The Lives of Our Galician Ancestors

Suzan provided two handouts at the Meeting, which are reproduced below.

Handout #1

Judische Kultus Gemeinde = Jewish Cultural Administration 1772-1918
Other titles: Kahal (central body)
               Kehillah (local district body)

Characteristics
Self-governing system established by Austrian law through most of Empire
Continued under Poland rule 1919-1926

Governmental tool to:
  · Communicate with Jewish communities about laws
  · Track Jews for official purposes
  · Enable government to hand-off enforcement of unpopular law & taxes

Useful for Jewish community to:
  · Promote cohesion
  · Promote standardization of compliance with Jewish law
  · Organize advocacy for more favorable laws and taxes
Gemeinde mandated Jews to:
- Belong to a Jewish community
- Attend annual service in the official synagogue of district
- Obey secular and Jewish law
- Pay required taxes to the district

Maria Theresa died 1780
- Legislation for central appointed Kahal comprised of 12 men;
- Later changed to 6 appointed and 6 elected

Josef II died 1790
- Reformer;
- Revamped Kahal to 141 Jewish communities;
- Disbanded Gemeinde structure 1789, retaining 141 recognized communities

Leopold died 1792
- Reinstated Gemeinde;
- Overturned some of Josef's reforms

Franz Ferdinand 1792-1835
- Overturned rest of Josef's reforms;
- Enacted new Jewish taxes;
- Harsh rule; return to occupational restrictions

Ferdinand 1835-1848
- Ruled under regent;
- Increases in special Jewish taxes;
- More occupational restrictions

Franz Josef 1848-1916
- Abolished some special taxes and in 1848-1868;
- Emancipation throughout Empire 1868 and in Galicia 1869;
- Retained Gemeinde structure with new duties

Charles 1916-1918

Handout #2

Jews were born into a district where they were registered for life unless given permission to change, but generally residence could be changed at will for marriage or work.

Composition of Gemeinde:
- 12 elected men;
- President selected to represent Jewish community with respect to state and local government and church leadership;
Appointed Chief Rabbi for each district:
Court composed of 3 rabbinical elders, and
Administrative personnel.

Who voted? Eligible men 13 years old and up and, apparently, women in business or with property. Eligibility meant that taxes were current.

How often were elections? Every 4 years

Were there political parties? Yes, many of them as time went on.

Gemeinde responsible for overseeing all aspects of the Jewish community, i.e. infrastructure; production of kosher wine and candles; kashering standards; integrity of eruv.

Annual approved budget for administration paid for with tax receipts.

Taxes were numerous and high for Jews until 1848: kosher meat; candles; "head" tax; synagogue; cemetery; marriage. Candle tax collected weekly by a "lecht pachter."

Franz Josef: came to power in 1848 during Hungarian uprising at age 18. Emancipated Jews throughout Empire, except Galicia in 1868; Galician Jews emancipated 1869.

- Mandatory elementary secular education 7-14
- Access to higher education
- Access to land ownership
- Reduction in occupational restrictions
- Mandatory military service for men

Expanded role of Gemeinde in 1875 legislation to include registration of births, marriages and deaths. Regulations issued 1877.

Hassidic influence very strong within Gemeinde
- Major roles in elected governance; struggle to dominate chief rabbinate;
- Organized resistance to civil marriage and mandated secular education;
- Advocacy for relaxation of restrictions, special taxes, prohibition of production and importation of Hebrew & Yiddish books.
To Purchase Suzan's Book