

# THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 7    September - October 2004

## The Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project

As we prepare to celebrate the New Year 5765, The Ivansk Project Action Committee is pleased to announce a campaign to restore the Jewish Cemetery in Iwaniska (Ivansk). The details of this undertaking are presented in this issue of the e-Newsletter.

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Photos that accompany this issue of the e-Newsletter can be viewed on the web:

Log on to: <http://nortontaichman.photosite.com/ivansk/RestoreCemetery/>

Click on individual photos to enlarge the image.  
Also, you can view the photos in the slideshow mode.

# **Our Unfinished Business in Poland**

**by Lisa Newman, Toronto, Ontario, Canada**

If you are reading this, then maybe you, like me, are descended from Ivansk Jews and have some interest in your family origins.

I write to tell you about a project that I find deeply meaningful, the projected restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Ivansk where our ancestors are buried. We have an opportunity now to restore order to the cemetery. At this time, there is a great deal of help available to us to accomplish this, especially from the Polish Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project, a non-profit U.S. foundation with extensive contacts in Poland.

As our Rosh Hashanah New Year celebrations lead us to reflect upon our traditions and our spiritual inheritances received from those who went before us, it is fitting to commit ourselves to caring properly for their remains. By participating in the Jewish traditions of taking care to preserve sacred burial grounds we fulfill one aspect of the fifth commandment, to honour our forefathers and foremothers.

Since the last war, the Ivansk cemetery where our ancestors lie has not been maintained. The graves of our ancestors, of our great-great- grandparents lie neglected in an overgrown, abandoned cemetery in Ivansk [today Iwaniska, a Polish town sans Jews]. A recent survey of the site revealed three fragments of gravestones lying on the ground, their inscriptions more or less legible. Other graves have no doubt been obscured by the healthy overall growth of vegetation, and await a cleaning of the site to be discovered as well. Still others may be able to be reclaimed from other uses to which they have been put. In other shtetlach where old Jewish cemeteries have been restored, the local Polish residents have been extremely supportive. And when approached recently by the Polish Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project both the mayor of Iwaniska and the parish priest, key personages in the town today, indicated their sincere willingness to help in the restoration and to involve local people in this work. The first stage, a cleaning of the underbrush, will be undertaken by local Iwaniska schoolchildren in the spring of 2005. (See further details in Greg Gregorczyk's article below.)

The generations of Jews who would have taken responsibility for maintaining these old graves and honouring our ancestors were killed in the Holocaust. Other intervening generations who survived, have grown up far from Poland, most of us in the U.S, Canada and Israel. There is no one else to do this: it falls to us to make sure these graves are properly restored, in accordance with key values in [our] Jewish tradition.

My own grandfather, Lazar Rotenberg, left Ivansk in 1893; several cousins and their families later joined him in Canada. But those relatives [cousins] who stayed in Ivansk all perished in the Holocaust; my generation never knew them.

No one alive in our family now has actual memories of Ivansk, we don't speak Polish at all and very few of us even speak Yiddish. We have only one or two photos of the old country, left behind so long ago. Most of us have never visited Poland, though among us we have travelled in many far-flung parts of the world.

Canadians for over a century, we descendants of Lazar Rotenberg are far removed from Poland. Or are we? Had it not been for those who went before us, we would not be here today.

With the aid of the Polish Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project, we can once again bring order to the neglected Ivansk cemetery and honour to the remains of our ancestors. Fortunately the PJCRP can help us with very practical, onsite assistance. As well, the PJCRP has extensive experience at dealing with obstacles such as governmental bureaucracy. The PJCRP has successfully restored a number of Jewish cemeteries in Poland already and is currently involved with about 30 similar cemeteries in Poland. They will soon be able to provide us with a 'ballpark' estimate of the extent of our project and the budget for funds needed; we will communicate with you through this e-newsletter at every step of the project. Based on the costs involved in other similar restoration projects, we "guesstimate" that a figure in the neighborhood of \$35,000-\$40,000 (US) is to be anticipated. Further details of the role of the PJCRP in our project are given below in a statement provided by its director, Norman Weinberg.

While the final project plan has yet to be drawn up, it will likely include the following: restoring graves and gravestones where found, cleaning the entire area of vegetation and undergrowth, building a wall around the area and erecting a monument to those killed in the Holocaust. In addition, we hope to include an educational component in the project, such as offering an annual award to a young person in Iwaniska who demonstrates an interest in Polish-Jewish history and is committed to promoting tolerance and reconciliation between our two peoples (see the message by Greg Gregorczyk, below).

Every stage of the work will be documented in photographs and video. [In nearby Ozarow, a similar project was documented and the DVD describing it is available to us through PJCRP]. You will be kept informed during all phases of the project. When the project is completed, a ceremony dedicating the restored Ivansk cemetery will hopefully be attended by many of us supporters.

## **How You Can Help: You can make a monetary donation!**

**We invite both Ivanskens as well as non-Ivanskens to take part in this project.**

***In Canada and the U.S. arrangements have been made for your contribution to be tax-deductible. We apologize for not being familiar with the laws governing charitable donations in Israel and hope that our Israeli landsman will also be able to generously contribute to the cemetery restoration.***

## CANADIAN DONORS

In Canada, please send cheques made payable to the:

**Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto  
4600 Bathurst Street  
Toronto, Ontario M2R3V2  
Attention Angela D'Aversa**

***N.B:*** In the cheque's memo line, please insert: **"for Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project"**

Donations to restore the Ivansk Cemetery can also be made on VISA or MasterCard by calling Janice Benatar at 416-631-5847 or by sending the information in writing including your Name and Card Number, Amount and Expiry Date.

If you wish, you may designate a person you wish to honour and a card will be sent to this person or the family to acknowledge your gift.

The Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto will deposit all donations to a special account dedicated to the Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project. You will receive a tax receipt from the Foundation.

## US DONORS

In the US checks should be made payable to:

**The Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies  
PJCRP Account  
787 Delaware Avenue  
Buffalo, New York 14209**

***N.B:*** In the check's memo line, make sure to indicate **"for Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project"**

**Donating on Line:** < [www.jewishphilanthropies.org](http://www.jewishphilanthropies.org) >

- Enter your credit card information.
- You will be asked to specify which agency and which fund you want to support.
  - **For agency**, select Poland Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project.
  - **For fund**, type in "Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project".

You can honor someone or send a memorial gift via this site, and the funds will be credited to the Ivansk Project. Your donation will be acknowledged by the Foundation and a tax receipt will be forwarded to you.

## How You Can Get Involved in Restoring the Cemetery

Money, while significant, is not all we need; your time and expertise will be very valuable in the tasks ahead to make the restoration project a success.

For instance, we would appreciate your assistance in:

- fundraising,
- designing and maintaining an Ivansk website,
- arranging travel, meals and lodging for those planning to attend the commemorative ceremony in Ivansk and a possible Tour of Jewish Historic Sites in Poland.

Please let either of the Ivansk PJCRP Coordinators, Norton Taichman in Philadelphia (610) 664-8171 (<[nstaichman@comcast.net](mailto:nstaichman@comcast.net)>) or Lisa Newman in Toronto (416) 489-0212 (<[lisa.newman.a@utoronto.ca](mailto:lisa.newman.a@utoronto.ca)>) know if you are willing to help.

### **Honoring Our Dead: One of the Greatest Mitzvot**

**by Norman Weinberg, Executive Coordinator, PJCRP**

On behalf of the Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project (PJCRP) I wish each of you and your family members a Healthy, Happy and Peaceful New Year. Shana Tova!

As we enter the high holidays, we remember our departed family members and friends. We also remember the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. Three million Polish Jews were among them. We remember them in our prayers, and by building Holocaust museums and memorials, through books, the arts and educational programs. But for the Holocaust, they and their descendants would have been caring for their ancestral cemeteries. By saving and restoring the cemeteries, you can do for them what they cannot...one of the greatest of mitzvot.

I would like to describe how I became involved in the PJCRP and how we will help you reclaim and restore the Jewish Cemetery in Ivansk.

### **My Own Story**

Ozarow, Poland was the shtetl of my parents and grandparents. They were among the few fortunate enough to leave before the War. Thousands who remained behind suffered in the confines of the Ozarow ghetto from starvation and disease until their deportation in October 1942 and subsequent murder in Treblinka.

In early May of 2001, I decided that saving and restoring the devastated and desecrated Ozarow cemetery, was long overdue. I knew about the condition of the cemetery from

researching family genealogy and from several contacts with other Ozarowers. My training was chemistry and business. I knew nothing about restoring cemeteries, so how and where to start? Fortunately, my Polish colleague and friend, Dr. Marek Lipsztajn, who was born in Poland after the war came to the rescue. Through him, I contacted Andrzej Omasta, a resourceful Polish artisan and businessman, living in Warsaw. Omasta agreed to help and we sent him immediately to Ozarow to meet the mayor and priest and gather information on what needed to be done. [Andrzej Omasta was to become the expert on Jewish cemetery restoration in Poland and is now the PJCRP Project Manager.] About the same time, I corresponded with Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Warsaw and Lodz, who became our greatest supporter. [Rabbi Schudrich is now the PJCRP Halachic Coordinator.] I also made contact with Dr. Eleonora Bergman, Deputy Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. She provided valuable advice and guidance on questions of design of the walls and gates and other important issues.

Through the miracle of the internet, the Ozarow Cemetery Restoration Project was initiated. An e-mail list of Ozarowers was constructed from addresses starting with my relatives, from addresses found in the JewishGen Family Finder and by networking. A series of memos and reports were sent out on breaking news, plans and progress for the cemetery. A beautiful website was designed by Marek's wife, Bozena (see [www.ozarow.org](http://www.ozarow.org)). Fundraising began and within three months all the money needed to restore the cemetery was raised, including: commissioning a site survey and design documents; cleaning the cemetery after more than 60 years of neglect; resetting fallen stones; returning many matzevot taken by the Germans as fortifications against the Soviets; restoring the walls and gates: and, placing a monument at the mass grave. And funds still continued to arrive so that enough was available to create a wonderful documentary film, "Return to Ozarow-Mending a Broken Link" (shown at the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival in April 2004).

Within five months the restoration work was completed and about 30 of us Ozarower descendants and contributors, including the Ozarower Rebbe, (Rabbi Tanchum Becker of Israel), on October 15, 2001 at the Ozarow cemetery for the commemoration ceremony. Much to our surprise, over 500 townspeople were there to welcome us, dressed in their finest and school children had been let out of school to attend this important occasion. The townspeople had brought huge bouquets of flowers. Greetings were extended by the mayor and the priest and letters of congratulations were read on behalf of the President of Poland and of the US, Canadian and Israeli Ambassadors. The media was there to cover the event. Stirring prayers were intoned at the mass grave by the priest in Polish and chanted in Hebrew by Rabbi Becker. Then, our busload of participants toured the cemetery, lit candles at various gravesites and following that we were ushered into a newly created Jewish museum of photos, artwork and artifacts. The Poles of Ozarow had gone out of their way to let us know how much they respected that Jewish descendants had returned to restore their sacred cemetery.

But I had no idea what was yet to come. My eyes were opened that what we had accomplished was not just about restoring a Jewish cemetery thousands of miles away in a remote part of Poland. In January of 2002, I received a package containing a video tape of Ozarow school children putting on a play honoring the town's Jewish heritage. Depicted was the Jewish marketplace and children in costume danced beautifully to

Jewish music. Then a further surprise two weeks later: the high school headmaster wrote that from now on the high school students would care for the cemetery. My wife Hannah and I were very touched by this and we decided to institute an annual scholarship award. Students were to submit essays on themes including the Jews of Ozarow, Jewish life and respect for others. The following year we made our first award to a 17 year old student who wrote the winning essay (this is posted at [http://www.ozarow.org/Winning\\_Student\\_Essay.shtml](http://www.ozarow.org/Winning_Student_Essay.shtml)). We gave a copy to the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw. Consequently, the headmaster was recognized with a prestigious award from the Israeli Ambassador for fostering good relations between Poles and Jews.

**The PJCRP** (See [www.pjcrp.org](http://www.pjcrp.org))

Rabbi Schudrich called me in June of 2002 to ask my help in restoring the cemetery of Karczew. He explained that whenever it rains there, human bones surface in the sandy soil. Animals chew on them. Something had to be done as soon as possible!

Along with the **US Commission for Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad**, a US agency, we managed to raise sufficient funds to erect a wall around the cemetery to prevent animals from getting at the bones. The next phase requires stabilizing the soil. The PJCRP was born. Its objectives are restoring all 1200 of the Jewish cemeteries of Poland, documenting the effort as much as possible and providing educational opportunities for Poles and Jews, especially children, to promote reconciliation and respect for one another.

In the USA the PJCRP is now recognized by the IRS as a 501c3 foundation, able to issue tax deductible receipts to donors. An arrangement has been made with the Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto for Canadian donors to receive tax deductible receipts. All funds raised go to furthering Jewish cemetery restorations in Poland. Overhead is largely covered by the Weinberg Charitable Fund. All PJCRP personnel and PJCRP coordinators in the US and Canada are unpaid volunteers.

At this writing there are about 30 PJCRP projects at various stages of progress, ranging from just an initial trip to the former shtetl for information gathering to projects nearing completion.

### **How the PJCRP Will Facilitate the Restoration of the Ivansk Jewish Cemetery**

There are four project phases:

**Phase I** Phase I has already been carried out. Andrzej Omasta, together with Greg Gregorczyk, made an initial trip to Ivansk in June, and reported on his findings in the cemetery. As if by some miracle they discovered 3 matzevot in the field. Phase I included Mr. Omasta's fee and travel expenses as well as time spent on preparatory talks before his visit and additional information gathering soon after his visit.

**Phase II:** When sufficient funds become available Phase II will be commenced. Phase II will consist of completing and filing an up-to-date survey of the Ivansk cemetery site, if such is not on record at the town hall or local government archives; finding local

contractors who will provide designs and cost estimates for the work; and filing any additional documents required by the town and local government. Phase II also will include design of the walls, gates and a memorial monument for the victims of the Nazis. The cost of Phase II will be of the order of \$2,500 US.

**Phase III:** By the completion of Phase II, the PJCRP will have a better idea of the exact cost of the restoration work. This will be conveyed to the Ivansk PJCRP Coordinators (Lisa Newman and Norton Taichman) who will in turn relay the information to you and set the target goal for the additional donations that will be required to proceed. Once the necessary funds are available, Phase III will begin, consisting of renegotiating costs, arranging, contracting and monitoring the actual restoration work.

The cost of Phase III will depend on the scope of work to be done, the materials of construction and the extent of participation of the town (for example with workers and equipment). Phase III restoration work may include: cleaning of the cemetery of over 60 years of debris, overgrowth and neglect; righting fallen tombstones and replacing them on firm bases; reclaiming and collecting monuments from outside the cemetery taken there under German occupation or by residents to build roadways, walls, yards and for other uses; erecting walls around the cemetery and gates as well as a commemorative monument to those who were murdered in the Holocaust. Phase III will also include funds for repairing roads and other sites where tombstones have been recovered as well as making a documentary film about the shtetl, the project and the descendants.

**Phase IV:** When the work is completed, a Dedication Ceremony will be held at the Ivansk cemetery, including Jewish descendants, Rabbi Michael Schudrich and other members of the PJCRP team, the mayor, priest, townspeople, representatives from Jewish organizations, the Polish government and foreign embassies, and the media. An annual award or other educational programs may also be set up to promote reconciliation and mutual respect between Ivansker descendents and the people of Iwaniksa. If of interest to participants, the Dedication Ceremony may be combined with a Tour of Jewish Historic Sites of Poland. (The PJCRP will advise on the tour, lodging and meals).

It is important to note:

- During all three phases, the PJCRP will communicate with Lisa Newman and Norton Taichman who will keep you apprised of progress and expenditures via The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter. You will be encouraged to make suggestions regarding the designs of the walls, gates and the commemorative monument.
- The work that the PJCRP does in Iwaniska will be subject to the authority of the Rabbi of Warsaw and Lodz, Rabbi Michael Schudrich, and therefore will be subject to strict orthodox Jewish tradition and religious practice.
- All the work that the PJCRP does in Iwaniska will be carefully monitored and is in accordance with the wishes and supervision of the **Union of Jewish Communities of Poland** and/or the **Foundation for Preservation of Jewish Historical Sites in Poland**, the two Jewish entities in Poland under which jurisdiction former communal Jewish property resides according to the laws of Poland. In addition, any work contracted out by the PJCRP will be subject to

approval by the town as well as the regional and state governments of Poland. The parish priest will also be involved in this aspect of the project.

I am confident that the Ivansker community will unite to support this meaningful undertaking. You can address your monetary donation through trusted Jewish foundations as detailed by Lisa Newman (see above). Also, you can offer your expertise and your time to help make the restoration project a success.

***Jewish cemetery restoration in Poland is about remembering and honoring the dead, and the millions slaughtered in the Holocaust, with hundreds of thousands murdered in cemeteries and nearby forests and buried in mass graves. It is among the greatest mitzvot one can do, since the dead cannot thank us. It is also about life and the living, about tikkun olam...repairing the world, reclaiming Jewish heritage, educating youth, tolerance and reconciliation.***

## **JEWISH – POLISH COLLABORATION IN THE RESTORATION OF THE IVANSK CEMETERY**

**by Grzegorz (Greg) Gregorczyk Warsaw, Poland**

***As the Jewish People usher in this New Year of 5765,  
let me wish you and your families a  
Happy and Peaceful New Year! L'Shanah Tovah; Good Yom Tov!***

There is absolutely no doubt that honouring our dead is one of the greatest mitzvahs a person can ever accomplish. It is so vital because caring for the graves of our ancestors helps us to better understand ourselves, *hic et nunc*, and to realize where we came from and who we are today.

However, when it comes to a project like ours, I believe there is still another mitzvah of similar value and parallel importance: I am referring to providing an educational component to our efforts to help make the world a better place. I would love to be mistaken, but the level of knowledge about Jewish life in Poland before the WWII, especially among younger generations, can only be described as almost nonexistent. I am convinced the situation in the town of Iwaniska does not deviate much from this very sad pattern.

My statement is based on my own personal experience: I was raised in a town that was inhabited for centuries by Jewish people – Kozenice (*Koznitz* in Yiddish). Yet, as I was growing up I was never aware that Jews and Poles shared my town. I only discovered this some twenty years later. Kozenice was rich in Jewish history: it was known worldwide for its famous *Koznitzer Maggid* (preacher) and it was one of the very first places in which the Chassidic movement began. Also, as a child I used to spend my vacation at my grandmother's place, in the vicinity of three shtetls that were very familiar

to your Ivansker ancestors; Opatow (*Apt* in Yiddish), Klimontow and Sandomierz. I also never realized that this little corner of Poland had a remarkable Jewish history.

Young people in Iwaniska are now facing the very same problem that I did: they simply do not know about the “forgotten or invisible past”. I admit this does not cause any trouble in people’s daily activities. One can live easily with it and even die without knowing. However, in such a case the life turns itself into nothing more than a rootless existence. The young generation is not to blame for this situation because no obvious remnants of Jewish life are to be found in their neighborhood and no one teaches about it at school. Perhaps a few kids will discover the full and rich story of their town’s history while the remainder will only hear the old prejudices and clichés of the past.

The project to restore the Jewish cemetery can serve a dual purpose: it can strengthen the link between you and your ancestors as well as kindle a new awareness of the past that was shared by your people and mine. We can educate the younger generation of Iwaniskers about the people who are buried on the hill outside their town and thereby build a future based on mutual reconciliation and respect. We can do it and we can do it right. The children and teenagers should be able to “remember”, although the verb may seem inappropriate for younger generations that cannot remember by themselves. The example of what has happened in Ozarow (please refer to Norman Weinberg’s article, above) should become a benchmark for our efforts. However, what to some extent was a spontaneous interest of the local school representatives in Ozarow should be a regular part of our activities within the framework of the Ivansk Project.

Therefore, I respectfully propose that a significant part of our endeavor should be focused on how to best inculcate the school children and teenagers of Iwaniska with an awareness of our shared past. According to the mayor and the priest we can take for granted that the kids (as well as their parents) will participate in the cleaning of the cemetery of underbrush in spring 2005. By the gift of their time and energy, by helping to clean up the cemetery in an act of human decency, the schoolchildren will absorb one of the most important lessons of their lives. And it is not simply a classroom lesson in history. It is hands-on, never-to-be-forgotten demonstration of respect and tolerance. Getting to know the past will be a perfect starting point for them to build a better world in their little town. If you believe in cosmic consequences of even the smallest action as I do, we can be sure the “ripple effect” of that act will generate positive results in the actions of others one day in the future. Isn’t it marvelous? Isn’t it touching?

It is important to remember that the support of local adult inhabitants will be needed during all stages of the Project and beyond. The PJCRP has applied a very wise approach in fostering such loyalty by hiring local workers and tradesmen to rebuild and maintain the cemetery. This will help guarantee the town’s sense of responsibility and ownership in the project.

As far as the children are concerned, we must not simply involve them in cleaning and helping to keep up the cemetery. We need to sustain and broaden their interest in learning about the past and the lessons of history. As in Ozarow, we need to promote long-term cooperation with the elementary and the high schools to include a component of Polish-Jewish history in the curriculum. The idea of instituting an annual scholarship award, even a very modest one, produced favorable results in Ozarow. Other

reinforcement mechanisms are undoubtedly possible, and I would appreciate hearing of your ideas and suggestions. Those of you who are teachers and educators have a great deal of experience in this area. I am going to be talking to the local school headmaster in the forthcoming weeks and would be pleased to present your concepts to him/her.

To sum up, the Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project should be viewed as a twofold mission. The first is focused on fulfilling our duty to those who are buried in the cemetery and to ourselves. The second is aimed at involving and gaining support of the local townsfolk, especially the children. It is the children who hold the key to a future that is more promising than the past.

Let this dual purpose be our guiding light throughout the Project. Only through winning the hearts and minds of the current residents of Iwaniska can we be proud to call our Project a complete success.

## **The Lost Tombstones of Ivansk**

**by Norton Taichman, Narberth, Pennsylvania, USA**

When I visited Ivansk in 1996 and in 2000, I walked over the ground of what was once a Jewish cemetery. Like so many other Jewish graveyards in Poland the Ivansk cemetery had been completely destroyed during the Second World War. I found no trace of the cemetery wall or gate, and the rows of tombstones that looked out over the surrounding fields and hills were no longer there.

Then, in June 2004 Greg and members of the PJCRP team made a surprising discovery: they found the remnants of three beautiful tombstones that had been unearthed by heavy spring rains. How many more treasures remain to be found? What will they look like? What information are they likely to contain? It would be helpful if we had photographs of the cemetery before it was desecrated but none exists, as far as we know. Based on the stones discovered thus far and the descriptions of Polish-Jewish matzevot in numerous documents, we have good ideas of what we are likely to encounter.

Like most other religions and cultures, we Jews pay homage to our dead. Our sentiments are reflected in such rituals as the way we prepare the body for burial; conduct the burial service; recite The Kaddish; observe the period of mourning; perform the unveiling ceremony; light Yahrzeit candles and more. As part of our tradition, we pledge that the names of our loved ones will never be forgotten. Although the vow cannot be kept in an absolute sense, we nevertheless attempt to fulfill our promise by naming our children and our children's children after those who are gone. In addition, matzevot are placed on the graves of family and ancestors as a physical expression of enduring remembrance.

From generation to generation we gather before the monuments of relatives and friends we once knew and reminisce about their lives and how they affected ours. At the tombstones of distant ancestors we are reminded that our roots are anchored deep in time. And as we pause to read the inscriptions on the stones of complete strangers we ponder on the nature of their lives and the world they lived in. A cemetery is not just a place for tears. It records the continuity of our communities. It is a place of self-discovery, illuminating who we are as individuals and as a people. The cemetery and its memorials sustain a bond between the living and the dead.

The devastation of the Jewish graveyard in Ivansk has created a void in our lives. Those of us who were born in Ivansk may still remember what once was there but can no longer honor our pledge at the graves of parents and grandparents. We who were born elsewhere may visit Ivansk, but we cannot place pebbles on headstones to symbolically assure our kinfolk (and ourselves) that they are not forgotten. In short, we are denied the indescribable experience of being surrounded by the monuments that reveal who we are and where we came from. While we will never completely recover what's been lost, we can respect the pledge to remember the names of our ancestors. *"The Ivansk Virtual Cemetery and Yiskor Book Project"* and the *"The Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project"* will help us fulfill our debt to past and future generations as well as to ourselves.

A critical task in the restoration process is to rescue as many matzevot as possible. Some may be hidden by dense vegetation or buried in the earth at the site. Others may have been carried off and used as building materials in the town or surrounding vicinity. Some may be intact while others may be broken beyond repair. In any event, we shall mount a search and return all that we can find to the cemetery where they belong.

In anticipation of what lies ahead I would like to describe some salient features of Polish-Jewish tombstones. I shall use photographs that others and myself have taken in Poland as well as illustrations copied from printed material. All this is new to me, and I ask for your indulgence for errors of omission or interpretation.

**Photos of the Ivansk & other Jewish Cemeteries in Poland can be viewed on the web:**

**Log on to: <http://nortontaichman.photosite.com/lvansk/RestoreCemetery/>**

**Click on individual photos to enlarge the image.  
Also, view the photos in the slideshow mode.**

*Matzevah* (plural, *Matzevot*) is derived from the word *masseba*, Hebrew for monument. Unlike the machined, computer-generated uniformity that typifies the style of contemporary memorials, tombstones in the shtetls' cemeteries were unique creations. They were inscribed with more than just the names of the deceased and his or her parent(s), the date birth/death and a brief epitaph. They told a story in prose and poetry that brings us nearer to past generations; they detailed such things as the deceased's birthplace, occupation, date of (day, month, year) and cause of death, names of

relatives, the significance of his or her life as well as passages from holy texts. In addition, the sculptor was given license to embellish matzevot with symbols, images, floral motifs and other ornamentation. Each stone was distinctive and many were works of art of exceptional beauty. It is a shame that such beautiful and compelling markers are no longer the norm in the Western World.

## Inscriptions on Jewish Tombstones

In an orthodox, Ashkenazi community such as Ivansk, gravestones stood upright in the ground and were inscribed in Hebrew (sometimes, the person's name was written in Yiddish). Polish was rarely employed. Although the civil authorities mandated the use of surnames in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, orthodox Jews seldom included their surnames on tombstones. Only the deceased's given name and the patronymic (father's name) appeared.

Below are some examples of inscriptions found on tombstones in Staszow, a close neighbor of Ivansk. Numerous stones and fragments were rescued by Jack Goldfarb and restored to the Staszow Jewish Cemetery. For a complete listing see: "Staszow Tombstone Epitaphs" by Hanna Jacobsohn-Kahanoff (reference below).

The well known pious, the memory of the virtuous [be blessed] the Rabbi's wife known for her charity. Most blessed of the tent dwelling women Mrs **Sarah** Daughter of R' **Israel** blessed be her soul. Died 14 Tamuz [5]700 [20.7.1940]. Let her spirit be bound up in life eternal.

Write with an iron pen carved in rock that God shall protect him. To the memory of the most erudite and God fearing Rabbi, he studied Torah and did good deeds. He was keen on justice, supporting the poor and the wretched. Our teacher and Rabbi **Mordechai Merkel** son of our teacher **Samuel**, died.....

Here is buried mourning our disaster, the crown of our head, the child six years of age **Israel Abraham** son of **Moshe Rivni**. Died 11 Tevet [5]695 [17.12.1934].

Alas! The loss cannot be replaced. Here is buried an able and honest rich man he always conducted himself in a Hasidic manner by humbling himself at the feet of the righteous namely the books of the righteous. Our teacher, belonging to the race of holy men, honest and upright, his home was a scholar's meeting place. While a rich man, he donated great sums to charity. Did with his money whatever he could, and with his money he did unsparingly. The erudite Rabbi our Rabbi and teacher **Mordechai Zev** son of R' **Meir HaKohen** blessed be his memory.....

In her flowering years, she was plucked from us at the age of 24. She wrapped us all in mourning. We all stand at her grave, acquaintances and family, bending our heads in great pain and bellowing. Mrs **Ester** daughter of R' **Jacob** blessed be his memory....

O to the day of calamity when her pure beloved [soul] parted from her so young an important and chaste **Hannah Razel** daughter of **Pinchas**. All was done by his word in great grace.

Hundreds of commonly used words or phrases were abbreviated and chiseled in stone. A few examples are shown in Table 1. More extensive lists can be found in several references listed at the end of this presentation.

**Table 1. Representative Abbreviations on Jewish Tombstones**

Translation	Hebrew	Abbreviation
Here lies a male / female	פה נמ / נ פה נמונה	פ'נ / פ'ה
Reb (Mr.) [not a Rabbi]	רב	ר'
Marat (Mrs.)	מרת	מ'
Wife of Reb	אשח רב	א'ר
Rabbi	רב	ר'
Our teacher and Rabbi	מורנו הרב	מ'ר
The righteous Rabbi	הרב הצדק	הר"צ
Of blessed memory	זכרום לברכה	ז"ל
Woe! Alas!	קר את אן	הה
Hashem (God)	השם	ה'
May his/her memory be for a blessing	זכרום / זכרונה לברכה	ז"ל
May his/her soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life	תהי נפשוה צרורה בצרור החיים	ת'נצ'ב'ה'

## Dates on Jewish Tombstones

The months are those used in the Jewish calendar. The numbers are derived from the Hebrew alphabet where each letter is assigned a numerical value. The manner in which the month and the year are recorded is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2. The Jewish Calendar / Months of the Year**

תשרי	חשוון	כסלו	טבת	שבט	אדר	אדר ב'
Tishri	Heshvan	Kislev	Tevet	Shevat	Adar	Adar II
(Sept/Oct)	(Oct/Nov)	(Nov/Dec)	(Dec/Jan)	(Jan/Feb)	(Feb/Mar)	(Mar)
ניסן	אייר	סיון	תמוז	אב	אלול	
Nisan	Iyar	Sivan	Tamuz	Av	Elul	
(Mar/Apr)	(Apr/May)	(May/June)	(Jun/Jul)	(Jul/Aug)	(Aug/Sept)	

By tradition the Jewish calendar dates from the "Creation of the World" beginning 3760 years before the Christian (Gregorian or secular) calendar. The Jewish New Year begins on Rosh Hashanah, the first day of Tishri.

**Table 3. The Jewish Calendar / Numerical Designations**

1	א	6	ו	11	יא	16	טז	30	ל	80	פ	400	ת
2	ב	7	ז	12	יב	17	יז	40	מ	90	צ		
3	ג	8	ח	13	יג	18	יח	50	נ	100	ק		
4	ד	9	ט	14	יד	19	יט	60	ס	200	ר		
5	ה	10	י	15	טו	20	כ	70	ע	300	ש		

In the Hebrew Calendar the year 5765 is usually inscribed omitting the 5000 as follows:

$$[5]765 = 400 (\text{ת}) + 300 (\text{ש}) + 60 (\text{ס}) + 5 (\text{ה}) = \text{תשסה}$$

The year [5]647 would be: תתמז

To calculate the secular year from the Hebrew date, add 1240 to the Hebrew date:

$$1240 + [5]765 = 2005$$

You may be wondering why the numbers 15 and 16 are represented in Hebrew as 9+6 and 9+7 instead of 10+5 and 10+6. Syd Kasten explains that the combination of 'ה and 'ו are the names of God. Placing God's name on a document gives it a holiness that carries strictures on its treatment and disposal, like a siddur that cannot be shredded.

## Symbols on Jewish Tombstones

A host of symbols were carved into the stones and many are illustrated in photographs and drawings in the web photosite that accompanies this presentation. They include:

- the hands of the *Kohanim* held in priestly blessing
- the pouring of water from a pitcher represent the *Leviim*
- lions, trees, bookcases and the Star of David designate men
- books are also a primary symbol of the Jewish people
- a candelabrum or *Menorah* signify a pious woman
- a hand placing a coin into a charity box recognizes philanthropy
- a feather quill or an inkwell denote a Torah scribe
- crown and ark with Torah identify a Rabbinic authority
- crown of Torah symbolizes wisdom and knowledge
- crown of a good name ("A good name is better than fine oil".)
- animals were used to symbolize the deceased's personal name (eg, *Hirsch*, *Zvi*, -deer; *Yonah*, *Feige*, *Tizpora*, -bird); *Lieb*, -lion; *Adler*, -eagle; *Dov*, -bear)

## Images on Jewish Tombstones

An array of images decorated the stones, enhancing their artistic impact and conveying insights into the deceased's life and the emotions of kinfolk who mourned his or her death. For instance:

- foliage and trees convey a sense of the renewal of life
- a broken tree or branch tells us that the deceased was a young person
- broken candles or candlesticks signify the death of a young woman
- broken lilies represent the death of a young child
- a garland for youth

- lion: strength, power, often protecting other symbols (crowns, pillars, arches, the *Aron HaKodesh*)
- eagle: king of birds, strength and power
- two doves may be inscribed on a double gravestone of husband and wife
- snake: belief in eternal life; the coming of the Messiah
- sheep: love for the departed and the pain of his/her death
- birds signify the soul and pigeons (doves) represent love

Hard work lies before us. The hope of finding and returning most of the missing tombstones to the cemetery will sustain our effort. Your generous support and the assistance of the PJRCP and the people of Iwaniska will assure success.

It is important to remind you once again about ***“The Ivansk Virtual Cemetery and Yiskor Book Project”***. Nothing lasts forever: even the restored cemetery may not be there for our great, great, great grandchildren. By contrast, a written record of those who were buried in Ivansk will be placed in several repositories guaranteeing that the names of our ancestors will be available to countless generations. That is why we plead with you to provide us with the names of your kinfolk who were buried in the Ivansk Cemetery. We also seek the names of those who were murdered by the Germans in the town or transported to Treblinka. You’ll find more information about this project in The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Number 4, May-June, 2004.

We will search for our lost tombstones in the cemetery and in the surrounding area. It is unlikely that our ancestors’ surnames will appear on the stones, and your information will help identify the deceased and their kin. In addition, gravestones found outside the burial ground may not have been taken from the Ivansk cemetery. Thus, it would be useful to have the names of those who we know are entombed in the Ivansk Cemetery.

The information required is given in the “index card” shown below.  
If you cannot fill in all the information, complete as much as you can.

<b>IVANSK VIRTUAL CEMETERY AND YIZKOR BOOK PROJECT</b>	
<b>Surname, given names:</b>	
<b>Place of birth:</b>	
<b>Vital dates:</b>	
<b>Cause of death:</b>	
<b>Father's name / birthplace:</b>	
<b>Mother's name and maiden name/ birthplace:</b>	
<b>Spouse's name:</b>	
<b>Business / career:</b>	
<b>Location of dwelling (on the Kesten-Brauner map):</b>	
<b>Names of children:</b>	
e-mail or post your card to: Arthur E Zimmerman, < <a href="mailto:arthurz@look.ca">arthurz@look.ca</a> >, 514 Brunswick Ave, Toronto, ON, Canada M5R 2Z5	

**Isaac Bashevis Singer** provides an insight that underscores why we are determined to accomplish our task:

*When I reached Warsaw, I walked among the ruins like that prophet-what was his name- Jeremiah. I saw a young man digging up the earth with a spade. I asked him what he was trying to find and he told me, "Myself".*

### **Further Reading**

#### **Books**

**Monika Krajewska. *Time of Stones*. 1983. Interpress. Warsaw, Poland.**

Monika Krajewska's monochrome photographs of Polish-Jewish cemeteries and tombstones bear witness to the civilization that was destroyed during the Shoah. Anna Kamienska contributes a comprehensive history of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Several drawings of gravestone art forms and images were copied from this book.

**Arthur Kurzweil. *From Generation to Generation: How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History*. 2004. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.**

A well-written and comprehensive guide to all aspects of Jewish genealogy. The chapter entitled, "Jewish Cemeteries, Your History Chiseled in Stone" describes how cemeteries serve as sources of personal insights and as windows to the history of our people.

**Arnold Schwartzman. *Graven Images*. 1993. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, NY.**

A rich photographic exhibit of images of engraved on European Jewish gravestones, many from Poland. The foreword is written by Chaim Potok.

#### **Other Documents**

**Jacob Goldfarb. "Saving Cemeteries Here and Abroad."**

The Jewish Week. May 16, 2003.

**Hanna Jacobsohn-Kahanoff. "Staszow Tombstone Epitaphs."**

Kielce-Radom SIG Journal. Vol 8 (1): 8-12, Winter 2004.

**Jewish Genealogy Web Site. "Reading Hebrew Tombstones."**

< [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org) >

**"Jewish Cemeteries in Poland."**

< <http://weber.ucsd.edu/~lزامosc/survey.html> >

**Ada Holtzman. "My Heart Breaks With These Broken Stones."**

< <http://zchor.org/matzevot/stones> >

**Isaac Bashevis Singer. in "The Image and Other Stories". Quoted by Ruth Gruber.**

< <http://www.giotto.org/jesse/poland.html> >

**Benjamin Yaari. "Documentary Evidence about Jewish Cemeteries for Studying**

**Youth." < <http://zchor.org/zadik/documentation.htm> >**

**L'Shanah Tova**

**To all, A Happy, Healthy, Prosperous 5765**

**A Year Filled With Peace!**