

# A REPORT ON THE ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITY IN ISRAEL

*translated from the Hebrew by Thia Persoff z"l*

During the horrendous years of the second world war, when the first greetings arrived from our town's people who were wandering as refugees across Russia, a group of people from Kutno living in Israel decided spontaneously to establish a committee to assist the needy. At that time (1943-1944), the representative of the international aid-committee, Mr. Josef Klarman, arrived in Israel. We handed him a list of names and addresses of Kutno Jews in Russia, in order to send them packages of food and clothing via Turkey.



Ashes of Chelmno's holy martyrs are brought to burial in the Nachalat-Yitzhak cemetery in Tel-Aviv (1949)

In May, the first official information of the Jewish annihilation in Poland, and the Kutno community there, reached us. At the same time, the first refugees from our old home started to arrive in Israel. Then the establishment of an organization for former Kutno residents turned to be more timely and urgent.

The first meeting took place soon after, one Shabbat afternoon, at Aharon Shlomo Elberg's home. About 20 people were present; old-timers in Israel and relatives of Kutno people. Chosen for the board were the members A. Sh. Elberg, M. Wigdorowicz, Z. Nordenberg, Y. Falc, and A. Lustigman. The important decisions made at that time were mutual-aid, a memorial to the town's martyrs, and the erection of a monument perpetuating the memory of the Kutno community on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

All those decisions were carried out. Our organization was among the first of former-town-residents to put a memorial tablet to the Kutno's Jewish community in the "Shoah cellar" [at Mount Zion in Jerusalem]. Many from our town participated in the solemn assembly the day after the memorial, among them two Knesset members who were former Kutners: S. Babe and Yaakov Riftin, and also the director-general of the Ministry of Religion, Rabbi Sh. Kahana.

In 1962, a marble monument was erected there. Many of the former Kutners from all parts of the country participated in the ceremony.

At that time, an idea had crystallized of memorializing the Jewish community of Kutno in a "Kutno Memorial Book" that will perpetuate her memory for

generations to come. Letters were sent to all former-Kutners organizations in the world, requesting them to start collecting documents, memories, lists, and funds to enable it to be published. In 1950, when our town's resident the historian Y. Y. Trunk was staying in Israel, we discussed with him the planned "Yizkor-Book" in more detail.

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In 1956, the organization had decided to have a festive reception for the great Jewish writer from our town – Shalom Asz. Not only Kutners came to the reception, but also many others who had nothing to do with our town, who wished to honor and give respect to our distinguished Kutner. (About the reception – see A. Lustigman's speech).

However, the main activities and concerns of the board were concentrated on publishing the book, on holding yearly memorial services and by keeping in touch with the Kutner organizations and individuals in other countries.

In 1961, the elected board of former Kutners comprised of A. Sh. Elberg as the honorary chairperson. Chairperson – Y. Majranc. Vice chairperson and in charge of the secretariat – Y. Elbaum. The secretariat – A. Lustigman, E. Wajchselfisz, and Ch. Grinbaum. In charge of finances – P. Hirsberg, Sh. Laron (Falc), P. Chasin, (Bagno), T. Puterman-Stuczyńska, H. Plocer, M. Wigdorowicz, Z. Lasman, Z. Metal, N. Moszkowicz, and A. Szymonowicz.

The full board held regular meetings each month, but the chairpersons met once a week. Their decisions were brought to the full board for discussion. There were also

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בירושלים

למען קדושים מושלכים באש!

קדושי קוטנה והסביבה  
( פולין )

שנספו בתאי הגזים ומקלאות האש  
שהקימו זרע עמלק הנאצים הטמאים  
יימח שמם וזכרם !

בגיהנום של חלמנו  
ביום זעם השם - כ"ה אדר ה'תש"ב  
תנצ"ב ה'

Memorial stone on Mount-Zion

frequent meetings with the Kutners in Haifa, in Leizer Niewialkowski's synagogue, or in one of the rooms in the Technion or in comrade Arie Orner's home. In Haifa was active a board of former Kutners. Its members were Arie Orner, Dr. Nisen Welcman, Felek Tajchner, and Liuba Turbowicz. Visits to the Kutners in Jerusalem and other towns were also made.

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In the early 60s, applications and requests from former Kutners, in Israel and other countries, to accelerate the process of bringing about the planned "Yizkor-Book" had increased. At a meeting at the home of Mrs. Hela Plocer, all the pertinent matters in relation to the book were brought up for discussion, and it was decided to choose a special board consisting of P. Hirszberg, L. Laron, Y. Elbaum, A. Lustigman, E. Wajchselfisz, Pola Chasin (Bagno), and Tola Puterman-Stuczyńska (of blessed memory). In addition, it was decided to reorganize the secretariat – the results were not late in coming; connections and contacts were strengthened with the boards of former Kutners in Paris, New-York, Mexico, Canada, Britain, Brazil, and Australia. In Israel, too, our Kutners felt the intensive activity of the new board, as they received frequently memos, circulars, and letters requesting them to share their writings for the book, and to donate money to enable its publication.

The visits of Kutners from various countries in Israel were very helpful in tightening the connection with us. We received them with warm hearts, often around festively set tables and spent time exchanging memories of our old home, and in conversations about future plans. After returning to the countries of their residence, many of them turned into our good-will ambassadors. Those were A. M. Bild, and the

engineer Y. Grabinsky in Mexico, Y. Trunk and Zomer in the USA, Hoffman and Szlajfer in Paris. The editorial office started to receive testimonial material, articles, chapters of memories, and photographs from bygone days in the town of Kutno.

In 1963, we published a prospectus "Kutno Book and surroundings", in which the contents and goals of the book were presented. The prospectus was sent to all the members of the organization in Israel and other countries.



Mr. Zomer (USA) visiting the committee in Israel. (1964)

A special problem came up, when a request was presented to include in the "Yizkor-Book" for Kutners, other places near our town where Jews were settled. According to the request of the organization in Paris, we decided to enable the perpetuation of the memories of three large Jewish settlements in the Kutno area. Those are Łęczyca, Krośniewice and Dąbrowice, since, in Paris, those three towns are organized together with the former Kutners.

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The editorial board members in Israel

After we got in touch with the editor Mr. David Sztokfisz, the editorial members (decided upon by the board) – the comrades: Babe, Mendelewicz, Majranc, Riftin, Moszkowicz, Frumer, Wajchselfisz, Elbaum, Wigdorowicz, Laron (Falc), Hirszberg, and Lustigman – started reading (alone or together) all the material that had arrived at the book's editorial office.

The editors gave their notes, sorted, corrected what needed correction, and prepared the material for the book. One fundamental idea was held by them – no material received should be rejected. Therefore, they had to labor hard in adapting and polishing the large amount of material. The members of the board and the editors had many discussions over each article, essay, etc. until it was found to be worthy to be included in the book.

The group of the editors was comprised of Kutners' representatives from all the countries where they settled.

Despite the intensive activities about the book publishing, the regular activities of the organization had not stopped. Purim and Chanukah balls were held, as were receptions for visitors from other lands. Even those and other activities were intertwined with our efforts to publish the book. The lectures and various appearances, and the income they generated, were dedicated to this "Yizkor-Book".

The date for the yearly memorial – 23<sup>rd</sup> of Adar – was strictly kept. The first part of the memorial was dedicated to the remembrance of our martyrs, and the second part was about organizational business: report on the board's activities, financial report, discussion and election of a new board.

The board elected in 1963 is still active today with hardly any change in its members: A. Sh. Elberg as honorary chairman, Y. Majranc for chairperson, Y. Elbaum as vice chairperson and general secretary, P. Hirszberg, and Sh. Laron – finance. A. Lustigman, E. Wajchselfisz, and Ch. Grinbaum – the secretariat. Members of the board: A. Szymonowicz, M. Wigdorowicz, G. Wolsztajn, Z. Lasman, N. Moszkowicz, S. Fajner (Bagno), H. Plocer; the auditing board – S. Frumer; from Dąbrowice – Z. Wajnsztok.

To make the activity more efficient, an executive board was elected comprised of members Y. Elbaum, P. Hirszberg, E. Wajchselfisz, Ch. Grinbaum, A. Lustigman, Sh. Laron (Falc), and M. Wigdorowicz.

About 300 families (about 1,000 persons) of former Kutners are living in Israel: 170 families in Tel-Aviv, Ramat-Gan, and Givatayim, 85 in Haifa and vicinity, 10 in Jerusalem, 52 in various kibbutzim and 8 families in the south of the country.

## THE SECRETARIAT



Former residents of Kutno in Israel at the memorial ceremony in Mount Zion in Jerusalem (1958)





At the yearly memorial ceremony of the Kutner landsmanschaft in Israel (Jerusalem, 1958)



At the annual memorial ceremony of the organization of former Kutno residents in Israel (Jerusalem, Mount Zion, 1958)





At the entrance of Mount Zion in Jerusalem



Presidium of the memorial ceremony in Tel Aviv, 1965. From right: Turbowicz, Orner (Korn), Mendelewicz, Elberg, Wajkselisz, Hirszberg, Lustigman, Elbaum, Laron (Falc)



Top: part of the annual memorial ceremony of Kutners in the "House of Pioneers" in Tel Aviv 1963.  
Bottom: committee of the Kutno former residents' organization in Israel