



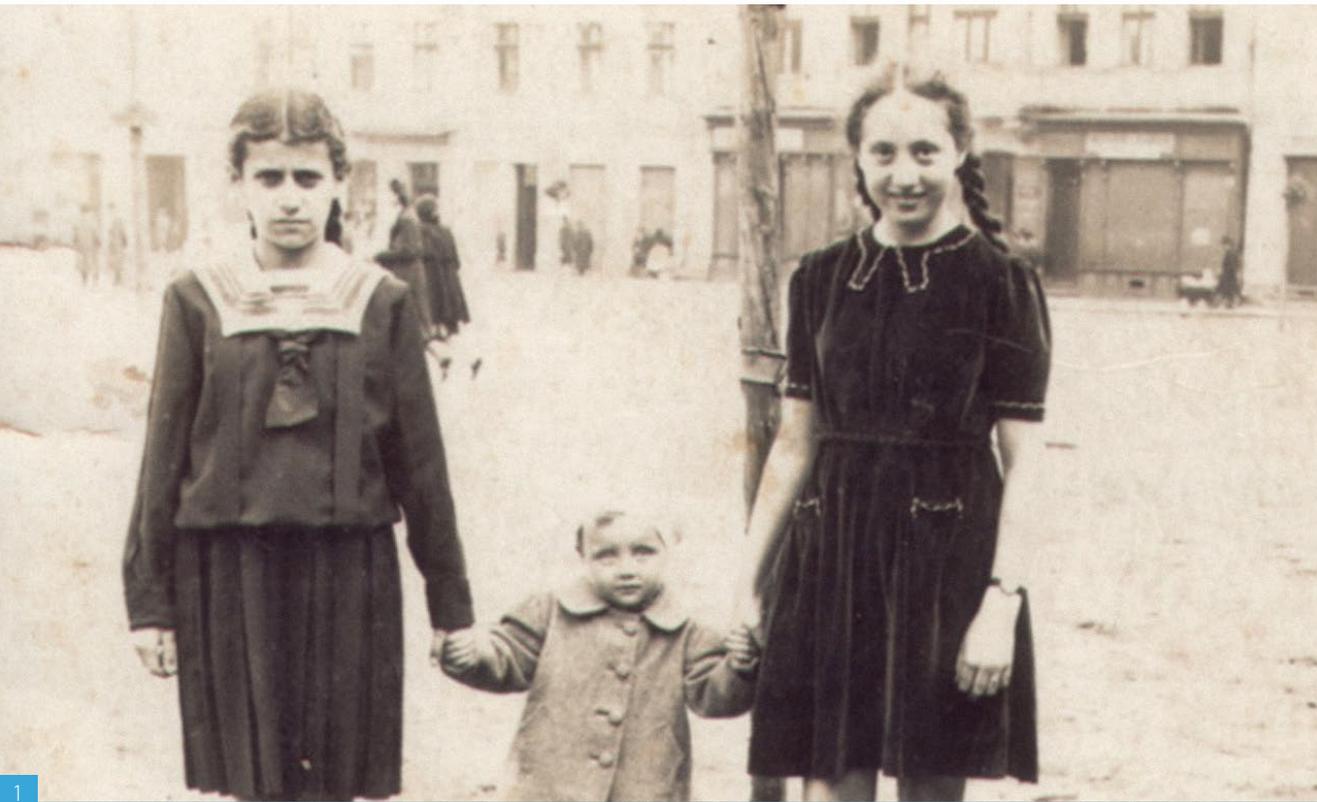
AUSCHWITZ JEWISH CENTER
CENTRUM ŻYDOWSKIE W OŚWIECIMIU
המרכז היהודי באושוויץ



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Auschwitz Jewish Center:
2007 Activities Report

Auschwitz Jewish Center: 2007 Activities Report



1. Left: Sabina Leser (currently Rosenbach) with her unknown friend and a child. Oświęcim, Main Market Square, May 3, 1939. Sabina Rosenbach Private Collection.

The Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC) is the only Jewish presence in Oświęcim – the Polish name for Auschwitz – a town that is now primarily associated with the site of the darkest tragedy of the 20th century.

In September 2000, the Auschwitz Jewish Center opened its doors to honor the former residents of the town and to teach future generations about the destruction caused by the Holocaust.

The Center facilities include the Jewish Museum, Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue, and Education Center.

The Center's exhibitions and programs are open to visitors and students from around the world. Dedicated to public education, the Center's programs teach about the richness of pre-war Jewish life in Oswiecim and build awareness of the dangers of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and the other forms of intolerance. Since 2006 the Auschwitz Jewish Center has been affiliated with the Museum of Jewish Heritage – a Living Memorial to the Holocaust in New York.

Below are highlights of the Auschwitz Jewish Center's work in 2007.

2007 was a year of new ideas and changes at the AJC. The Jewish Museum and Education Center renovation project was completed in May 2007. The ground floor rooms were changed into exhibition space and the Center's library and offices along with the conference room were renovated. With the exterior combining traditional and modern features, the AJC building now stands out as one of the landmarks in the heart of Oświęcim.

In addition to renovation of the building, the AJC has also taken on a new shape in the web. The new Polish and German websites available at www.ajcf.pl are now fully compatible with the original www.ajcf.org. Updated regularly, the websites provide historical background on the Jewish past of Oświęcim as well as inform about upcoming events at AJC.



2. Photo of an unknown author presents a group of children and women at the well on the Hospital Square in Oświęcim (presently Priest Jan Skarbek Square). In the background – Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue and a part of the house where Kornreich family lived (right, presently Auschwitz Jewish Center). This picture was taken most likely at the beginning of WWII (c. 1939-1941).

Collection of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim.

3. Interior of the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot synagogue.

The informational flyer about the Auschwitz Jewish Center is now available in English, German, Hebrew and Polish.

The AJC is committed to working with young people in the local community. The official opening of a special internship program for students of the local State College of Higher Education in Oświęcim was among the major events of the past year. Five students from



4. Students of English, volunteers at the Auschwitz Jewish Center (L-R): Anna Chłopek, Joanna Kosowska and Magdalena Korzec.

the College, including two Anias, Asia, two Magdas and Marcin, familiarized themselves with AJC activities and learned about the history of the town in which they are studying. The Center is looking forward to future cooperation with students of the College.

The past year also saw foreign volunteers working at AJC. Through participation in the EU program, European Voluntary Service, we have had the opportunity to accept young people from other European countries, who contribute to the AJC's accomplishments with their work and ideas. In 2007, Marie Venclova from Prague and Franziska Koch (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace) from Berlin worked with AJC staff in education workshops for visiting students. They were joined by Thomas Wieninger from Austria, who does Holocaust Memorial Service in the Center organized by Austrian Service Abroad, and Severin van Gastel from France, who is about to graduate from the Jagiellonian University.

We would like to thank our young friends from Poland and Europe for working with us this year.

In December 2007, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, our partner from New York, produced a short movie about the AJC. The movie highlights the mission



5. Marie Venclova (Czech Republic), volunteer at the Auschwitz Jewish Center. Photo by Tomasz Mól.

6. Franzi Koch (Germany) and Thomas Wieninger (Austria) – volunteers at the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

7. Severin van Gastel (France) – intern at the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

and work of the AJC through testimony, archival photographs, and interviews. To see the movie please visit http://www.mjhnyc.org/museum_aboutus_h.htm

The Jewish Museum and Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue

The AJC held an opening this year of a gallery of Jewish artists from Oświęcim. Creation of the gallery was made possible through the generosity of two of Oświęcim's prewar Jewish citizens, Henryk Schönker and Tova Berlinski, who donated their paintings to AJC. Henryk donated three art works entitled: Departing for Higher, Better World, The Almond Tree in Eyn Kerem and The Yearning. Tova donated a diptych and a painting of black tulips. The works of these outstanding artists are presented on the first floor of the Center.



8. Marble piece from the Oświęcim Great Synagogue's decoration, found during the excavations in 2004.

9. Oświęcim Great Synagogue memorial plaque at the Berek Joselewicz Street.

10. Diptych made by Oświęcim former resident Tova Berlinski, donated to the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

11. Artwork by Oświęcim former resident Henryk Schönker, entitled The Yearning, donated to the Auschwitz Jewish Center.



Following the renovation, the core exhibition, the Jews of Oświęcim, was updated with the latest historical research.

A new exhibit section was opened to commemorate Oświęcim's Great Synagogue, which was torn down by the Nazis at the beginning of WWII. The exhibition includes artifacts from the Great Synagogue site, which were excavated by a team from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. They are a part of a large collection of almost 400 artifacts which require careful conservation. The AJC is currently seeking funds for this important project.

In addition, this year saw the installation of a commemorative plaque on the site of the Great Synagogue on Berka Joselewicza Street in Oświęcim.



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12. Polish Heroes workshop on Righteous Among the Nations.

13. Polish Heroes. Those who Rescued Jews – the opening of the exhibition, May 2007.

14. Righteous Among the Nations – Janina Rościszewska and Paweł Roszkowski.

15. Neighbour Next Door. Yiddish in the Contemporary Israeli Art – the opening of the exhibition.

In May, the AJC launched a new photographic exhibition, Polish Heroes: Those Who Rescued Jews. The exhibit presents profiles of 21 men and women from the Małopolska region. The exhibition is the first step in an ongoing educational project to pay tribute to the more than 20,000 individuals honored as Righteous Among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Israel, paying special attention to the over 6,000 Polish recipients. It was organized as a collaborative effort among the Auschwitz Jewish Center, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, and the Polish American Jewish Alliance for Youth Action (PAJA).

The opening of Polish Heroes was preceded by an educational workshop for teachers and educators. The workshop included meeting with two of the Righteous among the Nations featured in the exhibition, Janina Rościszewska and Paweł Roszkowski, and a lecture on the subject by Alina Cała, PhD, from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The workshop was facilitated by Artur Szyndler, PhD, of the AJC.

In October, Polish Heroes: Those Who Rescued Jews was presented during a ceremony of the President of the Republic of Poland, which honoured the Righteous. The event was coordinated by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and took place in the Polish National Theatre in Warsaw.

In the summer, the AJC hosted the exhibition Neighbor Next Door: Yiddish in Contemporary Israeli Art. Made up



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of work by Israeli artists, the exhibition asked questions about the crystallization of personal identity in relation to language and the relationship between language and place. The issue was presented through both traditional means of expression and modern techniques. Moreover, this exhibit was accompanied by a lecture of Prof. Haim Maor, an artist and lecturer at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva (Israel). His art works were also displayed in the exhibition. The exhibition was brought to the AJC with the help of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of Israel in Warsaw, Israel Lottery Council for the Arts, Lerner Fund of Yiddish Israel and Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw. Exhibit's curator was Yifat Laist (Israel).



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The third exhibition shown in the Jewish Museum in 2007, *Living On*, presented portraits of Holocaust survivors, liberators, prisoners of war, and witnesses who came from or moved to the state of Tennessee. The photographs were taken by Professor Robert Heller of the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and the exhibit was brought to AJC with the cooperation of Tennessee Holocaust Commission and US Consulate General in Kraków.

In November, the AJC met with and recorded testimonies of Israelis who lived in Oświęcim before the war. The material collected by AJC staffer Artur Szyndler, PhD, is an invaluable contribution to the body of historical knowledge about the vanished world of the Jews of Oświęcim. The testimonies will be used in the making of a documentary film about the history of the local Jewish population.

16. *Living On* - the opening of the exhibition.

17. Former residents of Oświęcim, brothers Abraham (left) and Jerzy Feiner, Ramat Gan 2007.

18. Former residents of Oświęcim – Henryk Schönker and Lola Bodner, Tel Aviv 2007.

19. Former resident of Oświęcim – Rachel Jakimowski, Tel Aviv 2007.

20. Former resident of Oświęcim – Zygmunt Feiler, Tel Aviv 2007.

The Chanukkah concert by Israeli group Ha-Makor was the most important musical event of the past year. The young artists' modern presentation of Chanukkah songs surprised the large audience gathered at the AJC. During the concert, a ceremony of traditional Chanukkah Menorah lighting took place.

21. Chanukkah at the Auschwitz Jewish Center, 2007 – Israeli band Ha-makor. Photo by Tomasz Mól.



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2. Jewish youth, participants of the March of The Living during their visit at the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue, 2007.

23. A group of ten American rabbis and bishops visiting the synagogue.

24. Former resident of Oświęcim Moshe Weiss (in the middle) with his family at the Auschwitz Jewish Center.

25. Alona Frankel, an Israeli writer in the synagogue, 2007.



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Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University (CCJU) who visited the Center in September 2007.

In 2007, the Jewish Museum and the Chevra Lomdei Mischnayot Synagogue were visited by thousands of tourists from all over the world, both as individual guests and in organized groups.

For many of them, the visit to the AJC was a pitstop on their way to the Auschwitz State Museum. In keeping with past years, the greatest number of visitors came to the AJC with the March of the Living.

Distinguished guests to the AJC in the past year include a group of nine bishops and rabbis from the Center for

During the eight years it has been open, the AJC has been visited by dozens of the former Jewish citizens of Oświęcim and their families. For most of them, this was their first visit back to the town since their deportation to ghettos in 1941. The 2007 visit of Alona Frankel, an Israeli writer born in Poland, was among the most important events of this kind. Mrs. Frankel's mother lived in Oświęcim before WWII and Alona survived the Holocaust in Poland. After the war, she moved to Israel, where she started to write and illustrate books for children. Her works have become bestsellers and have been translated into 12 languages. The illustrations from

her books have been presented in exhibitions in Israel and around the world. On her visit to the AJC, Alona Frankel promoted her first book for an adult audience, *A Girl*, in which the writer talks about her childhood during the war.

In 2007, the AJC acquired a number of valuable artifacts, including documents, objects, and photographs of great importance as historical sources of information about the Jews of Oświęcim. Recent acquisitions include:

- A book, *Libanon Nuta*, of religious comments by Rabbi Natan Nussen Nuty Landau (1840-1906) who lived in Oświęcim. It was printed by L. S. Deutscher in Krakow and published in Oświęcim in 1901 by Rabbi Landau. The first page of the work has a unique bilingual Polish – Yiddish seal of the rabbi's son, Rabbi Leser Landau (1869-1938);
- A collection of photographs depicting members of a Zionist organizations from Oświęcim, which was acquired from the Beit Lohamei Hagetaot (Ghetto Fighters' House) in Israel;

26. Cover of the book entitled *Libanon Nuta* by Oświęcim Rabbi Natana Nussen Nuty Landau (1840-1906).



27. Members of a chalutzim organization named kibbutz Borochov in Oświęcim (interwar period). Collection of Beit Lohamei Hagetaot.



28. Correspondence card sent by Joachim Appel from Oświęcim to his brother Moritz, living in Vienna, 1911.



29. Berek Joselewicz Street, Fall 1939. Collection of the State Archive in Katowice.



Nazis at the beginning of WWII, the pictures have been acquired from the State Archives in Katowice;

- Dozens of photographs donated by former citizens of Oświęcim who live in Israel today.

Please help the Auschwitz Jewish Center preserve the history of the local Jewish community. We are seeking donations of personal artifacts, including personal testimonies, photographs, formal and personal letters, diaries, press articles, and any other materials reflecting the history of the Oświęcim Jews before, during, and after WWII. Anyone willing to donate or lend such materials to AJC is kindly requested to contact:

- A collection of postcards from the 19th century, which are handwritten in Yiddish and belonged to the Appel family of Oświęcim;
- A collection of photographs depicting wartime Oświęcim, including the Jewish Street. Taken by the

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Education Center

The Auschwitz Jewish Center is dedicated to public education and offers a wide range of programs for visitors include lectures, seminars, meetings, and cultural events.

In the past year, the AJC launched a new educational program called My Former Neighbors, which is designed to engage and educate local and regional Polish residents about the history of the Jews of Oświęcim who were murdered in the Holocaust, as well as about Polish-Jewish History, Jewish Culture and Traditions, and Polish-Jewish Relations. My Former Neighbors (MFN) is comprised of two parts: Educational Program for Secondary School Students and the Adult Education Program.

The MFN program for secondary schools students consists of four sections, each of which offers a different subject and/or way of learning.

30-31. My Former Neighbors workshops.

The first section of the program, Elder Brothers in Faith is an interactive workshop that introduces students to Jewish traditions, holidays, and culture. This workshop focuses on the holidays and traditions of the Jews in Poland, and other topics concerning Jewish laws, religion and culture.

The second part of the program, What was Oshpitzin? addresses pre-war Jewish life in Oświęcim, using it as a microcosm of Jewish life throughout Poland. This section is designed to educate students about the destruction caused by the Holocaust. It utilizes all of the Center's existing facilities, tours, and exhibitions and provides a better understanding of the inherent role that Jews have played in Polish society.

The third part of the program, Walking Their Paths, is a study tour of what was once Jewish Oświęcim. Students view historic sites such as the Jewish cemetery, the former Great Synagogue, and Jewish Street. At the cemetery, they learn about the symbols on selected Jewish tombstones. The tour is a practical way to explore the Jewish history of Oświęcim.

The last session, Why Do We Need Tolerance?, is a workshop based on Jane Elliot's Blue Eyed diversity training video. Students watch the famous classroom exercise



showing how quickly people can succumb to discriminatory behavior. The video serves as an introduction to a discussion on prejudices and stereotypes persistent in society; it also raises sensitivity and awareness of the ways prejudices manifest themselves in everyday life.

The AJC invited high schools from the Oświęcim region to take part in the MFN program. As a result, over 700 students participated in the lectures and workshops in the past year.

The second part of My Former Neighbors, the Adult Education Program, is geared towards adult audiences and includes a series of lectures focusing on various aspects of Jewish history and culture. The talks are accompanied by movies and discussions.

My Former Neighbors is made possible through the financial support of the Stefan Batory Foundation and the Consulate General of the United States in Kraków.

The AJC's other education programs finished the year with a talk by Leszek Mazan, a famous writer and publicist from Kraków. During his lecture, From Ibrahim To Ajzyk, Mazan told many stories about Galician Jews and presented his latest book Polska Praga (Polish Prague).



33. *Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows: A Bridge to History 2007.*

34-36. *American Service Academies Program (ASAP) 2007.*

37. *Polish Heroes workshop.*

38. *My Former Neighbors workshop.*

This past summer also saw the continuation of AJC's two flagship programs for U.S. audiences, American Service Academies Program (ASAP) and the Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows: Bridge to History program.

Through the American Service Academies Program, future military leaders from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy, and the U.S. Air Force Academy took part in an intensive, three-week course dedicated to the study of the Holocaust and the events leading up to it. The participating cadets and midshipmen visited historical sites related to the Holocaust, including the Belzec extermination camp, the area of the Warsaw ghetto, the historical districts of Warsaw and Krakow, the Museum of the Warsaw 1944 Uprising, and Kraków's formerly Jewish quarter of Kazimierz. Meeting with students from Polish military academies was also a part of the ASAP.

The Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows: Bridge to History program is designed for students who have recently received their undergraduate degrees and those who are enrolled in a graduate program. In 2007, after a brief orientation in New York City, the Fellows traveled throughout Poland for five weeks, visiting Kraków, Warsaw, Oświęcim, and Lodz. An intensive program at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and a study trip throughout south-east Poland (formerly known as Galicia) were also included in their agenda. In Oświęcim, the Fellows studied the history of the local Jewish community and met with a Roma survivor of the Auschwitz camp, thanks to AJC's work with the Roma Association in Poland.

The AJC designed an education program to work alongside Polish Heroes, a special photographic exhibit that opened in May 2007 at the AJC, which focuses on Poles honored as Righteous Among the Nations. The educa-

tional project prepared a group of students from local high schools in Oświęcim to act as peer guides for the exhibit. The students took part in a series of workshops exploring the subject of rescuing Jews during the Holocaust and recorded an interview with a Righteous from Kraków, Professor Michał Rościszewski.

The library of AJC's Education Center continues to grow, now containing over 1,000 books in English, German, Hebrew, and Polish.



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The Auschwitz Jewish Center is an affiliate
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Cover photo: Sabina Leser (currently Rosenbach) with her unknown
friend and a child. Oświęcim, Main Market Square, May 3, 1939.
Sabina Rosenbach Private Collection

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