

# Felshtin Pogrom Commemoration Draws More Than 100

"On the morning of February 18, 1919, about 600 of our ancestors were brutally killed. Today, 80 years later, we join together to make some sense of our collective past."

With these words, New Jersey artist Phyllis Nevins opened a reunion of more than 100 descendants of people who lived in the Ukrainian village of Felshtin, marking the rebirth of the landsleit organization.

The first major gathering of Felshtiners in years, if not decades, took place in Mendy's Restaurant in New York City on February 7, 1999.

Highlights of the event included a keynote address by Professor David Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and attendance by two persons born in Felshtin, Fina Feldman and David Biser.

After Rabbi Maurice Novoseller, son of Felshtin's Rabbi David Novoseller, offered a blessing, Phyllis Nevins welcomed the group, noting that the translation of the Felshtin yizkor book "has been the primary motivation in the revitalization of the Felshtin Society."

"The fact that the book is written almost entirely in Yiddish has frustrated those of us who want to understand our heritage," she noted. "My father, not yet 16, witnessed the pogrom, helped bury the dead, and tried to suppress that memory for the rest of his life. To better understand my father, I need to understand his history."



Top Row: (Left): Sid Shaievitz and Sora Ludmir, photo by Rhoda Shaievitz; (Right): Phyllis Nevins

Bottom Row: (Left): David Biser (born in Felshtin), photo by Phyllis Nevins; (Right): Rabbi Maurice Novoseller, photo by Rhoda Shaievitz.

Felshtin Society President Sid Shaievitz revealed how his search for his roots motivated him to organize efforts for the yizkor book translation and re-energize the Felshtin organization. He also invited outreach efforts to identify additional families descended from Felshtiners.

Sora Ludmir described the emotional journey she undertook while translating the Felshtin book: "I was right there with them. I lived the very words of the book. I felt what they felt. I understand their language. I *am* a Felshtiner."

The historical context of the Felshtin pogrom was explained by Mike Nevins, and Professor Roskies delivered the keynote address on the importance of the Felshtin yizkor book and the work of the Society.

"The revitalization of the Felshtin Society is very important," Roskies observed. "The DNA of Jewish memory is not the family; it is the institution, the *landsmanshaft*. If we are to preserve the memory of Felshtin, we cannot do it as lone individuals."

Future Internet projects, the restoration of the Felshtin section of the Baron Hirsch cemetery in Staten Island, archival research in Russia and Ukraine, and Felshtin anecdotes were discussed by David Baum, David Biser, Alan Bernstein, Barbara Fischkin, Peter Hoffman, and Mel Werbach.

Thanks to writer Barbara Fischkin, Secretary of the Felshtin Society, the reunion received excellent coverage in *Newsday* and the *Forward*.