

Londýnský kroužek Ostraváků
Der Londoner-Ostrauerkreis
Our Ostrava Group

Number 23, New Year and Second Literary Edition

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We did not expect to write another Newsletter so soon, but one of the many delightful surprises we have is receiving even more interesting material about Ostrava and Ostravaks and information about other Ostravaks. Keep it coming!

2012 Ostravak Reunion

We are beginning to think about another Ostravak Reunion, on Sunday September 2nd, at the Czech Embassy. Would you be interested in it?

These events involve quite a lot of effort, time and expense (£350-£400, depending on the number of people attending). Would you be willing to:

1. Help with organising invitations, name badges, etc?
2. Help in collecting sandwiches and cakes from N London and bringing them to the location
3. Help in setting out the sandwiches, serving tea etc?
4. Help in tidying and washing up?
5. Sponsoring all or part of the costs?

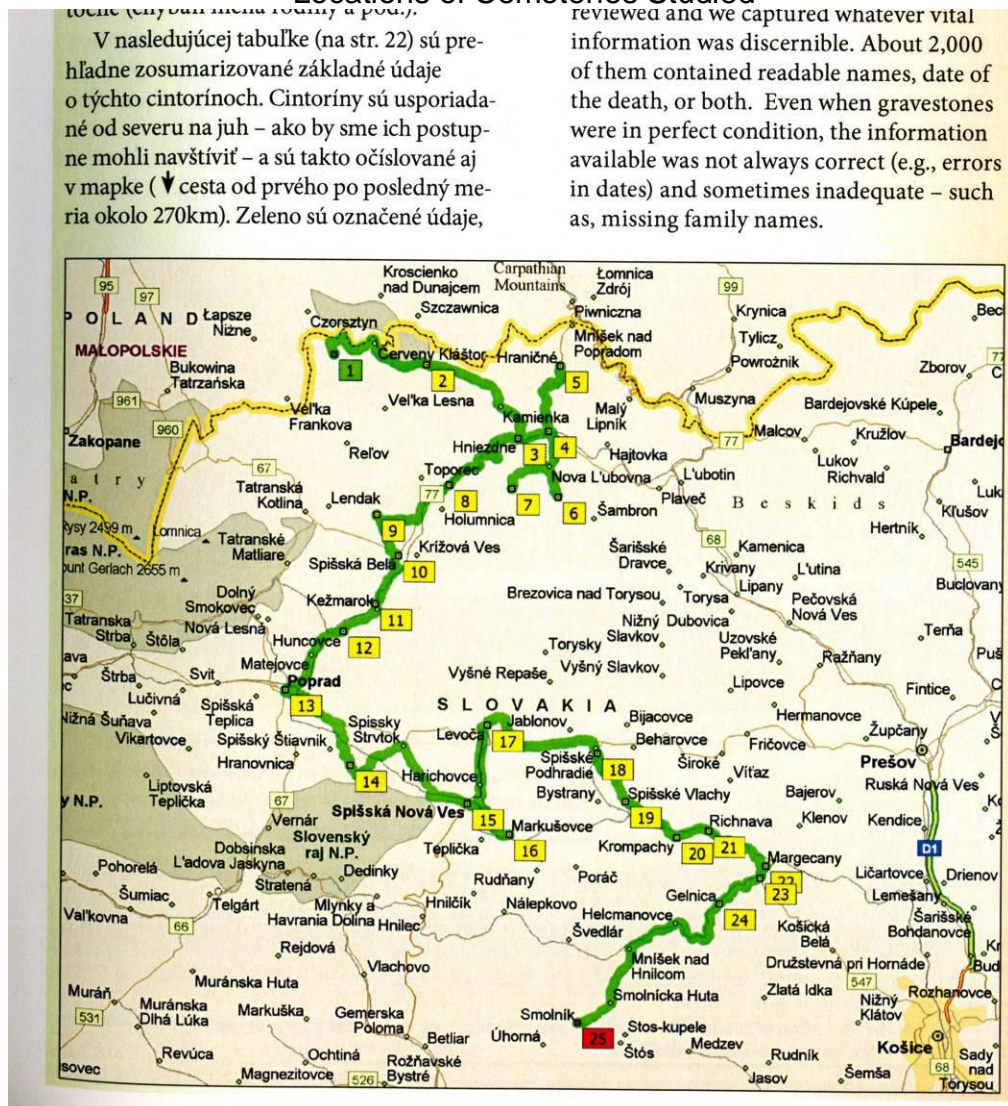
Please let Monica know.

Literary Activities

Jews in the Spiš Region -1 Kežmarok (ISBN 978-80-89264-48-9)

Madeleine Isenberg has kindly donated a copy of the book to our Ostrava archive. It is an exhaustive 96 page study of the 27 cemeteries (25 locations) of Kežmarok and its surroundings with an outline of the history of Jews in the Spiš region and

Locations of Cemeteries Studied



information about some of the outstanding historical figures and families. Copies are available from Madeleine Isenberg (madeleine.isenberg@gmail.com) at USD28.00 plus postage.

Escape Story - Eva Erben's Holocaust autobiography

Yes, it has finally appeared! And people who have read it speak highly of it: "...could not put it down until I finished reading to the last page. It was harrowing but felt that Eva Erben's story came through so well and at the end I was so pleased that she survived the terrible ordeal of the camps and is now living in Israel. I felt in a strange way a sort of kinship to her as I was of similar age at the time of her going to the camps. My suggestion would be a compulsory read of this book in all Schools – so easy to read and explains the situation so vividly" (Millicent Challis)

The deal to get the book published involved Eva buying a number of books, which we are now selling on her behalf. If you have not yet ordered your copy, you can still do so. It is available through Amazon or directly from David at £8.99 plus p&p:
Total cost:

In the UK	£10.50
Europe	£12.00 (or €15 <u>in cash</u> to avoid bank charges)
Rest of the World	£13.50 (or US\$ 22 <u>in cash</u> , to avoid bank charges)

Please make cheques payable to David Lawson or bank transfer to

Barclays Bank Ltd
Surbiton Branch
Sort Code 20-46-73
Account 80688983
IBAN GB29 BARC 2046 7380 6889 83
SWIFTBIC BARCGB22

Hildegard Taussig's Memoir

Miriam Friedmann Morris has sent us a copy of her mother's memoir, written in Czech but translated into German. Hildegard was 10 years older than Eva Erben, but experienced Terezín, Auschwitz, Christianstadt and the death march, as well as a return to Prague. It can be viewed through the link: Hildegard Taussig Friedman, *Meine Lebensgeschichte (My Life Story)*, 1941-1945: on this webpage:

<http://www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/responses/friedmann/timeline2.html>

Přemysl Pitter's Life Story: *Love your Enemies*

David Vaughan, of Czech Radio, has sent us a 90min DVD of the life of Přemysl Pitter, made by Tomáš Škrdlant. Pitter set up and ran homes before and after the war for children of all religions and races. Among the many that he saved was Yehuda Bacon, who features prominently in the film. The DVD is in German and Czech with English sub-titles.

Edith Rosenbergová's Story

You may recall the story of The Handbag (Newsletter #19, March 2011) that belonged to Edith Rosenbergová and was found in Hampstead by Dr Deborah Brown. This handbag encouraged us to try and find out more about Edith and how her handbag came to be lost in a flat in Hampstead. We have now built up an extensive picture of Edith and Otto and their lives, with the help of Elen Gräzer, Marie Eichler, Peter Barber and several others. It is being written up; it runs to 4,000 words and about 50 photographs so far. This will be available on the website of the Jewish Museum in Prague, in due course.

Velke Dilo, Magnum Opus, The Great Ostrava Story

People frequently ask us, what we plan to do with all the information and material that we are collecting. There are two answers:

- All the information we have collected is being organised and entered into the data base of the Jewish Museum in Prague (JMP). This is well under way, with the help of Dr Jiří Jung supported by the donations that some of you have already made. The information will be available to future researchers, so the memory of Ostrava and its Jewish community will be kept alive.

- We hope to write a book, in English, of the history of Ostrava and its Jews. This *Magnum Opus* (*Velke Dilo*, in Czech) will take quite a long time to complete, but we actually intend to start it! So far we have concentrated on the collection of material, which has been both a reason and an excuse for delaying the work. But our New Year's resolution is to cease procrastinating and get on with it!

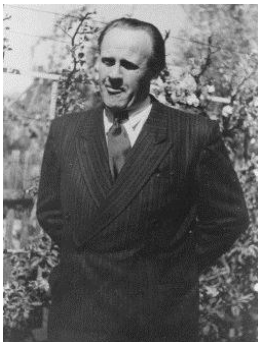
Your help is needed:

- a. We would like to have as many family histories as possible. You are in the best position to write up what you know about your family, with relevant photographs and documents. Please produce as full a history of your family as you can and let David have it. He will happily edit it and add any more information that he can find.
- b. We are not Czech speakers and much of the historical information is in Czech. If you do speak/read Czech and are willing to devote some time to helping David with translations, please let us know.
- c. We are not historians. If you are and are willing to work with David on the historical background, please let us know.

Oskar Schindler and Ostrava

Madeleine Isenberg has found a website with information about Oskar Schindler, the one portrayed in the film *Schindler's List* by Stephen Spielberg: (<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/schindler/sch006.html>).

Schindler apparently moved to Ostrava in October 1938 (although that date seems unlikely):



Oskar Schindler in Krakow, 1940.

In October 1938 Schindler was released from prison. He received new orders from the Abwehr, and with his wife, Emilie, moved to a flat in Moravska Ostrava - Mrs Schindler's apartment at 25, Parkstrassa, Moravska Ostrava. He was now operational as the Second-in-Command of the Moravska Ostrava Abwehr office.

The Abwehr building in Moravska Ostrava shared offices with sections of the Gestapo, SD, and Kripo. Karel Gassner was Head of the Abwehr in Moravska Ostrava was, with Schindler as his deputy. Schindler's team in the field were Alois Girzicky, Ervin Kobiela, Hildegard Hoheitcva, and Hans Vicherek, all of whom were engaged in collecting and assessing information from a number of sources, sub-agents acting on their behalf on the Polish border.

Does anyone remember the Schindlers from Ostrava or have any other information?

News of Ostravaks

Fred's Bar Mitzvah

Fred Austin (geb. Alfred Stiller) celebrated his Bar Mitzvah on his 83rd birthday (see Newsletter #21). Alice Goldenfeld has sent some lovely photographs of the event:



Fred with his sons, Brian and Ian
Mazal Tov to Fred, Margaret and the whole family!

George Löwy and Karel Reisz

George writes from the USA:

Dear David,

I want to commend you on Newsletter #22. You and your collaborators have done an outstanding job putting together this issue. I was most intrigued by Pavel Reisz's contribution because Karel was my best friend for the first 12 years of our lives. Thank you for a great job!

George Lowy

Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Samuel Katz and Frantisek Benedikt

Hanford Gross writes:

My wife, Kitty, is the granddaughter of Samuel and Greta Katz who left Ostrava in February 1939 for Quito, Ecuador. Samuel was born in 1904 and Greta in 1913. Samuel owned an optical business in Ostrava. Kitty's great grandparents Leopold and Karolina Benedikt lived at Johaniho Street No 14 with her grandparents. Kitty's great uncle Frantisek Benedikt born 5.12.21 escaped from a work camp after being deported to Nisko in 1939 with

Leopold. Frantisek eventually travelled to England where he enlisted and flew for the RAF until 1944 when he died in a plane crash. This past summer Kitty and I visited his grave in Tain, Scotland.

I plan to write a book/family history after completing my research. I am interested in communicating with anyone who knew any members of the Katz-Benedikt family or who lived in Ostrava before and during WW2. Your newsletter mentions Jiří Roden as flying for the RAF. Please email his address or way of communicating with him. I would also like to receive your previous newsletters particularly #10 as it deals with Nisko.

Do you know anything about the Gross or Benedikt families? Please let Monica or David know and we will pass on the information.

Pavel Vransky

Petr Brod showed me us an article about Pavel Vransky (geb. Wechsberg) in *Doba seniorů*:

Pavel writes:

My former name is Wechsberg. Concerning my fate, I managed to escape in May, 1939 to Poland, joined the Czechoslovakian foreign army, after the unit has been for one and half year interned in the Soviet Union nearly the whole unit has been shipped to the Middle East. I engaged in the fighting in surrounded Tobruk and Lybia (Eritrea), volunteered the RAF in the UK, and after training engaged in the search of Nazi U boats until the end of the war. After the war I was aircrew of Czech air lines (CSA) until 1949. In the Communist regime I had to leave this job, and then have been engaged, knowing 4 foreign languages as translator in different offices. In the sixties of the last century I worked in the Transport Ministry, and attended some conferences concerning civil aviation in the west and east. This lasted to 1969, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the forces of the Soviet Union, and then I worked in different recreation places belonging to the Trade Union as driver and dogbody, retired in 1988. The whole time after the war I was living in Prague, at present in a village at the border of Prague, am married, have 3 daughters, 5 grand children, and 6 great grand children. Am over 90 years old, and still active in the freedom organisations, comprising a membership of former soldiers of the foreign Czech army, and Holocaust survivors. Concerning the scroll from Ostrava, I well remember the synagogue in Ostrava. We were not religious Jews, but in my youth we used to attend at the high holidays in the synagogue. I remember the shrine with the scrolls and reading from it at my bar mitzvah.

Pomáhal psát historii svobody

Letos oslavil 90. narozeniny. Plukovník v. v. Pavel Vranský, jeden z posledních žijících obránců Tobruku, následně příslušník 311. (československé) bombardovací peruti RAF. Navzdory věku vypráví nadále temperamentně a pamatuje si i nejmenší detaily. Jeho zážitky by jistě vydaly na román. Skromně podanou, ale realistickou kroniku o statečnosti, vlastenectví, demokracii. Nezačala až s nacistickou okupací: „Rodiče měli v Ostravě třípokojový byt a po roce 1933 jeden pokoj dávali k dispozici utečencům z Hitlerova Německa. Kromě jiných u nás tehdy přespali i Thomas Mann. Emigranti vyprávěli a my jsme z první ruky věděli, jak to v Německu vypadá.



Posádka liberátoru kpt. Protivj před bojovým letem. Pavel Vranský čtvrtý zleva...

I když jsem tehdy byl vlastně ještě kluk, už jsem věděl, co je nacismus a jakou hrozbu představuje.“

Nacistická okupace ani ne osmnáctiletého Pavla zastihla na internátní škole v Kroměříži. „Večer 14. března mi volal otec, že Němci už obsazují Ostravsko. Řekl jsem to klukům a všichni jsme vyrazili na náměstí. Tam bylo několik set lidí, zpívala se hymna, vykřikovala protiněmecká hesla. Kroměřížští Němci začali vyvěšovat z oken prapory s hákovými kříži a my kluci jsme jim je strhávali... Taký někdy začátkem května, když jsem se od známých, kde jsme poslouchali Londýn, vrátil na internát, zastavil mě spolužák a říká - tam nechoď, Němci hledají lidi, co strhávali jejich fangle...“

Místo na internát šel na nádraží a nočním vlakem odjel do Ostravy. Z obavy, že Němci ho doma už hledají, až druhý den informoval rodiče a vyrazil na hranice s Polskem. Na samotě u hranic měl známého, u kterého měl přespát. Jenže právě v tu noc začali Němci celou oblast prohledávat. „Před domem na silnici, stály proti sobě německé nákladáky s rozsvícenými světly, takže tam to nešlo. Ani do zahrady a z ní do lesa. Tam už byla také německá hlídka a jediné místo, kde jsem se mohl schovat byl kurník. To už jsem slyšel, že Němci jsou ve vedlejším dvoře. Vletěl jsem dovnitř

a protože jsem měl z domova baterku, rozsvítil jsem ji a říkal si: Tady zůstanu. Slepice tam seděly na hřebeně a já jsem viděl, že nad nimi je ještě střešní trám. Došlo mi, že na zemi zůstat nemůžu, protože by mě uviděli hned, když otevřou dveře. A tak jsem se šplhal na trám. Slepice z toho šlely. Kdákání, mlácení křídly muselo být slyšet na kilometry. No nakonec jsem seděl nahoře na trámu. A skutečně: když Němci prohledávali dvůr, tak jeden otevřel i dvířka kurníku. Posvítl si ale jen na jeho spodek... Netušil, že nahoře jsem já a klepu se strachy.“

Do Polska přešel druhý den. V Krakově se dověděl, že se v nedalekých Bronowicích z našich emigrantů vytváří vojenská jednotka. Velel jí podplukovník Svoboda, který byl i v jeho odvodní komisi. Cvičilo se však v civilu a s klaciky. Když nacisté přepadli Polsko a padla Varšava, měla se jednotka přesunout do Rumunska. Lehkým vítězstvím opilí Němci bombardovali vlaky, masakrovali prchající civilisty, Pavel viděl střelbu z leteckých kulometů do žen a dětí... V Tarnopolu mají Češi prvního padlého. Do Rumunska nedorazí. Místo toho se dostávají do sovětského zajetí. Nakonec



Moskva internovaným Čechoslovákům, kteří se odvolávají na smlouvu z roku 1935, povoluje po skupinách odchod na

Margaret Vogel

It is with great sorrow that we announce the death of Heinz Vogel's wife, Margaret, early in January, just a few days after the birth of her great-grand-daughter in Israel. We send our deepest sympathy to Heinz and all the family.

June Roden

June, the wife of George Roden (Jiří Rosenstein) died suddenly in December. We send our deepest sympathy to George and all the family.

Jewish Genealogy website on Ostrava

Madeleine Isenberg writes:

I think I sent you this link: <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kezmarok/>

I created this for JewishGen. It's an on-going process. As I get more information/photos/documents I update it when I can.

I'm in the process of creating another one for Huncovce, Slovakia.

I notice that there is nothing for MO under Western Europe. Perhaps there is someone among your folk who would be willing to create something. Perhaps I could even help out in an advisory capacity. After everything that you do and know, it would probably be nice to share it with more of the world. It doesn't cost anything to join JewishGen and it is quite an amazing resource.

Warm regards,

Madeleine

If anyone would like to work with us and Madeleine to establish the Ostrava site, please let Monica or David know.

Polish Genealogical Research

Andrea Pitera has sent us information about a Polish genealogical researcher whom she has employed. He writes:

Ladies and Gentlemen

In recent years, I did not do genealogical research. Also refused to issues related to exploration and recovery of the property. Because I dealt with scientific work and worked at the university. I have written many articles and conducted many studies on the history of the Jews. I specialize in the history of Jews in the south of Poland, and Silesia, Galicia and the surrounding area. Scientific work at the university was for me more interesting than the private search genealogy and real estate. Unfortunately, life brings difficulties. My wife is seriously ill with cancer. He is currently in very poor condition. Requires a large health care. We have a 11-year-old son, who also needs care. Therefore, I resigned from my job at the university. Earnings at a Polish university currently does not protect my family financially. Besides, the university is far from my village. So I decided to go back to genealogical research and to recover the property. Again, I'm open to private orders related to genealogy. I work with good lawyers who help recover the property in the court. Besides, I can be a guide to southern Poland. I can be a driver for visitors to southern Poland (I have car Volvo

V40 combi). This letter will allow myself to send to all my existing customers and friends.

Sincerely yours.

Jacek Proszyk

tel.cell +48 667 542 255

email: proszyk@tlen.pl , proszyk@gmail.com

skype: jacek.jaworze

If you are interested, please contact him directly. Please note that this information is given in good faith but without any guarantee or recommendation on our part.

New Year Greetings from Poland

Kdysi, v roce 1973, jsme měli před maturitou na tablu krásný citát pro danou příležitost :

„Chtěl bych mít kapku štěstí nebo sud rozumu“.

Dnes bych to pro nové příležitosti upravil :

„Chtěl bych mít sud zdraví a kapku štěstí“.

A přeji to i Vám. Nejen do Nového roku.

Jindřich Rusek

Once upon a time, in 1973 we had a lovely table on graduation quote for the occasion:

"I would like to have a drop of happiness or barrel of reason."

Today I would adjust for new opportunities:

"I would like to have a barrel of health and drop of happiness"

And I wish it to you. Not only the New Year.

Henry Rusek

We, also, wish all our readers a very Happy and Healthy New Year

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