



# United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad



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## U.S.-Ukraine Commission Meets in Kiev, Deepens Cooperation

The U.S.-Ukraine Joint Cultural Heritage Commission met in Kiev in May to discuss a broad range of issues important to both countries. Topics included national legislation to protect cemeteries from development, the progress of restituting religious communal properties, and efforts to document the condition of cemeteries, massacre sites, and synagogues throughout Ukraine.

U.S. Ambassador Steven Pifer and Commissioner Irving Stolberg led the American delegation, which included Professor Harry Reicher of Agudath Israel of America, Director of the Ukrainian Museum-Archives in Cleveland Andrew Fedynsky, Dr. Samuel Gruber, Commission Deputy Executive Director Christopher Hill, and U.S. Embassy Third Secretary Alexandra McKnight. Deputy Minister of Culture and Arts Leonid Novokhatko represented Ukraine along with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Committee for Construction and Housing, and Jewish community including the chief rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine.

Participants discussed the implementation of a July 1998 Executive Order by the Ukrainian government to protect all religious



From left to right, Ministry of Culture official Yevnika Linova, Andrew Fedynsky, Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, Commissioner Irving Stolberg, Deputy Minister of Culture Leonid Novokhatko, and a Ukrainian volunteer clean up a cemetery outside Kiev.

burial sites in the country from development. The American delegation commended efforts by the Ukraine government to consider national legislation to protect these sites and agreed to provide its advice as that process moves forward.

The two sides also discussed new laws dealing with preserving cultural heritage — including the repatriation of cultural assets taken from Ukraine

during the Nazi and Communist eras. Talks encompassed how to highlight and preserve Ukrainian culture in cooperation with museums and universities in the United States.

Ambassador Pifer, who opened the meeting, encouraged both sides to continue work on cultural issues of common concern, including Ukraine adopting a “transparent and

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## Eizenstat Signs Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina

Stuart Eizenstat, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and Special Envoy for Property Claims in Central and Eastern Europe, signed last December a document laying the groundwork for efforts to preserve cultural sites important to Americans in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The agreement, signed at a ceremony at the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina before a select group of U.S.

and Central and Eastern European diplomats, expresses the interest of the United States and its Bosnian counterparts to cooperate in preserving and protecting sites of historical and cultural value. These efforts include the centerpiece of the Commission's current restoration efforts, a renowned prayer house and

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## Commission Cosponsors Preservation Effort in Gliwice, Poland

Commissioner Lee Seeman and Associate Kathy Hadda are leading the effort to raise funds for the restoration of a Jewish cemetery and a burial hall in Gliwice, Poland. The two are being generously assisted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In addition, Andrzej Folwarczny, a Catholic member of the Polish *Sejm* (Parliament), has created a foundation to attract support for the multi-phase project. He has also dedicated himself to improving Polish-Jewish relations and envisions the project as one that will bring Poles together in common understanding of their shared history and future.

The cemetery is one of the few in Poland that was not razed by the Nazis during World War II. The burial hall, which is one of a handful still standing in Poland, was built in 1902 in the Gothic Revival style. It is a one-story symmetrical building with an attic, built on a three-winged plan. The façade is made of brick and consists of three tall pitch-roofed wings connected with lower walls. The main hall, in the middle, is the tallest.

Ms. Hadda became involved in the restoration project after she and her mother, who grew up in Gliwice, visited there in May 1998. She found a bustling and lively town but little of the Jewish community that had thrived before World War II. She was particularly troubled by the neglect and partial vandalism of the cemetery and ornate burial hall.

The Commission is proud to cosponsor the restoration effort. The burial hall, which will still retain its original historical form and character upon



Toppled tombstones lie near the abandoned prayer house at the Jewish cemetery in Gliwice, Poland. The main hall of the house can be seen at the top center of the photo.

completion, will serve as a multicultural educational center. It will include a concert facility in the main hall, and an exhibition area, office, and maintenance space.

The sponsors of the preservation project — the Commission and the Forum for the Dialogue Among Nations — are seeking private financial support for both the restoration of the pre-burial house as well as the perpetual care of the cemetery. For further information, please contact the Commission at (202) 254-3824. ■

## Work Continues on Holocaust Memorial

The Commission continues to accept donations for its model cemetery preservation project in Wyszkwow, Poland. The restoration project for the Jewish cemetery, razed by the Nazis and ignored by the Communists, began in 1992.

The Commission enlisted the town government, the local Catholic parish and more than 100 individuals and groups from around the world, to erect a memorial adjacent to the cemetery. The monument, containing tombstones taken from the cemetery, was dedicated in September 1997.

Last November, Chairman Michael Lewan, Executive Director

Joel Barries, and Project Director Lena Bergman joined Wyszkwow Mayor Jan Malinowski and Rev. Wojciech Borkowski in planting a tree at the cemetery honoring its caretaker, who passed away last fall. His son, Artur Kujawa, continues his father's duties at the cemetery. Since the November visit, plans have been drawn up to complete the stone facing on the memorial. Work should begin this summer.

The city government has replaced portions of hedge fencing that were stolen recently and increased police patrols of the remote area where the cemetery is located. ■

## Auschwitz Treatise Will Be Republished

A five volume, approximately 1,300-page, history of Auschwitz-Birkenau has been translated from Polish to English and will be published this fall. Commissioner Warren Miller, who raised the funds for the translation, has assisted with the editing. The work will be published by the State Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is already in circulation in Polish and German, and has received widespread acclaim among scholars worldwide as the most authoritative treatise on the largest and most infamous of the Nazi death camps. ■

## Commission Enters Partnership with Heritage and Genealogy Association

The Gottscheer Heritage and Genealogy Association has contacted the Commission to express its interest in cooperating to preserve its cultural heritage in Slovenia.

The Gottscheer people, originally from Germany, began settling among indigenous Slovenes in Eastern Europe during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Over the years, they faced incursions from the Turks and the French, and later, their homeland was annihilated during World War II.

Shortly after the war ended, many who survived fled to Austria, but not before about 3,000 Gottscheers were killed and about 2,000 disappeared. Survivors also settled in Canada and the United States.

Today, of the more than 400 chapels and shrines originally built

throughout Gottschee, only 38 remain, and most are in very poor condition.

Vestiges of Gottscheer cultural heritage can still be found throughout the region, including the remains of German inscriptions in the interiors or on the furnishings of several surviving churches.

Under the leadership of Commissioner Phyllis Kaminsky, the Commission signed an agreement with the government of Slovenia in 1996 to cooperate in preserving the cultural heritage of Americans who trace their roots to Slovenia.

This agreement incorporates an element of reciprocity in protecting cultural heritage and was approved by a unanimous vote of the Slovenian Parliament. ■

## Agreement Pledges Cultural Cooperation



Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Eizenstat (left), Commission Chairman Michael Lewan (center), and former Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the United States Sven Alkalaj shake hands after signing a cultural preservation agreement.

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cemetery in Sarajevo. According to the agreement, the United States and Bosnia-Herzegovina will work toward setting up bilateral expert working groups in cultural preservation.

The former ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Washington, Sven

Alkalaj, worked closely with the Commission, Chairman Michael Lewan, and Commissioners Joseph Halfon and Phyllis Kaminsky, on negotiating the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. ■

## Trip to Highlight Auschwitz Synagogue Reopening

The Commission continues its active role to restore the last remaining synagogue in Oswiecim, Poland. The synagogue is located a short distance from the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps. The restoration project is headed by the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation and New York businessman Fred Schwartz.

In September, Chairman Michael Lewan and Executive Director Joel Barries plan to join a delegation of American, Polish, and Israeli dignitaries at a ceremony reopening the synagogue. The ceremony will be the centerpiece of a week-long mission that begins in Berlin.

The project also includes the construction of a study center adjacent to the synagogue. The center will serve as a place where visitors can learn more about Jewish life in the town prior to World War II and reflect on their personal experience at the concentration camps.

Movie producer Steven Spielberg has provided the center's theater with his documentary of Oswiecim survivors' recollections of life before World War II.

Chairman Lewan and Mr. Barries represented the Commission at a groundbreaking ceremony in Oswiecim last November. U.S. Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA), a Holocaust survivor, commemorated the event in a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives. ■

## Commission Honors Outgoing U.S. Consul General to Poland

At a June reception in his honor, Francis "Paco" Scanlan, who recently completed his tour as the U.S. Consul General in Krakow, received the Commission's Meritorious Service Award from Chairman Michael Lewan.

As Consul General, Scanlan played an instrumental role in the Commission co-sponsored restoration of the only synagogue still standing in the town of Oswiecim, located a short distance from the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps. (Please see story on Page 3.)

In particular, Scanlan aided the Commission and the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation, the project sponsor, in convincing Polish officials to allow it to move forward. Since then, he has enthusiastically supported the restoration effort and provided leadership on behalf of the U.S. Government.

At the reception, Chairman Lewan noted the key role played by Scanlan.

"Without the committed leadership of Paco Scanlan, I am not sure that it would be possible to celebrate the day when this synagogue, once a carpet warehouse, will again be brought to life," he said. The reopening of the synagogue is scheduled for September 12, 2000.



Chairman Michael Lewan stands with former U.S. Consul General to Poland, Paco Scanlan and his wife, Piedad, after presenting him with a Commission award.

The reception also provided an opportunity for the Commission to thank Mariusz Handzlik, a Counselor at the Polish Embassy, for his six years of dedicated service in Washington on behalf of the Polish people. Lewan noted that, "There are few who have done so much to encourage Polish and Jewish dialogue and understanding."

Attendees at the reception included U.S. Ambassador to Poland Christopher Hill and Daniel Eisenstadt, the Executive Director of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation, who also acknowledged and thanked Scanlan for the valuable contributions he made during his tenure in Krakow. ■

### Ten Countries Sign Cultural Agreements

The Commission has the authority to enter into agreements with Central and Eastern European countries to establish frameworks for the protection and preservation of cultural sites. The following countries have signed such agreements: Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Agreements with Belarus, Bulgaria, and Hungary are still pending. ■

### Meeting Is Held in Kiev

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nondiscriminatory process" for returning properties seized from religious groups. In addition to preservation topics, the May meeting provided a venue for Ukrainian officials to announce the publication of a catalogue of Jewish cultural artifacts in the country. The two delegations discussed building on that significant work by publishing an extensive survey of the condition of religious properties.

Plans were made for the fourth meeting in Washington and Connecticut in 2001. During the visit, delegation members toured cultural sites in Kiev, including the St. Sophia Cathedral and Pecherska Lavra Caves Monastery. They visited a historic Jewish cemetery in Berdichev which had been threatened by development, dedicated a Holocaust memorial at a massacre site in Zhytomir, and met with regional officials in Majibet. ■

## Commission Sponsors Ukrainian Heritage Project with Museum

In January, the Commission built on its already strong ties with the Ukrainian Museum-Archives in Cleveland and endorsed an effort by museum President Andrew Fedynsky to establish a Ukrainian Heritage Project.

The Cleveland museum houses an extensive collection of Ukrainian writings, artwork and other artifacts brought to America or created by early immigrants from Ukraine. When implemented, the heritage project will ensure that similar collections in the United States and Ukraine receive the attention and care that they deserve and are available for scholarly research.

The heritage project, which the Commission hopes to support with a planning grant, expands an existing pilot project administered by the museum. That project integrates U.S. and Ukrainian academic and cultural institutions. Once implemented, the program would sponsor Ukrainian scholars and interns for work in American museums in addition to holding conferences and college courses in Ukrainian studies at American universities.

The pilot project, launched in 1998 under the auspices of the U.S.-Ukraine Joint Cultural Heritage Commission, includes partnerships between the Cleveland Museum, Ohio State University, Cleveland State University, and the Lviv School of Art. ■



**Jan Karski**  
1914-2000

The Commission remembers **Jan Karski**, a Polish hero who helped the eyes of the world see the horrors of the Holocaust.

"Whomever saves one life saves the world entire."

— The Talmud

## Bratislava Gravesite Will Be Renovated

The Commission has lent support to a Slovak-government project to restore an underground crypt housing the grave of Chatam Sofer, a renowned figure in the world of Judaism.

Commissioner Chaskel Besser and Commissioner Irving Stolberg spearheaded the Commission's involvement, which comes under the auspices of a 1992 cultural preservation agreement with the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic.

Because of its proximity to the Danube River, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century tomb has sustained significant water damage over the years and has been disturbed

by trollies passing overhead. Under an agreement signed in July 1999, the site will be restored and the train tracks relocated. The city of Bratislava will finance the relocation of the tracks and the Ministry of Culture will provide a grant to the local Jewish community to restore the tombstones.

A New York-based preservation group is providing funding for a memorial at the site. The Commission is grateful for the strong support of U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut and for the active involvement of Slovak Minister of Culture Milan Knazko. ■

## Fund-raising for Memorial Continues

Commissioner Warren Miller continues to raise funds for the construction of a memorial at Buchenwald to honor and remember the victims of the Little Camp.

During World War II, inmates at Little Camp, separated from the main camp by barbed wire, faced the greatest suffering of those imprisoned at Buchenwald. By 1945, the camp held as many as 30,000 prisoners at a time. Just before liberation in April,

Little Camp inmates made up more than half of those herded into trains or marched to death.

The final architectural plans have been approved and permits for construction have been issued. Construction cannot begin until the funds to complete the project are on deposit. Depending on the success of future fund-raising efforts, the Buchenwald memorial could be constructed within the next 12 months. ■

## Pace of Commission Surveys Step Up With New Funding

**A**dditional funding has allowed the Commission to accelerate its decade-long effort to identify and document significant historic, cultural, and religious sites throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Since Commission surveys began in 1991, nearly 5,000 cemeteries, religious buildings, killing sites and mass gravesites have been documented by Commission research teams.

Work continues in Ukraine and Romania, and new surveys have been initiated in Lithuania and Latvia. Previous surveys in Slovakia and Hungary are being revisited.

This year the Commission will also begin updating and expanding its survey work to update surveys in Poland and the Czech Republic to account for changes to sites over the past decade. The Commission also hopes to renew and expand its survey work for Slovakia and Hungary that was carried out in the early 1990s, but suspended before completion due to lack of funds.

These surveys have proved invaluable in protecting sites from privatization in former Communist countries and in stimulating public interest in preservation. Since the web site listing this data was launched in 1996, more than 120,000 visitors have utilized the data, located at [www.jewishgen.org/cemeteries](http://www.jewishgen.org/cemeteries). (The information can also be linked to via the Commission's web site at [www.preservationcommission.org](http://www.preservationcommission.org).)

The Commission has been busy gathering information from other countries and other ethnic groups, as well. Working reports have been drafted about the status of sites in some countries with which the Commission still does not have cultural preservation agreements, including Belarus and Macedonia. Similarly, documentation of Roma sites in Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland is underway.

### Survey Projects

The four-year long survey of Jewish burial sites in **Ukraine** officially ended in December 1999. In all, the research team visited and described 1,453 distinct sites.



Commission Research Director Dr. Sam Gruber examines a tombstone at the Jewish cemetery in Berdichev, Ukraine. Gruber oversees the Commission's surveys of cultural and religious sites throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Throughout this project, information on individual sites was made available online as it reached the Commission, thanks to the volunteer work of the International Jewish Genealogy Society's Cemetery Project.

The Commission is now preparing a final report THAT analyzes the data to describe the condition of Jewish burial sites throughout the many regions of Ukraine. The project was made possible due to the financial support of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

In **Romania**, the Commission begins its second year of cemetery documentation. This phase includes visitation and documentation of 470 cemeteries and 63 synagogues throughout Transylvania. Discussions are now underway to extend the survey to all 785 known cemeteries and 101 synagogues.

In February 2000, Commission Research Director Dr. Samuel Gruber visited **Lithuania and Latvia** to begin surveys there. In Lithuania, the condition of approximately 400 cemetery and mass killing sites throughout the country will be documented. A parallel survey of other Lithuanian minority sites — notably the Roma and old Believer communities — will be undertaken this year. These documentary surveys will be conducted by the Center for the Stateless Culture at the University of Vilnius in cooperation with the Latvian Ministry of Culture. In Latvia, site visits began in the spring of 2000. ■

## Chairman Visits Sarajevo and Budapest

Commission Chairman Michael Lewan traveled to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Budapest, Hungary in April to advance preservation efforts in those countries.

In Sarajevo, Mr. Lewan met with leaders from the Jewish community, city and national governments, United Nations, Office of the High Representative, and U.S. Ambassador Thomas Miller to discuss the restoration of the 370-year-old Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo.

The cemetery is the oldest intact burial ground of any religious group in Southeastern Europe and one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's most revered national treasures. During the country's 1991-95 conflict, the cemetery was mined extensively, and its walls, tombstones, and ornate pre-burial house were damaged. Work is underway to restore the cemetery and save the pre-burial house, which was often hit by mortar fire.

Due to the strong support of U.S. Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-NY) and U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, Congress appropriated \$100,000 for the Commission in Fiscal Year 2000 to help attract private funds for the restoration. About \$70,000 has now been raised from Bosnian and American sources. During his visit, Lewan surveyed the condition of the site and delivered \$10,000 in matching funds toward the pre-burial house restoration.

In addition to support from the Jewish community and city officials, Lewan learned that the United Nations has committed to this and other preservation projects of various religious groups throughout the country.

### Hungary Trip

Building on the Commission's record of accomplishment in Hungary — led by Commissioner Zvi Kestenbaum — Lewan met with officials from the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Budapest. The meeting's focused on the eventual signing of a cultural preservation agreement between Hungary and the United States. Government officials appeared to approve of the agreement, which is similar to the one signed most recently by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While in Budapest, Lewan also met with government and religious groups who could carry out a



Sarajevo Jewish community leaders Jakob Finci (left) and Dr. Igor Gaon (center) meet with Chairman Michael Lewan (right) at the historic Jewish cemetery in the city in April.

survey of cultural sites of importance to American citizens. Lewan found sincere interest in undertaking such work and was impressed with current efforts to document the condition of sites, as well as their deep commitment to preservation.

During his stay in Hungary's capital, Lewan also had the opportunity to meet the U.S. Ambassador to Hungary Peter Tufo. As always, U.S. Foreign Service personnel in both Sarajevo and Budapest provided excellent support for the Chairman's visit. ■

## President Appoints New Commissioner

The Commission welcomes Fran C. Eizenstat, who was appointed by President Clinton in April 2000. Eizenstat has long been committed to her Jewish heritage as well as child advocacy. In addition to her duties as a Senior Business Developer for Housing Finance Agencies at Fannie Mae, she serves as a board member on the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger. She is married to Stuart Eizenstat, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury. ■

## Message from the Chairman

**T**hese Jewish cemeteries are part of our common past. They are places of deep spiritual and historic significance. Let these places join Poles and Jews together as we await the Day of Judgement and Resurrection.”

— Pope John Paul II

The words of His Holiness were on my mind when I learned of the passing of Cardinal John O'Connor. His Eminence was truly a man of great compassion. His tenure as New York's Cardinal is filled with stories of his fierce opposition to anti-Semitism and his active work to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. One of these stories is worth telling.

As Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, one of my responsibilities is the protection and preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Eastern and Central Europe — which is a task I take seriously and, as a Catholic, carefully.

I learned in early 1997 that Pope John Paul II would be in his native Poland for a week of prayer and religious ceremony. I thought? the trip would be a wonderful opportunity for the Pope to speak forcefully to the Polish people and especially to Catholic clergy on the importance of protecting Jewish cemeteries. However, how does someone like me reach the Pope? The answer (only in America) was to call Rabbi Morris Sherer, an extraordinary man himself, who was the President of the Agudath Israel.

Rabbi Sherer, now of blessed memory, was a dear friend of Cardinal O'Connor. I met with the Rabbi and he quickly agreed to set up a meeting with His Eminence. A week later, shortly before Easter, Rabbi Sherer and I found ourselves in the Cardinal's residence behind St. Patrick's Cathedral. Twelve years of Catholic school had never prepared me for that

moment; I was nervous to the point of distraction. But the Cardinal was kind, friendly and attentive to my request. He promptly agreed to discuss the matter with the Pope when he visited the Vatican after the holiday. A short time later I received a brief note from the Cardinal telling me he had had the "conversation" and it was now "in God's hands." Five weeks later in Kalisz, Poland, the site of an ancient and important Jewish cemetery, the Pope's voice echoed through the land.

Words became deeds and today in Poland much progress is being made to save cemeteries. These holy places do join all people in a common bond. To take care of the dead is an obligation, a mitzvah. To that end, His Holiness John Paul II, Rabbi Sherer, and His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor left us a wonderful legacy.

Let the work continue! ■

*Michael Lewan*

For more information on the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, please call (202) 254-3824, fax (202) 254-3934, or e-mail [commpaha@erols.com](mailto:commpaha@erols.com).

The Commission's Chairman is Michael Lewan; the Deputy Chairman is Rabbi Zvi Kestenbaum. Commissioners include Ned Bandler, Chaskel Besser, Fran Eizenstat, Anita Freedman, Edgar Gluck, Joseph Halfon, Phyllis Kaminsky, Alice Kelikian, Gary Lavine, Rachmiel Liberman, Warren Miller, Lee Seeman, and Irving Stolberg. The Commission is staffed by Executive Director Joel Barries, Deputy Executive Director Christopher Hill, and Research Director Dr. Sam Gruber.

**U.S. Commission for the  
Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad**  
1101 15th Street, N.W., Suite 1040  
Washington, D.C. 20005