

Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art & Monuments

News, articles and information about Jewish art, architecture, and historic sites. This blog includes material to be posted on the website of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments (www.isjm.org).

MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2015

Lithuania: First Meeting of the Commission for the Issues Concerning the Jewish History and Culture



Pakruojis, Lithuania. Wooden Synagogue. The municipality which will restore the synagogue which was [damaged by fire in 2009](#) for use as a library. Support for the project comes from the European Economic Area and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.

Lithuania: First Meeting of the Commission for the Issues Concerning the Jewish History and Culture

by Samuel D. Gruber

Last month a new international Commission for the Issues Concerning the Jewish History and Culture, had its first meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania. This was an event that many advocates and activists for the protection and preservation of Jewish cultural heritage in Lithuania hope will help quicken erratic and often slow government and NGO commitment to and participation in programs and projects to document, protect, and present Jewish cemeteries, Holocaust related sites, and former synagogues.

Full disclosure: I've been named a member of the Commission and my name was listed in the Lithuanian legislation that established the Commission last January. The position is unpaid, and for now I will be participating based on my experience and my well-known priorities, and representing the International Survey of Jewish Monuments. For personal reasons, however, I was unable to travel to Vilnius for the inaugural meeting.

According to information provided by the Lithuanian government when the legislation passed, the Commission is:



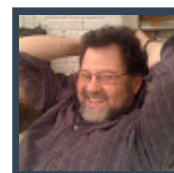
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Welcome

This blog provides news and opinion articles about Jewish art, architecture and historic sites - especially those where something new is happening. Developed in connection with news gathering for the International Survey of Jewish Monuments website (www.isjm.org), this blog highlights some of the most interesting Jewish sites around the world, and the most pressing issues affecting them.

About Me



[Samuel Gruber](#)



Samuel D. Gruber
I am a cultural heritage consultant involved in a wide variety of documentation, research, preservation, planning, publication, exhibition and education projects in America and abroad. I was trained as a medievalist, architectural historian and archaeologist, but for 25 years my special expertise has developed in Jewish art, architecture and historic sites. My various blogs about Jewish Art and

"headed by Alminas Mačiulis, Chancellor of the Government, [and] will examine issues related to the Lithuanian Jewish cultural and historical heritage, preservation of the Jewish cemetery and Jewish mass graves in Lithuania, other issues of Lithuanian Jewish culture and history and put forward proposals to the Government as regards the implementation of the tasks assigned. The Commission will involve not only Lithuanian public institutions and organizations, but also American and international Jewish organizations, as well as Lithuanian Jews (Litvak) community."

That is a pretty open-ended agenda, and it remains to be seen how Commission members will prioritize the long list of concerns about broad issues and specific places. though my own immediate concerns are for the renewed application of effort to protect and preserve cemeteries in accordance with their historic boundaries; to retrieve stolen gravestones; and to provide informative and truthful on-site and online narratives and documentation about destroyed Jewish communities and their fate, including the marking of surviving damaged or re-purposed religious and institutional buildings and when practical and affordable, the conservation of these buildings with Jewish identity and when possible Jewish use. I look forward, too, in better linking these efforts to related work on Lithuanian-Jewish heritage abroad, such as the ongoing [LostShulMural Project](#) in Burlington, Vermont, which is contributing to our understanding of Lithuanian Jewish art and artists, and immigrant connections with the "Old Country."

Other Commission members have particular expertise in other areas, including property restitution and Holocaust Education, both areas where according to many involved, progress has slowed. Additionally, I hope that much more will be done to foster recognition and respect of the small number of Holocaust survivors, including Resistance fighters, still in Lithuania, and to integrate concern for the Jewish heritage into national cultural heritage protection policies and priorities.

Some communal property restitution issues have been resolved; for better or worse. Years of negotiation led in 2011 to a \$53 million dollar settlement from the government, establishing a fund to be administered for Jewish communal and cultural purposes. In 2011, Rabbi Andy Baker, who is a founding member of the new Commission, [wrote of the difficulties](#) in obtaining any type of financial commitment and that in the end, activists and Jewish leaders settled for the best deal they thought they would ever get. The 2011 law certainly stimulated the formation of the new Commission.

Most of the settlement the money is still forthcoming, and the research and deliberations of the Commission will effect the spending priorities for these funds years to come. "The Foundation for Disposal of Good Will Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Communities" was established at the end of 2011, after the Government of Lithuania had passed the [Law on "Good Will Compensation for the Immovable Property of Jewish Religious Community."](#) Subsequently, The Good Will Foundation was formed by the Foundation for Lithuanian Jewish Heritage, which is a partnership between the Jewish Community of Lithuania and the World Jewish Restitution Organization. The Foundation will review project applications and administer funds. [You can read more here.](#)

Monuments, Central New York and Public Art and Memory allow me to clear my email and my desk, and to report on some of my travels, by passing on to a broader public just some of the interesting and compelling information from projects I am working on, or am following. Feel free to contact me for more information on any of the topics posted, or if you have a project of your own you would like to discuss.

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I am available for public lectures and presentations as well as private tours and consulting. [To learn more click here.](#)

Recent and upcoming talks, lectures and tours:

Arise and Build: American Synagogues and Jewish Identity
March 18, 2015
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm

Center for Holocaust and Jewish Studies
Penn State Harrisburg
Morrison Gallery, Library

Kosher food reception to follow
Information: 717-948-6727,
abb20@psu.edu,
or harrisburg.psu.edu/chjs

The (Re)Invention of Jewish Art: Jewish Painters and Painting in Modern Times

Sunday, March 29, at 2PM
Congregation Beth Sholom - Chevra Shas
18 Patsy Lane - Off Jamesville Road,
Dewitt

Refreshments Will Be Served
Free and Open to the Community

This illustrated lecture will discuss how during the period of Jewish emancipation in Europe during the 19th century, as Jews achieved more and more political freedom in Europe, Jewish artists re-invented Jewish art. They produced a body of



Kalvarija, Lithuania. Like many Jewish cemeteries in Lithuania, the recognized boundaries of the cemetery are much smaller than the real area, which lies open for development or other uses. Photo: Ruth Ellen Gruber 2006.

After the fall of Communism Lithuania was quick out of the box with programs to identify and protect Jewish sites. Under the leadership of the late [Joseph Levinson](#), cemeteries and mass grave sites were identified and marked. Levinson published his important [The Book of Sorrow](#) identifying these sites. More recently, the Vilnius Academy of Arts in partnership with the Center of Jewish Art at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem researched and published the two-volume [Synagogues in Lithuania: A Catalogue](#) (Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2010/2012). In my opinion, this is the best and most comprehensive catalog of surviving synagogue buildings yet produced in any country, anywhere. A large assemblage of research and funding organizations partnered in the ambitious multi-year project. These two works will certainly continue to be the foundation of future efforts to choose those places for investment and intervention - whether for commemorative, education, or economic reasons.

According to a [press release](#) on the official Lithuanian government website issued after the May 7th meeting:

"Lithuania is proud of its rich history and abundant cultural heritage. I can assure you that it is very important for us to renovate the Jewish heritage sites and adapt them to the needs of the society. We must tend to these matters together: the Government, municipalities, the Lithuanian Jewish community as well as the local communities," said the Chancellor of the Government A. Mačiulis.

During the meeting, members of the Commission discussed issues concerning the identification and preservation of the Jewish heritage in Lithuania, protection and preservation of the Jewish cemeteries and mass killing sites, the place of the culture and history of Lithuanian Jews and other related questions.

Members of the Commission agreed to formulate an action plan for the legal registration and relevant documentation of the Jewish cemeteries and mass killing sites. It was also decided to follow the action plan and preserve, manage and adapt to the needs of the society the Jewish cultural heritage sites, as well as to provide access for the society to the archival documents, and to keep compiling the list of the Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust mass

work based on the Hebrew Bible, synagogue life, and the Jewish world in which they were raised. By the end of the 19th century, academically trained artists were also addressing Jewish social and political themes in their art as well as religious traditions. This lecture introduces the work of many often forgotten artists such as Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, Solomon Alexander Hart, Alphonse Levy, Edouard Brandon, Simeon Salomon and many others.

In the independent studios of the early 20th century many of these trends continued, though styles and subjects changed. Many Jewish artists actively engaged in and promoted new art styles including impressionism, Art Nouveau, cubism, fauvism, expressionism and constructivism - sometimes distancing themselves from all things Jewish, and sometimes building on Jewish themes. Well known Jewish Impressionists and Modernists included Camille Pissarro, Jozef Israëls, Max Libermann, Marc Chagall, and Amadeo Modigliani. Most of these Jewish painters- with the exception of Chagall - only occasional referenced Judaism in their art, though collectively they influenced how 20th century Jews viewed, understood and collected art.

**Synagogues of New York City:
History, Architecture & Community**
Wednesday, April 1, 2015, 6:30 PM
Center for Jewish History
15 W. 16th St., New York, NY 10011
Members: Free

Non-members: \$10 suggested donation

[Reserve tickets for this event](#)

In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of New York City's Landmarks law and the Landmarks Preservation Board, architectural historian and preservationist I will trace the rich and varied architectural history of New York synagogues emphasizing remarkable buildings that have been lost, those that have been lovingly restored, and a significant number of noteworthy buildings that could

graves. The Commission agreed that the long history of Lithuanian Jews and their rich culture should be fully represented in the educational plans and measures.

During the course of this meeting, four topics were addressed:

1. The long term protection and preservation of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves of Holocaust victims must be assured. Not all the sites of mass murder are clearly identified and properly memorialized. Many Jewish cemeteries are also uncared for and unprotected. Government authorities proposed a series of steps to address the registration, documentation and preservation of these sites, noting the legal obligations of municipalities. A working group will be created to follow through on this.

2. The Jewish heritage in Lithuania encompasses buildings notably synagogues, books, newspapers and other archival documents, Torah scrolls and other ritual objects. They represent the shared cultural patrimony of Lithuania and world Jewry. Today's discussions focused on specific plans underway to restore a number of synagogues and other places of Jewish heritage, noting the importance of including information on Jewish life and history. The conversation also highlighted the cooperative program underway between YIVO and the Lithuanian National Library and State Archives.

3. Members of the joint commission agreed that more must be done to teach Lithuanian children about the history of Lithuanian Jewry, including its contribution to Lithuania and to world Jewish thought, and also about the Holocaust in Lithuania. This will entail a thorough examination of the current school curricula and textbooks as well as other activities such as school visits to museums and historical sites.

4. Jewish representatives pointed out that there are significant gaps in Lithuanian law on private property restitution and its subsequent implementation that have precluded some number of Jewish Holocaust survivors and their heirs from being able to file property claims or to have them successfully addressed because of residency or citizenship requirements at the time. At today's meeting it was agreed that a more thorough examination of this problem will be undertaken with the goal of determining what appropriate remedies might be taken to address it.

In the months to come I will make a point of more regularly reporting on Jewish heritage issues from Lithuania and I hope that I'll have a chance to visit there soon. Meanwhile, I encourage readers with experience in Lithuania to share their thoughts with me as comments or privately, and to alert me to particular area of concern - either specific sites or broad issues - that will benefit from public discussion and attention, and that may need to be addressed by the Commission.

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Posted by [Samuel Gruber](#) at 1:45 PM 

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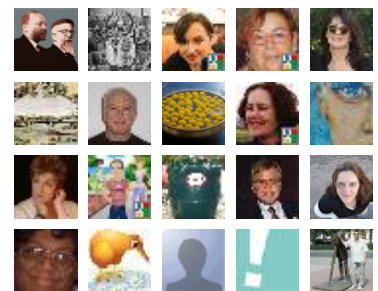
and should be preserved. Some of the most notable of these buildings have been recognized as New York City Landmarks and others are included in recognized Historic Districts. Throughout this richly illustrated lecture This talk will introduce the necessary features that define all synagogues and the special features, including changing architectural styles and building configurations that are quintessentially New York.

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[Shirley Moskowitz: A Life in Art \(1995\)](#)

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[Silenced Sacred Spaces: Selected Photographs of Syrian Synagogues by Robert Lyons \(1996\)](#)

[Synagogues in the Garden](#)

[The Blueprint: How a 1959 book](#)

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[The Choices We Make: Eldridge Street Synagogue and Historic Preservation](#)

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[The Rabbi's Son Who Built Detroit
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[American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community \(Rizzoli 2003\)](#)

[Ebrei Piemontese: The Jews of Piedmont \(contributor 2008\)](#)

[Jewish Identity and Contemporary Architecture \(Prestel 2004\)](#)

[Synagogues \(Metrobooks 1999\)](#)

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[Selected Muslim Monuments and Historic Sites in Bulgaria](#)

[Sites Associated with the Lives and Deeds of Foreign-born Heroes of the American Revolution, 2002](#)

[Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in Poland, 2nd revised edition, 1995](#)

[Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in the Czech Republic,](#)

[1994](#)

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Historic US Synagogues

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[Beth Ahabah, Richmond, Virginia
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[Cong. Tifereth Israel, Queens, NY \(1911\)](#)

[Isaac M. Wise \(Plum St.\) Temple, Cincinnati \(1866\)](#)

[Kehllia Kedosha Janina, New York \(1927\)](#)

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[Lloyd Street Syn, Baltimore \(1845 ff\)](#)

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[Sixth & I Historic Synagogue \(former Adas Israel\), D.C.](#)

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[Virtual Restoration of Smalltown \(Texas\) Synagogues](#)

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Reference

[Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities](#)


[Explanation of the Jewish Calendar](#)



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