



STAFF PHOTO/ALAN CHAPMAN

Norwell residents Laura and Rick Brown are gearing up for a project where they will travel to Poland and help rebuild a synagogue destroyed by the Nazis during World War II. Both are professors at the Mass College of Art and have taken on interesting projects in the past, such as building a replica of the first American submarine called "The Turtle."

Reconstructing history

Norwell residents trying to rebuild synagogue in Poland

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The Nazis destroyed it, but Norwell residents Rick and Laura Brown plan on helping to rebuild an old synagogue. The project they've decided to take on is not happening around here though, but in Poland.

Rick and Laura are part of an international team that will be helping to rebuild the Zabłudow synagogue, located

in the town of the same name. Laura said the group is composed of artists, educators, builders, historians and others. She and Rick are professors at the Mass College of Art and they are also members of the country's Timber-Framers Guild.

Rick said before the Nazis went into Poland during World War II, Poland was about 30-percent Jewish.

"The Nazis annihilated three-million Jewish people in Poland during the war," he

said. "Now, the Jewish population is next to nothing."

Rick explained the project to rebuild Zabłudow just kind of came to them. He said an archaeologist and an architect from Poland, both members of that country's Ministry of Culture, have been thinking about rebuilding the synagogue for some time.

"There have been efforts to rebuild other religious buildings over there," Rick said. "All the synagogues were

Residents trying to rebuild synagogue

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destroyed during the war.”

Rick said the archaeologist and the architect recently came across some architectural plans for the synagogue which had been preserved since 1923.

Rick explained in 1923 another young architect in Poland “went to the Polish government because he was fearful for the future.” He said the young man convinced officials to record historic buildings through drawings. One of the drawings done was of Zabludow, and it was done in great detail.

Rick said the archaeologist and the architect got their hands on the plans but were not really sure how to go about getting people’s attention. They wanted to find people who might be interested in taking on a rebuilding project. Rick said eventually, they started displaying the drawings at international trade shows. He added it was through those trade shows that he and Laura found out about the project and they noted they were immediately interested in it.

“It’s amazing those documents still survive,” Rick said. “We have drawings to work from.”

A few weeks ago, Rick and Laura went to a conference in Poland to discuss the rebuilding project with people of all types from all over the world. They said the event was fantastic and got them even more excited to do the project.

“Everyone entered with their own vision but we all came out

recognizing the complexity of the region, the history and communication between different parts of the world,” Laura said of the conference. “This is all part of a larger need to work united in creating awareness of a gaping cultural hole.”

“Now what we have to do is create an organization that can go about the steps to make this

ing the story behind it is important.”

Rick and Laura said the international group is striving to rebuild the synagogue exactly as it looked back when it was destroyed. They said the building will not be constructed on the original site, as that is a fire station right now.

“The project is still being

other schools around the world that can participate in the overall project,” Laura said. “There’s so many levels where people can enter.”

“We want to keep this as international as we can,” Rick added.

Rick said once the model is built, the project can start to take shape. He said he expects that from start to finish, the project will take several years to complete.

“And once it’s actually built, we’ll be doing a historic replica of the building’s interior, so that will take some time.”

Rick and Laura both said they don’t know if Zabludow would still serve as a synagogue once it is rebuilt. They said it could serve as something like a museum.

“By rebuilding it, younger generations will have the opportunity to see what past generations lost,” Laura said.

“I’m a baby-boomer and in my dad’s family, four people went off to war,” Rick said. “For me, this is a unique way to study the war. The rebuilding part of the whole project will be the easy part. Understanding the hows, whys, whos and whats is the hard part. This is an opportunity to go deep into a unique period and it’s a wonderful way to learn about history.”

For more information on the project or to contribute funds to the cause, send e-mails to handshouse@comcast.net or call (781) 826-7314.

“It’s more than a synagogue, it depicts a cultural heritage that is now a gaping hole in Polish history. You can’t necessarily replace the synagogue but relaying the story behind it is important.”

— Laura Brown

happen,” Rick added. “But we want this to be more than just rebuilding a building. This is much bigger than that.”

“It’s something that must be done,” Laura said. “It’s a subject that encompasses so much history. The history of the Holocaust is one of the most profound issues of the 20th Century. We’ll never be able to go back and make complete sense of it. By rebuilding the synagogue, we can start to understand that period of history and create a way of comprehending what happened.

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defined and refined,” Rick said. “We need to put together a business plan, we need to raise funds and we need the proper leadership.”

Rick and Laura said they plan on going back to Poland this summer. Rick said he is teaching a course at Mass Art called “Technology in Culture” through which he will have his students build a detailed model of Zabludow.

He added he hopes the model will be shown in places like museums and galleries and used to help raise funds.

Rick said he is hoping some of the Mass Art students will join he and Laura in Poland this summer as well.

“We’d like to link up with