

**JEWISH MUSEUM OF FLORIDA ISSUES CALL FOR MATERIALS FOR
EXHIBIT ON POLISH JEWS WHO SETTLED IN FLORIDA
Deadline is August 2010**

The Jewish Museum of Florida is very proud to announce a new acquisition that is significant to the Jewish history of Florida, as well as world Jewish history.

Peter Maurice, of England and Spain, donated to the Museum ten Polish wooden synagogue models, which he built. These detailed models depict synagogues in Poland from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the villages of Przedborz, Gombin, Zabłudow, Gwozdziec, Wysoke Mazowieckie, Lutomiersk, Kornik, Narowla, Glinne and Pilic. They all have distinct architectural elements that are reflective of the time and place in which they were created.

Creating a Florida Connection Exhibit

To share these models with the public, the Museum is planning an exhibit to tell an expanded story of Jews in Florida who came (or whose ancestors came) from Poland. If you (or someone you know) are one of them, please contact the Museum Registrar (305-672-5044, ext. 3167) or email (registrar@jewishmuseum.com) so that we can create a "Florida Connection" with your families' photos and artifacts. Donors need to provide the dates, names, and places for each photo, document and artifact and the story overview of the family.

Jews of Poland and their Wooden Synagogues – Jewish Folk Art

Jews lived in the territory that later became Poland as early as the 8th century when Jewish merchants were part of the trade routes across the continent and by the 10th century, they were turning to agriculture and handicrafts. Then during the Crusades more immigrants came and some became moneylenders. During the 13th and 14th centuries, intense urbanization and rising persecution of Jews in Western Europe encouraged even more Jewish immigration to Poland, where they were welcomed. They lived in concentrated areas of their towns, “the Jewish quarter,” and the center of their lives was the synagogue.

The period from 1580 to 1648 has been called the Golden Age of Jews in Poland. Because timber was plentiful and easy to work with, it was widely used in Poland as building material. The architects and craftsmen were quite skilled at elaborate designs that followed the rules for the layout of the synagogue. 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. The wooden synagogues were memorable because, unlike all previous synagogues, they were not built in the architectural style of their region and era, but in a newly evolved and uniquely Jewish style.

Moreover, while in many parts of the world Jews were proscribed from entering the building trades and even from practicing the decorative arts of painting and woodcarving, the wooden synagogues were actually built by Jewish craftsmen. To many people, the

Polish wooden synagogue represents the only indigenous Jewish architecture, that is, a style of folk architecture that is both unique to the Jews, and not primarily adapted from something else.

The Nazis in WWII destroyed the early wooden synagogues in Poland, mostly in 1939. Some built in the 19th and 20th century have been found in Poland and what is now Lithuania and are in deteriorated conditions.