

A Time to Gather Discussion Guide/Bibliography

A Time to Gather Stones Together *Discussion Guide and Bibliography*

In July 1992, two French and 22 American Jews participated in a tour group to Eastern Poland and Western Ukraine, to an area which was formerly known as Galicia. Some came to search for their family histories, others to revisit towns and cities of origin. All of the tour participants found the reality and symbolism of stones, in the remains of synagogues and cemeteries. This brought to mind for many the words in Ecclesiastes, there is "...a time for sadness and a time for joy, ...and a time to gather stones together."

In his social biography, Roots, Alex Haley gives us the insight and encouragement to understand the personal and cultural importance of having a past from which to understand the present. *A Time to Gather Stones Together* provides an opportunity to observe genealogists search for their family histories and in the process, identify with forgotten or unknown aspects of their European Jewish heritage.

The program offers genealogists an understanding of the extensive resources currently available in Poland and Ukraine for research into pre-war family histories. Viewers will appreciate the scenes of the archives, the appearance of available records, and the quality of interest evidenced by the archival officials in the visit of this group. The program also emphasizes the importance of utilizing professional genealogical guidance in accessing these resources.

A Time to Gather Stones Together visits a geographic area once bordered in the East by the Pale of Settlement -- imposed by the Russian Empress Catherine the Great in 1795 -- and in the West by Prussia and Hungary. This area, which at the turn of the 18th century was approximately 600 miles wide and 600 miles from North to South, is now principally contained within Eastern Poland, and Western Ukraine. Between 1500 and 1880, it held the largest contiguous Jewish population in the world. In 1850, an estimated 3 million Jews lived in this area. While some sought and found acceptance within the dominant Polish society, most remained within the language and cultural separation of their own communities.

In the 50 years prior to 1939, a few thousand Jews from Galicia emigrated to Palestine while nearly two million left for America. By the outbreak of World War II, there were nearly four million Jews still living in this area. Among those who remained some were too poor to emigrate, some were fearful of the unknown, others believed in their dreams for a secular Polish nation in which they would participate as Polish citizens, while others were unable to emigrate for lack of the sponsors or necessary visas. Less than half a million survived the following years of the Holocaust and the subsequent 40 years of Soviet repression. Genealogists tell us that eighty percent of America's Jewish population today can trace at least one ancestor to this area.

Viewers interested in genealogy will appreciate the procedural issues associated with searching for information in official archives and the assistance of city officials and local historians. They will learn, as well, of the equally important informal assistance which can be extended by local community representatives.

While viewing this program, it is important to recognize and differentiate the specific interests of genealogists on this tour from those of Holocaust survivors. The latter were more interested in returning to see their towns of origin, or the places from which they had fled or escaped.

For discussion purposes, viewers may wish to consider the following questions:

- In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the destruction of most of Europe's Jewish population, should we still be interested in learning about and understanding over 1,000 years of European Jewish history?
- In those communities where ruins of synagogues and cemeteries remains as evidence of an earlier Jewish presence but where there is no current Jewish life, should these ruins be repaired, and if so, by whom, and why?
- In relation to their cultural and religious heritage, what can the remaining Jews look forward to as citizens of either Poland and Ukraine?
- Should these Jews be encouraged to emigrate, and if so, to where?
- Before considering a visit to state and local archives in Poland and Ukraine for genealogical research, what preliminary steps should be taken?

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ARCHIVES and LIBRARIES

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2 Thornton Road,
Waltham, MA 02154

Request guide to its genealogical sources (on Brandeis University campus).

FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY, 35 North West Temple Street,
Salt Lake City, UT 84150

Has birth, marriage, and death records of many European Jewish communities before 1900 (notably Poland, Germany and Hungary) on microfilm, indexed by present town name. Microfilm can be brought by request and payment of small fee to your nearest Mormon Library.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, Washington, D.C. 20540

See: Local History & Genealogy, Hebraic Division, Map Division, European Division. Collections include telephone books (worldwide), Yizkor books, extensive maps and gazetteers.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES, Washington, D.C. 20408
(regional branches throughout the United States)

Census for the U.S., 1870-1910 (some indexed); index to some ship passenger lists, passport applications, military records, court records, maps. Send for free orientation packet.

YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH, 1048 Fifth Avenue,
New York, 10028

Records of Jews in Yiddish-speaking lands/Eastern Europe, Yizkor books, landsmanshaftn records, rabbinic encyclopedias, and others.

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*Special recognition is given to Miriam Weiner, C.G. and to
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