

# THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 17

March - April 2006



**TO YOU AND YOURS,  
A PESACH FILLED WITH HAPPINESS!**

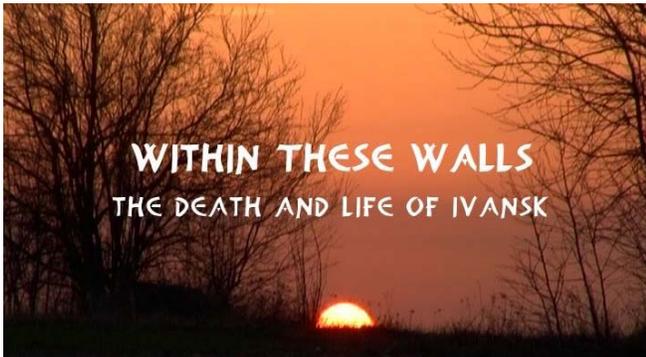
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## Within These Walls: The Death and Life of Ivansk (Film Trailer)

by David Blumenfeld

Jerusalem, Israel



As many of you know, I am in the process of producing a documentary film about Ivansk and the work of the Cemetery Restoration Project. Although the film is far from being complete, I created a preview of the film with a short collage from some of the scenes and interviews we have conducted.

Inspired by the dramatic testimony of *"The Funeral"* by Yitzchak Goldstein (see: The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter #3, March-April 2004), the

trailer follows Goldstein's testimony verified with vignettes by some residents of Iwaniska who remember the Jews that once lived there, by Jewish survivors from Ivansk and by members of our community who are involved in the restoration of the cemetery.

More work still needs to be done. Many more people need to be interviewed in Poland, Canada, the United States and Israel. As well, I will document the next stages of the project including the building of the cemetery wall (planned for the spring) and culminating with the cemetery dedication in Ivansk, (hopefully this summer).

The trailer provides just a taste of some of the footage and introduces just a few of the many people we have interviewed thus far. You will need a high-speed internet connection; otherwise the preview can take up to 15-20 minutes to download.

As well, you'll need to view the trailer using *"Quicktime Player"* software: if you don't have *Quicktime*, you can download it without charge from the following web sites:

**For Mac go to**

<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/mac.html>

**For PC Windows go to**

<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/win.html>

**You can view the trailer on my web site:**

<http://www.blumenfeld.com/ivansk/>

**Visit The Ivansk Project web site:**

<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Iwaniska/home.html>

## A DAY IN IVANSK: 2 August 2005

by Shira Blumenfeld      Jerusalem, Israel

My story takes place in Ivansk, Poland.



**The Israeli Contingent: Shira and her colleagues in Poland.**  
Shira is seated in the second row (see arrow).

Like many twelfth graders in Israel I went to Poland to better my understanding of the Holocaust. During our trip, we visited the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka, a disturbing and moving experience. We also did something different - something that no school had ever done before. We went to a little shtetl called Ivansk (which is called Iwaniska in Polish).

Why would we go to such a small and unheard of place like Ivansk?

My father, David Blumenfeld, is presently working with a group of Ivansker descendents on the restoration of the

Jewish cemetery just outside the town. Upon hearing that we were going to Poland, my dad immediately suggested that we stop in Ivansk and help with the restoration. The trip organizer, Chaim, who incidentally is a descendent of the neighboring town of Apt (Opatow), was familiar with our shtetl and jumped at the idea. My dad went along with us on this journey and filmed what happened as part of the documentary he is preparing on the history of the Ivansk Jewish community.

On our last day in Poland we were on our way to Ivansk. I remember my feelings as we were driving toward the town. Every time there was a sign telling us that we were getting closer I felt more and more anxious. Being a fourth generation Ivansker I hold a connection with the place and have heard many stories from my grandfather and my father about our family which once lived there.

We finally arrived in Ivansk and parked in front of the Town Hall and the Mayor's office. The Mayor himself came out to greet us. Of course, all being girls, we had to use the restroom, and the mayor instantly suggested that we use the restrooms in the Town Hall. Little did he know how long it would take forty-five girls to use the bathroom!

When we were finally settled, we got back into the bus; we drove around the square and traveled two kilometers to the Jewish cemetery. We could not drive all the way to the cemetery because the last leg of the journey was down a very narrow dirt road that our bus could not handle; so we jumped out and walked the rest of the way singing Israeli songs. By the time we arrived at our destination we were all very excited.

The restoration project had already started months before, so I was expecting to see a fairly intact cemetery. Instead, what I saw was a field. That was all: no borders, no graves, nothing. Poland had gone through the rainy season before we arrived and weeds were now covering the entire field. In the previous autumn workers had cleared the field but it was overgrown again.



Eager hands bring to light a fragment of a tombstone.

Chaim is one of our teachers at school and knows a lot about the Holocaust. He does trips with other schools too and if it weren't for him our trip never would have happened. He really made us understand the feelings of our people who lived in Poland during the war, and all of us really appreciated having him as our tour guide. Chaim told us our job was to find anything significant under the weeds covering the field. We were instructed to feel along the ground for any unnaturally hard places because hidden just beneath the surface, may lay a piece of a tombstone. To our astonishment, we actually found a tombstone with Yiddish writing on it and determined that it belonged to the grave of a woman.



We are gathered around Mrs. Pawlik who told us about the Jewish people who once lived in the shtetl. The man whose back is to the camera is a survivor of the Holocaust; he described what it was like to be a young boy during those terrible times. Chaim is on the right wearing a blue shirt.

Near to the cemetery was a little wooden house belonging to an elderly woman, Jawiga Pawlik who was able to tell us about the cemetery and the Jewish Community in Ivansk. Coincidentally, her father was the caretaker of the cemetery up until the day the Germans deported the Jewish people to Treblinka.

As a young girl Mrs. Pawlik witnessed what happened when the Germans murdered a group of ten Jews, among them two children. The victims were marched to the cemetery, forced to dig a large pit and told to stand in one line along the edge of the pit. A Nazi officer on a white horse shot every adult once and the children twice. When Mrs Pawlik finished her story, we had a short ceremony to remember all the Jews from Ivansk and from all over Europe who lost their lives in the Holocaust.



We then took the fragment of the tombstone we had found and lit a memorial candle next to it and sang HaTikva – the first time this was ever sung in Ivansk. Then, Chaim made a moving speech about the Holocaust, about how we were privileged to be able to come to a place that is otherwise widely unknown and to commemorate the Jews that lived through the Holocaust and those who did not.



Standing beside some of the matzevot we found in the cemetery, we lit a memorial candle to commemorate the lives of our people who were destroyed in the Holocaust.

Standing in the Ivansk cemetery I really started to appreciate the history of our people in Poland, the Jews who died before and during the Holocaust. It was very sad to realize that they missed out on one of the greatest events that has happened to the Jewish people, the establishment of the State of Israel and the privilege of being able to live there. I, being a fourth-generation Ivansker, am able to share in the miracle that is the State of Israel. I will always remember my day in Ivansk and the new meaning and understanding it brought to me. To be able to return to the place that my family originated from was magical. Some day soon I hope to go back to Ivansk and see the final result of the Jewish cemetery restoration.

# Status Report on Ivansk Cemetery Restoration Project

## Construction

We have accepted a competitive bid to begin work on the perimeter wall and entrance to the restored cemetery. Contracts and agreements are being drawn up and if all goes according to plan, construction should begin by late April and be completed by July 1<sup>st</sup>.

We are currently awaiting bids for the erection of an obelisk and memorial plaques to honor our people buried in the cemetery and those who were murdered by the Nazis and have no grave.

## Dedication of the Restored Cemetery

We hope to rededicate our cemetery in August but are not able to provide a firm date at this time. Experience has taught us that in this kind of work unforeseen delays should always be anticipated; therefore, we're holding off making a formal announcement until we are certain that the project will be completed in time for the ceremony.

Meanwhile, we would like to get an indication of how many people are thinking about attending the rededication ceremony. This will help us start to explore options for group travel, accommodations and possible tours. Also, it will facilitate keeping you posted on developments and give you an opportunity to express your ideas and preferences for the trip.

The ceremony itself will be a one-day affair but you should figure that you'll need at least 3 days to fly into Poland, drive to Ivansk and then back to the airport for your flight home. Most attendees will probably want to spend extra time in Poland and we will offer suggestions for your consideration.

Please send the following information to me as soon as you can; it will NOT obligate you in any way to attend the ceremony.

**You may e-mail ( [nstaichman@comcast.net](mailto:nstaichman@comcast.net) ) or telephone me at (610-664-8171).**

Your name.    Your e-mail address.    Your telephone number.	
Your departure city and country	
Number of persons who may accompany you:    No. Adults ---- ;    No. Children (12 or under) ----	
Are you interested in any of the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Quotes on group airfare and accommodation.</li><li>• Extending your trip either before or after the rededication of the cemetery to explore Poland or other European destinations.</li></ul>
Comments, Questions or Special Requirements	

## **Protecting Jewish Heritage: A Petition to Safeguard Jewish Cemeteries in Central Europe**

**by Frederick Salzberg**

**Northbrook, Illinois, USA**

*[Editor: As we stand on the verge of beginning the construction phase of restoring our cemetery, it is important to remember that our commitment to this very special place will not end when the project is completed. The cemetery will require continual care and maintenance to prevent the overgrowth of vegetation and deterioration over time. We are exploring ways to protect the graveyard and are confident that a satisfactory solution will be found for the short-term. But long-term protection of the cemetery is more problematic; we need to establish a mechanism to guarantee perpetual care of the cemetery.]*

*Frederick Salzberg is taking steps to address this problem. He is enlisting signatures for a petition urging the World Jewish Congress to become involved in maintaining Jewish cemeteries in Central (Eastern) Europe. He seeks the help of Jews throughout the world in persuading the WJC to assume this essential role in preserving our heritage for future generations.*

*The following letter from Fred Salzberg describes the nature of the petition Fred intends to submit to the WJC. If you'd like to support of this important undertaking, please sign the petition, which is posted on the web (see below). And try to get others to join us by forwarding this message to family and friends.]*

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March 27, 2006

Dear Ivanskers:

In the history of the world, Holocaust will forever be synonymous with the worst tragedy befallen the Jewish peoples. This is clearly manifested in voluminous literature, which describes the suffering and the death of six and a half million Jews brutally murdered by the Nazis. Even sixty years since the end of World War II have not lessened the pain of survivors. They bear the witness to this unspeakable crime and defy those who deny that it ever happened. But as the time marches on, ranks of survivors rapidly decrease and soon there will be no witnesses left. However, the resting places of martyrs speak louder than any voice can, and the cemeteries where thousands are buried, will forever testify what has happened to Jewish peoples.

Encouraged by Germans during the war, the local population desecrated Jewish cemeteries. Ensuing political climate after the war did not permit any repairs and maintenance of Jewish cemeteries. This caused decimation of the cemeteries by unabated ravages of the weather, overgrowths by trees and vegetation. Subsequently, many cemeteries were subjected to other uses, such as building of factories, parking lots, or even degraded to garbage dumps. All this violated the strongest belief of Judaism, prescribing utmost respect and honor to be afforded to our departed ancestors. As clearly reflected in the Talmudic saying, Jewish gravestones are greater than the royal palaces. Unfortunately, not until the fall of communism, could Jewish peoples adhere to this principle and begin restoring cemeteries in Central Europe. Individuals acting alone toward this noble cause did almost all of these efforts. Although much remains to be done, a number of cemeteries have been restored to dignified resting places of Jewish peoples. Many contain mass graves of thousands brutally murdered during the ghetto time. Monuments erected to their memory give a reminder of their unspeakable suffering.

Restoring our cemeteries not only fulfills the commitment toward our ancestors, but also preserves the heritage of Jewish peoples. This is particularly important considering that eighty percent of American

and Canadian Jews have their roots in Central Europe. In addition, cemeteries provide an educational base for teaching of tolerance, as demonstrated by visits of Polish children. There is however, a very crucial caveat, which must be resolved. It deals with the future of the cemeteries. Small Jewish communities in Central Europe, some consisting only of a few aged individuals, are incapable of preserving the cemeteries and local governments show very little interest to do so. Hence, the future of Jewish cemeteries is very much in doubt, unless their restoration and upkeep is assumed by a major Jewish organization, such as the World Jewish Congress. Without this commitment, Jewish cemeteries in Central Europe will be annihilated and current restoration efforts would have been in vain. Consequently, the heritage of Jewish peoples in Central Europe would be erased, fulfilling the desire of Nazis murderers. This must not be permitted, both from our religious point of view and moral obligation to our future generations.

I respectfully ask for your support in this noble cause to secure the future of Jewish cemeteries.

Please add your name to the petition by accessing the *Protect Jewish Heritage* website:

<http://protectjewishheritage.org/petition.php>

Thank you!

Sincerely yours,

**Frederick Salzberg, Ph.D.**

Email: [fsalzberg@protectjewishheritage.org](mailto:fsalzberg@protectjewishheritage.org)

480 Central Avenue, Northfield, Illinois 60093-3016

## **Rescuing Matzevot Fragments in the Cemetery: A Once In A Lifetime Experience**

When we initially developed an action plan for restoring the cemetery, we thought we would try to recruit student volunteers or hire local workers to collect matzevah fragments that are strewn over the graveyard. But we have decided against this.

Instead, we want to offer Ivanskers the chance to perform this great mitzvah!

**We are seeking about 8 volunteers, Ivansker men and women, who are willing to work hard without pay or benefits and prepared to bear all expenses to travel to Ivansk.**

I know it takes a lot of chutzpah to come up with such a deal, but I assure you that if you volunteer for the job, the inner rewards will be priceless and will last a lifetime.

**Here are the details:**

There are hundreds of broken matzevah lying on the ground of the graveyard. We want to collect, clean, catalogue, photograph and orientate all of them so that they can be embedded and displayed right side up in the wall of the restored cemetery.

We expect that the process will take about 3 days of fieldwork.

## **The dates for the retrieving the fragments are: May 23, 24, 25.**

Based on these dates, here is a suggested timetable that brings us together for approximately 7 days:

- **Sunday or Monday 21-22 May:** Arrive Warsaw. Drive to Iwansk. Stay at hotel in Staszow (or Sandomierz).
- **Tuesday 23 May:** Walk around Iwaniska. Begin work in the field.
- **Wednesday and Thursday 24- 25 May:** Work in the field.
- **Friday 26 May:** Farewell Iwansk. Return to Warsaw.
- **Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 May:** Warsaw
- **Monday 29 May:** Return home.

Individual variations in the plan are possible. For instance, you may want to fly into Krakow, which is closer to Iwaniska than Warsaw. But depending on airline fees this may prove more expensive. Some participants may not want to stay over on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> of May or some may decide to extend their trip either before or after working in the cemetery. This can be arranged as needed.

We would meet up in Warsaw, rent a car or cars (up to 4 passengers per vehicle) and drive to Iwaniska, a distance of approximately 100-120 miles (200 km). We will stay at a hotel in Staszow or in Sandomierz. Staszow is more convenient to Iwaniska (10-15 minutes as opposed to 30-45 minutes drive). The only hotel in Staszow is no-frills, clean, with private bath and is less expensive than the hotels in Sandomierz. Sandomierz has the advantage of being a picturesque medieval town with several fine restaurants. We can decide on where to stay once participants have been identified. There are very few kosher restaurants in Poland and none in the countryside. But dairy selections are available in almost all restaurants.

A typical workday starts with breakfast at 7:00 am and ends at 5:00-5:30 pm.

For fieldwork you'll need to bring: old clothing, comfortable shoes, a pair of rubber boots (in case of rain; the mud is very tenacious), rain jacket, hat, work gloves, small trowel, a bristle brush or hand broom (to clean the stones), sunglasses, sun screen, and water bottle. A camera to record your experience is an absolute must.

It won't be all work and no play. We'll have opportunities to meet with the local people including the Mayor and other officials. We're sure to attract attention, and most people will be extremely friendly and interested in what we're doing.

We'll return to Warsaw on Friday and stay at a moderately priced hotel. Depending on your religious preferences, you can spend a traditional Shabbat with members of the Jewish community. Others can organize sightseeing tours for Saturday and Sunday. There's a lot to see in Warsaw including the Old Town, the Warsaw ghetto, Kasamierz (the old Jewish ghetto) and the Jewish cemetery. We're also likely meet with some of the people who are assisting us in executing the restoration project.

Are you interested????

**If you are, we need to work quickly to make the necessary arrangements.**

**Please get in touch with me as soon as possible,  
either by e-mail: [nstaichman@comcast.net](mailto:nstaichman@comcast.net) or by telephone: (610) 664-8171**

**The Cemetery Project still needs your support to fund items that were not anticipated in our budget estimates. Your help would be greatly appreciated. Please consult the last page of earlier e-Newsletters for instructions on how to make a gift. Thank you!**

## The Ladies of the Henry Street Shul

by Arthur E. Zimmerman

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

[Editor: Have you ever sought after information on an arcane subject or a murky fact, pursuing every conceivable avenue to no avail?

When I run up against such obstacles, I call on my friend, **Dr. Arthur E. Zimmerman**. Arthur has the uncanny ability to ferret out data and piece together missing parts of a puzzle. His profession may be physiology but he's happiest when he's rummaging through dusty archives, nosing around reams of newspapers, magazines and journals or listening to long silent voices on wax recordings. He doesn't let go until he finds it out.

I turned again to Arthur a couple of months ago after receiving a photograph from **Lisa Newman**. The photo was titled, "**The Ladies of the Henry Street Shul**" and is a prized possession of 93 year-old Ivansker, **Goldie Waks**, who allowed Lisa to borrow it.

My family belonged to Toronto's **Bais Yaacov (Beth Jacob; Die Poylishe Shul; The Henry Street Shul)** as did many other Ivansker families. For over 50 years the imposing Romanesque shul was the focus of Jewish life of the immigrant Polish-Jewish community. My grandfather, Chaim (Chamol) Teichman was one of the shul's benefactors; and with his resonant tenor voice, he served as its Bal Korah (Reader of the Torah) extraordinaire for many years. My parents, aunts, uncles and cousins were married there; prior to burial my great grandmother lay in state on its steps; my brothers and I were Bar Mitzvah in the shul. And so it was with so many of our landsman. Sadly, the shul with its beautiful frescos of the signs of the Zodiac, wild creatures and scenes of Israel is no longer ours. Fortunately, the truly grand Aron Kodesh, with two Lions of Judah sitting on top guarding the Ten Commandments, has been preserved and is housed in the Beth Jacob V' Anshe Drildz Synagogue on Overbrook Place in North York (see photo at left). As a young child those Lions scared the wits out of me: their illuminated eyes pierced into my soul as if they could see all my foolish thoughts and misdeeds.



**The Aron Kodesh of  
The Bais Yaacov Shul**

You can enlarge images in this document by clicking on the "ZOOM IN" button on the Adobe Reader tool bar.

Today, The Henry Street Shul is the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. The church appeared in the film, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding". I had no idea that it was used as a prop in the movie, and when it appeared on the screen I literally jumped out of my seat. "That's my shul!", I bellowed. Everyone in the theatre (in one of Philadelphia's suburbs) must have thought I was nuts.

Back to the photo of "The Ladies": it was a black and white picture of about 50 women, many of whom were supposedly from Ivansk. It was taken somewhere in Toronto early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The occasion for the gathering was unknown as were the identities of almost all of the women in the picture. I studied the print looking for a familiar face in the crowd. I had never seen so many women wearing sheitels (wigs). Maybe my grandmother or great grandmothers were there. But I recognized no one. And I couldn't think of a way to learn anything more about the picture and its subjects.

So I called Arthur and told him what I had.

"Hmm, that sound's pretty interesting," he murmured. I knew he was hooked.

And sure enough Arthur came through with the goods and then some.

Below, Arthur describes how he went about gathering information bearing on the "Ladies of the Henry Street Shul". ]

Below, Arthur describes how he went about gathering information bearing on the "Ladies of the Henry Street Shul". ]

My assignment was to find out where and when the picture of "The Ladies" was taken and how it relates to the Henry Street Shul. Also I wanted to outline how I conducted my research and the resources used, in order to show how anyone could do their own studies. This sort of enquiry never



goes in a straight line and the ability to think laterally to get around roadblocks is valuable. It is also imperative to sort and keep track of all the bits of the puzzle, the ones that appear relevant and the many that do not. It's a grand feeling when you research your files and find an old puzzle piece that fits neatly into the proper space and opens a window that was previously obscured!

Moe Ceresne of Toronto, the 92 year old younger brother of Goldie Waks, told Lisa Newman that the photo was taken on Elm Street, Toronto.

My first questions were:

1. Why are these ladies identified as "of the Henry Street Shul", which was built in 1920-22, well after the period of the costumes in the photograph?
2. What were the ladies doing on Elm Street?

I noticed that several of the ladies were sitting on old pressed-back kitchen chairs with turned legs, so it was reasonable to assume that they had just come out of a nearby assembly hall. Could there have been an early shul on Elm Street?

About the time the forensic study of the photograph was beginning, Goldie Waks (née Ceresne, Moe Ceresne's older sister) told Lisa Newman that there had been a shul, a former church on the south side of Elm Street, between Yonge Street and Teraulay (now Bay Street). Apparently, Polish Jews - many from Ivansk - bought it and it was the first Poylisher Shul in Toronto. The shul was quite near to Lisa's grandfather Lajzer (Elazar / Louis) Rotenberg's rag shop at 49 Elm Street near Teraulay, the very same building that had been the John Labbatt bottling works until 1914-15.

### **The Building on Elm Street**

To see whether there had been a shul on Elm Street, my first step was to consult Might's Toronto City Directory (**MTR / MTA**), which has an alphabetical listing of every resident of the city, plus a list of residents by street and number. Might's revealed that there had indeed been a synagogue on Elm Street, at number 17, on the south side, a few doors west of Yonge Street. It first appeared in the 1906 edition and was listed until 1920. The building was vacant in 1921 and occupied by a

veterinary surgeon after that. The Might's Directories never gave a congregation name, but after a few years, in the listing under "Churches", it was called "The Elm Street Synagogue". In fact, I was not able to find any contemporary reference naming the congregation of the Elm Street Synagogue as Beth Jacob.

The building at 17 Elm St was originally a church. In the 1902 directory, it was erroneously called the New Jerusalem Temple and The Disciples of Christ. According to **LoT** (page 537), this pleasant "small, rough-coated frame building topped with an old-fashioned little belfry with green blinds" was built in 1870 by the Swedenborgians, or New Church people, at a cost of \$2,500. The Swedenborgians called it "The New Jerusalem Temple". The land was originally part of Fleming's nursery garden. The Disciples of Christ, who had no ordained minister, no creed, articles or confessions of faith, and numbering around 100, purchased the church from the Swedenborgians on March 1, 1900, and moved up from Louisa and James Streets. In 1905 the Disciples sold the building to the trustees of the Elm Street Synagogue.



The wooden church at 17 Elm Street, built by the Swedenborgians in 1870, and pictured here in 1904. (LoT. pages 527 & 538)

Behind the main room of the church, holding 200 people, was a large Sunday School room, a small classroom and a little kitchen. In 1886, the Swedenborgians enlarged the schoolroom with a brick addition costing \$700 (**LoT**) The 1894 to 1913 Goad's Fire Maps of Toronto (**MTA**) show the building as wooden in the front two-thirds, with a small porch on the front and a brick block at the back. The maps also show the church property consisting of city lots 2, 3 and 4, the westernmost lot #4 being vacant.

The current building at 17 Elm Street is a flat-roofed one-storey structure owned by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, covers all three lots and does not resemble the old church in any way. In fact, the accessible east wall appears to be solid brick all the way to the rear. The Eagles kindly allowed me to inspect the interior of their clubhouse, and I found no evidence of an earlier structure. The Eagles say that there was a parking lot on the west side when they bought the building from a Japanese restaurant in 1959. That parking lot was lot #4.

## The City Assessment Rolls

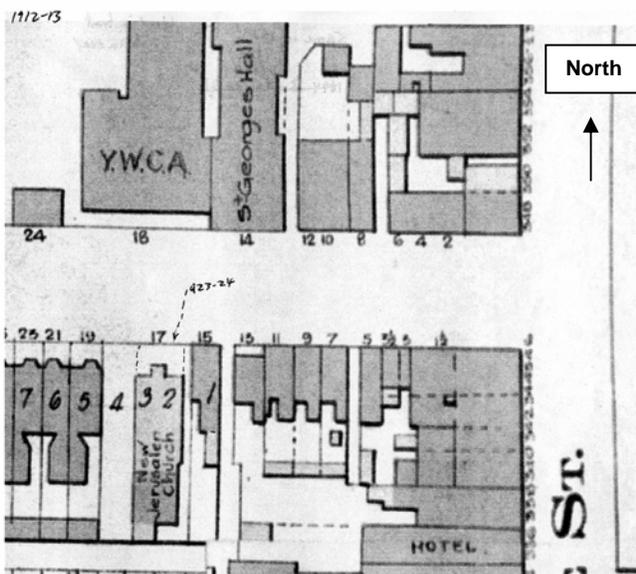
The City Assessment Rolls (**MTA**) is the place to find the names of tenants and owners of every building and lot in the city. It even gives the resident's age, citizenship and occupation, plus the value of the building and the value and dimensions of the lot.

The 1905 entry for 17 Elm Street (Ward 3, District 2, page 206, #49338, July 13, 1905) shows it as the meetinghouse of the Disciples of Christ, on a property 60 x 104 feet deep, the land valued at \$3,000 and the building at \$2,000. By 1912, for the "Jewish Synagogue" (page 229), the land was assessed at \$7,500 and the building at \$2,000, and in 1919 (page 386) the land was assessed at \$8,400 and the building still at \$2,000. This strongly suggests that, over the 14-plus years of synagogue ownership, there had been no substantial improvement to the structure of the building.

The Assessment Rolls also listed the trustees of the "Jewish Synagogue". Throughout the whole tenure they were Louis Rottenberg (through the years variously Rottenberg, Rothenberg or Rotenberg) of L. Rottenberg and Son, 236 Dovercourt Road (1912-19) and 145 Elizabeth Street; Mandell Granatstein (variously Granastein or Granstein) of 128 Agnes Street (later Dundas Street);

Louis Rothstein of Rothstein Brothers at 188 Chestnut Street and Simon Schwartz (or Swartz). Three of the trustees, Rottenberg, Granatstein and Rothstein, began as junk dealers in The Ward. I could not positively identify Simon Schwartz/Swartz. Might's lists three Samuel Schwartzes in 1908, one of them a barber with Hugh Hamilton and another a peddler.

The caretaker (shamus), from 1916 to 1920 was Labe (Leib, Louis) Schwartz, alien, age 79 as of Sept. 6, 1918, but on Sept. 5, 1919, the caretaker was given as Meyer Caplan, alien, age 77.



The Goad's Fire Maps (MTA) show the footprint of the property, three city lots, altogether 60 feet in width and 104 feet in depth. These maps, if to scale, indicate that the entire structure of the building, on the two easterly lots, had to be about 93 feet long and 40 feet wide.

**Thus, the yard on the west side (lot #4) was 20 feet wide and could have been where the ladies were photographed.**

Incidentally, there were at the time two synagogues on Elm Street, the other being the Goel Tzedek, in a former church on the northeast corner of University Avenue. (LoT p. 562)

### Recollections of Elm Street Synagogue

**Goad's Fire Map:  
detail from the 1913-14 edition.**

Yonge Street is the north-south street at far right and Elm intersects at right angles. The shul, on lots 2 and 3, is light-shaded at the front, indicating a wooden structure. In the next edition, 1923-24, the current brick building is shown, but no building permits were issued to the shul up to the end of 1917.

In the Swedenborgian period, the building was described as "...pleasant...not luxurious at all but comfortable and home-like. There is no attempt at adornment whatever; the interior is plain and neat, thus corresponding with the unpretentious character of the exterior". (LoT)

A newspaper article from early in the shul's existence was retrieved, reporting on a congregational meeting to organize a Jewish party to

put forward candidates for the municipal election (TDS Oct. 22, 1906, p. 2). Mr. Garfunkel was in the chair. A second article, on the installation of a new Torah for the new congregation, already comprising 74 members, did not mention names but stated that the feasting and dancing lasted 36 hours. (G Feb.1, 1910, p. 5).

A dissident group split off in 1907 over the issue of tickets being required for admission on the High Holy Days, and established Chevra Tomchei Shabbos in a cottage on Chestnut Street. (JoT p. 103) My paternal grandfather was a founder of another Ivansker shul in Toronto, Congregation B'Nai Moshe, incorporated in 1912 and occupying a house at 37 d'Arcy Street from 1924 until around 1962. Did this group split off from Beth Jacob, or from some other shul and, if so, why?

Goldie Waks, born in 1913, remembers going to Elm Street to hear the *shofar* on High Holidays when she was perhaps 4 or 5. She says that her shoes were rubbing her feet, and her father had to carry her. Her younger brother, Moe Ceresne says that the Polish shul was in fact about 90% composed of Ivanskers, and those who 'married in'. He remembers pulling horsehair threads out of the seats to tickle the guy sitting in front of him, Gimpel Pasternak. He believes the shul was founded quite early in the 1900s and recalls that it was a small shtibl, all on the main floor, with no women's gallery. The

women sat off to one side. His impression is that there was more than one storey to the building and wonders whether the rabbi perhaps lived upstairs.

## The Rabbi

Who was the rabbi? I could not find any rabbi's name in the available municipal records; however, Ellen Scheinberg (**OJA**) has a note about a researcher seeking information about Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg (maternal grandfather of Mordechai Richler) who was said to be Rabbi of the Elm Street Synagogue.

Back to *Might's* Directory and the Assessment Rolls again, where I found a Rabbi Joseph Rosenberg living at 174 Agnes Street (later re-numbered as 210 Dundas Street West) from 1915. This was a rented house, on the north side almost halfway between Centre Avenue and University Avenue. From 1917, *Might's* identified him as "Rabbi, Synagogue 17 Elm Street", but he was not listed after the 1920 edition (probably compiled in mid-1919). In the Assessment Rolls (p. 376, Sept. 6, 1918), he was described as Rabbi, tenant, British Subject, age 54.

Stephen Speisman says that the Polish Jews organized the community to hire a Polish rabbi for Toronto, and in 1911 a famous talmudist and academic arrived to take up the post. They declined to elect him, however, as he proved administratively inadequate and, in 1913, they appointed the Polish writer and historian Rabbi Rosenberg (**JoT** p. 166). The newspaper databases turned up an article on the arrival of Rabbi Rosenberg from Lodz (**G**, July 28, 1913, p. 6). He was welcomed at Union Station by 500 Polish Jews, led by Messrs. Garfunkel, Rottenberg, Weinstein and Glass, representing some 800 families of the Elm Street Synagogue. Mr. Weinstein told *The Globe* (now *The Toronto Globe and Mail*) that the current building was almost too small to accommodate the congregation, and the trustees were contemplating "building one of the most elaborate synagogues ever constructed in Toronto". Four years later, the Polish Jews of Toronto met in St. George's Hall on Elm Street to establish a new synagogue. Mr. Tornovsky was in the chair, Rabbi Rosenberg was the speaker of the evening, and they raised \$1,000 to begin the project (**TDS** Aug. 14, 1917, p. 8). It is not clear whether Rabbi Rosenberg himself may have spearheaded the beginning of the building project.

Another of Rabbi Rosenberg's many legacies to Toronto was the creation of a second talmud torah, the *Eitz Chaim Schools*, for the traditionalist Polish community, in contrast to the modernist and liberal Lithuanian school on Simcoe Street run by Rabbi Gordon. The cheder style education of the boys was to be exactly as it had been in darkest Poland: religion was emphasized, as opposed to Hebrew grammar and secular writings. *Eitz Chaim* began on Chestnut Street, moved to Simcoe Street and finally to a former Italian club at 68 d'Arcy Street. (**JoT** p. 173)

Yehuda Leib "Yudel" Rosenberg's vital statistics are: born in Skarashev, Poland, November 8, 1859, and died in Montreal, October 23, 1935 (**Brody**). The birth year of 1859 contradicts the age of 54, given the Tax Assessors in 1918. In Poland, he had been a writer of fiction, in addition to his rabbinical interests, and was the author of "The Golem" (1909), about the exploits of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague. That story was not an ancient legend, but was created by Rabbi Rosenberg, possibly based upon Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Jew's Breastplate"(1899).

Rabbi Rosenberg was so poorly paid that he "lived in virtual poverty" and was very discouraged, so around 1918-19 he left Toronto for a better position in Montreal. (**JoT** p. 101). Toronto's loss was eventually Canada's gain in Rosenberg's grandson, Mordechai Richler, a great writer of fiction.

## Incorporation of the Synagogue

I telephoned the current *Beth Jacob V'Anshei Drildz* office but they have no records of the Elm Street Shul or of their history before the opening of the Henry Street Shul in 1922. Stephen Speisman (**JoT** p. 101) says that the Polish community organized Toronto's 5<sup>th</sup> synagogue in 1899, while **Sloame** says it was in 1889. Neither provides any documentation or proof that the shul was called Beth Jacob

at the beginning. A later incorporation date for the "Beth Jacob Congregation", in 1919, can be searched under Corporation # 00016975 for a fee at the Companies Branch, Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Business Services, Suite 200, 393 University Avenue, Toronto.

It appears that the Elm Street building was closed and vacated by the congregation some time in 1920. Perhaps they had to sell the building to raise money for the planning and laying the foundations for the new shul, but I found no indication of where the congregation held services between the closing of Elm Street and the opening of Henry Street in 1922.



A drawing of the proposed Henry Street Synagogue by Benjamin Brown, the architect, was published in late 1920 (**TDS** Nov. 13, 1920, p. 1). The new synagogue was projected to cost \$120,000, but came in at \$156,000. It opened on Sunday, August 20, 1922, the ceremonies conducted exclusively in Polish (!) and lasting all day. Only Alderman Singer spoke in English. Cantor Josef Rosenblatt (the "Jewish Caruso") was brought in from New York to sing, and Mr. M. Granatstein bought at auction the golden key used to ceremoniously unlock the great front doors. (**TDS** Aug. 21, 1922, p. 3) [photo at left: M. Granatstein holding the golden key] Someone else bought the key to the side door.

### Identification of "The Ladies of the Henry Street Shul"

*So, now we know that "The Ladies" belonged to the Elm Street Synagogue, and we know when and maybe where they assembled for the picture.*



**But can we assign names to any of them??**

Moe Ceresne identified his mother in the photograph: **#7 is Preva ("Patricia") Ceresne**, née Schaeffer, born on a farm in Poland. She married Jake Ceresne, an Ivansker who for years was Lajzer (Elazar / Louis) Rotenberg's right-hand man in his Toronto businesses. Goldie Waks and Moe Ceresne are two of their seven children.

Moe Ceresne has identified #24 as **Rivka (Rebecca) Rotenberg** of Zavichost, who married Lajzer (Elazar / Louis Rotenberg of Ivansk (see **JiC** p. 353), and they lived in Ivansk until they came to Canada around 1893. She was Lisa Newman's maternal grandmother (see: The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter, Issue #15, November – December 2005).

Based upon the styles of the ladies' costumes, Ellen Scheinberg was able to date the photograph as circa 1908. Later, when going through the OJA database, she discovered that Mr. William Wolfish had donated a copy of "The Ladies" to the OJA in 1977 (**OJA** photo #1311). He identified it then as the Ladies Auxiliary of the Elm Street Shul, 1907, so Ellen was right on with her date!

Mr Wolfish was able to identify the following ladies:

1	Mrs. Starkman	15	Mrs. Fenkel
2	Mrs. Winrose (or Weinrose)	18	Mrs. Leodjan (?)
3	Mrs. Feigel Arbris	21	Mrs. Goldhar
5	Tillie .....??	23	Mrs. Ray Fish
6	Mrs. Silverberg	24	Rivka (Rebecca) Rotenberg *
7	Mrs. Preva Ceresne *	27	Mrs. Bloom
12	Mrs. Gimpel Paskowitz	45	Mrs. Lerinbaum
14	Mrs. Close		
* Identified by Moe Ceresne			

**Can you identify any of the "Ladies of the Henry Street Shul"?**

**If so, can you provide a scan of another picture of this woman for comparison?**

**If you can, tell us if any of these ladies, or their families, are Ivanskers.**

***Please get in touch with me if you have any information:***

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### **The Latest Results: The Earliest Years** (and a practicum for you)

Norton Taichman recently found a brief article by Howard Markus on the history of Beth Jacob (revealing that the shul was officially "the Congregation of the Russo Polish Jewish Synagogue of Bais Jakov Anshei Poland"). I consulted Ellen Scheinberg again, asking for the provenance of Markus' article. She thought laterally, however, and turned up a 1926 book by A.D. Hart. (**JiC**). The article on Beth Jacob says that it was founded in 1899 by Polish Jews, among whom were Messrs. M. Granatstein, L. Rotenberg, S. Garfinkle, G. Pesachovitch, Z. Wagman, I. Wagman, S. Lederman, J.

Sugar, C. Garfunkel, H. Rotenberg and M. Rotenberg. The first President was Rev. Samson Garfinkel. They first met for services in a small cottage at the rear of a house on Chestnut Street. After a few years, they moved to a small place on Centre Avenue and, feeling crowded by 1904, bought the Elm Street site. (JiC p. 156)

Now, come along with me and we'll try to deduce where that cottage might have been. Might's and the Assessment Rolls do not reveal any shul on Chestnut, except the old Austrian Shomrai Shabbos at #109-111. Where to start?

Here is the sequence that I followed:

- 1) First, we need a name for linkage. President Garfinkel was a rabbi (or a chazan / shochet?), and it's reasonable to assume that Beth Jacob may have been formed around him. So let's find out where he lived.
- 2) Might's for 1902 showed him as a ticket agent at 165 Queen West and living at 110 Chestnut. He's living on the right street, but could there have been something like a cottage in his back yard? Let's dig deeper.
- 3) Now to the Assessment Rolls, July 20, 1900, p 146 (#30961), where Samson Garfinkel, clergyman, age 36, lived at 110 Chestnut and owned 106-112 Chestnut. His tenants were William Lonanfeld at 106, Aaron Finkelstein at 108 and Louis Rottenberg, cloakmaker, age 32 at 112. (This Louis Rottenberg is not Lisa Newman's grandfather who lived at 145 Elizabeth Street.) He had two more tenants, however. Moses Rosener lived in the rear of 106-108 and Mike Kokh in the rear of 110-112. The four houses in front measured 13' 9" x 70', each lot assessed at \$275 and each building at \$550. Rosener's dwelling was 35' x 50', the land worth \$350 and the building \$200, but Kokh's was somewhat smaller, at 20' 3" x 50', the land worth \$202 and the building \$200.
- 4) The 1899 Goad's Map shows a large structure behind Garfinkel's houses, its footprint almost as large as the block of four houses. Note that we do not know the elevation of any of these buildings. On the north edge of the large structure, right behind 112, is a small block, probably Kokh's place, and we can speculate that that might well be one candidate as the cottage, the first meeting place of Beth Jacob. Pure speculation, as there are two other small structures nearby, behind 100-102, either of which could be the place.
- 5) When we go back to the Assessment Rolls for 1900, taken August 30, 1899, we find a note that Joseph Douglas was to be omitted as owner of 106-112 Chestnut and the name Samson Gurfinkel, 93 Chestnut, inserted as the new owner. So, we have an approximate date of sale to Garfinkel.
- 6) Back to look at 93 Chestnut, just to check on Garfinkel. Here we find Samuel Garfield (#30847), Rabbi, age 35, tenant of Elizabeth O'Hanley. No wonder Rabbi Samson Garfinkel suddenly appeared out of nowhere! Such name and spelling changes are what make this kind of quest so tricky.

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***Now that we have a candidate for Beth Jacob on Chestnut Street,  
can anyone figure out how to find the successor shtibl on Centre Avenue?***

## Summary

So, what's in a picture? In this case, quite a few thousand more words than you might have expected. The trick is to ask questions and think about where to look for links. Links lead to more links - to names, photos, maps, people - and to more questions. The search rarely takes you to a satisfactory answer in a single step or even down a straight path. You will hit brick walls and have to think your way around them. It's a real forensic job. If you're persistent and lucky, you can end

up developing a multi-dimensional concept of a time past that can, in turn, open understanding for you in many unexpected directions.

These fragments are what I could discover about the now largely forgotten Poylishe Shul at 17 Elm Street. Collecting bits from various archives, newspaper databases and libraries and tapping the few surviving memories, we now have an indication of what was once there. It is a great tragedy that the early history of this synagogue was not recorded and kept when the information was current. The names of most of the founding members are likely lost as well. Fortunately, the lightly annotated photograph of the Women's Auxiliary of the shul survived and has provided the impetus to find out what we still can about the picture, about the location and about the organization. More research needs to be done to dig out the rest of the early history of Beth Jacob, about the first meeting places and about the Elm Street Shul.

In the time allotted to meet the publication deadline, I could not corroborate some of my evidence. I like to have three independent sources for the confirmation of any fact. Without this solid base, the results must be considered preliminary. Given the sparseness of the surviving record, however, and the fact that the immigrant community was probably trying to stay well below the radar, it may well be difficult to sort out very much more of the pre-Henry-Street Beth Jacob story. It is going to require serious, determined and devoted archaeology by some obsessive researchers.

Oy Vey! It could never end!!

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Thanks to Lisa Newman, Metro Reference Librarians at the Baldwin Room, archivists at Metro Archives and Ontario Archives, Dr. Norton Taichman, Moe Ceresne, Goldie Waks and special thanks to Ellen Scheinberg, Director of the Ontario Jewish Archives.

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