

Celebration of the New Wall Around the Skala Podolskaya Jewish Cemetery

Skala Podolskaya was a town of 6,000 in the 1930s, half of whom were Jewish. Of these 3,000 Jews, only 200 survived the Holocaust.

In 1998, the then Skala Benevolent Society, (a Landsmanschaften) completed the building of a wall around the Skala Jewish Cemetery. That original Landsmanschaften had been created in the 1890s and was primarily based in New York City and in Israel. That organization ended in 2017, when its president, Max Mermelstein died.

The Skala Research Group was created in 1999 by Denise Azbill. I (Tony Hausner) have been the Shtetl leader of that group since 2005. We now have over 225 members located in the U.S., Israel and other parts of the world.

Unfortunately, shortly after the 1998 wall was completed, it started to deteriorate. By 2020, large portions of the wall had fallen down. We of the Skala Research Group decided it was time to build a new wall, to protect the dignity and the legacy of our Skala ancestors. Via Gesher Galicia, (a non-profit organization carrying out Jewish genealogical and historical research on Galicia, formerly a province of Austria.)

I contacted ESJF (the European Jewish Cemetery Initiative). ESJF provides funding for Jewish Cemetery Walls, is primarily funded by Germany. I was in touch with Philip Carmel who leads that organization, and Alex Bessarab who is the project manager in Kiev, Ukraine. ESJF estimated that the cost for removing the remains of the old wall and building a new wall would be \$55,000. ESJF agreed to contribute a significant amount to that effort. However, most of the

funding for this project came from our own Skala Research Group members. Gesher Galicia provided support for our fundraising efforts.

Alex Bessarab led the effort to tear down the old wall and build the new one. The new wall was completed this past August, 2025. Here is a link on our Skala Podolskaya website for the new wall.

See <https://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/SkalaPodol/SkalaJewishCemeteryNewWall.html> for photos of the new wall. This is part of the Skala Podolskaya website (see <https://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/SkalaPodol/>).

We are particularly grateful to Alex for managing the building of the wall expeditiously, especially in the face of the war that was going on, as he and his family live in Kiev, Ukraine.

On Sunday, October 26, 2025, the Skala Research Group got together at the home of Merle Kailas' place in Manhattan, to celebrate the building of the new wall. About 20 persons attended in person or via zoom, with participants mainly from the U.S. but other countries as well including Israel, etc.

We are all very grateful to Gesher Galicia and especially ESJF, Philip Carmel and in particular to Alex Bessarab for the completion of the wall, and what it represents. It's a wall but it's also more than a wall. Because its successful reconstruction represents what a few people can accomplish together, even in the face of challenges; veneration for our ancestors, and a determination to keep memories of our recent history, both good and bad, alive for future generations.