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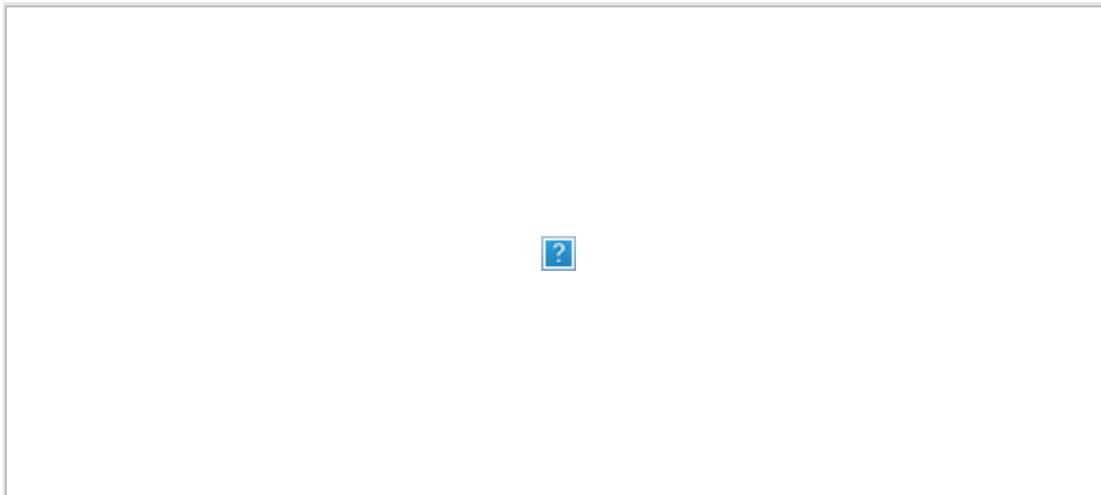
Eric D. Schwerin
Rosemont Seneca Partners, LLC



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U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad > Home

Congresswoman Gets Commission Award for Cemeteries Protection Law



Commission Members pose with U.S. House of Representatives Member Grace Meng of New York (fifth from right) during the Commission's meeting in Washington, DC September 10th. Commission Chair Lesley Weiss (light blue jacket) gave Meng the Commission's Cultural Heritage Preservation Award (Weiss is holding the certificate of award) for being the sponsor of a new U.S. law making desecration of cemeteries a violation of religious freedom. Federal law gives the Commission the assignment of encouraging the national governments of Central and Eastern Europe to protect cemeteries containing remains associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens. The law sponsored by Meng gives the Commission a stronger argument for the protection of

burial places in the region.

Memorial to Serock, Poland Holocaust Victims Dedicated

Commission Member Lee Seeman speaks during the dedication August 27th of a Commission memorial in Serock, Poland remembering the people of the community who were Jewish. Most were killed during the Holocaust. The memorial is on the site of the town's Jewish cemetery. Nazi German forces destroyed visible evidence of the burial ground but parts of some grave stones were found in recent years. These were incorporated into the memorial, which was primarily funded with monies raised by Seeman. The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) arranged and oversaw the building of the memorial on land donated and made accessible by PKO Bank Polski. It also arranged the dedication ceremony, which included remarks by U.S. Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull, Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich, Serock Mayor Sylwester Edwin Sokolniki, Legionowo Powiat Starost Jan Grabiec, Agnieszka Zawadzka of the Mazowieckie province Voivod, Piotr Kadlcik of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland, Justyna Borkiewicz of the PKO Bank Foundation, and Hannah Champness, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor from Serock who lives in the U.S. and attended the ceremony. Champness raised funds for the memorial as a Bat Mitzvah project. The memorial was originally suggested by then U.S. House of Representatives Member Gary Ackerman.

Commission Memorial to First Female Rabbi Dedicated

Commission Member Gary P. Zola and Chair Lesley Weiss at the Terezin Memorial in the Czech Republic in front of a plaque memorializing the first woman to become a rabbi. The Commission sponsored the plaque recalling Rabbi Regina Jonas of Germany, who was imprisoned at the Nazi's Thereisenstadt concentration camp before being sent to her death at Auschwitz. The plaque was dedicated in a ceremony July 24th in which the women who were the first ordinees of their denominations as well as the first Orthodox woman to be ordained "Rabba" participated. Representatives of the Terezin Memorial and the Jewish Women's Archive also spoke. Dr. Zola initiated the plaque project.

Funding was donated by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Memorial to Jews of Bardejov, Slovakia Killed in Holocaust Dedicated

Bardejov, Slovak Republic Mayor Boris Hanuscak shakes hands with Commission Chair Lesley Weiss and Member Emil Fish at the dedication June 24th of a major memorial to the 3,262 Jews of the city and the surrounding area murdered in the Holocaust. The three (and another dedication program participant) are standing in front of the memorial's walls naming the victims. Fish built the memorial with the encouragement and support of the Commission through the Bardejov Jewish Preservation Committee that he founded and heads. He is a native of the city who was imprisoned at the Nazi's Bergen-Belsen concentration camp before emigrating to the United States.

Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD) presented Chairwoman Weiss with the Jewish Heritage Celebration's Jewish Heritage Appreciation Award at the U.S. Capitol May 7th. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA), Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL), and Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz joined Cardin in praising the Chairwoman's work.

Commission Chair Lesley Weiss (right) and Member Jules Fleischer (left) with U.S. Ambassador to Sweden Mark Brzezinski July 9th before the posthumous award of the Congressional Gold Medal to Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg for saving tens of thousands of Hungarians who were Jewish during the Holocaust.

About the Commission

The Commission is an independent agency of the Government of the United States of America. It was established by U.S. [Public Law 99-83](#).  The law directs the Commission to—

1. [identify and report on cemeteries](#), monuments, and historic buildings in Eastern and Central Europe that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens, particularly endangered properties, and
2. obtain, in cooperation with the Department of State, [assurances from the governments](#) of the region that the properties will be protected and preserved.

In addition to the types of sites specified in the law, the Commission also seeks the preservation of similar types of properties, including related archival material. It, additionally, encourages and facilitates private and foreign government restoration and preservation projects.

The establishment of the Commission recognized that the population of the United States is mostly comprised of immigrants and their descendents. Because it is, the United States has an interest in the preservation of sites in other countries. These sites are an important part of the cultural heritage of many Americans.

The Holocaust and 45 years of atheistic, Communist governments created a critical need that led to the Commission's establishment. The Holocaust annihilated much of Europe's Jewish population, killing most Jews and forcing others to flee. In many countries, none were left to continue to care for the communal properties that represented an historic culture in the area and constitute an integral part of the Jewish religion. (Burial places are sacred in Judaism)

The destruction, desecration, and deterioration of properties under the Nazis persisted under subsequent Communist regimes. Additionally, Cold War tensions hindered access by Americans who wanted to ensure preservation of the sites.

Many properties continue to be endangered. Governments and communities in the region face fundamental and competing challenges. Some Jewish sites have also been affected by a resurgence of anti-Semitism.

The Commission was established in 1985 by [Public Law 99-83](#).  It began its operations when it received its first appropriation in Fiscal Year 1990.

The Commission consists of [21 Members](#) appointed by the President. Of these, seven are appointed in consultation with the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and

seven are appointed in consultation with the President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate. The Members are appointed for three-year terms, although they continue to serve until they are replaced. They are not paid for their service.

One Member is designated by the President to chair the Commission. The current Chair is the Honorable Lesley Weiss of Washington, DC.

The Commission is required to meet every six months. It is assisted by a small staff.

On a day-to-day basis, much of the Commission's work consists of addressing problems regarding specific sites that are raised by U.S. citizens, federal officials, or others, and assisting U.S. citizens and groups with restoration, preservation and site marking projects.

Assistance is generally provided through interventions with foreign government officials and sometimes provided through Commission sponsorship or co-sponsorship of the projects. In some cases, technical assistance is provided, funds are raised, and the Commission receives contributions on a tax-deductible basis and transfers the monies to local contractors for Americans.

[Projects](#)