

BARDEJOV



JEWISH PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

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*"Having survived, I owe something to the dead and anyone who does not remember, betrays them again." Elie Wiesel*

Dear Friend,

In June 2005, I visited Bardejov with my wife, Jenny, and my son Jeffrey for the first time since 1949. I wanted to show them where I was born and grew up, what my life was like during and immediately after the war, and the places they had heard about all their lives.

As I expected, returning to my childhood home and sharing this experience with my family was very emotional. But what I did not expect, and what disturbed me very much, was the condition of the Jewish cemetery, the synagogues, the Mikvah, and Beith Hamidrash of Bardejov's once-vibrant Jewish community. The cemetery was overgrown and inaccessible, and the names on the stones were illegible. Two main synagogues—the Old Synagogue (part of the historic Jewish quarter) and the Chevra Bikur Cholim synagogue, where many of us were bar mitzvah'd—were in a dilapidated state, and another shul, the Chevra Mishnayot Synagogue, was now a school of commerce. You can imagine the sadness I felt seeing what had happened to these properties.

We had visited Bardejov right after the death of Meyer Špira A"H, one of the town's last Jewish residents. All these years, Mr. Špira had taken it upon himself to keep up the Bikur Cholim synagogue the best he could. If not for him, I am certain it would have been completely destroyed.

The Old Synagogue is part of the historic compound of Jewish community structures dating from the 1800s, including the Mikvah and Beith Hamidrash. The compound—which was singled out by UNESCO for "its cultural and historical significance" when nominating Bardejov as a World Heritage Site—was in great disrepair, and a large building supply company now occupied its buildings and grounds.

I wondered, Who will see to it that these properties are properly maintained? Who will be the voice of our ancestors who perished in the Holocaust, and in their memory respectfully maintain the places where they lived, prayed, and died? What can we do? We—and I personally—could not just stand by and let our Jewish history disappear forever.

I resolved to act. Mostly with my own funds, and with some assistance from the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO)—which represents the country's estimated 3,000 Jews and manages the Jewish public properties—I arranged for an initial restoration of the cemetery. This work was coordinated by the Heritage Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries (HFPJC) in Brooklyn, New York, and involved cleaning up the cemetery grounds and making them accessible. The clean-up was completed by August 2005. UZZNO now provides funds on a monthly basis to a cemetery caretaker.

In spring 2006, I established the Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee (BJPC)—a nonprofit organization dedicated to the restoration and preservation of Bardejov's Jewish community

properties as memorials to the town's rich Jewish history. In July of 2006, I returned to Bardejov to determine how the BJPC might work with the local and national officials who are responsible for restoring and preserving these properties.

As a result, we received a commitment from UZZNO to work with us to restore the Old Synagogue. We also realized the significant contributions the BJPC could make to both local and national efforts to acknowledge the Jewish heritage of Slovakia.

In 2006 we restored the cemetery, laid new foundations under each headstone, and posted each stone on our website.

In 2010, the Old Synagogue in the Suburbia was vacated and restored. In May 2012, the BJPC organized a [commemorative gathering](#) and reunion in Bardejov, which brought together "Bardejovers," their descendants, and friends from around the world. The event received extensive media coverage in Slovakian and international media and has helped to set the stage for the BJPC's ongoing and future projects as we continue to diligently pursue our mission.

On March 25, 2013, construction began on the BJPC's latest project: a [Holocaust Memorial Garden](#). We plan to have a dedication ceremony in June 2014. But there is still much to do. The Mikvah, Beith Hamidrash, and the Suburbia grounds are still occupied by the building supply company.

We need to work together to persuade Slovakia's local and national authorities to continue with our goals of restoring the historic 19th-century Jewish Suburbia complex, including the immediate removal of the building supply company. Once the site is vacated, we will pursue creating an educational and cultural center there in honor of Bardejov's once-thriving Jewish community.

We will also continue to work towards the preservation of the Bikur Cholim synagogue and to produce the [memorial book of Jewish Bardejov](#).

I look forward, with your help, to achieving all our goals in the years to come. As we move forward, we hope you and others will join us. If you are interested, please [contact us](#) to learn about the many ways you can help and [support us](#). We hope you will share with us the important work that the BJPC will accomplish in the near future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Emil".

**Emil Fish**, Founder  
Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee