

## My Trip to Klimintów, Poland

by Judy Seibel Liebeskind

In August, 1996, while on a trip to Poland, my husband and I made arrangements to visit Klimontów, the town that my grandparents had left in 1906. Prior to our trip we conducted research by making personal contacts and library visits. My grandparents, surnamed Seibel (Zabel, Zebel), died in the United States in the 1940s, but I questioned aunts and other family members for their memories. I also contacted Betty Tward, née Seibel (Zabel), who is not related and who left Klimontów in 1938 and currently lives in Toronto. She claimed that there were no other Seibels there when she left. She herself came to Klimontów after she married; her family had originally come from Baranov and Grebov.

I learned from a branch of the Mormon Church Family History Library (FHL) that there were Jewish records in Klimontów going back over a hundred years. These records were available from the FHL. I ordered several years worth of records on three rolls of microfilm for a charge of \$3.00 per microfilm. After a wait of approximately three weeks, they arrived, and I reviewed them. There were pages and pages of text in Polish (not lists of names and dates), which I could not understand and did not have enough time to have translated before the trip.<sup>[1]</sup>

I also visited the YIVO Institute in New York City, which had a limited file on Klimontów, that included photos of the synagogue, which is still standing. There was also a small book written in Yiddish by a Holocaust survivor from Klimontów about his experiences. I also determined from an old guide book (*Off the Beaten Track: Poland*) that there was a Jewish cemetery still in existence.

Our trip itself began in Kraków, where we were met by a private driver together with an English speaking guide arranged for us by Isram Travel Co. of New York City. During the two hour drive, we passed through beautiful rolling countryside, mostly farmland and orchards. The two lane road was well paved, lightly traveled by cars, horses and wagons. Amid this beautiful countryside lies Klimontów, a neat-looking village filled with beautiful flowers. Our first stop was the City Hall, which had already closed for the day. We next attempted to obtain information from the priest at the Roman Catholic Church; he was not there. Our guide stopped several local residents, and learned the name and address of the town clerk in charge of the local records. She was Markot Henryka who lived at Ulica Sandomierska 66 in Klimontów. The guide knocked at her door and explained to her that we would like to see the records. Markot

immediately left her home and traveled with us to her office.

At her office she showed us the numerous books that contained the Jewish records of Klimontów, going back a hundred years. These were the original documents which had been photocopied by the Mormon Church, part of which we had seen<sup>[2]</sup>. She explained that some of the documents were in Polish and some were in Russian, depending on the politics of the time<sup>[3]</sup>. The text generally contained the names, occupations, and ages of the witnesses. Many of the births were recorded years after the birth. One example was of someone recording their birth at age 33. Markot offered to help us; however, it would take some time. We agreed on a price and exchanged addresses. We gave her several possible spellings of the family name, as well as the name of my grandmother and my great grandmother.

Markot then toured us around the town. Nearby the City Hall was the parish church, designed by the Swiss architect Lorenzo Muretto. The church is quite magnificent and was built in the early 18th century and modified with a cupola, facade and tower in the late 18th century. The interior contains fine stuccowork by Giovanni Battista Falconi and is still one of the major tourist attractions in Klimontów. The central square is covered with flowers and is surrounded by mainly small shops that sell a variety of wares. There was little for sale that would interest a tourist. The synagogue is neo-Classical in architecture and is intact; however we were not permitted to enter it as it was still being renovated. There were however, no signs of renovation activity. Markot indicated that the local government wished to restore the synagogue because it a part of their history. At one time more than half of the residents here were Jewish.

As we took pictures of the synagogue, several locals approached us. One had a photocopy of a book written in Yiddish by a Holocaust survivor from Klimontów. This was a copy of the book that we had seen at YIVO.

Next she took us to the site of the cemetery, which was destroyed except for one section of about 9 square feet on a corner of the property, which was fenced off and saved as a memorial. It contained a number of tombstones that were overturned forming what appeared to be a patio. The main structure on the site of the old cemetery was a school. Since reports had indicated that the cemetery had survived World War II and as of 1967, the cemetery had still been intact, we asked Markot to explain what had happened to the cemetery. She indicated through gestures that the stones went into the

building of the school which had been constructed in 1968. Our guide entered into a lengthy conversation with Markot. We imagine that Markot was advised that this was not a politic thing to say. Markot subsequently said that she didn't know what happened to the cemetery. It was obviously destroyed to make way for the school.

We conjectured that the cemetery was destroyed in 1968 as part of an anti-Semitic outbreak across Poland and in many of the countries under Soviet rule following the Six Day War in Israel. The Soviet Union was pro-Arab, anti-Israel, and engaged in many anti-Semitic actions including the expulsion of 20,000 Jews from Poland at that time.

Several weeks after our return from Poland, Markot sent us copies of several pages from the records that contained the name Kloss, the name of my great grandmother; however these do not appear to be related. She was unable to find any reference to family name Seibel or Zabel, or Zebel.

Obtaining translations of these pages was not an easy matter. The local Polish priest advised us that it was written in Russian, not Polish. A friend from Russia could not translate them since they were written in an archaic form of Russian. Finally we found some Russian emigres who could successfully translate the pages<sup>[4]</sup>.

Analysis of the translations indicated that there were no connections to my family.

Our trip to Poland was arranged by Isram World of Travel, 630 Third Avenue, NY 10017-6780, telephone 800-223-7460. Isram arranged the private tour to Klimontów through WECO Travel, Atkyn Buswen Center, Chmielna 132/134, Warsaw, Poland; telephone 011 48 2 2658, fax: 011 48 2 2658 1848.

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Editor's Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> Several articles in the *KR-SIG Journal* describe the Napoleonic format of the vital registrations and offer tips on how to use them. Specifically, see "Vital Records in Poland — A Primer" (I:2), "The Power of Extracts" (I:1) and "Don't Let a Little Extraction Scare You" (I:2).

<sup>[2]</sup> Not exactly. The records filmed by the LDS are those at the Polish State Archives, not the local Civil Registration Office (USC). The LDS microfilms of Jewish civil registration of Klimontów cover 1810-1877. The USC holds records for only the most recent 100 years. See "Vital Records in Poland — A Primer" (I:2).

<sup>[3]</sup> Records were kept in the Polish language 1810-1867, and 1918 through the present. Records of 1868-1918 were kept in the Russian language.

<sup>[4]</sup> Again, refer to "Vital Records in Poland — A Primer" (I:2) for references on how you can interpret these records yourself.

#### DESCRIPTION OF PHOTOS:

- #1 - Shops in town square of Klimontów
- #2 - Additional shops along main square
- #3 - Judy Liebeskind standing outside Klimontów town hall.
- #4 - I to r, guide, Judy Liebeskind, Markot Henryka (Klimontów town clerk)
- #5 - Wedding hall inside Klimontów town hall
- #6 - Klimontów synagogue, currently under renovation
- #7 - Remains of former Jewish cemetery in Klimontów, cemetery itself was destroyed by the government to make way for a school in 1968.
- #8 - Klimontów parish church designed by Swiss architect Lorenzo Muretto
- #9 - Park near center of town in Klimontów
- #10 - Shops near town square.

ALL PHOTOS HAVE GOOD CONTRAST

PHOTOS HAVE BEEN PROMISED TO YIVO FOR THEIR COLLECTION