

Translated from: <http://wyborcza.pl/1,91446,19131474,malopolskie-macewy-z-ogrodzenia-przeniesione-na-cmentarz-w.html?disableRedirects=true>

Wyborcza.pl

Matzevas Transferred from a Fence to the Cemetery in Olkusz

Matzevas, Jewish tombstones, were used to build a wall around the former high school in Olkusz. The wall was dismantled by volunteers from Poland and US. The recovered gravestones found their way to the Jewish cemetery in Olkusz, and the wall was filled with concrete.

November 3, 2015

The campaign was carried out under the Matzeva Project, implemented by an organization operating in Poland, Israel and the US called "From The Depths". The aim of the project is to restore the memory of more than 1,200 million Jewish cemeteries and the stolen tombstones.

Volunteers came equipped with basic tools, as well as a jackhammer and a generator. Part of the tombstones were moved during an earlier action, when they arrived for the first time in Olkusz. Others still within the wall were removed on Tuesday.

"As part of our project we have been moving tombstones, used as a building material, to cemeteries. We were informed by volunteers that in Olkusz a school used the gravestones as building material. We have the permission of the current owner of the building, which once housed a school, then a learning center for drivers, and now stands abandoned. With the help of volunteers from Poland and the US, Jews and non-Jews, we will remove the gravestones and transport them to the new cemetery in Olkusz. The holes will be filled with concrete," - said program coordinator Lena Klaudel.

One and a half years into the project, they have already moved several thousand fragments of gravestones back to Jewish cemeteries in Poland. "We always cooperate with local authorities and volunteers, because it is not just the Jewish heritage, it is a story that concerns us all" stressed the coordinator of the project.

"When someone dies, the only thing left behind is his name. And when the name is taken, then nothing remains," said Jonathan Daniels, president of the foundation "From The Depths". Volunteers treat the restoration of gravestones and their return to cemeteries as restoring the dignity of those who have died. "Unfortunately, because of what happened during the war, there were no Jews who could take care of the Jewish cemetery in Olkusz. And now, 70 years after these events, we come back here. We are students and volunteers from the US and Israel who have come together to restore their memories. This action would not be possible without the help of Polish volunteers," emphasized Mr. Daniels.

He emphasized that "such action has an international dimension. People from all over the world can see how students from the US and Poland work together and do something positive," he stressed.

"We appeal to everyone, asking to pass us information about the graves, with fragments of Torah scrolls, because it is through these gravestones, these artifacts can restore contact between Jews who live now in the world, and the Poles," appealed Jonathan Daniels.

"We are very pleased that we can participate in this, our generation is the last that has a chance to meet with survivors of the Holocaust. It's important to do something for these people to preserve their memory after them," said Chelsea Roston, an American student volunteer who attends Wellesley College.

"From the Depths" was founded by descendants of Holocaust survivors in an effort to preserve the memory of their parents, grandparents and other ancestors. The Foundation works with survivors of the Holocaust from all over the world and with Jewish communities, especially from Eastern Europe.

Its aim is to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and preserve the names of victims of the Holocaust. "We continuously speak to successive generations of Survivors," declare the organizers of the foundation.

The old Jewish cemetery in Olkusz was founded around 1584 at the suburb Sławkowskim. Allegedly buried here is Lewko, a banker of King Casimir the Great. During World War II, the Nazis severely destroyed the cemetery. They destroyed the fence and gravestones, and built a deep anti-tank ditch. Following the war, the cemetery fell into disrepair. Carried out in 1984, an inventory showed the presence of dozens of tombstones. In 2006, during construction work in one of the courtyards in the district Pomorzany, workers found about 40 tombstones. Thanks to the efforts of members of the Olkusz Cultural Association the tombstones were returned to the cemetery. Currently an area of approximately 0.5 hectares contains 30 preserved tombstones. The area is not fenced.

The new Jewish cemetery in Olkusz was built around 1900 in Sławkowskim, a suburb near the river Baba, on the current street called John Cantius. Also he was devastated during World War II. After the war, the decay of the abandoned cemetery went on. In autumn 2010, volunteers came to the cemetery and started cleaning, along with prisoners from Prison in Trzebinia under the "Shadows of the Past" program. An area of approximately 1 hectare preserved nearly 200 tombstones.