



## **THE RECLAMATION OF MEMORY: U.S. DONORS HELP REVIVE AND CELEBRATE JEWISH CULTURE IN POLAND**

**IN THE EARLY 1930S, POLAND WAS HOME TO THE LARGEST JEWISH COMMUNITY IN EUROPE, AND THE COUNTRY WAS AT THE CENTER OF JEWISH CULTURE. THAT WAS BEFORE WORLD WAR II, DURING WHICH ROUGHLY 90 PERCENT OF POLISH JEWS WERE KILLED BY THE NAZI REGIME. SEVENTY-SIX YEARS LATER, SEVERAL NONPROFIT INSTITUTIONS ARE WORKING HARD TO DOCUMENT THE COUNTRY'S LONG JEWISH HISTORY, TO CELEBRATE ITS RICH JEWISH CULTURE, AND TO CONNECT THE JEWISH DIASPORA WITH THEIR POLISH ROOTS.**

Since the middle of the 10th century, Poland provided a haven for Jews fleeing religious persecution elsewhere. By the early 20th century, the country was home to three million Jews - the largest Jewish community in Europe. But the Second World War proved catastrophic. Nearly 90 percent of Polish Jews were killed during

the Holocaust. Among the survivors, many had fled to neighboring countries, and during the decades that followed, quite a few started a new life in the United States or Israel. During the Communist period, more Jews left the country. Much of Poland's Jewish life, but not quite all, went quiet.

Today, 76 years after the end of the war, only an estimated 21,000 to 30,000 Jews remain in the country. But Poland's Jewish community is resurging, and the community's culture is coming back to life, thanks to the efforts of philanthropists like Tad Taube.

Born in Krakow in 1931, Taube immigrated to the United States in the spring of 1939, just months before the outbreak of World War II. He studied at Stanford University, served as an officer in the U.S. Air Force, and became a successful businessman.

"The main reason we support the Jewish community and its heritage in Poland is that it is part of our cultural legacy," explains Taube. "In the United States, an estimated 75 percent of all Jewish people trace their history back to Poland. Poland is where it all began, starting in medieval times."

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**HELISE LIEBERMAN**

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#### **DOCUMENTING POLAND'S JEWISH HISTORY**

Based in San Francisco, Taube Philanthropies established the Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland to support the cultural and communal revitalization of Jewish life there, including through partnerships with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Galicia Jewish Museum, the Jewish Community Centers in Krakow and Warsaw, the Taube Community Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland, and the

Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow - the largest event celebrating traditional and modern Jewish culture in the world.

The Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland enriches Jewish life in Poland and connects Jewish people from around the world with their Eastern and Central European heritage.

The Center organizes heritage study tours, and develops educational programs and resource materials for use in schools, universities and museums in Poland and internationally. It provides a broad and interactive educational experience, enabling participants not only to visit the country's Jewish sites of memory and today's community, but also to meet individuals involved in relevant heritage preservation and educational programs, and to partake in contemporary Jewish life.

One of the Taube Center's partner museums is the Galicia Jewish Museum in Krakow, which was founded in 2004 by British scholar John Webber and British photographer-journalist Chris Schwarz. Together, the two worked on the publication of a book documenting the history of Jewry in the country, an idea which later evolved to become an interactive contemporary exhibition spotlighting modern day Jewish life, and ultimately gave birth to the institution to house it - The Galicia Jewish Museum.

"Poland has been a center of the Jewish world for centuries. Then it became the center of Jewish death, with most of the Holocaust victims killed here," says Jakub Nowakowski, the director of the Galicia Jewish Museum. As an act of self-preservation, he explains, talk of Jewish life was removed from public discourse for nearly 60 years after the war.



*Interior of Tempel Synagogue in Kazimierz, an old Jewish district in Krakow, Poland.*

“That’s why the story of Poland and its Jewish people is so compelling. Reclamation of memory and the past, and the rekindling of Jewish identity are the best examples of resilience,” says Helise Lieberman, executive director of the Taube Center.

Then, a global pandemic threatened to slow down that reclamation of identity ...

### **SHIFTING TO VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING**

As it did to many other cultural institutions across the globe, the coronavirus pandemic dealt a blow to the work of the Galicia Jewish Museum and the Taube Center, but both are pivoting to continue their missions.

Pre-pandemic, the Galicia Jewish Museum welcomed more than 70,000 visitors a year, and much of its revenue was generated through ticket sales for exhibitions, guided tours and space rentals. The

museum has now pivoted to online programming. To fill the revenue gap, it relies on outside partners like Taube Philanthropies, which has supported the museum since its start, to keep the museum’s core operational side running.

“Sponsors are happy to cover the cost of exhibitions or other projects that you can see. But those initiatives would not be possible without our operational team - we need to cover salaries, pay the bills and other running costs,” Nowakowski says.

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**JAKUB NOWAKOWSKI**

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Like the museum, the Taube Center has shifted to virtual programming, tapping into its international network of scholars and cultural icons in its monthly webinar series. The Center now receives donations from its digital attendees and counts on grants, in addition to the generosity of individual donors who connect with its core mission of supporting and enriching Jewish life in Poland.

The Taube Center previously released Field Guides to Jewish Warsaw, Jewish Krakow and Jewish Lodz. In 2020, the Center was awarded a grant from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to expand and translate its premium publication highlighting a thousand years of Jewish life in Poland, published in Polish, English, German, and Hebrew.

“All of these resources are not only beneficial for educators, guides, and our visitors coming from abroad,



*A stage performance during the Jewish Culture Festival in Krakow.*

but also for our fellow Poles. We all have a lot to learn from our shared narrative," says Lieberman.

#### **U.S. DONORS SUPPORT THE JEWISH REVIVAL**

Support from donors is necessary to sustain the Jewish revival in Poland, and that includes donors based in the United States. When the Galicia Jewish Museum looked for a fiscal sponsor a few years ago, to receive tax-deductible donations in the United States on its behalf, it found KBFUS. "Without our partnership with KBFUS, it would be much more complicated for us to accept contributions from U.S. donors," Nowakowski says.

Similarly, when the Taube Center decided to further diversify its sources of funding, it also reached out to KBFUS, at the recommendation of the Galicia Jewish Museum. From the onset, Lieberman says she was taken with "the ease of the process, and the organization's warmth and expertise."

"We're delighted that the donations come in so quickly," she says, "and when they do, KBFUS is very helpful in making clear how we should thank our donors." She adds that it feels like KBFUS really wants the Taube Center to succeed in its fundraising efforts, so that it can fulfill its mission.

Part of that mission involves connecting with Jews across the globe, to inform them about the Center's efforts to revive and celebrate the culture of Polish Jews - which long pre-dates the horrors of World War II.

"Many people come to Poland to visit the six death camps that were established by the Nazi occupiers. The Taube Center's approach, which recently changed its name to the Taube Center for Jewish Life & Learning, is to enhance an understanding of the history of Polish Jews, its traumas, contributions, and its resilience," Lieberman says.

[centrumtaubego.org.pl](http://centrumtaubego.org.pl)

[galiciajewishmuseum.org/en](http://galiciajewishmuseum.org/en)

[jewishfestival.pl/en/](http://jewishfestival.pl/en/)

[polin.pl/en](http://polin.pl/en)

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