



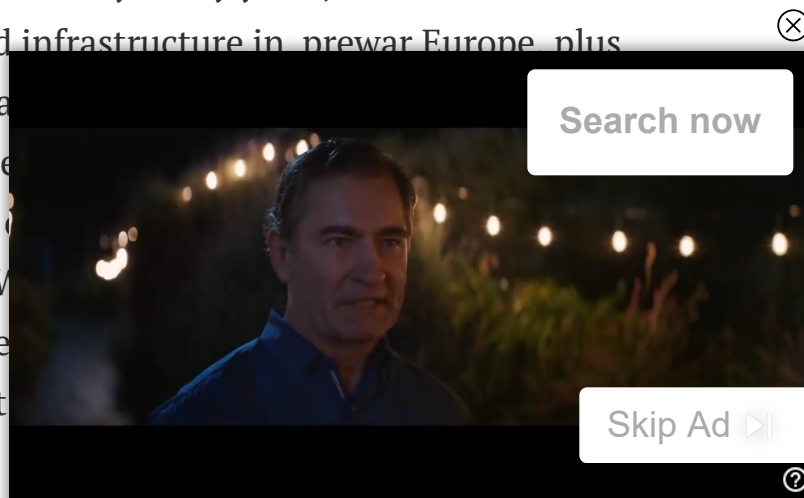
THE BLOGS

Saul Chapnick

The Midnight Plane to Czernowitz: The 2018 International Yiddish Conference

Have you ever missed an anniversary, a birthday, or event and regretted it for years, or even a lifetime? I have. It was missing out in attending the 1908 International Conference on Yiddish Language that took place exactly 110 years ago this year at Czernowitz, a city that served as the regional capital of the Hapsburgs (modern day Chernivtsi, Ukraine).

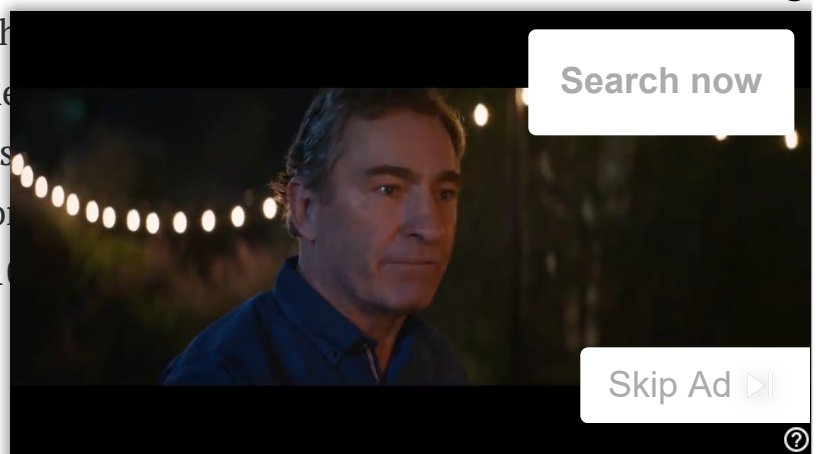
You may ask even how was it distinctly possible that a man my age could have been around 110 years ago. For the past nearly thirty years, I have immersed myself in learning about Jewish life and infrastructure in prewar Europe, plus seeing what the role of Yiddish was, if at all. At this age, modern history began with the commonwealth, the modern-day State of Israel, the Conference, or the Kishinev Pogroms, which were just not in our lexicon, even though they were thus making them modern, not ancient.



As Jews, it is incumbent upon us to fulfill the obligation of “Zakhor,” “To Remember.” We are to look back at our history and internalize it in such a way to feel just like we were there, and feel what our brethren felt. This is just not reflected in our reading of the Passover Haggadah, but everything we do and say in life. To do “Zakhor” means we have a fuller understanding of ourselves in order to be able to navigate the future. Zakhor enables us to be more comfortable with self. That is why I went on a personal quest over the last 25 plus years to visit libraries, read books, make visits to Poland and Ukraine to meet with political leaders, rabbis, community leaders, and lay people so that I can learn and experience.

The Times of Israel presents: A Tale of Two Cities

Czernowitz 1908 symbolized to me that turning point in Jewish history. A part of me felt that I did spiritually attend the conference, but I knew that it was a physical impossibility. The scholar, posted in Facebook that he was attending the 2018 International Commemorative Conference on Yiddish Language at Czernowitz to mark the 110th anniversary of the conference.




Not many have a chance for a “do over” in life. To start the time clock all over again with a clean slate. I felt I then had that opportunity. I had less than a month to make plans to attend and to see if I can even afford it. How can I not attend? Opportunities like this come once every 110 years (although I learnt at Czernowitz they had one ten years ago, and are tentatively planning one for 2028).

On August 5th 2018 I was in heaven and took the midnight flight to Kiev with a connecting flight, and a waiting time of three hours, to Chernivtsi, Ukraine. The small terminal for the connecting flight was crowded with conference presenters as well as Israeli tourists touring Ukraine to explore their “Shorashim (roots).”

The atmosphere was electric. The camaraderie was high. I introduced myself to Dovid Katz for the first time. Dovid (Lithuania) is larger than life personality. He exudes welcoming, warmth, intelligence. His personality is dynamic. He is physically large. He set the tone for the conference. He introduced me warmly to everyone, thanked me for coming and neither he nor anyone else showed any heirs or arrogance. I, who was a stranger amongst those that knew of each other or each other’s works, was now a part of this event. That spirit continued every day of the conference.

It is that spirit, of warmth, scholarliness, acceptance and camaraderie that made the 2018 conference different than the 1908 conference. The 1908 conference was rife with those snubbing others, divisions, vicious infighting and screaming. The reason it made history is that it was a milestone that Yiddish achieved such a stature as a language to







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more importantly, Yiddish was declared an official language of the Jewish People (as opposed to *the* official language). It was a miracle that the outcome of that conference was even able to agree on that declaration, but it was that declaration that made history.

The presenters of the 2018 conference were very realistic about the state of Yiddish today. No one was wearing rose tinted glasses. There was no schmaltzy, nostalgic feelings. No reference to ad nauseam terms like “mamaloshen.” Even the opening of the ceremony with a piano-violin duet did not include, thankfully, numbers like “My Yiddishe Mama.”



Author with Vladislav Davidzon(l), Editor in Chief, The Odessa Review: A Journal for New Ukraine

It was truly an international forum with papers and panels conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, English, Romanian, and yes, Yiddish. Everyone had an earpiece listening to the translators, situated behind a glass booth, who were in the back of the room. Only presentations conducted in Yiddish did not need a translator.

Topics ranged from Hasidic Yiddish to Yiddish in various regions of the world, linguistic studies, Yiddish authors and poets and historical topics. The setting was majestic and grandeur. Chernivtsi University, the site of the conference, was the site of the church during the Holocaust. The building was built with Austrian style architecture. The buildings, large and small, were built with ornate. The roads are still paved with cobblestones. On the east side of the Ukraine in good condition since the war. I witnessed a country that was crumbling under decades of neglect by both the existing and the new.

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It was the personalities that made the conference what it was. I was perhaps one of three non-academic attendees. The rest of the conferees were either presenters or sponsors. They ranged from authors to academics, from Satmar to Chiloni (secular). They represented various political bents from Jewish leadership in various organizations as well as the Ukrainian Jewish Community to the Directors of the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter. Leading Ukrainian politicians and ministers from Kiev attended and stayed with us for a respectable amount of time as well as world Jewish leaders or their representatives. Even our Ukrainian hostesses, saw to our every need with their

patience, intelligence and personalities. Security was tight, but everyone felt this was less of a necessity, and more of a precaution. In sum, this *was* a historical event.

The attendees represented our past and hope for the future. Each person had a huge, but giving, personality. The names are too many and I am concerned about skipping someone. He Moskovich. He was the Founder/Chair/Elder/Zakane (biblical meaning), of this postwar conference in Czernowitz in 19 I joined him with those that chose to eat from the conference, he would point out



Kriszta Eszter Szendroi(UK), the Author, Chaya R Nove (USA) and Daniella Mauer (Israel) (l to r)



LARGER THAN LIFE: Daniel Galay, Leyvik House, Dovid Katz, the Author, Yochanan Ron-Singer, World Organization of Bukovina and Descendants



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they were before the war. Imagine our excitement when he showed us the building where the original 1908 conference convened.

Dr. Moskovich captured everyone's attention during the opening of the exhibition, "Yiddish Prints," that took place at the Scientific Library of the Chernivtsi National University. After the usual twenty minute "obligatory" introduction by politicians and library directors about the various Yiddish publications and newspapers that existed before the war and displayed at that exhibition, Dr. Moskovich, in the middle of this big hall, without a microphone told us how he went to this library in 1983, during the times of the Soviet Union, asking and then demanding to view these documents. The Soviet Union denied and continued to deny their existence. How wonderful, how important, how timely, that these documents which were hidden away from the Jewish community and the world at large, can now be displayed for everyone to see.

During my final night at Czernowitz, I lifted my glass to my kosher comrades who joined each other at all meals. I thanked them for their warmth, and complimented each one of them who contributed their special, gift, personality and talent to the conference. I continued to say, "because of you, that feeling of longing to attend the 1908 is no more. The 2018 conference exceeded and surpassed

Here's to 2028.



Dr. Moskovich addressing crowd at exhibition of "Yiddish Prints," Scientific Library of the Chernivtsi National University.

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The 'Kosher' Crew

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For nearly thirty years, Saul passionately devoted and immersed himself to studying Jewish life in interwar Europe. Overnight, not only did this 1000-year-old community vanish, but so did its complex communal infrastructure. What piqued Saul Chapnick's interest and curiosity was finding out exactly what it was that disappeared. In talking to politicians, survivors, scholars, Jewish communal leaders from Eastern Europe, and making trips there, Saul Chapnick was able to uncover the richness and the tragedy of interwar Jewish life in Europe. At the same time, Mr. Chapnick has discovered a limited reawakening of Jewish life in his parents' and ancestors' native land, Poland. Saul Chapnick has talked in various venues whether Yiddish and Yiddish Culture still has relevance today. He has also spoke about the importance this 19th and 20th Century world has to contemporary life today as well as to post-Holocaust Jewish identity. He also prepares the adult participants of The March for the Living about modern day Jewish Poland



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