

and the remaining part of the stone was sinking almost below the level of the surrounding grass. I was afraid it would vanish forever, so we dug it up and raised the level of the dirt. I was thrilled to find the Hebrew on the back! Her name was Freda Sadie Fisher, died 22 October 1930, daughter of Yale Chaim. I was successfully able to finally obtain her birth and death certificates now that I knew her date of death. If anyone can read this tombstone after unknown decades in the mud, I'd really appreciate it! ♦♦

Author Linda Ewall-Krocker has been interested in genealogy since the early 1980s, fortunately starting shortly before her dad passed away, so that she did get some information from him. His little funeral prayer books have also been a helpful resource for when family members were buried, though not where, since he knew that and didn't jot it down; the information died with him.

*Names and towns Linda is researching: **Fishelov (Fisher)** in Kachinovichi (suburb of Pinsk, Minsk Gubernia, Belarus); **Weiss** in Kamyanets Podilskyy, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine; **Goldman** in Somes, Russia (or Rava-Rus'ka in Lviv Oblast of western Ukraine); and **Greenberg** in Odessa, Ukraine. You can reach Linda at: cappuccinoholic@gmail.com*

SEROCK, POLAND CEMETERY PROJECT AND MY TRIP TO POLAND

by Jeffrey Barnett



Almost eight years ago, I wrote an article for *Chronicles* (Vol 25, No. 3/4 May 2007) detailing the condition of the Jewish cemetery in Serock, Poland and the project that several of us were undertaking. It started in the summer of the year 2000, when my son, Seth, visited our ancestral *shtetl* (town) during a post-college graduation trip to Europe. While the town of Serock, about 25 miles north of Warsaw, survived the ravages of World War II, no sign of the once thriving Jewish life remained. By chance, he met a local man who showed him the remnants of the Jewish cemetery. Located in a park, just outside the main area of the town, he found a mound with the fragmented remains of *matzevot* (tombstones.)



Eventually, my interest in genealogy began, and I found the wonderful people of JRI-Poland. When I contacted Stanley Diamond, Executive Director of JRI-Poland, about what my son had discovered, he put me in contact with Howard Orenstein, JRI-Poland's town leader for Serock. This started me on an eight-year path that culminated last August. Initially, Howard and I arranged to have JRI-Poland send a photographer to take detailed pictures of each fragment. Upon receipt of the photos, Howard added them to a town website he established. We found volunteers to provide translations of each stone and added that to the website. In 2007, Lee Seeman, a commissioner from the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (<http://www.heritageabroad.gov/Members/LeeRSeeman.aspx>) agreed to take on the task of organizing a memorial project on the site after being contacted by my cousin, then U.S. Congressman Gary Ackerman.

Over the next seven years, Lee spearheaded a fund raising project using newspaper articles and personal appeals to her philanthropic friends, while Gary and I contacted our extended family members for donations. While this phase was ongoing, Lee worked with Monika Krawczyk of The Foundation for the Preservation

of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) (<http://fodz.pl/?d=1&l=en>) whose stated mission is “to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland.” Monika and her staff worked with the current owners of the property, PKO Bank Polski, and Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich. Since the actual boundaries of the cemetery were not available, getting governmental approval to re-deed the land back to the Jewish authorities in Warsaw has not been possible. However, Monika was able to get the bank to acknowledge the claim and is continuing to work on a permanent transfer of ownership. Meanwhile, plans were drawn up for a memorial and dedication.

With the costs of the monument increasing as the years progressed, new life sprung when a young lady joined the venture. As part of her Bat Mitzvah project, Hannah Champness, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor from Serock, raised funds to help us get close to our goal. Using that impetus to “dip into the well” we were able to get additional funds from previous donors, as well as from Lee herself. Finally, in the spring of 2014 the project was on! Lee worked with Monika who arranged for the plans and construction of the actual memorial. A date for the dedication was set: August 27, 2014.

I took this opportunity to take my first trip to Poland. After a stopover in Holland and Belgium to “find my grandfather” (see my article in the last issue of *Chronicles*, Vol. 31-4, pp. 15-18) my wife and I, accompanied by my sister and her husband, traveled to Warsaw. Before visiting Serock, we spent several days touring Warsaw & Krakow. We visited the death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka. We also toured many of

the towns where my family lived between the late 1700s and WWII, including Ostrów Mazowiecka, Krasnosielc, Różan, Brok, and Pułtusk. While there is no Jewish presence in any of these small towns, our guide arranged to have a local resident walk with us and show us what remained or where certain buildings used to be. In Brok, where my great-grandfather was born, we walked through a forested area sprinkled with matzevot of the cemetery.

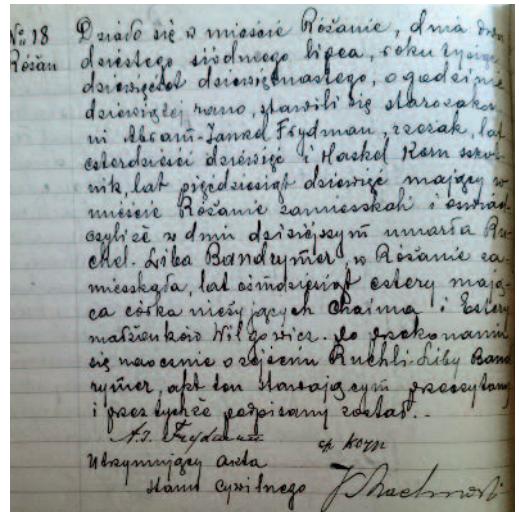
In Rozan, (58 miles north of Warsaw) where my father was born, we saw the monument in the cemetery erected by an organization of former

Różan Cemetery Monument

residents now living in Israel.

We also visited the local civil records office, (Urząd Stanu Cywilnego, abbreviated “USC”) in Rozan, where they maintain vital records less than 100 years old, in hopes they would have a record of my father’s birth. Unfortunately, they said it was not registered, but we were able to take a picture of my paternal great grandmother’s death record in 1919. Up to this point, I had no idea when or where she died. I only knew she was alive in Pultusk in 1918 living with her daughter-in-law. Another piece of the puzzle was found!

Our visit to Krasnosielc (56 miles north of Warsaw) was most warming. This is the town where my grandmother’s family lived. I am still a trustee of a *landsmanshaft* (society of former residents of a town) of Krasnosielc families and their descendants in New York. A local historian showed us the synagogue (the only one remaining in any of the villages we visited) This building is currently a supply warehouse. I had seen photos of the building before, but being there, the shul where my grandparents were married in 1911, was an extremely moving experience for all of us!



1919 Death Record for Ruchla Liba Bandrymer, the author's great grandmother



Former Krasnosielc Synagogue

We were then taken to a small area that was the former Jewish cemetery. This is where my paternal great grandfather was buried in 1898. There appeared to be nothing left as we walked the accessible part of the plot. I did unturn a large rock that appeared to have Hebrew engraving on it. We said *Kaddish* (hymn of praises to God, often referring to the Mourner's *Kaddish*, to show that despite the loss Jews still praise God) for my ancestor and the countless others whose graves have been lost. Upon our return to the States, I started discussions with Monika Krawczyk (FODZ) about protecting and erecting a small monument in this cemetery as a reminder. In the near future, our burial society will spearhead the cost.

On August 27th, we proceeded from our hotel in Warsaw to Serock. When we arrived, a local librarian gave us a short walkthrough of the town, showing us the local Polish public school which all children, including Jews, attended and received a secular education. The school existed in the same location when my father and his siblings lived in Serock. We assume they must have been educated there. The town square or market area, *rynek*, was alive that day with local vendors selling everything from fresh fruits and vegetables, jars of pickles, and

clothing to handcrafted wooden utensils. Not quite what it would have been looked like before the war, but it still gave us a good feeling participating in a Market Day as my ancestors once did!

Jeffrey Barnett at the Serock Cemetery Monument



Nazi German forces ordered that all traces of the cemetery be obliterated. The gravestones on the wall were piled up on a nearby site. This memorial pays tribute to a once vibrant Jewish community and honors those citizens of Serock who were murdered in the Holocaust solely because they were Jewish."

The dedication ceremony was organized, once again by Monika Krawczyk. Speakers included Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Serock Mayor Sylwester Sokolniki and other dignitaries from the province, a representative from PKO Bank, Hannah Champness, (see her very moving speech on youtube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5O1NJi9Z-w>),

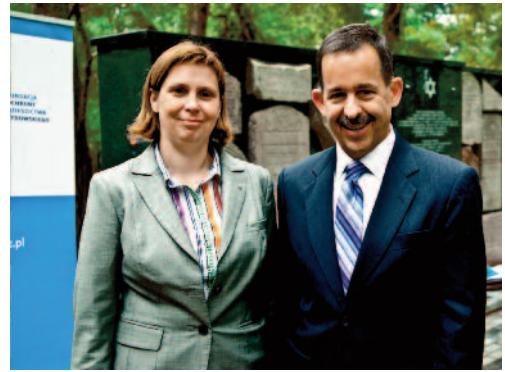
Attending the dedication ceremony from the USA:
Helen Alpert, Hannah Champness, Seymour Weiss (my brother-in-law), Ambassador Mull, Gloria Weiss (my sister), myself, Arlene Barnett (my wife) and Lee Seeman.

We then proceeded to the dedication ceremony on the grounds of the Jewish cemetery. This was the first time I saw the monument that we worked on for over seven years! To say we were impressed would be an understatement. It was a beautifully designed marble wall with pieces of the *matzevot* artistically mounted and centered by an inscription in Polish and English: "This area comprises the Jewish cemetery of Serock. Jews were buried here from the 18th century until 1939 when



Gloria Weiss who brought a message from Congressman Ackerman, and special guest speaker, U.S. Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull. It was an extremely moving and teary-eyed ceremony. It was eight years in the making but well worth the time and effort. Our trip to Poland, culminating on this day, was a once in a lifetime event! ♦

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Jeffrey Barnett started his genealogy hobby in 2002. His family roots are all from Poland; he is researching family names: Bandrymer, Bulman, Kraska, Solarz, Zilberberg, Grossman and Grunzspan. Contact Jeffrey at: jeffreyjbarnett@aol.com



Monika Krawczyk and U.S.
Ambassador Stephen Mull

RABBINICAL ROYALTY IN THE FAMILY: THE STORY OF MY RENOWNED GREAT GREAT GRANDFATHER, NAFTALI REITER

by Joan Pollak



When I was growing up, my mother told me about her great grandfather on her mother's side, the famous Naftali Reiter, the "head rabbi" of New York City. I was not familiar with too many rabbis other than the one from my own suburban Reform synagogue, so Rabbi Reiter sounded very exotic to me. Twenty years ago I became immersed in Jewish genealogy, and after successfully researching my dad's ancestors from Germany and Czechoslovakia, who immigrated to the U.S. in the 19th century and immersed themselves in secular business life while remaining religiously observant, I set about to learn more about the life of this exalted religious ancestor.

My mom provided me with the names of the Reiter cousins she remembered, and with the help of internet search engines I began to contact first, second, and third cousins to learn more about Rabbi Reiter and to put together a more complete family tree. I also visited archives and searched for immigration and death records. The cousins that I spoke with were very aware of their renowned rabbinic ancestor, and some families were devoted to saving articles and artifacts related to him. One of my mom's cousins had saved several obituaries and articles that were published after his death, which she was happy to pass along, and also provided a photo of him that appeared in a book about great rabbis from the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Other cousins provided additional photos of Naftali, his wife Leah, and their children, and pointed the way to additional published articles referencing the rabbi's history, which were also located in the JTS libraries. I was fortunate that one of my newfound cousins, Jay, willingly translated the articles for me. Another cousin passed on a good amount of oral history and personal points of view about the Reiter family history and relationships.

I learned that Naftali Reiter was born to Moses and Chaja Perl Reiter in 1846 in Malcov, Hungary, a settlement outside the city of Bardejov which is now located in modern day Slovakia. The eldest of seven children, he demonstrated his talent for Torah study at an early age and was mentored by renowned rabbis in Bardejov and elsewhere in Europe. His specialty was Torah law as it applied to marriage and divorce, and he was ordained at the age of eighteen in Bardejov.



Rabbi Naftali Reiter