

Steven D. Reece

From: Steven D. Reece <sdreece@matzevah.org>
Sent: Thursday, January 5, 2017 10:20
To: billbrostoff@netscape.net
Cc: 'David Brostoff'
Subject: RE: Matzevah Foundation project selection

Dear Bill,

Thank you for contacting me and responding to my query.

The situation of the Jewish cemeteries in Poland (as well as the rest of Europe) is appalling and overwhelmingly difficult. In Poland alone, there are 1,200 Jewish cemeteries across the countryside. The Jewish cemetery in Trzcianne is representative of the typical state of most Jewish cemeteries: uncared for and ruined.

I am familiar with the film, "A Town Called Brzostek" and I have met Professor Jonathan Webber in 2015 at the European Jewish Cemeteries Conference in Vilnius. I saw the film at the conference and it is an admirable effort of restoration. It is a good model but I would caution you to keep in mind that every situation, in which an attempt is made to restore a Jewish cemetery, is different and presents its own challenges and obstacles. I would be happy to assist you and advise you as you all move forward.

The most important element to establish at this point is who is the actual owner or steward of the cemetery. By default the State of Poland is the owner of all Jewish cemeteries, since Jewish cemeteries are legally national, historical monuments. There are 9 Jewish communities in Poland. Some are large as in Warsaw and others are quite small. In roughly 45% of the cases depending upon the location, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage (FODZ) in Poland is the owner of the Jewish cemetery. In the remaining cases, various Jewish communities in Poland may be stewards or have oversight of the Jewish cemeteries. The Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries has religious oversight of all Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Determining who is the owner and/or has responsibility for the cemetery must be determined first prior to any work whatsoever is undertaken due to the fact that permissions must be secured depending upon the nature of the work.

In leading the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF), I work closely with the Rabbinical Commission and partner with FODZ. Both are instrumental in navigating the bureaucracies associated with Jewish cemeteries. We should begin with them in order to determine ownership and/or stewardship. The Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) is a research organization and does not directly concern itself with restoration work in Jewish cemeteries. I also cooperate with them albeit indirectly.

You may find a few specifics on the Jewish cemetery in Trzcianne here on [Virtual Sztetl](#). The cemetery is large having an area of roughly 1 hectare or 2.5 acres. Determining or confirming actual boundaries probably would be requested if an accurate survey map is not in existence. Even if there is one, the local government may require one as a part of the restoration process. If a wall or fence is constructed then conducting a survey will be required.

Based on my experience, it would be difficult to clear the cemetery completely of the undergrowth in 5 working days, but adequate assistance and organization, it could be done.

Regarding local contacts, I would first determine ownership from the Rabbinical Commission and/or FODZ. If FODZ is the owner then they would be the official delegate, who would initiate contact and open discussions. If FODZ is not, then, I would advise you or someone else as a delegate of the descendant's group to contact the mayor of the city or wojt (like

a mayor) of the community. Before beginning any work, it would be a very nice and well received cultural gesture. We can discuss next steps further, once ownership is determined.

Concerning the involvement of the descendants, age should not be barrier. I nearly 62 and I do this every summer ☺. Many of our volunteers are retired. Last year, I worked with a descendant's group in which most of the volunteers were retired or close to retirement age. Of course, we had many younger people and a group of 30 year olds who also participated.

Based on my experience, I have prioritized a summary of your goals for the project below:

1. Clear and clean undergrowth
2. Erect a sign of some sort
3. Determine the number of matzevot (headstones)
4. Relocate and recover matzevot (in the local community)
5. Document the process in some manner
6. Delineate the boundary of the cemetery
7. Fence the cemetery
8. Conduct a ground penetrating radar survey

I would suggest that you consider commemorating and rededicating the cemetery once it is cleared. This will make a strong statement to the local community. The memorial matzevah (stone memorial marker) generally depending upon the quality and size of the stone, would cost in the neighborhood of \$2,000 to \$2,500 including the cost of the stone, inscription and installation. It could cost more however.

Fencing the cemetery will be costly but possible. There is a an organization that I know of who might be able to fence it with a very simple fence. They have certain criteria that must be met; however, at this point it would be premature to reach out to them.

Moving forward here is a thumbnail sketch of what I suggest:

1. Determine ownership/stewardship
2. Contact Rabbinical Commission for Matters of Cemeteries
 - a) Agnieszka Nieradko agnieszkanieradko@gmail.com
 - b) AND copy Elżbieta Jeżowska elzbieta.jezowska@gmail.com
3. Contact FODZ
 - a) Monika Krawczyk Monika.Krawczyk@fodz.pl
 - b) AND copy Marcin Bartosiewicz marcin.bartosiewicz@fodz.pl
4. Determine interest in the descendant's group concerning the restoration of the Jewish cemetery in Trzcianne
5. Develop project request
 - a) Including a preliminary project plan and project budget
6. Present a project request, project budget and project plan to the Board of The Matzevah Foundation for consideration
7. Formalize project plan and project budget
8. Determine project roles and parameters
9. Set project date
10. Mobilize volunteers
11. Secure funds
12. Meet with local government officials prior to project inception
13. Engage local community
14. Initiate the project

Again the most important step at this time is determining ownership of the cemetery. To this end, please reach out to Agnieszka and Monika. Please make sure that you let them know that you have contacted me and are interested in working with TMF in some manner.

Please let me know what you think, but what I have presented to you is a rough idea of what developing a Jewish cemetery project looks like. We will have to fill in a number of blanks along the way but for now this is enough to get you started.

Sincerely,

Steven

Steven D. Reece

Founder and CEO, The Matzevah Foundation, Inc.

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From: billbrostoff@netscape.net [mailto:billbrostoff@netscape.net]

Sent: Tuesday, January 3, 2017 18:40

To: sdreece@matzevah.org

Cc: David Brostoff <david.brostoff@earthlink.net>

Subject: FW: Matzevah Foundation project selection

Dear Steven,

Thank you for responding to my cousin David Brostoff (the ad hoc family historian and genealogist) . David and I chatted recently about the cemetery in Trzcianne. My wife and I recently visited the cemetery on a trip to Poland. Before we left, David had mentioned the state of Jewish cemeteries in Poland which seemed to be corroborated in our visit. I'll respond to your individual questions below, but also want to first put things in perspective. We are just beginning to investigate possibilities for what could be done regarding the cemetery; we saw the movie "A town called Brzostek" and see that as a model as the ultimate project but understand that we may have to adjust our expectations as to what could reasonably be accomplished. Even if your foundation would be unable to help in Trzcianne, we would appreciate any suggestions for how to proceed (foundations to contact, how best to initiate contact with the local community, etc.). The rest of my responses are in line...

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Steven D. Reece" <sdreece@matzevah.org>

Subject: RE: Matzevah Foundation project selection?

Date: January 2, 2017 at 7:10:49 AM PST

To: "David Brostoff" <david.brostoff@earthlink.net>

Reply-To: <sdreece@matzevah.org>

Dear David,

Thank you for contacting me with regards to the Jewish cemetery of Trzcianne, Poland. I am very sorry for the delayed response; however, with the holidays, I hope that you understand.

We will not be able to consider your project for 2017; however, we will be glad to consider it as one of our projects for 2018. Concerning your question, we do have a process of assessing and selecting the Jewish cemetery restoration projects in which we will participate. Generally speaking, we look for the following criteria in selecting projects for consideration:

Projects that involve the community around the Jewish cemetery
Projects that allow us to partner with Jewish individuals, groups and/or organizations
Projects that involve education about the Shoah

When you have time, would you be so kind to provide some additional information about the cemetery? I have a few questions immediately following that will help us both understand the context of your request better and how we might work together moving forward.

1. Who is the owner of the cemetery? Is it the local government or does it belong to a local Jewish community or Jewish institution in Poland?

We don't know who, if anyone, owns the cemetery. To the extent we know, there is no local Jewish community remaining.

2. If it belongs to a Jewish community or a Jewish institution, to which one does it belong?

NA

3. Have you contacted any of the Jewish agencies in Poland that work with Jewish cemeteries? If so, who?

We haven't contacted anyone yet, during my visit we spoke briefly to JHI in Warsaw but didn't receive any advice about this cemetery.

4. How large is the cemetery? How many hectares or acres?

It's impossible to state with any accuracy. There is an area that is not farmed or developed that is probably 5-10 ha in extent. The borders on two sides have farms, a border on one side has a memorial to fallen Russian soldiers. It's hard to imagine that the entire area is taken up by the Jewish cemetery based on the size of the former Jewish community. At present, there are no signs as to what exists there. We confirmed the location given in historic maps and by flagging down local motorists, bicyclists, and chatting with townsfolk.

5. Are you in contact with anyone locally (in Poland), who might be interested in assisting you care for and restore the cemetery?

Not yet. We would be interested in suggestions for potential contacts.

6. Are there other people in your network (such as a descendant's group if there is one), who are interested or would like to be involved in this project?

We know of perhaps 100-200 descendants from ancestors in Trzcianne, but we haven't approached anyone yet. It is likely that at least a few beyond us would be involved.

7. Would it be possible to mobilize a group of descendants, friends or family, who would be able to join you in the work?

Yes, it's possible. Alas, the most likely participants are well into their 60's and beyond and their contributions might be more from an armchair perspective. It is likely that my wife and I would participate on site for the duration of the project. Perhaps a few more would. As we progress, I suspect both David and I would try to recruit various sorts of participation.

8. What would be your vision for the project? What would you like to see accomplished?

At a minimum, (1) the boundary of the cemetery should be delineated, and (2) some sort of sign should be erected. A moderate effort might include (1) a survey to see how many headstones remain [we found three badly deteriorated stones in a few hours of wandering], (2) vegetation [really a young forest] should be cleared, and (3) a rudimentary fence should be erected. The "Cadillac" plan would presumably be something like the film mentioned above, where as many headstones as possible be relocated, some idea as to the extent of burial be determined (ground penetrating radar for remains), contact with the local community and descendants be made and arrangements for the future be sorted out. Some of our relatives are musicians, journalists, and filmmakers, so perhaps working in tandem with local organizations, some formal documentation of the process could be celebrated.

9. What role would you like for The Matzevah Foundation to play in this project?

To start, any advice or template for a path forward would be very helpful and appreciated. As we have no local contacts in Poland, a list of potential contacts would be appreciated as well perhaps with some insights on how best to proceed. We did chat with several individuals (through an interpreter) in and around Trzcianne who were very helpful and understanding our situation. I see that engagement of the local community is essential for success and also part of the mission of the Matzevah Foundation.

We realize that Trzcianne is a very small issue in the broader picture, but anything that could be done toward honoring our ancestors and reconciliation with the past would be welcome.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Brostoff

If you have not done so already, I would ask you to visit our webpage at <http://www.matzevah.org> in order to learn more about us and our work. Our primary purpose in restoring Jewish cemeteries is to work towards ultimately reconciliation (a process that takes time). We do this primarily by bringing

Jewish and Christian (non-Jewish) volunteers together in a common project (mitzvah). We typically do the project during a week in the summer in Poland.

I appreciate your inquiry and look forward to what may emerge.

Respectfully,

Steven

-----Original Message-----

From: David Brostoff [<mailto:david.brostoff@earthlink.net>]

Sent: Sunday, December 25, 2016 21:31

To: Steven Reece - Matzevah Foundation <sdreece@matzevah.org>

Subject: Matzevah Foundation project selection?

Steven,

How does the Matzevah Foundation choose its projects?

I am interested in the restoration of the Jewish cemetery of Trzcianne, Poland.

David

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David Brostoff
Berkeley, Calif.
(510) 841-7382