

## Kapciamiestis Visit Marcia and Paul Greenbaum

My husband, Paul, and I took a wonderful 4 day trip to Lithuania in October 2012. The day we spent in Kapciamiestis, where my grandparents, Max and Bessie Simon, had lived until 1906 was definitely the highlight of our trip.

During the two and a half hour drive from Vilnius we passed farms, forests, a few people, and a few animals. Except for a short distance on an old cobblestone road, the roads were very modern even though Kapciamiestis is in a rural area just 5 miles from the border of Poland and Belarus.



As soon as we approached the town, having come from the desert of New Mexico, we were immediately struck by the beauty of the trees, the lakes, the well-cared for wooden homes, and the litter free streets.



The only Jewish remembrances we found were an exhibit in the Kapciamiestis Museum



which is attached to the school and the Jewish Cemetery. With the help of Carol Hoffman, who gave us much assistance in planning this trip, we asked our guide, Marius, to email the mayor and museum director. Upon arriving at the museum the mayor was waiting outside for us and graciously greeted us.



The museum director gave us an in depth tour of the museum which she explained was built with funding from the European Union. In the near future she plans to enlarge the Jewish area to depict Jewish life in the town.

The Jewish Cemetery is located just north of town and across from a lovely pond. Many grave stones remain. Our guide commented that it is the best cared for Jewish Cemetery that he has seen in Lithuania. Many gravestones are still standing and the new fence highlights the area.





Using the map from Dorothy Leiver's book, *The Jews of Kopcheve*, we were able to locate where Jewish families had once lived as well as the location of the Synagogue.

We found the Lithuanian people to be very helpful and polite. They are very proud of their country and their heritage and those we spoke with were quite forthright about the Nazi atrocities. They also seemed to be interested and knowledgeable about the Jewish history of the country.



In the Kaunas area we saw the Ghetto, Fort IX,



and had a tour of the Sugihara House where 3,000 visas were given out in 1940 to help Jews escape. Trakai Castle was also worthwhile in spite of the wind, snow, and cold temperatures we had that day. We found the food to be excellent and enjoyed many traditional potato and mushroom dishes.

We were happy to find a Jewish presence at The Choral Synagogue in Vilnius where we were warmly welcomed for a very joyous Simchat Torah service.

It was a most worthwhile trip.

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