

# Kremenets Jewish Cemetery Project

Update Report, 23 August 2007

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I visited Ukraine between 19 and 27 April 2007. There were two primary objectives for this trip: (1) to review work done at the Kremenets Jewish Cemetery by Professor Volodomyr Panaovich Kucheryaviy and his team; and (2) to meet with our consultant, Chris Cleere, and discuss the requirements for a stone conservation training course for Phase 2 of the Project. During the trip I also met with Andriy Andriyevich Guslavskiy, former Mayor of Kremenets and currently Director of the Kremenets-Pochayiv Historical-Architectural District, with Leonid Svyatoslavovich Kichatiy, currently Mayor of Kremenets, and with a half-dozen Jews from the Kremenets community. In addition, I met with Taissa Bushnell, Chris Cleere and Oleksandr Kryskiv in Lviv to discuss integration of the Kremenets stone conservation training program with a new program to be conducted in Lviv. And, we met with Roman Nawrotsky, Deputy Mayor of Vishnevets to discuss the Vishnevets Jewish Cemetery.

## A Little Background

After two years of trying to obtain grant funding to restore the Jewish Cemetery of Kremenets, we were successful. In August 2006, a private foundation awarded us a grant of 10,000 GBP (Great Britain Pounds), about \$18,600, to begin Phase 1 of a projected four-phase multi-year project. Our primary tasks were (1) to develop a detailed plot map of the cemetery, (2) to develop a landscaping plan which would control erosion, provide access to the Cemetery, and which would include a memorial area for gravestones retrieved from the town, and (3) to develop cost estimates for restoring the cemetery, including repairing and re-setting the gravestones and repairing/rebuilding the boundary wall. We had several subsidiary tasks, which I will discuss later in this report. To accomplish the work, we planned to hire a landscape contractor who would inventory all vegetation in the cemetery, clear excessive vegetation, number each gravestone and major fragment in a non-destructive way, evaluate the condition of the existing boundary wall, show the location of each numbered stone on the plot map, create a landscape plan for the Cemetery, and provide the cost estimates required for Phase 2. We contracted with Professor Volodomyr Panasovich Kucheryaviy (Figure 1), the only internationally listed landscape architect in Ukraine. Professor Kucheryaviy is head of the Department of Landscape at Lviv Polytechnic University.

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In August 2007, I received Professor Kucheryaviy's final report, including the plot map and landscape plan. We are getting the documents translated. He and his team did excellent work. However, the report includes some surprising results.



**Figure 1 - In the Jewish Cemetery, before brush removal  
from right: Alex Dunai, Prof. Volodomyr Kucheryaviy, Taras Lebus',  
Sergei Kucheryaviy, and Ron Doctor, September 2006**

The Kremenets Jewish Cemetery is much larger than we thought

Previously, we had contracted with Valeriy Rozenblit to photograph all accessible gravestones in the cemetery. Valeriy provided us with more than 3,200 photos. We completed translation and editing of these and are preparing a database with all the information extracted from them. With 3,200 gravestones on a fairly steep hillside, we knew the restoration project would be a major effort (Figure 2). However, we did not know how large the project really would be.



**Figure 2 - Kremenets Jewish Cemetery, Before Brush Removal  
Left Photo: Old part of Cemetery, by David Goldenberg, 1997  
Right Photo: The upper slope, by Radek, 2001**

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**Figure 3 - A view from town, the old part of cemetery after excess vegetation removal**

The Cemetery is much more extensive than previously thought. Clearing excess vegetation revealed many gravestones that could not be seen before the clearing (Figure 3 thru Figure 5). Professor Kucheryavii's team counted 7,348 gravestones, plus another 1,449 graves without stones! This is one of the largest surviving ancient Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine.



**Figure 4**

**The old part of the cemetery after excess vegetation was removed  
The thicket on the right is typical of vegetation that was removed.**

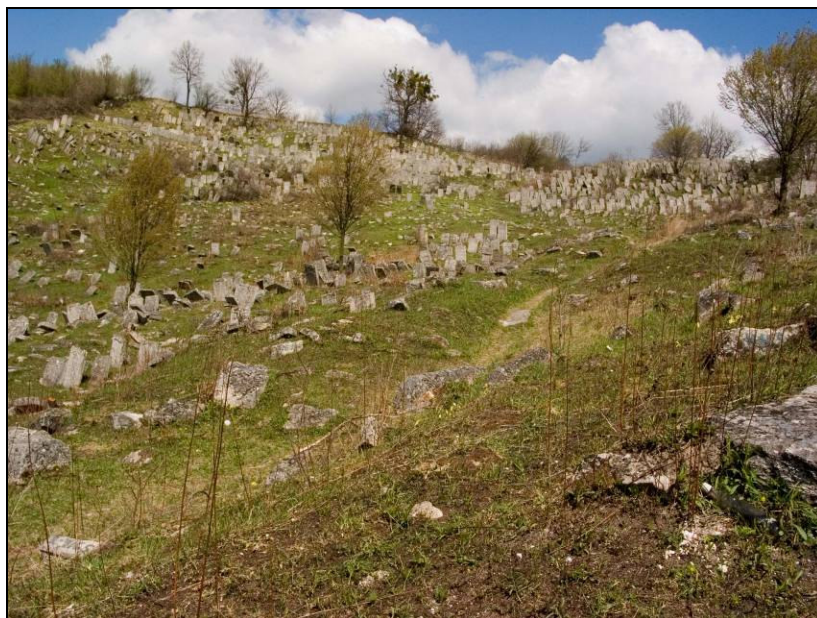


Professor Kucheryaviy's team categorized the stones according to their condition.

- 1,649 are in "decent shape".
- 2,483 are slanted. About half of these can be re-set a bit easier than the others.
- 2,283 are broken.
- 1,166 are on the ground. This number includes about 233 that are completely covered with earth but are identifiable as graves. Of the stones on the ground, about 430 are 80% or more covered with earth. More than half of the stones on the ground can be re-set vertically.
- 1,216 gravestone bases are without vertical headstones



**Figure 5 - The old part of the cemetery after excess vegetation removal  
Overgrowth clearance revealed many downed stones,  
and many stones missing from the old part of the cemetery  
In the photo below, a newer section of the cemetery is in the background**



Clearing the vegetation had two other effects. From the town, you now could see how extensive the cemetery really is. And, now we could identify the remains of three *ohelim* in the old part of the cemetery (Figure 6). (An *ohel* is a structure built over the grave of a notable person, usually a revered Rabbi.) We know from the Yizkor Books that the grave (and *ohel*) of Rabbi Yitschak Ber Levinzon was near the middle of the old part of the cemetery. Rabbi Levinzon was a noted Haskalah leader of the late 1700s and early 1800s. If one of these three *ohelim* is indeed his, then this is a wonderful discovery. We may be able to determine this by translating the gravestones in the *ohelim*.

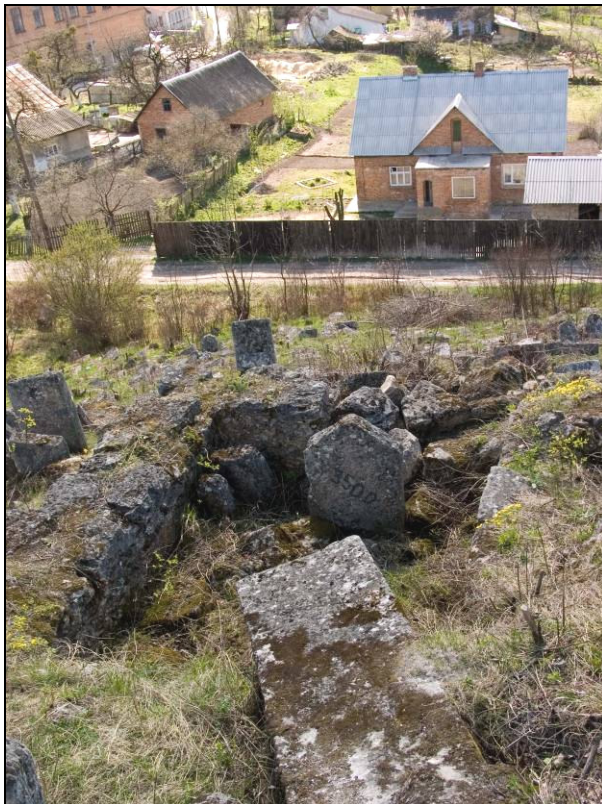


Figure 6

**Left Photo: Remains of an *Ohel* containing Matzeva 3500. The house at top left belongs to Valeriy Rozenblit, our project photographer.**

**Top Photo: Looking upslope from the *ohel* that contains matzeva 3500 the remains of the 2nd of three *ohelim* is visible.**

### Meeting with the Jewish Community - Gravestones at the Lyceum

During my April visit we met with the following members of the Jewish Community: Valeriy Rozenblit, Sveta Rozenblit, Lola Fursik, Larisa Fursik, Boshna Mel'nik, and Larisa Potelnitskaya. I explained the work that was being done in Phase 1 of the Project and discussed the plans for Phase 2. They approved the idea of a stone conservation training program to be held in Kremenets. They already had heard about the possibility of using Valeriy's detached garage, which is across the road from the



old part of the cemetery, as a workshop, and there was much good-natured laughter when I mentioned it. Regarding the training program, they wanted to know ...

- When would it take place?
- Can women participate in the training?

On behalf of the Jewish community, they agreed to the proposal to include the Jewish Cemetery in the Kremenets-Pochayiv Historical-Architectural District.

As the meeting was ending, the group told us about an incident that had occurred the previous week and asked for my help. The *Kremenets Oblast Humanitarian-Pedagogical Institute*, located at the Lyceum, is the local institution of higher learning, a college. Later in 2007, the Institute and the nearby Kremenets Botanical Gardens will sponsor a major Conference at the Institute. As part of preparations for the Conference, the Institute is constructing a new pathway to link the the Institute with the Gardens. When digging for the pathway began, they unearthed about 20 Jewish gravestones.

The local Jews were upset because they had been informed that Afanaciy M. Lomakovich, Rector of the Institute, planned to use the gravestones to pave the new pathway. The faculty advised him that this should not be done, but plans were proceeding to do it anyway. A maintenance person at the Institute called one of the Jewish women to alert her to this. Despite the protests, the Institute still planned to use the stones for paving. The local Jews asked me to intervene.

We visited the Campus. Along the existing pathway to the Lyceum's offices, I noticed a Jewish gravestone fragment alongside the path (Figure 7 & Figure 8).



**Figure 7 - Pathway to Lyceum**  
Matzeva Fragment at center-bottom of photo



**Figure 8 - Matzeva Fragment**  
alongside pathway



As we approached the Institute's playing fields, we could see a stack of about 20 gravestones (Figure 9 and Figure 10).



**Figure 9**

**Approaching Stack of Gravestones at the Institute**



**Figure 10**

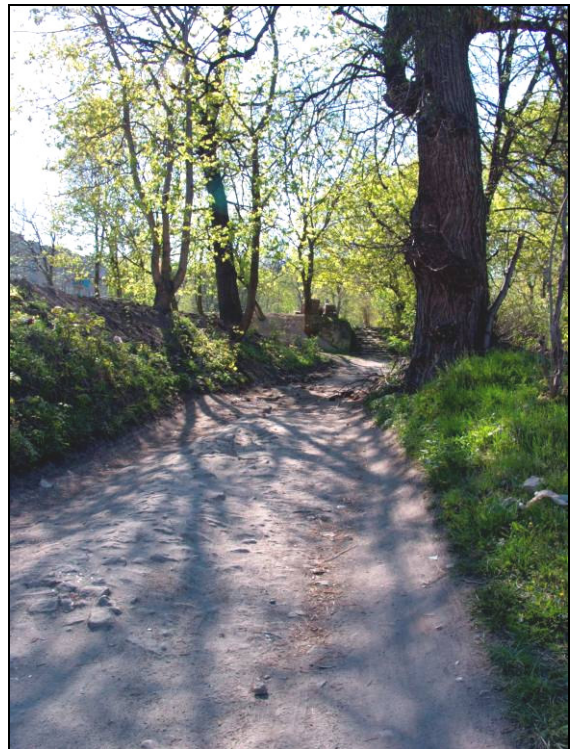
**Stack of Excavated Gravestones at the Institute**

One of the Institute's physical education faculty in the nearby building showed us where the stones were found (Figure 11). He said the Institute intends to excavate the entire area for a paved pathway. The area extends for about 100 yards (Figure 12). It could contain several hundred stones.



**Figure 11**

**Excavation Site of Institute Gravestones**



**Figure 12**

**New Pathway to be Excavated at the Institute**



I met with the Rector, A.M. Lomakovich the next day. He was quite conciliatory and agreeable. After describing our activities in Kremenets and discussing the gravestone problem, we signed an agreement. He agreed to securely store the stones already excavated as well as any other stones they find until we can relocate them to an appropriate place in the Jewish Cemetery. He also agreed to notify Valeriy Rosenblit before they move the stones to storage, so that Valeriy can photograph each stone for us. In return, we will include selected faculty and students in the gravestone restoration training program ... if we get funded ... and I will provide his faculty with the results of our work.

Why are there Jewish gravestones at the Institute? Because during the war, the Nazis used the Lyceum buildings as a military hospital and they used the gravestones to pave the courtyard. This discovery raises a question ... How many other areas were paved with Jewish gravestones?

#### Gravestones in the former Gestapo Parking Lot

On a hillside above the high school there is a building that currently is used as a youth center. During WW2, this building was Gestapo HQ. It is surrounded by a large area paved with asphalt (Figure 13). Adjacent to it is a small area that is used as a parking lot. This small area is paved with large rectangular stones. It is bordered by smaller stones set at an angle against a concrete curb (Figure 14).



Figure 13 - A large paved area surrounds the former Gestapo HQ, now a Youth Center. The paved area continues around the side and back of the building.

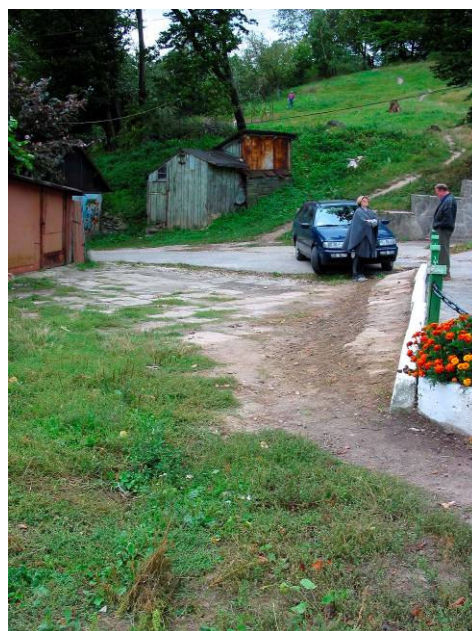


Figure 14 - Small parking lot paved with large stones & slanted stone border



On each of my past visits to Kremenets, I had been told that the Nazis paved these areas with Jewish gravestones from the Jewish Cemetery. On a 2004 visit we found one indication that this indeed was the case. Along the border of the small parking lot was a gravestone fragment with a Hebrew inscription. (Figure 15 and Figure 16)

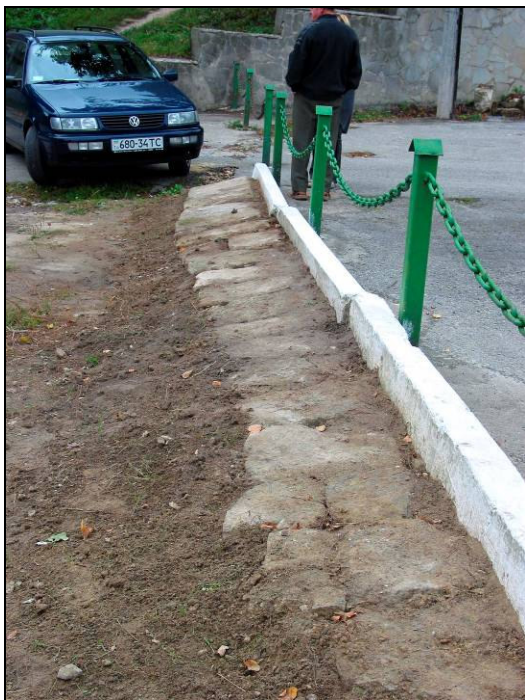


Figure 15 - Stones forming a border of the small Gestapo parking lot



Figure 16 - In 2004, this gravestone fragment was along the border of the small Gestapo parking lot

By the time I returned in 2006, this fragment had disappeared.

Former Mayor Guslavskiy and current Mayor Kichatiy both agreed to do test excavations to determine whether or not there are gravestones under the paving. During my April visit, Mayor Kichatiy assigned a city worker to help us. Chris Cleere, our stone conservation expert, guided the investigation.

The large stones in the small parking lot are Jewish gravestones. The smaller stones along the border are gravestone fragments (Figure 17 & Figure 18). And, ten inches below the asphalt surface of the large paved area, covered by a sandy soil, there are Jewish gravestones (Figure 19 & Figure 20). All are face-down, preserving the inscriptions.

If the entire large paved area on three sides of the building has gravestones under the asphalt, there could be more than 1,000 gravestones. Retrieving them, placing



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them in a memorial area of the Cemetery, and repaving the parking areas will require a major effort. In the meantime, we replaced the stones, face-down.



**Figure 17**  
Chris Cleere with gravestone fragments excavated from the border of the small parking lot at former Gestapo HQ

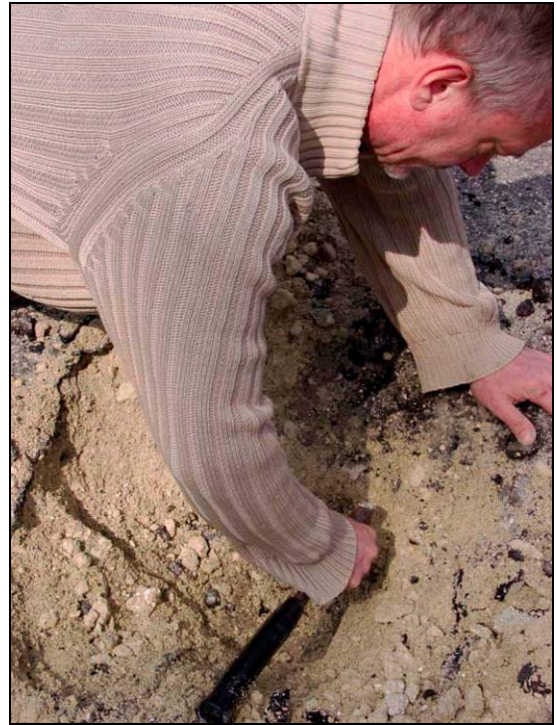


**Figure 18**  
Chris Cleere excavating gravestone fragments from small parking lot at former Gestapo HQ





**Figure 19**  
City workman breaking through asphalt in  
large paved area at former Gestapo HQ



**Figure 20**  
Chris Cleere excavating gravestone fragment  
in large paved area at former Gestapo HQ

### Re-thinking the Restoration Project

The size of the cemetery and the condition of the visible gravestones has caused us to re-think our approach to the restoration project. Previously, we planned to re-set downed stones and clean lichen and moss from all stone surfaces so that we could obtain good photos of all the inscriptions. Basic landscaping (paths & benches, weed control, erosion control, wall repair, plaques etc.) would complete the project.

Our preliminary work shows that there are at least 2-1/2 times more gravestones than originally photographed. In addition, many more stones are down than we previously thought. And we have learned that cleaning and restoring these stones must be done properly and very carefully to avoid doing permanent damage to them. There are internationally accepted standards for stone conservation, but there are only a handful of trained stone conservationists in Ukraine. Most of those trained people work at Chersonesos in Crimea, and they were trained by Chris Cleere, who continues to work there with them.

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As I noted earlier, we retained Chris to help us design a plan for restoring the Kremenets Jewish Cemetery. He proposed that we carry out a two to three week training program in Kremenets to obtain a cadre of trained workers who would use internationally accepted stone conservation techniques in the Kremenets Jewish Cemetery. We developed two grant applications to get funds for this training program and for a followup pilot program. Because of the large number of gravestones in the cemetery and their condition, the expense for restoring the entire cemetery is prohibitive. We will have to do the restoration in a prioritized, phased manner. The pilot program would begin in the old part of the cemetery. In subsequent years, as funding becomes available, the restoration work would be extended to other parts of the cemetery.

How far should we go with restoration? How much money is it reasonable to spend, assuming funding becomes available? Would it be better to restore only part of the cemetery and leave the remainder to illustrate the ravages of man and nature? These are questions that we must ask and discuss before we proceed much further with this project. I hope that we will be able to use our Kremenets Discussion List on Rootsweb (UKR-KREMENETS@rootsweb.com ) to explore these issues.

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