

# So You Want to Come to the IAJGS 2018 Warsaw Conference? Great! Now What?

by Robinn Magid

[See note at the start of "As I See It." Ed.]

Warsaw, Poland, home of the largest pre-Holocaust Jewish population will be the location of the 38th annual conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS). (Eighty percent of the Jews alive in the world today have roots in Poland.) The conference will be held from Sunday, August 5 through Friday, August 10, 2018. The official hotel for this first international Jewish genealogy conference to be held in Central or Eastern Europe is the Hilton Warsaw Hotel on Grzybowska Street. English is the official language of the conference. This article describes the Warsaw Conference in a way that will help attendees plan their trip, understand

---

*This article describes the Warsaw Conference in a way that will help attendees plan their trip, understand the daily conference format/timeline and prepare now to gain the most from this historic genealogy event.*

---

the daily conference format/timeline and prepare now to gain the most from this historic genealogy event.

Although based in Poland, the conference will not be exclusively "about" Poland. At this writing, most proposed lectures appear to be about the methodology of Jewish genealogy, which is applicable to research in any country or geographical region, though most proposals appear to use Poland, including both its current and former territories, for working examples. Lands that once were part of Poland include Belarus, Galicia, Lithuania, Prussia and Ukraine. The program committee is receiving proposals to speak about all of these places, as well as Germany, Romania, Russia and the Sephardic world. All of Eastern Europe, and the rich Ashkenazi civilization Jews developed there, is of central interest to the majority of potential conference attendees, but our aim is to provide a balanced schedule that will benefit all Jewish genealogists—with or without Polish-Jewish ancestry.

## Topic Areas

As this article goes to press, we are still accepting lecture and panel proposals so we do not yet have a complete conference schedule to present. We can, however, describe some general areas of focus that reflect themes among proposals currently in hand. These areas include:

- Expertise, resources and repositories in Eastern Europe for Jewish genealogical research
- Changing borders, borderlands and migration-tracking challenges for the genealogist
- Memory, presence and place; dialogue and education about the traces of a Jewish past where no active Jewish community exists today
- Project methodology, sharing successes and personal experiences in Jewish genealogy
- The unique contribution of women in the Eastern European Jewish experience and culture
- The Shoah: Reclaiming the names of the lost and honoring those who saved lives

The conference planning committee also has received inquiries about travel considerations. Many attendees will use the IAJGS Warsaw Conference as a springboard for visits to ancestral hometowns in Poland and nearby countries. We anticipate that the typical attendee will be accompanied by more family members than is usual at these annual conferences. There also may be a number of *landsleit* (people from the same ancestral town) for many places of interest. The pre- and post-conference opportunities make planning more complicated than usual. Not only will attendees have personal research agendas but they will need to accommodate the interests of accompanying family members who will compete for time and attention. With these factors in mind, the committee is planning a conference that includes "family time" by adjusting the schedule to start lectures later, allow a longer lunchtime and end the evening early to allow the genealogist to spend time with family members while not missing key components of the conference.

We have received travel-related questions asking everything from what is the currency in Poland (the Polish zloty) to how to plan a trip that minimizes vacation days from work while accommodating a shtetl visit. In addition to reading articles such as this one, we recommend that readers subscribe to the "2018 IAJGS Warsaw Conference" Facebook group and/or join the "Warsaw Discussion" Listserv, both reachable from the conference website IAJGS2018.org.

Committee members also are receiving numerous questions about what research will be possible to do at or near the conference as well as inquiries involving research that might be accomplished in advance of the trip. In this regard, see "Visiting Poland: Everything You Need to Know Before Coming to Your Ancestral Town" by Witold Wrzosinski in the Fall 2017 issue of AVOTAYNU. Wrzosinski's tips are helpful, sensitive and insightful. Additional ques-

tions may be asked privately at [info@iajgs2018.org](mailto:info@iajgs2018.org).

Planning a conference is a dynamic process. This article represents the situation now, but we still are early in the planning process, schedules are merely outlines and are subject to change.

### Conference Partners

Conference co-hosts and partners are POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw. The Polish State Archives (PSA) also is cooperating closely. As part of its participation in the Warsaw Conference, PSA will bring some interesting archival holdings to share close-up and hands-on. Each partner organization holds significant private collections of interest to any genealogist, in addition to being of research value to those with roots in Poland. Authorities from all three institutions will speak at the conference and access to their special holdings will be made available as part of the “Resource Village” described below. Some of the materials are physical books; others are databases for which access is not offered online. The traditional IAJGS Resource Room will become a part of the Resource Village, a central feature of this conference.

The POLIN Museum and the Jewish Historical Institute both have permanent exhibitions with modern interactive formats. Visits to each institution are strongly recommended for conference attendees as well as their families. Detailed special arrangements for the conference will be described in the future, but here is a general outline.

POLIN Museum of the History of the Jews has a legendary Core Exhibition described on its website, [www.polin.pl/en](http://www.polin.pl/en). In addition to the Core Exhibition, a temporary exhibit, “Estranged. March ‘68 and its Aftermath” is scheduled to be held during the conference. POLIN Museum offers access to a beautiful map of Jewish Warsaw at [www.polin.pl/sites/default/files/mapa\\_eng\\_ed4.pdf](http://www.polin.pl/sites/default/files/mapa_eng_ed4.pdf). The Museum’s Resource Room is available to the general public and specialists from the Resource Room will be available for consultations in the conference’s Resource Village.

In addition to an active genealogy department, which also is accessible to the visiting public, the Emanuel Rin-



*Warsaw Hilton*

gelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw ([www.jhi.pl/en](http://www.jhi.pl/en)) has created a permanent exhibit on the famed Emanuel Ringelblum Archives. The archives was a project created in the Warsaw ghetto by a group of Jews known as Oneg Szabat that met secretly on Shabbat to record what they were experiencing during the war. Attendees at the IAJGS 2014 Salt Lake City conference may recall a presentation there entitled “Time Capsule in a Milk Can,” about this archival material, recalling the boxes, including milk cans, that were recovered in the rubble after the war documenting the people and their daily life in the hell of the Warsaw ghetto.

Reservations should be made in advance for the Oneg Szabat Permanent Exhibit, which has a room capacity of only 35 people. Visit their website at [www.jhi.pl/en](http://www.jhi.pl/en). To buy tickets for the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute’s Permanent Exhibit

and to view the August calendar, access [https://tickets.jhi.pl/rezerwacja/terminy.html?grupa=&nr\\_miesiaca=2018-08](https://tickets.jhi.pl/rezerwacja/terminy.html?grupa=&nr_miesiaca=2018-08).

In addition to the new Ringelblum exhibit, a favorite feature of the Jewish Historical Institute is its outstanding bookstore and cafe. The bookstore is worth a specific visit as it offers many books of value for the Jewish genealogist. Be sure to save suitcase room for pearls found there and elsewhere.

The Polish State Archives is lending its support for the conference in several key ways including encouraging its archivists to attend the conference, present lectures and bring materials of interest to Jewish genealogists. Although they are not designated as “partners,” the conference anticipates hosting additional archivists and librarians from several other countries near Poland. Some plan to participate in panel discussions about international access and digitalization of their holdings. Others will appear as speakers on behalf of the various Jewish genealogy special interest groups (SIGS) and will be announced along with the final conference schedule.

### Conference Hotel Information

The Hilton Warsaw hotel offers complete convention

facilities that will allow us to hold all major conference events under one roof. This will optimize access to the conference for people of all ages, physical conditions and levels of religious observance. The Hilton is located in a developing part of the city with interesting restaurants and museums nearby. Kosher restaurants and the Nozyk Synagogue are a (vigorous) walking distance from the hotel. Taxis, Uber cars and light rail trams run nearby. Hotel rooms in Poland typically include breakfast/brunch and the Hilton will feature an extensive breakfast buffet to accommodate most diets. A small grocery store and several restaurants are conveniently located next door to the Hilton.

Most of Warsaw, including the major museums, Palace of Culture, and picturesque Old Town (Stare Miasto) all are within a close or vigorous walking distance for most age groups. It took me 12 minutes to walk to the Palace of Culture, about 20 minutes to the synagogue, and 29 minutes to POLIN Museum. Last year, I walked to the Okapowa Street Jewish Cemetery in about 10 minutes, then walked on to the POLIN Museum from there. It is manageable for people who walk for exercise. The spectacular Warsaw Uprising 1944 Museum is one short block away.

The films at the Warsaw Uprising Museum are quite well done, especially the 3-D film, which is “fly by” of the destruction done to the city during the war. This poignant museum provides additional context for the Jewish genealogist trying to understand the Polish experience of World War II, as well as for any tourist who would like to understand why Warsaw looks as it does today. The devastation and eventual recovery are dramatic, and the museum tells the story well.

In addition to reserving the 200 standard rooms in the Hilton Warsaw, we have reserved blocks of 50 rooms at each of the following hotels: Westin Hotel, Radisson Blu, and the Warsaw Marriott. The Marriott is the farthest from the Hilton but is near the Nozyk Synagogue. The Westin and the Radisson Blu are on Grzybowska Street about three blocks from the Hilton and closer to the Nozyk Synagogue and kosher restaurants.

### **Welcome to Warsaw; Sunday, August 5**

The conference begins on Sunday, August 5, 2018, with a “Welcome to Warsaw Day.” We will offer a small number of introductory lectures in the early morning, including a short orientation to the conference cell phone app. After that, a series of walking tours for an additional fee are available before the heat of the day. They have been planned by Taube Jewish Heritage Tours. Probable destinations include the Warsaw ghetto landmarks and the Okapowa Street Jewish cemetery, which is one of the few intact Jewish cemeteries in Poland with interesting graves to visit both in terms of the people buried there and as outstanding examples of Jewish cemetery art.

Sunday also will be a good day to visit the POLIN Museum. Consider purchasing an annual pass as one can easily spend more than one day there. We expect to offer special

passes through the conference registration system as the conference approaches. Look for details on the conference website, [www.iajgs2018.org](http://www.iajgs2018.org).

From 2–4 p.m. Sunday, registered conference attendees can participate in an extended version of the traditional IAJGS ShareFair in the ballroom of the conference hotel. Major Jewish genealogy special interest groups (SIGs), archivists, librarians, professional researchers and vendors are invited to participate in this event, which serves as an introduction to the major groups and themes appearing at the conference in a festive trade show atmosphere.

A conference hors d’heuvres reception will be held from 4 p.m. until approximately 6 p.m. at which time the opening plenary session, including welcoming speeches and a short theatrical presentation, will take place. Details to follow.

### **Typical Weekday Format**

Each weekday (except Friday) of the conference will include at least six presentation time slots, beginning at 8:30 a.m. We plan to complete each day about 4 p.m. with a light refreshments reception followed immediately by an evening program from about 6 to 8 p.m. The goal is to allow attendees to finish for the day in time to have dinner or an evening out with their travel companions.

In Poland, it is customary to eat dinner late (8 to 10 p.m.), and since Warsaw is located fairly far north, the sun will set rather late in August. In addition to facilitating experiencing the Warsaw nightlife, conference organizers hope to make it simpler for those who pray *mincha/ma'ariv* to attend the evening program and then gather for prayer afterwards, so they will not miss the main end-of-day event or lecture.

On Thursday, August 9, all sessions will end by 5 p.m. in order to hold the traditional IAJGS closing banquet in the Hilton ballroom. Dinner tickets to the banquet are sold separately and we expect there will be dinner entertainment, probably with an invited speaker. Banquet tickets will be available through the conference registration system. Dinners will include a variety of choices and may be ordered as kosher or vegetarian. Sit-down meat meals catered by the Hilton chef, although not kosher, will be “kosher style.” That is, they will not mix meat and milk, and will avoid any pork or shellfish products. A Glatt kosher caterer will be engaged to provide kosher options throughout the conference. Anyone interested in sponsoring a reception or subsidizing kosher options at our conference should contact the organizers at [info@iajgs2018.org](mailto:info@iajgs2018.org).

Depending upon the number of lectures accepted by the program committee, Friday, August 10 may include scheduled talks until about noon. Because Shabbat comes late this time of year, Friday afternoon will be a good time to visit museums and other local sites.

Conference attendees are invited to spend Shabbat with the local Jewish community. In addition to meals being arranged at the local synagogues, reservations may be made in advance for at least one of the kosher restaurants. An authentic Shabbat experience in Warsaw in one of several

settings is possible if synagogues are given a little advanced notice. With sufficient interest, the conference also can arrange for Friday night dinners at the conference hotel. These plans will develop as the conference approaches. How to reach the synagogues or hotel for advanced reservations and payment will be announced on the conference website.

### Resource Village

The central feature of the conference facilities will be a Resource Village, centrally located in the Grand Ballroom of the conference hotel. The Resource Village will include vendor exhibits, resource room space, translators, mentors, and tables where conference attendees can speak with archivists, experts and genealogy volunteers on topics of interest.

Co-hosts, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish History Institute of Warsaw, each will bring computers to share their proprietary databases with conference attendees. Other organizations also have compiled databases that they do not post on the Internet. Most are collections of 20th century lists such as Holocaust survivor cards in the collection at the Jewish Historical Institute or passport applications indexed by the POLIN Museum. The Resource Village is designed to provide a comfortable setting to search these databases with assistance from the personnel that maintain them.

Some organizations and vendors will exhibit from Sunday afternoon through Wednesday at 5 p.m. Other exhibitors, especially towns and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around Poland, will be encouraged to choose a specific day and time to participate by hosting a table in the Resource Village if they cannot participate in the full schedule. As a result, each day of the conference will feature unique presentations; attendees should not plan to miss any day of our conference. The Resource Village promises to be an innovative IAJGS conference experience with the ability to perform research at the conference and to engage with a diverse group of experts all under one roof.

### New Conference Features

In addition to the Resource Village, the Warsaw Conference will feature two additional, new programming features.

• **Telling Your Story.** Attendees are encouraged to present their town or family stories in a short format called “Telling Your Story.” These will be offered at 30-minute intervals and are intended to allow the retelling of a personal or geographically limited story to a small audience. It may appeal to groups who are about to visit, or who have just visited, their ancestral shtetl and wish to share their experiences with similarly interested genealogists.

• **Sharing Your Project.** Conference attendees also are encouraged to share project ideas, personal methodology and successes in a 30-minute format for the benefit of a more specialized audience than befits a 60-minute lecture in a large lecture hall. The “Share Your Project” format will experiment with allowing a genealogist to present for interested parties a project or idea in a shorter time and in a small room setting.

### Scheduling Your Time

Those planning to attend the conference often ask how to schedule their time before and after the conference. A favorite question is “What will I miss if I don’t come to one day of the conference?” Unfortunately, no answer exists now. At this point in the planning, we can make only general comments and they are subject to change. Our basic recommendation is to plan excursions to archives, museums and libraries before or after our conference and to realize that research should be done in advance of visiting an archive to maximize and respect an archivist’s time and patience. The conference has contracted with Taube Jewish Heritage Tours to plan group and customized tours outside the Warsaw area both before and after the conference. Taube Tours can be reached at [iajgs2018@taubejewishheritagetours.com](mailto:iajgs2018@taubejewishheritagetours.com).

The conference schedule outline includes:

- Sunday: “Welcome to Warsaw,” early lectures, walking tours, ShareFair from 2–4 p.m., followed by a reception and the opening plenary session
- Monday: General conference lectures including the Pamela Weisberg Memorial Lecture sponsored by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles in the 5–8 p.m. time slot
- Tuesday: General conference lectures including Memory, Preserving the Jewish Past in Europe and the Relationship between Jews and non-Jews
- Wednesday: The focus will include Lithuania and other countries bordering Poland
- Thursday: General conference lectures culminating in the annual banquet and awards ceremony
- Friday: Will include lectures and meetings early in the day

The conference is occurring during a year of significant commemorative milestones in Poland, the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independent Poland in 1918 following 123 years of Poland’s absence from the world map, the 75th anniversary of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the 50th anniversary of “March 1968,” a political crisis that resulted in the final wave of Jewish emigration from Poland amidst significant anti-Semitism, including employment firings and expulsion from the country. All these events will figure prominently in the conference agenda.



## Summary

The IAJGS Warsaw Conference promises to be a memorable and historic event in the history of Jewish genealogy conferences. Though not exclusively about Poland, Ashkenazic culture and history is sure to feature prominently, considering the Warsaw venue. The conference is being planned to make it comfortable for Jewish genealogists to travel with families and friends, attend the conference and still have free time to spend with companions.

Accommodations and conference plans make this conference easily accessible to Jewish genealogists of all ages, abilities, and levels of religious observance. Ideas and programs still are being formulated and readers are encouraged to visit the conference website which is located at [iajgs2018.org](http://iajgs2018.org), for more information, including how to join the closed Facebook group or conference discussion listserv. Write to us at [info@iajgs2018.org](mailto:info@iajgs2018.org) for further assistance.

*Robinn Magid is the lead co-chair of the IAJGS 2018 Warsaw Conference. She is a board member of JRI-Poland and a frequent speaker at IAJGS annual conferences. Magid was recently awarded a medal from the mayor of Lublin, Poland, for inspiring the cultural identity of her family's ancestral city through her genealogy work. She lives in Berkeley, California.*

## Have you used the AVOTAYNU Consolidated Jewish Surname Index?

**More than 4,000 people use it weekly!**

It lists 700,000 surnames found in 42 different Jewish genealogical databases that cumulatively have more than 7.3 million entries. You can find CJSI at:

<http://www.avotaynu.com/csi/csi-home.htm>

## A DICTIONARY OF JEWISH SURNAMES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION: VOLUME 1: MAGHREB, GIBRALTAR, AND MALTA BY ALEXANDER BEIDER

For more than 30 years, Dr. Alexander Beider focused on the origin and evolution of Ashkenazic names and the vernacular language of Eastern Europe. He has now drawn his attention to surnames of the Mediterranean region—mostly Sephardic—and has published the first volume of his research: *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Mediterranean Region, Volume 1: Maghreb, Gibraltar and Malta*.

The book identifies nearly 2,000 independent root surnames from which more than 10,000 variant surnames are derived. A typical entry contains three sections: Main, Origin and Variants.

- The Main section identifies the surname and spelling variants (in both Latin and Hebrew characters), where in the region it was used, earliest references, and bibliographic source of the information. There are nearly 300 sources from which Dr. Beider draws his conclusions.
- The Origin section includes an identification of bearers of the name as having a single common ancestor (monogenetic) or multiple independent ancestors (polygenetic). This is followed by the etymology—the linguistic origin of the name.
- Finally, the Variant section shows the main variants of the name that exist in the region

The introductory portion describes the history of surnames in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya), Gibraltar, and Malta making a particular focus on the Jewish migrations to these regions from other Mediterranean countries as well as migrations internal to the area covered.

By the comprehensiveness of the sample of surnames collected and the rigor of their linguistic and historical analysis (similar to that found in previous works by Dr. Beider), this study dwarfs all previous publications dealing with the Jewish surnames from Maghreb.

8½" x 11" 728 pp. hardcover \$89.00 + shipping

**To order:** On the Internet at <http://avotaynu.com/books/Maghreb.html>  
Or call 1-800-AVOTAYNU (1-800-286-8296)

A complete list of names and sample dictionary entry (Abecassis) is at the site

