



**JEWISH MUSEUM OF FLORIDA
MEDIA RELEASE**

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***NEW EXHIBIT TO OPEN AT
JEWISH MUSEUM OF FLORIDA SEPT. 13***

***"Wooden Synagogues of Poland
& The Florida Connection"***

***Tells Stories of Shtetls and Families that Represent the
Majority of the Jewish Community.***



Gombin synagogue model.

On September 13, the Jewish Museum of Florida opens to the public an exhibition that tells stories of Polish shtetls and some of their Jewish families who settled in Florida. The genesis of the exhibit was the donation by Englishman Peter Maurice of ten models of 17th-18th century Polish wooden synagogues. He researched and built the 1/40-scale models 2003-2007.

Jews have lived in Poland for more than 1,000 years. About 80% of the American Jewish community has origins in Poland.

That is not surprising, as we know that this was the center of the European Jewish world with more than 3 million Jews before the Holocaust. The focus of life for these Polish Jews was their synagogue. For 400 years prior to World War II, the Jews of the shtetls built approximately 1,000 wooden synagogues, because timber was plentiful. According to some art historians, the wooden synagogues of Poland, with their painted and carved interiors, were a truly original and organic manifestation of artistic expression-the

only real Jewish folk art in history.

These beautiful and unique 17th and 18th century Polish wooden synagogues no longer exist. During World War II, the Nazis burned to the ground those still standing. Some synagogues built in the 19th and 20th centuries have been found in Poland and what is now Lithuania and are in deteriorated conditions.

This exhibit conveys the enormity of what was lost during World War II. Poland was the place where the Nazis built most of the death camps. This is the place where most of Europe's Jews perished.

The Museum's founding executive director and chief curator, Marcia Jo Zerivitz, said, "While we have various models in our Collections, from a kosher bakery in Lakeland to a model of our very own Beth Jacob synagogue, this donation is so unique in that it brings a taste of old Polish Jewish life to modern day Miami Beach. So many Floridian Jews have a family history from Polish shtetls. These beautiful, unique models evoke memories of our heritage. When you look at them, you can almost hear the davening (praying) from within the walls and recall the pain of suffering of all Eastern European Jews from the period of the Holocaust when the Nazis destroyed these structures and most of the Jewish people. Through the creation of these models, Peter Maurice ensured that an element of Jewish life in Poland would not be forgotten. And we are so honored that Maurice chose the Jewish Museum of Florida from all the museums in the world to tell this compelling, significant story."

Many Floridian Jews have a family history from Polish shtetls (small towns in

Eastern Europe with a sizeable Jewish population). To make the Florida Connection, the Jewish Museum of Florida invited Jewish families to submit material evidence of their Polish roots for this exhibition. The curatorial staff researched each of the towns represented by the wooden synagogue models and by the families, so the story includes photographs, artifacts and documents from more than 30 towns and nearly 40 families.



Dombek Family, Sosnowice, Poland, c.1910.

The exhibit runs through March 18, 2012.