p>wójt Marcin Brzozowski</p> <p>Wprowadzenie Dr. Hatte Blejer, potomek i szef projektu z USA Profesor Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, potomek z Przerośli</p> <p>Odświeżenie tablicy informacyjnej o cmentarzu Piotr Puchta, Dyrektor Generalny, Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego Rafał Bukowski, Radny Rady Powiatu w Suwałkach, mieszkaniec Przerośli Agata Liszewska, Potomek z Przerośli Jean-François Abramatic, Potomek z Francji Yael Yitav, Potomek z Izraela Rabbi Shai Wolfeld, Naczelny Rabin Polski</p> <p>Modlitwa Rabbi Shai Wolfeld: El Maleh Rachamim</p> <p>Orkiestra Klezmerska Teatru Sejnerskiego</p> <p>Poczęstunek w siedzibie GOKSIT w Przerośli, Ulica Rynek 11</p>	 <h3>Dedication Ceremony for the Jewish Cemetery of Przerośl</h3> <p>In memory of those who once lived here and those who were buried here.</p> <p>Welcome Representative of Gmina Przerośl</p> <p>Introductory Remarks Dr. Hatte Blejer Jewish descendant of Przerośl and project leader from the U.S.A. Professor Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz Non-Jewish descendant from Przerośl</p> <p>Unveiling of Cemetery Sign Piotr Puchta, CEO of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, FODZ Rafał Bukowski, deputy county commissioner, non-Jewish resident of Przerośl Agata Liszewska, non-Jewish descendant of Przerośl Jean-François Abramatic, Jewish descendant of Przerośl from France Yael Yitav, Jewish descendant of Przerośl from Israel Rabbi Shai Wolfeld, the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland</p> <p>Prayer Rabbi Shai Wolfeld: El Maleh Rachamim</p> <p>The Klezmer Orchestra of the Sejny Theatre</p> <p>Reception to follow at Rynek Street 11</p>

Figure 33. Printed program for a commemoration at Przerośl Jewish Cemetery.

13. Maintaining a Restored Cemetery

A restored cemetery will revert to its former state if not maintained due to the natural growth of vegetation and aging of any improvements. Further, an unmaintained cemetery may, with time, fade from the consciousness of the descendant and local communities.

This section discusses the potential items needing attention, how to accomplish them, and how to fund them. Alas, there is less collective experience with this than with other material presented in this Guidebook. Thus, we provide current thinking and knowledge here with the caveat that we are working with various experts in the field and that this section will be refined in the near future.

Ideally, planning for the long-term maintenance of a restored cemetery begins early on in the restoration process. Unfortunately, it is sometimes an afterthought. To ensure comprehensive and effective maintenance, all of the interested parties should be involved in planning and execution phases. These include the project leader/descendant group, the local community, and the various regional and national authorities.

We list potential tasks below, but it is important to understand that each project will be different and that some may not be applicable to a particular cemetery.

Items for long-term monitoring and maintenance

Monitor and maintain vegetation so as not to damage matzevot or impinge on access
Monitor growth on the surface of *matzevot* and remove if necessary
Monitor and maintain memorials, signs, etc.
Inspect fence and gate (if any) for structural integrity
Monitor visitor access (parking, paths)
Inspect for and remove trash or other debris (including spent memorial candles)
Inspect for and repair any vandalism (e.g., graffiti, toppled matzevot)
Monitor need for cleanup after major storms (e.g., tree limbs impinging on *matzevot* or access)
Report status to concerned parties

While most of these items can be accomplished using guidance from other sections of this Guidebook, a few require some explanation.

Site inspection and reporting

It is critical that a regular schedule, perhaps annual, be established and also lists of parties to be notified of the status, potential issues, work performed or needing to be addressed. The extent of the site inspection depends on the nature of the cemetery and the various individuals involved. It can range from a simple “drive by” or involve thoroughly walking through the cemetery with a specific list of items potentially needing attention.

The person or firm performing this work might be a contractor working under direction of FODŽ, for FODŽ-owned cemeteries, trusted city officials, or local interested parties.

Vegetation management

Grass, other undergrowth (i.e., saplings), and vines may need to be controlled to minimize potential damage to *matzevot* or other structures and not impede access. Each cemetery will differ not only on factors such as rainfall, soil type, and existing vegetation but also whether it is urban or rural and the preferences of the local community. Recommendations thus should draw from several fields: landscape planning for urban cemeteries, particularly those in the midst of a city; forestry and land management for those in or near forested or other wild or perhaps agricultural areas, and plant/wildlife ecology for those near national, regional parks, or other sensitive ecological areas.

In some cemeteries, vegetation may need attention as frequently as every year. Presumably, the same methods should be used as during the initial restoration and in most cases involve hand tools rather than heavy equipment. Some thought has been given to mulching this vegetation which would presumably reduce future maintenance requirements, but we have no details for Jewish cemeteries as yet. Further, we have seen less grass and other undergrowth in cemeteries with thick mature forests than those which are more open, but we cannot yet formulate this into management guidelines.

Growth on *matzevot* surface

Although lichens, mosses, and algae on the surfaces of *matzevot* and other structures are very slow growing, they may require attention from time to time. We cover safe techniques to do so in Section 8.

How will this work get done?

Successful restoration projects recognize that restoration and protection is not a one-time “drop-in” effort. The best successes are when there is an ongoing relationship between the project leaders and the local town leadership, as long as one is healthy enough to do so. Much of the work could be done by the contractor performing the original vegetation clearing, if a contractor was used, by volunteers organized by local individuals or the descendants, or bid out to another firm. Selection probably should be vetted by authorities in the cemetery restoration field, for example, FODŹ or the RCC, with buy-in from local officials.

How do I assure the work I pay for is actually done?

Because monitoring performance these contracts from a distance, be it Warsaw or your home country may be challenging, we suggest some sort of verification be written into contracts. For example, before and after photos, or before and after visits by someone independent of the contractor may go a long way toward assuring contract compliance.

How do I finance all this?

To date, funding or volunteers needed for maintenance after an initial restoration has been from a variety of sources including the descendant community, the local community, and nonprofit organizations funding contractors. In our opinion, this is fraught with risks. Thus, we recommend exploring long-term commitment or funding of some sort.

Creating a financial endowment for cemetery maintenance with adequate funding for its long-term is a potential means of assuring long-term success. Although we have relatively little experience at present, we encourage you to investigate an Endowment Care Trust Fund conceived, developed, and established by Friends of Jewish Heritage Poland (see text box). To our thinking, this is a way to make sure that your work or your donors' work continues long after you or they are not in a position to fund it or raise funds for it. Alternatively, you might wish to contact your own local Community Federation to establish such a

long-term fund. These endowments do not replace restoration funding but rather address future requirements.

Endowment Care Trust Fund: One way to assure “perpetual” care for a restored cemetery

Friends of Jewish Heritage Poland (FJHP) works with the Jewish Community Fund of Greater New Haven to establish endowment funds for your particular cemetery of interest. The minimum to establish such a fund (currently generating 4% annual returns) is \$10,000. Annual proceeds from this fund will be used to support ongoing clean-up and/or maintenance repair at the designated cemetery.

Funds can be accepted as outright cash gifts, or can be made through stock donations (a great tax-free way to avoid capital gains tax and be charitable), or can be Required Distributions from IRAs for those of qualification age. As a permanent endowment, there would be specific rules set up in the endowment so that the funding would continue in perpetuity for the specified purpose even if any of FJHP, FODŹ, or any other similar specific organization ceased to exist.

Finally, it is crucial to have a written plan that outlines responsibilities, reporting mechanisms, and specific actions for addressing the monitoring, maintenance, and notification tasks mentioned in this section. The plan should be comprehensive and serve as a reference for ongoing activities. It should also list contact information of responsible parties and who to notify about issues. We are not aware of any such formal documents (as of the time of writing this document in mid-2024).

Please note that while these guidelines cover various aspects of post-restoration care and maintenance, specific details may vary based on the unique characteristics of each cemetery. Adaptation and customization are key to effectively preserving and sustaining the restored cemetery for future generations.

Contemporary vandalism

Even in contemporary Poland, there is a low level of vandalism of Jewish cemeteries. You may indeed read reports about this in Polish and Jewish news sources.

Sometimes this is intentional. Graffiti is one example (Fig 32). Alas, there are “haters” in every community, including those where communal support has been exceptional, and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries still occurs in those communities. Sometimes the damage is unintentional or done from ignorance, for example *matzevot* may be toppled or moved as part of some ill-conceived game.

The local (non-Jewish) community (municipal individuals and police) is typically very sensitive to these issues and resolves them quickly

How do you reduce the risk of your project being vandalized? At least one local activist suggests that the local community needs to be involved at all stages and states that cemeteries that have installed memorials or done other work without close involvement of the community are at increased risk of vandalism.

Figure 34. Graffiti on a Jewish cemetery monument in central Poland in 2018. The city officials and local police notified FODŹ and quickly cleaned up the damage. The monument is behind a locked gate and substantial fence.



APPENDIX

- I. How to Order Historical Luftwaffe (WWII German Airforce) Overflight Photos
- II. Recommended Books
- III. Recommended Films
- IV. Organizations: Nongovernmental and Governmental
- V. Rabbinical Commission Guidelines for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries
- VI. Genealogy Research
- VII. Polish Language Resources
- VIII. Travel Tips for Descendants Restoring Cemeteries in Poland

I. How to order historical Luftwaffe (WWII German Airforce) overflight photos

NARA (The National Archives and Records Administration) has a repository of aerial photographs taken by the Luftwaffe during WWII. NARA is an independent federal agency within the executive branch of the United States government. NARA's mission is to preserve and provide access to government records. The repository is extensive and covers many sites in Poland where Jewish cemeteries exist.

Anyone can use the National Archives either through in-person visits or by hiring an independent researcher to obtain copies on your behalf.

To the extent we know, all of us obtaining such maps have used an independent contractor. While NARA provides a list of contractors (<https://www.archives.gov/research/hire-help/media.html?format=cartographic>), many of us have used one particular contractor familiar with our needs: Dirk Burgdorf, AAA Research, contact@naraexpert.com. We are confident there are others that will produce adequate results.

The procedure is to make a preliminary inquiry with precise geospatial data (latitude, longitude) available from GoogleMaps or similar program, with an approximate size of the area. The contractor will respond with the approximate cost and time required or a request for more detailed information. For a small cemetery, costs start at around US\$150 which may be paid by PayPal.

It is important to keep in mind that results have ranged from minimally to exceptionally helpful depending on the particular photographs available.

II. Recommended Books

Print

- Bielawski, Krzysztof. 2024. *The Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland*. Academic Press. (English Edition, the original Polish version is also available) [NB: The author is considered one of the leading researchers of Jewish cemeteries in Poland; this is a detailed description of the destruction and fate of Jewish cemeteries in Poland]
- Kaplan, Karen. 2014. *Descendants of Rajgród: Learning to Forgive*. Manora Press.
- Kurtz, Glenn. 2015. *Three minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. (see also film referenced elsewhere)
- Metnick, Alan. 2016. *Captured in Memory: Photographs and Thoughts on Poland*. Ten Trees Design Group, Providence, RI. [FJCP author]
- Oren, Dan A. 2018. *The Wedding Photo*. Rimmon Press. [FJCP author]
- Segal, Joshua L. 2005. *Field Guide to Visiting a Jewish Cemetery: A Spiritual Journey to the Past*.
- Steinman, Louise. 2013. *The Crooked Mirror: A Memoir of Polish Jewish Reconciliation*. Beacon Press.
- Weizman, Yechiel. 2022. *Unsettled Heritage*. Cornell University Press. [NB This is a scholarly historical treatment of Jewish cemeteries and other Jewish property in Poland and puts the current efforts of cemetery restoration in a broader context. We strongly recommend this book to anyone thinking about restoring an ancestral cemetery as this grounds projects in a broad cultural perspective.]
- Wisniewski, Tomasz. 2009. *The Lost World of Small-Town Jewish Cemeteries*. Instytut Wydawniczy Kreator. [Presents descriptions and numerous photographs of Jewish cemeteries pre-WWII]

Electronic

- A Guide to Jewish Cemetery Preservation in Western Ukraine: This site contains a tremendous amount of detailed information on many aspects of restoration targeted toward western Ukraine some of which is transferable to projects in Poland. <https://jewishheritageguide.net/en>
- Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation. <https://www.esjf-cemeteries.org/publications-and-reports/>
- Rymkiewicz, Maciej. 2021. *Procedure for Reconstructing Fences at Historic Jewish Cemeteries*. National Heritage Institute. Warsaw <https://ksiegarnia.nid.pl/produkt/procedura-postepowania-przy-odtwarzaniu-ogrodzen-na-historycznych-cmentarzach-zydowskich/>

III. Recommended Films

Recommended films depicting Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland

“Did You Know”: Briefly introduces the concept of neglected cemeteries and means to start restoration (Sponsored by some FJCP members)

<https://www.vimeo.com/739469003/fa4186bc6a>

A Town called Brozstek (Jonathan Webber)

<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/atowncalledbrzostek> (NB there may be a small fee to view)

Goniądz cemetery (by Tomek Wisniewski)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9JWAw1yZj4>

Przasnysz cemetery

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AgB83eMGPs&list=TLPQMDEwMzIwMjHM-zaN2V5N6g&index=1>

Trzciannie cemetery (by Tomek Wisniewski)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xqKIy1cC0>

Dan Oren’s story of Markuszów cemetery

<https://my-property-story.wjro.org.il/2023/01/24/bringing-a-lost-community-back-to-life/>

Highlights of the clean-up, restoration, and dedication at Markuszów

<https://vimeo.com/704369061/ab5c731d92>

International conferences on cemetery restoration (organized in part by FJCP members)

Restoring Jewish Cemeteries of Poland 2021: The Task Ahead

<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/conference.html>

Restoring Jewish Cemeteries of Poland: The Task Ahead (2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WTxK4cSRYc>

Other films of interest:

Glenn Kurtz’ film (companion to his book listed above)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1_vYrs9kng

Hiding and Seeking with your friends

<https://vimeo.com/497314192> Password: Poland

The Presence of Their Absence

A Holocaust Film about the son of Holocaust survivors undertaking a small cemetery restoration project:

<https://thepresenceoftheirabsence.com/>

Tomek Wisniewski’s films (Dr. Wisniewski has been filming Jewish cemeteries and related subjects in Poland for decades and several hundred are on YouTube):

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=bagnowka
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWydAQjXikw>

Goniądz: Nieobecni Sąsiedzi - Absent Neighbors
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxAEnu2i7Nk>

YouTube video Goniądz. Wrócić do domu - Come Home
https://youtu.be/pnRUDUsYvge?si=emiefP73S0_XjoBW

Polish Jewish cemeteries and their restoration (produced in part by an FJCP member together with FJHP, The Matzevah Foundation, and JewishGen)
<https://youtu.be/jxXcbeNcfiQ>

Forum for Dialogue's films (for example)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oN1DoEsIus>

IV. Organizations: Nongovernmental and Governmental

Potential partner organizations

Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP): The primary mission of FJHP, a U.S.-based nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, is to engage descendants and other supporters to protect and commemorate surviving sites and monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. FJHP provides detailed descriptions of restoration projects which agree to be associated with them, thus making potentially interested descendants aware of ongoing projects. They also list all known in-progress and completed restoration projects (thus providing a means for interested descendants to see if there is an ongoing project for their ancestral cemetery). They provide one means of easily transferring funds to Poland in a manner which may be tax-deductible for U.S. citizens. FJHP provides an important liaison for descendants to authorities in Poland (particularly FODŻ). Most importantly, they graciously advise potential and existing project leaders with valuable advice on all stages of restoration and encourage new projects and project leaders to work with them. Thus, FJHP is an invaluable resource for many of us involved in restoring our ancestral cemeteries.

<https://jewishheritagepoland.org/index.html>

Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (Fundacja Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego; FODŻ): The primary mission of FODŻ, a Polish nonprofit foundation, is to protect and commemorate the surviving sites and monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. The Foundation is active where no Jewish community exists today or where distance from major urban centers or lack of sufficient financial resources makes it difficult for existing small Jewish communities to provide adequate long-term care and maintenance. They currently own around 150 Jewish cemeteries, but their responsibility covers potentially 1200 cemeteries spread over two thirds of Poland, some of which they may own in the future. They provide advice, facilitate meetings between descendants and local officials, oversee contracts for most aspects of cemetery restoration and maintenance, and otherwise represent descendants in their quest to restore their ancestral cemeteries.

<https://fodz.pl/>

Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries (RCC)/Polish Rabbinate: Most work in Jewish cemeteries in Poland is overseen by the Chief Rabbi of Poland and more broadly the RCC. The RCC collaborates with FODŻ to assure that restoration is performed consistent with Jewish customs, works with the local church in stakeholder engagement during the restoration process, and represents the broader Jewish community. They also work/consult extensively with issues of mass graves. The RCC has published a document of guidelines for work in Jewish cemeteries in Poland, included in the Appendix, but also available at: <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/tradition-and-jewish-culture/religion/rabbinical-commission-guidelines-for-the-preservation-of-jewish-cemeteries>. [NB This publication this is no longer current and there are no plans for an update, the material is considered “guidelines” and not “cast in stone” according to a representative of the RCC.]

Other useful organizations

The Matzevah Foundation (TMF): The Matzevah Foundation is a U.S.-based volunteer nongovernmental organization committed to restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland and facilitating reconciliation between diaspora descendant Jews and contemporary Polish Christians. They mobilize volunteers to donate labor on several competitively chosen cemetery restoration projects and bring a tremendous amount of

experience and expertise in not only the hands-on physical aspect of restoration but also the human aspect. Further, they also generously provide valuable advice to those planning or engaged in restoration projects but not using their services. Project leaders typically pay for some expenses of the volunteers. Many FJCP members have worked with them ranging from advice through collaborating with on-site projects.

<https://www.matzevah.org>

Forum for Dialogue (Forum Dialogu): Forum for Dialogue is the oldest Polish nonprofit dedicated to fostering Polish/Jewish dialogue. They identify and connect people from Poland and abroad for whom Jewish history and heritage matter. Their work focuses on raising awareness of the histories of Jews in Poland, the way these histories were conveyed to descendants of Polish Jews and facilitating bonds between Jews and the country of their ancestors. For descendants in the planning phase of a restoration project, they will connect project leaders with local activists who can facilitate their project by working with the local government, Church, and school. They also sponsor a regular Zoom presentation of interest to the Jewish diaspora community and contemporary Poles interested in Jewish culture. Several FJCP members have been greatly helped by their program and team members. In the past, they have had high school programs which involve the local schoolmaster and teachers and may include the students working to clean the Jewish cemetery and to learn about the families by interviewing older residents.

<http://dialog.org.pl>

Coalition of Guardians of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (Fundacja Dziedzictwa Kulturowego): They are a Poland-based volunteer organization considering themselves guardians of memory of the Jewish heritage in Poland. Their intent is to preserve the memory of multicultural Poland for future generations. They clean and restore Jewish cemeteries and inventory everything that has been remembered for those who are no longer with us. They are primarily ordinary inhabitants of Polish towns, local government officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, pupils and students, and teachers. They provide assistance and education to local Poles wanting to restore and care for their local Jewish cemetery and have developed a short cemetery restoration Guidebook tailored for local Polish volunteers. They have been of help to various FJCP members for example by meeting with schools, the local Church, and government officials to share their successes in nearby towns.

<https://cmentarzydzowskie.org/en/>

Foundation for Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (Fundacja Dokumentacji Cmentarzy Żydowskich w Polsce): The mission of this Poland-based organization is to provide a searchable database of headstones in Jewish cemeteries in Poland. At present, the database includes roughly 150 cemeteries (though data for some are incomplete as their restoration process is in progress); upon request, they will document others at a nominal cost. They work closely with Jewish Records Indexing Poland and other organizations such as FODŹ and the Matzevah Foundation. They also provide abbreviated guidance for work in cemeteries and a searchable list of owners.

Other information sources for work on Jewish cemeteries – general information

National Heritage Board of Poland/National Institute of Cultural Heritage (Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa). They have descriptions of about 200 cemeteries, including photographs, histories, ownership information etc. <https://zabytek.pl/en/obiekty/?ciekawe=jewish-cemeteries>. National Heritage Board (www.nid.pl) has a database of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The database includes exact coordinates, addresses plus information on ownership (if the owner is known). Email: nid@nid.pl

European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF): ESJF is a German-based nonprofit with the core objective of protecting and preserving Jewish cemeteries across Europe through the accurate delineation of cemetery boundaries and the construction of walls and locking gates. As of 2022, the ESJF has demarcated and fenced more than 250 Jewish cemeteries across Central and Eastern Europe thanks to annual support from the Federal Republic of Germany, the European Union, and private donors. Two publications of note are “Catalogue of Best Practices for Jewish Cemetery Preservation,” and “Jewish Cemeteries in the Classroom.” The latter is written for teachers, this manual provides a unique guide to exploring Jewish cemeteries in the classroom. With sections on Jewish heritage, as well as guides to interpreting tombstones and leading cemetery expeditions, it contains all the tools necessary to help students engage with their local Jewish heritage in a meaningful way. Importantly for descendants engaged in a restoration project, they provide competitive grants for fencing and fencing. Working with FJHP and FODŹ, one of our FJCP members was able to engage ESJF in providing a generous grant to FODŹ for a wall construction.

<https://www.esjf-cemeteries.org>

International Jewish Cemetery Project: A nonprofit Volunteer Cooperative Initiative of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) to Identify Jewish Burial Sites and Interments Throughout in the World. They have an extensive database of Jewish cemeteries in Poland and elsewhere. Information may be contributed by descendants or others.

<https://iajgscemetery.org/eastern-europe/poland/>

Jewish Heritage Europe: Jewish Heritage Europe is an expanding web portal to news, information and resources concerning Jewish monuments and heritage sites all over Europe. A project of the Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe, JHE fosters communication and information exchange regarding restoration, funding, best-practices, advisory services, and more.

<https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/cemeteries/>

Heritage Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries (HFPJC), also known as Avoyseinu: is U.S. based a nonprofit organization committed to assisting Jews in restoring their ancestral cemeteries in Eastern Europe. They have been involved in the restoration of some Polish cemeteries.

<https://www.hfpjc.com/>

Jewish cemeteries in Poland (Cmentarze Żydowskie w Polsce): Is a website with an extensive and detailed listing of Jewish cemeteries in Poland, including photographs, maps, ownership, etc., along with other information on Jewish cemeteries. The site is run by Krzysztof Bielawski, a staff member of FODŹ who has been helpful to FJCP members.

<http://cmentarze-zydowskie.pl/>

Taube Foundation: They are a philanthropic U.S.-based organization promoting Jewish culture and cultural projects in Poland. They also provide financial support for many projects in Poland, organize tours, both set and custom, for descendants. Their website provides considerable background information on Jewish issues in Poland, including travel guides for Warsaw and Krakow, and recordings of interviews with luminaries in Polish Jewish issues. Further, their Warsaw office may provide some logistic support or advice on cleaning tombstones, cemetery restoration, contact Mrs. Helise Liberman of Taube Center in Warsaw

<http://www.taubephilanthropies.org/center-for-the-renewal-of-jewish-life>

POLIN Museum: The Polin provides a broad range of pertinent services not only for cemetery restoration but also genealogy. They provide access to (and assistance with) a broad range of databases regarding Jewish history and culture in Poland. Several staff members have graciously provided information and help with some cemetery restoration projects. Their “Virtual Shtetl” provides considerable information on many towns in Poland including data on cemeteries.

<https://www.polin.pl/en/resource-center>

<https://sztetl.org.pl/en/memory-in-stone>

Yahad In Unum: Provides a very detailed database of maps and details of mass graves and related data such as links to documents and videos of witnesses of mass killings.

<https://yahadmap.org>

Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in Poland: This is a document by Samuel Gruber and Phyllis Myers that provides an overview of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in Poland updated in 1995. Data on over 1000 cemeteries throughout Poland are presented.

https://www.heritageabroad.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/survey_poland.pdf

Białystok Jewish Museum, aka Museum of the Jews of Białystok and the Region, The Place (Miejsce): A treasure trove of Jewish cultural items from northeastern Poland ranging from data on cemeteries, through family histories, thousands of videos, and collections in a “bricks and mortar” museum. The museum staff very graciously advises and collaborates in cemetery restoration projects and archiving pertinent cultural items. They have worked with the FJCP members with projects in this part of Poland and have provided critical help to some of us.

<https://www.jewishbialystok.pl/EN>

Jewish Historical Institute (JHI): JHI is a Warsaw-based institution dedicated toward archiving and spreading knowledge about the heritage Jewish presence in Poland. The institute serves as a museum, presenting its collections as temporary and permanent expositions, organizing various kinds of artistic events, academic conferences and public education meetings, as well as educational and publishing activity. A special task of the JHI is genealogical work for which they are invaluable help. They also have considerable information on Jewish cemeteries in Poland which they generously share and have been helpful for FJCP members.

<http://www.jhi.pl/en>

State Archives: May contain useful and interesting information. Available in English and Polish

www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl

J-nerations: An Israel-based association that deals with preserving the memory of the Holocaust by fighting Holocaust deniers as well as discovering Jewish sites in Poland, with an emphasis on cemeteries that were destroyed by the Nazis in World War II or by the Polish authorities after the war. The organization employs lawyers who specialize in dealing with the restitution of Jewish property, historians who specialize in the Holocaust, private researchers, translators, digital media experts and more. The organization specializes in filing lawsuits and proving the ownership of Jews over the properties and graves of their ancestors. The organization works in cooperation with a number of Polish organizations working to preserve Jewish history. They have been instrumental in restoring several Jewish cemeteries in Poland. FJCP has no experience in collaborating with this group yet.

<https://www.facebook.com/Jnerations/>

The Daffodil Project: The Daffodil Project aspires to build a worldwide Living Holocaust Memorial by planting 1.5 million daffodils in memory of the children who perished in the Holocaust and in support for children suffering in humanitarian crises in the world today. They are an initiative of Am Yisrael Chai, a nonprofit Holocaust Education and Genocide Awareness Organization. They have teamed up with local authorities in Poland and also descendants to plant daffodils in Poland to represent the number of children who perished there. In fact, some local activists have worked with schoolchildren to plant daffodils adjacent to Jewish cemeteries in towns such as Goniądz.

<https://www.daffodilproject.net/>

U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad: The Commission is an agency of the U.S. government with a mission pertaining to cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Eastern and Central Europe associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens and working with governments to help protect and preserve these sites. They have provided limited funds for some Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland and also to Forum for Dialogue (see above). They actively solicit donations which are a substantial part of their ability to provide project funding, and may also transfer funds, oversee fieldwork, and provide technical assistance.

<https://www.heritageabroad.gov/projects>

General

There are numerous other organizations in Poland and worldwide that may be of help to your project with a history of providing logistic and financial support. As your project proceeds, it is likely that you will run across them from your collaboration. FJCP member have had positive experiences with many of these and expect to work with others in the future. Examples include the Lauder Foundation, the Nissenbaum Foundation, and Center for Three Cultures.

V. Rabbinical Commission Guidelines for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries

Komisja Rabiniczna do Spraw Cmentarzy

Rabbinical Commission guidelines for the preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Status of the cemeteries in Jewish law and tradition

A Jewish burial is mentioned for the first time in the Book of Genesis, when after the death of his wife Sara, Abraham bought a piece of land to bury her in it. (Genesis 23:2-20) In the Jewish tradition, the cemetery is created at the moment of purchase of a lot of land for the burial purposes – the land obtains its special status even before the first burial.

In Judaism both – the spirituals and physical – are holy. The soul is the source of the holiness, while the body is a vessel that carries it. According to the Jewish tradition and law, human body is holy even after death and remains so till the Judgment Day. Therefore the bones of the departed remain holy and inviolable. Tradition says that the soul and body are connected even after death; therefore if the bones are violated here on Earth, the peace of the soul in Heaven is also violated.

Because the bones are sacred they need to be treated with the utmost respect. The bodies of the departed must be buried in the ground (this excludes both cremation and leaving them above ground) and remain untouched. This is the reason why in Judaism the exhumation is strictly forbidden, except special and extraordinary cases.

Commission Activities in Poland

The Commission was established to supervise all the works taking place at the Jewish cemeteries in Poland. The focus of the Commission is the preservation of the cemeteries in their historical borders (pre-war borders). From the point of view of the Jewish law, within which the Commission operates, the key issue is the preservation of the human remains buried at the cemetery, regardless whether said remains are placed in the anatomical order or are mixed with the soil. In other words, according to the Jewish tradition the cemetery is where the human remains are, regardless whether the external signs of the cemetery were destroyed, its boundaries were blurred or the cemetery was built-up. In this regard the Commission's task is to prevent the building up of the cemeteries, as well as expanding the facilities already existing that were constructed during the World War II, Polish People's Republic or after 1989. The fact that the necropolis was built-up and human remains desecrated in the result of past earthworks does not mean that Jews no longer consider this area a cemetery – a holy place.

Methodology of the Commission's work: performing works at the cemeteries

Judaism expressly prohibits interference in the earth structures at the Jewish cemeteries due to the danger of moving the bones. Therefore, allowed by the Jewish tradition are only noninvasive research methods. In order to recreate the historical borders of the cemetery or recognize the burial zone, the following tools are available: synchronization of the pre-war maps, synchronization of the aerial photos from the World War

II, GPR surveys and LIDAR (light detection and ranging). The basic tool is an on-site verification – checking the area for the remains of the pre-war fence or other cemetery objects.

The archeological excavations are allowed only in special cases, under consultation with the Commission and under the rabbinical supervision of the delegated Commission employee.

Matzevot (tombstones)

According to the Jewish tradition matzevot belong to the deceased and therefore should be returned to the cemetery of origin. It is not allowed to re-set the so-borne matzevot in a way imitating the original setting, suggesting that they are located in the original spot – original burial place. The Commission recommends that in such case, the optimal solution is a creation of the lapidary, integrated with an existing fence or located in its vicinity. The exact location of the lapidary should be agreed with the Rabbinical Commission. Moreover digging, raising or re-setting tombstones that fell, were overgrown or covered by the soil at the cemetery is forbidden.

Summarizing, forbidden are all activities that may violate the human bones located under the surface of the earth.

Any renovation, maintenance and care for the matzevot should be performed in accordance to the conservation procedures and in case of any doubt – consulted with the Commission.

Practical remarks:

- while recreating the inscriptions during renovation of the matzevot, the text needs to be consulted with the Commission (Hebrew consultation),
- the use of any chemical substances on the matzevot is strictly forbidden without a permit from the appropriate Conservator,
- tombstones or inscriptions should not be painted without prior approval of the paints and techniques to be used by the appropriate Conservator,
- matzevot should not be cleaned with hard brushes, including wire brushes.

Guidelines for conducting work on Jewish cemeteries

The following guidelines apply both to the fenced and marked cemeteries, as well as to those which borders are not recreated yet. In case of the latter ones it should also be noted that one of the forms of the protection of their burial zone is to change the land use to the “green area”, subject to the public notification that the given area is a cemetery; it should be noted in a way that will leave no doubt that the area should not be used for recreational purposes.

From the point of view of the Jewish tradition, the most important is providing peace of the dead and the inviolability of their burials. Therefore all works conducted at the cemeteries, including projects aiming to recreate their historical borders, should take into account these priorities

Within the Jewish cemeteries –

it is not allowed:

- to carry any type of work on Shabbat (from dusk on Friday till dusk on Saturday) and on Jewish Holidays,
- to dig,
- to transport soil from the cemetery,
- to enter with the heavy equipment (the appropriate permits can be issued only by the Commission),
- to remove the roots of trees and bushes,
- to dig out the tombstones,
- to arbitrary bury bones,
- to dig under the fence,
- to open graves;

it is allowed:

- to cut to the ground level - trees, bushes, annual, biennial and perennial plants,
- to remove with biological means carps and roots of the old trees,
- to burn weeds, branches and wood - in accordance with the health and safety regulations,
- to lay out lanes on the ground surface - after consulting with the Commission,
- to add additional layers of earth, providing that it is free from debris and other contaminants,
- to clean the tombstones,
- to place commemorative plaques and information signs – after consulting with the Commission.

Notice: If you find human remains stop working immediately and contact the office of the Commission.

In case of any substantive questions or concerns, please contact the Rabbinical Commission directly (6 Twarda St., 00-950 Warsaw, tel. +48 22 526 54 59).

Source: Rabbinical Commission for Jewish Cemeteries in Poland

VI. Genealogy Research

For those of you who weren't drawn to restoring your ancestral cemetery because of work on your family tree and family stories, we recommend doing so if only to identify and identifying and contact relatives and other descendants to gain additional potential project participants and funding.

Equally important is to use these resources to help identify the person associated with a particular *matzevah*. With only a given and parents' names, birth and death dates, a perusal of records can sometimes identify a family name as well.

Jewish Records Indexing-Poland (JRI): JRI is an independent nonprofit organization. It a comprehensive Internet searchable database containing indices of Jewish records from current and former territories of Poland. The database contains a collection of index entries from the vital registers of birth, marriage, and death from Jewish records in Poland from the 19th and early 20th century. In addition to the indices of vital records, the JRI-Poland database includes indices to many other types of records, including Books of Residents for various Polish towns, census records, army draft lists, indices to burials in cemeteries and gravestone files, Polish passports, ghetto death records, newspaper announcements of births, marriages, and deaths, court and legal announcements in official newspapers, and other resources to assist researchers in their quest for documentation about their ancestors.

<https://jri-poland.org>

JewishGen is a U.S.-based nonprofit organization with a worldwide database of genealogical support data including Poland. Importantly, they co-sponsor volunteer cemetery restoration projects in Poland.

JewishGen Family Finder (useful for finding other descendants). If you are new to researching your roots or want to improve your proficiency, they also have on-line courses

(<https://www.jewishgen.org/education/description.asp?course=40510>)

<https://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/>

JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR)

<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/tree/CemList.htm>

<https://www.jewishgen.org/>

The Jewish Historical Institute (JHI)/ Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (ŻIH), also known as the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute: The JRI is a Warsaw-based organization hosting archives, a library, historical artwork, and various cultural events; they also provide assistance with genealogical work.

<https://www.jhi.pl/en/genealogy>

VII. Polish Language Resources

Pronunciation

Forvo: Provides native speakers pronouncing Polish words including place names. There are typically multiple people providing pronunciations. In the event your ancestral town isn't listed, they will usually add it to the site within a few days.

<https://forvo.com/>

Translation (examples of our favorites)

Google translate: This will translate copied text, photographed text (e.g., from a restaurant menu), or spoken language. This is available both on-line and as a phone app.

<https://translate.google.com/>

DeepLTranslate: Provides superior text translation including docx, pdf, and pptx formats.

<https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>

Language Study Resources online

We strongly encourage you to learn as much Polish as you feel comfortable with. Knowledge of even a few words will go a long way to developing relationships with local Poles not only directly involved with your project but also in the broader community in which you will be working.

Following are examples our members have had experience with.

Pimsler: A great introduction to the Polish language. The lessons are very professionally done apparently by an old-school language instructor. There is no written text to go along with it (a stated strategy of the program) which meant that it can sometimes be hard to figure out the precise pronunciation. Note that each lesson needs to be repeated multiple times. After the first few times, one can play the lessons speeded up (1.5 times recorded rate). This alone can provide some low-level language skills. This can be used on Audible.com purchased through Amazon; there are ways of getting this less expensively than usually advertised if you search diligently.

<https://www.pimsleur.com/learn-polish>

PolishPod101: Numerous lessons with multiple instructors for various interests. There is text, detailed explanation, and quizzes. You can advance your skills past what can be learned in Pimsler. The explanation and examples of tenses, cases, and conjugations may be challenging for some learners. Can be purchased online from their website. Overall, worthwhile and recommended. A very valuable feature is word of the day which is emailed.

<https://www.polishpod101.com/index.php>

Duolingo: Although there are some who benefit from this, others do not find this useful.

<https://www.duolingo.com/>

Rosetta Stone: At least one of our group found this helpful for beginner-intermediate level Polish especially because of the speech recognition feature.

<https://www.rosettastone.com/buy/learn-polish/>

Easy Polish: This is a good web-based series of videos including both English and Polish subtitles. Basic version is available free, study plans, tutors, available for an extra charge.

<https://easypolish.org>

Language Reactor: This site provides listings of videos on Netflix, YouTube, etc. with English and Polish dubbing and text. This has the ability to find translations for specific words, find other usage examples, pronounce words, and build a vocabulary list. There are many thousands of hours of videos. Most importantly, it is free.

<https://www.languagereactor.com/catalogue>

Other Videos/movies

Netflix with special language learner subtitles (e.g., both Polish and English subtitles, plus the ability to step back phrase at a time, also other features, about 10 available):

<https://languagelearningwithnetflix.com/catalogue.html#language=Polish&country=United%20States>

Other Polish language movies with English subtitles are also available:

<https://www.netflix.com/search?q=polish%20language>

YouTube: various Polish language presenters and presentations are available ranging from low to high quality on a huge range of topics. Can be browsed for subjects of interest.

Translating

Print resource providing translation guide:

Jonathan D. Shea and William F. Hoffman. 2007. *In Their Words: A Genealogist's Translation Guide to Polish, German, Latin, and Russian Documents*: Polish: 1 Language & Lineage Press.

VIII. Travel Tips for Descendants Restoring Cemeteries in Poland

Here, we offer specific advice about travel beyond what may be in current travel webpages or guidebooks based upon our experience in the course of our cemetery restoration projects. We hesitate making specific recommendations beyond what is listed because of individual preferences and needs vary widely.

If you are not an experienced international traveler, we strongly recommend you spend a few hours perusing printed and on-line travel guides, for example, Lonely Planet and TripAdvisor. These will help immensely with travel logistics, selecting a suitable hotel, learning about general tourist sites, and the Jewish sites you may wish to visit beyond your ancestral town.

Phone/internet:

Most of Poland is well connected by phone and data. There are some rural areas with no coverage. If your cell plan is too expensive for the amount of time you spend in Poland (check with your carrier about international rates and whether your phone is unlocked), you may wish to purchase a SIM card or eSIM. For example, we have had luck using sim cards ordered in advance from Orange (a French company) which has excellent service through much of Poland. Polish sim cards are also available at the various international airports in Poland and elsewhere. You may wish to look at coverage maps for your cell service particularly if you will be in a remote area. The disadvantage of such a sim card is that your regular cell phone number will not work until you replace the original sim. Many hotels have excellent free or inexpensive Wi-Fi. Also, WhatsApp is widely used in Poland.

Getting around:

Train travel in Poland is generally efficient, comfortable, safe, and inexpensive. Several of us regularly take the train from Warsaw to places like Bialystok and Krakow but have ventured as far as western Poland or Germany.

- We recommend traveling first class since the additional cost is minimal. Be sure that you understand if you need to transfer on the way to your destination or if the ticket is part train and part bus. A slight adjustment in time may yield a better trip.
- There is a train connection in Warsaw airport to downtown Warsaw and elsewhere. If you are taking the train to central Warsaw from the airport (most of us use taxis or rideshares), make sure you know the best station to get off (many hotels are near the central Warsaw station). If you are not stopping in Warsaw, but going further afield, you will need to transfer at least once. Unlike taking the train from central Warsaw to outlying cities, directions for such transfers from the airport train station are not very understandable and you may need to ask for help. There are ticket machines at the Warsaw airport train station with English directions.
- We suggest buying your tickets at: <https://www.intercity.pl/en/>. Although you can print out paper tickets, their phone app (both Android and Apple) is easy to use and offer the possibility of using electronic tickets and making last-minute changes.
- Note that there are not porters to help with luggage in most train stations and you may have to schlep your luggage up and down stairs (or arrange for a guide to meet you and help). For this reason, if we are arriving and leaving from Warsaw, we sometimes leave some items not needed during our stays in remote areas at our Warsaw hotel. One exception to this was the Warsaw Marriott which is located adjacent to the central Warsaw train station. The staff will help with you luggage to and from the train. In August 2024, this became the Warsaw Presidential Hotel. We are unaware whether the new management will provide this service, but try to provide this information in Guidebook updates.

- Project partners/local authorities: In some instances, FODŹ, for instance, might accompany you on a day trip to your ancestral cemetery to meet with local officials. Sometimes, partial reimbursement is expected.
- Car rental: Car rentals are readily available in Poland at the airport and city locations. Note that an international driver's permit may be required (at least for Americans); check with your rental agency. Roads are well maintained and signed. Most cell phone navigation apps work very well in Poland. Some FJCP members have driven extensively in Poland, others have been reluctant to do.
- Driver (presumably English speaking). It is possible that you may be able to hire a car and driver to take you to specific locations. This may be less expensive than hiring a licensed tour guide particularly if you want to spend a lot of time at one or two locations. Though this has been recommended to us, we don't have direct experience.
- Uber is widely available in the larger cities and is generally less expensive than taxis. You might be able to get an Uber on an hourly basis.
- Taxis are available in many areas, but may overcharge tourists particularly to/from the airport or hotels.

Hotels and agro-tourist accommodations:

- There is a wide range of hotels available in the main cities, and where we use as a base for our projects. The Warsaw Airport Renaissance and Courtyard are across the street from the airport and thus are convenient if you have a very late arrival or early departure. There are many both less expensive and more luxurious equally satisfactory hotels in Warsaw.
- In the smaller towns with no convenient hotels, some of us have made arrangements to stay in agro-tourist facilities. These may be found either using a web search or an on-line travel agent such as Booking.com. These are very popular with the Poles and book up early. Although we generally make reservations in January for August, they may be available on short notice. Note that not all accommodations have air conditioning; if this is an issue for you, be sure to investigate and confirm in advance.

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (U.S. State Department):

This program (for U.S. Citizens) will provide you with any needed travel alerts and may be helpful in other ways. <https://step.state.gov/STEP/index.aspx>. We strongly recommend you register before you travel.

Translation on the go:

Having the GoogleTranslate app on your phone is handy for reading signs, menus, real time oral conversations, etc. Be sure to download the Polish Language module and become familiar with its use before you leave.

Cash/credit cards:

Almost all businesses take credit cards. If asked whether you want to pay in Polish Zloty or the currency your card uses, it is usually less expensive to pay in Zloty. As of the last writing, there is no way to add a tip onto credit card charges in restaurants, so be sure to have a supply of cash for and approximately 10% cash tip as you see fit. Make sure that your credit card does not have a foreign transaction fee (sometimes 3%). Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) are widely available in the airports and often even small towns. So, there is no need to take a supply of Zloty into Poland. Note that foreign currencies are generally not accepted.

Food/dining

- English language menus are available in many restaurants, though you may need to specifically ask.
- Kosher food is available in a few Warsaw restaurants (e.g., <https://www.facebook.com/bekefwarsaw/>, <http://www.kosherdelightpoland.net/menu.html>) (may require advance ordering) and possibly other big cities. It is a good idea to research your needs before you leave.
- Vegetarian and vegan food is widely available everywhere in Poland but care should still be exercised when ordering.

Visiting homes:

If you are fortunate enough to be invited into someone's home, your host may request that you take off your shoes. This is common but not universal and you should be prepared to do so. You should consider presenting your host with a small gift, a souvenir from your hometown or perhaps flowers or chocolates.

Planning air travel

It is generally wise to purchase your tickets at least ten weeks in advance, but you may wish to begin monitoring airfares as much as a year in advance. We recommend trying to get flexible tickets; while refundable tickets are typically more expensive, many airlines will currently let you cancel a flight and receive credit for future travel. As itineraries in Poland can unexpectedly switch, this is an important consideration. We suggest doing initial air travel planning on these two places: <https://matrix.itasoftware.com/search> and <https://www.google.com/travel/flights>. You can get preliminary cost estimates by varying your plans a few days and thus minimize the expense. We suggest booking tickets directly with the airline. Another factor to consider is the luggage allowance as the number and weight of checked bags can vary from airline to airline. If seat comfort is important (seat pitch and width), you may want to get precise seat measurements and optimize your seat choice by using SeatGuru (<https://seatguru.com/>) or similar site. While Warsaw is the obvious place to fly, there are other international airports in Poland that may be either cheaper to fly into or more convenient to your project

Travel and Guide Services

While it is likely that you will use an experienced licensed guide for an initial trip to the cemetery and primary sites you wish to visit if there are other sites you want to see, you may wish to save the fee by making other arrangements. Most medium and large cities have many inexpensive guides available who can provide a custom itinerary. These can be found on travel sites. We offer these based upon our own personal experiences but cannot guarantee your own experience

Warsaw-based:

Agencies:

- Taube Jewish Heritage Tours: They provide custom tours all over Poland and are exceptionally generous supporters of Jewish culture in Poland. <https://taubejewishheritagetours.com/>
- Travpol Travel Agency Ltd: Warsaw-based guide providing tours over much broader areas including eastern Poland. <http://www.travpol.pl/>

Individuals:

- Witold Wrzosinski: Warsaw-based but provides service over a much broader area including northeast Poland. He has participated in cemetery restoration projects, and is currently director of the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery and head of the Warsaw Jewish Community, thus currently limiting his availability. He may have recommendations for other guides. w.wrzosinski@avanim.pl
- Franciszek Bojańczyk: Franciszek has degree in Hebrew Studies and Politics and is an experienced Warsaw tour guide. He currently works at the Jewish Historical Institute and thus may not be available. franciszek.bojanczyk@gmail.com

Kraków -based

- Krzysztof Suszkiewicz: He is one of the experienced and knowledge guides for Jewish Kraków and region. krzysztof.suszkiewicz@gmail.com

Białystok-based

- Daniel Paczkowski: Białystok-based guide for travel and genealogy <https://ancestral-tourism.com/>
- Dr. Tomek Wisniewski is exceptionally experienced in Jewish cemetery restoration and has helped several FJCP members arrange meetings with town officials, produce videos, etc. <https://jewishtravelagency.com/product/shtetls-footsteps-of-our-ancestors-bialystok-region/>

Lublin-based

- Agata Radkowska: Agata is based in Lublin, but has set up lodging in Northeast Poland and assisted in finding guides for Gdansk, Warsaw, and Kraków. agata@rootkatours.com

Wrocław-based (but national availability)

- Genealogytour.com: Provides genealogical research, tours, and heritage tours throughout Poland. Knowledgeable about Jewish cemeteries in various parts of Poland. office@genealogytour.com

Basic transportation/Car or Van & Driver. If you or a group only needs to be driven between points without formal guide service, we have used Shuttle24. They can be booked in advance with a firm price quote <https://shuttle24.pl/en/>

CONCLUSION

In the journey of Jewish cemetery restoration in Poland, we are reminded of the timeless wisdom found in the Talmud attributed to Rabbi Tarfon: "*You are not required to finish your work, yet neither are you permitted to desist from it.*" These words resonate deeply as we, the descendants, embark on the task of honoring our ancestors and preserving their sacred resting places. Each step we take, each stone we uncover, and each prayer we offer is a testament to our commitment to reconnect with our rich heritage. While the enormity of the task may at times seem overwhelming, we draw strength from this profound teaching. It reminds us that our efforts, no matter how small, contribute to the collective tapestry of restoration and remembrance. Let us persevere with unwavering determination, knowing that each act of preservation, no matter how incremental, is an act of love and reverence. May this sacred undertaking not only revive the physical presence of these cemeteries but also breathe life into the spirits of those who came before us.

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First, we laud the efforts of those previously or currently involved in restoration. There is no shortage of individuals, nonprofit organizations, and government officials who have created the basis for the progress to date upon which we build. Those individuals are truly living treasures.

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I went to Poland to restore my ancestral cemetery. I had seen the state of the cemetery a few years earlier, so I knew the task was daunting, but I was otherwise quite ignorant of what I would experience. I am the eldest in my generation. When I was a child, my beloved Baba (grandmother) told me stories of her parents' life in Poland. As the curator of family lore, I felt responsible for honoring her memory and the memory of her ancestors. My first thought was to find the matzevot of the Frankels, Bramsons, Margolises, and Myszkowskis. Instead, I found an impenetrable forest of tall trees and high bushes. The matzevot were mostly gone, looted by the Germans, the cemetery gate and the beautiful stone wall were in part re-purposed either then or subsequently. The cemetery was abandoned and neglected from 1939 to 2017 when I arrived with a group of descendants.

It is now 2023 and, in the years, since I started restoring the cemetery, I have changed. The simple task of restoring a cemetery I naively embarked upon turned into a richer journey. I was greeted with "welcome home" that first summer by a famous native, who hosts our group each year in his historic house on the rynek (marketplace). A descendant chazen (cantor) led us the first summer saying Kaddish and singing El Maleh Rakhamim for our deceased ancestors buried there, a tradition I have carried on each summer, joined by non-Jewish Przerośl natives, all of us moved to tears. I have met and grown fond of a large group of cousins, landsmen, and non-Jewish Polish supporters from the small town. The journey has not only been about restoring a physical space but also reviving the bonds of shared history, culture, and humanity. I know that we have honored our Baba and her ancestors, all of us who have participated in this work in any manner.

*Hatte Blejer,
FJCP member*