



# SHTETL ROUTES

Travels Through the Forgotten Continent





In memory of  
Robert Kuwałek



PL

BY

UA

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[A] Brama Grodzka (Grodzka Gate) in Lublin, the western facade, 2014. Photo by Joanna Zętar, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[B] Brama Grodzka (Grodzka Gate) in Lublin, the eastern facade, before 1939, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**The "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre** is a Lublin-based municipal cultural institution promoting the education and protection of cultural heritage. In its projects, the Centre draws on the symbolic and historical significance of the building where it is located – the Grodzka Gate. This brick and stone archway was once the physical passageway between the Christian and Jewish quarters, as well as the symbolic meeting point of cultures, traditions, and religions within the city of Lublin. ¶ The origin of the "Grodzka Gate – Theatre NN" Centre was born from the activity of the NN Theatre, which was established in May 1990. The Centre itself has been in operation since 1992, when it was given the dwellings above and around the Grodzka Gate to use as its premises. ¶ World War II brought about the annihilation of Lublin's Jews, and after the Germans destroyed the Jewish quarter, a huge void was left in the municipal organism. This marked the end of several centuries of Lublin's development as a bi-cultural, Polish-and-Jewish city. More than three quarters of a century have passed and the new Lublin (rebuilt after the war) has mostly forgotten about this Polish-and-Jewish city, that within the large empty areas around Lublin Castle there was once a bustling town of many streets, houses, and synagogues. ¶ The theatre became similar to an "Ark of memory" in which old photographs, documents and memories are constantly gathered. In the gate, in the artistic and educational activities carried out here, a symbolical meeting space is created – a ground for discussing the past and making the future.

## Introduction

The idea of the “Shtetl Routes” project is based on the experience and knowledge gained from the documentary, artistic and educational work completed with regards to the Jewish cultural heritage of Lublin (Poland), which has been ongoing since the inception of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre in 1992.

Despite the lasting traces of the many centuries of Jewish presence in the areas where we live, for example, the Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian borderland, so far the local memorial sites related to Jewish history and culture have not been sufficiently appreciated as valuable items of European heritage. During the implementation of the project we devoted particular attention to the cultural phenomenon that was peculiar to Central and Eastern Europe and that strongly influenced the local cultural landscape – the shtetl (Yid. small town). A unique kind of town inhabited by Jews and Christians of various ethnicities. ¶

In the guidebook, *Shtetl Routes: Travels Through the Forgotten Continent*, we tell the stories of 62 towns located in the region encompassing the borderland of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, focusing on the stories of the Jewish communities

that once lived there. There were almost a thousand towns to choose from, making the task of narrowing the selection down to 62 a difficult one. In order to do this, we applied the following criteria towards our decision making process concerning which locations specifically to include in the itinerary: tangible heritage (a Jewish cultural heritage object existing in the location, such as a cemetery, synagogue, mikveh, library, school, sports club or house of a specific person); intangible heritage (an interesting story told on the spot in a museum, cultural centre, NGO, etc.); local actors involvement and existing tourist infrastructure. In several cases we gave preference to a location which may have been less spectacular physically, but was more interesting because of its intangible heritage, or the participation of local activists. ¶ When we started work on the project we asked ourselves a number of questions: How, in general, do we describe the Jewish cultural heritage of the borderland of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine? More specifically, how should we, the present-day and mostly non-Jewish inhabitants of this region, describe this heritage? How can we present this heritage as cultural

[A] Luboml, houses at the market square and synagogue, 1925. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Kock, 1920s, a 3D model prepared by Polygon Studio as part of the Shtetl Routes project, 2015, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



tourism? How is it best to avoid the pitfalls of commercialization, simplifications, and stereotypes? How can we show Jewish heritage as the common heritage of both the descendants of Eastern European Jews and the present-day inhabitants of the borderland? ¶ When seeking answers to these questions, we launched the [www.shtetlroutes.eu](http://www.shtetlroutes.eu) web portal. We also prepared a map of Jewish heritage sites in the borderland of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine and drew up proposals for thematic trips (such as Following Isaac Bashevis Singer's Footsteps; Following S. An-ski's Footsteps; the Painters

and Photographers Route; the Famous Rabbis Route; the Jewish Resistance Route). We also organized a series of training courses for tour guides. And, in order to facilitate a kind of interactive time travel, we prepared an application containing 15 three-dimensional digital models representing towns of the Shtetl Routes in various historical periods. ¶ In addition, this exceptional guidebook came into being. It is not only an invitation for real, on-site journeys, but also an encouragement for readers to use their imagination. Our intention is to evoke the narratives of Jewish culture, once so



Participants in a training workshop for *Shtetl Routes* tourist guides at the former synagogue in Zheludok (Belarus), 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

important to the towns and boroughs of the borderland, by referring to the surviving objects of cultural heritage, such as synagogues, prayer houses, cemeteries, schools, cinemas, printing houses, factories, and sometimes ordinary houses. This is why the book is abundant in quotations and references to memories, stories from literature, and Memorial Books. ¶ The journey we wish to encourage you to make can be a difficult one, as it leads through cemeteries and into a world destroyed by the Holocaust, without avoiding stories about the tragic events which took place during this time. But the book is intended, above all, to be a guide to the cultural wealth and diversity of the world of the old shtetls. We also try to show how these towns attempt to draw on their Jewish heritage today, both where Jews still live and where there are no Jews anymore. ¶ The history of the borderland has always been multi-layered, and so in turn this guidebook attempts to be also. When we were beginning to work on the project,

one of the key members of the team – and the author of this guidebook – was to be Robert Kuwałek. Robert was an excellent historian, irreplaceable tour guide, an explorer of the borderland memory and the first director of the Museum-Memorial Site at the former German Nazi death camp in Bełżec. However, his sudden and untimely death in 2014 forced us to change the format of this book. What we have produced is a kind of anthology of texts, united by the subject matter and the main narrative structure, written by a large group of authors from various countries. ¶ We invite you to explore its pages, pack your bags along with your imagination, and voyage through a *Forgotten Continent*... To travel the shtetl routes of the borderland of Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus.



# The small towns of Eastern Europe – Europe's great heritage

The cultural heritage of Europe is not only found in its major cities and their magnificent historic monuments. Unique treasures can also be found in the borderlands straddling the eastern frontier of the European Union. These are the small towns located mainly in Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland that once contained substantial Jewish populations, places which were often referred to as shtetls (shtetlach, shtetlekh). The Jewish community played a defining role in these places, and for hundreds of years they formed a dynamic element in the cultural, social, and economic landscape of Europe.

After the annihilation of the Jewish population during World War II, small towns that had dominant Jewish communities were no longer in existence. This pre-Holocaust landscape has remained alive only in memories, in old illustrations, in photographs, in literature, in Memorial Books, and in the surviving architectural relics such as synagogues that were often left in ruin, and cemeteries that lay desecrated and abandoned. But it is precisely in these areas of Europe where a large part of today's Jewish population, namely those now residing in North and South America, in Australia, in South Africa, and also in Israel, have their roots. By now, the lost pre-War world of East European Jewry is a closed chapter. Still, it is important to tell the story of this world, these places, and these people,

to demonstrate that they constitute a wonderful part of Europe's cultural heritage. And indeed, over the past 150 years in particular, poor Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe and their descendants have enriched modern culture, art, and science the world over.

¶ Years after the Holocaust, the role of Jewish culture in Europe, a place where this rich culture was formally an integral part, is being uncovered once again. The void that opened up after the Holocaust created a need for the revitalization and commemoration of places related to the Jewish community, including the Eastern European shtetls. ¶ The "Shtetl Routes" project and the "Forgotten Continent" program are an attempt to make these diverse stories comprehensible and important to Europe. To be responsible for inspiring reflections on the





[A] Kremenets, before 1939, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Pinsk, market at the Pina river, before 1939, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



emergence and long-term existence of multicultural communities on the small town level. ¶ The “Forgotten Continent” needs this kind of transcendent narrative. A multi-layered and tragic, but

also wonderful story that will be both interesting and important to the visitor, no matter if they are from Europe or more distant parts of the globe.

## In search of the Jewish Atlantis

As an East European cultural myth, the shtetl looms large in modern Jewish imagination. Israeli students take regular classes in literature and history of the shtetl at six major national universities. Americans avidly absorb stories about their ancestral Polish or Russian or Lithuanian homeland. Poles, Germans, and the French arrive in their tens of thousands to the annual Krakow *klezmer* festival, which celebrates the shtetl folklore. Films containing snap-shots of the shtetl, from “Shtetl” and “Everything Illuminated” to “Defiance”, attract thousands of moviegoers worldwide. ¶ Today the shtetl symbolizes the Jewish life in the ‘Old World’, and is associated with the Yiddish language and folklore, Ashkenazi piety, traditional family and education, ghettoized Jewish way of life, poverty, evictions, persecutions, and pogroms. The shtetl stands for the entirety of East European Jewish history and culture that was destroyed during World War II and wiped out by the Holocaust. ¶ The shtetl also remains significant on the East European historical map, although at present none of them now physically remain. A vibrant and burgeoning

market town with a predominant Jewish population, the shtetl was a key point for economic development and trade throughout the centuries within the territories of what is today six, and possibly more, countries, including Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Moldova, and Ukraine. Although towns which were former shtetls, such as Bolekhiv, Chortkiv, Kazimierz Dolny Mir, Ostroh, Szczebrzeszyn, Tykocin and Valozhyn in fact still remain, the localities that bear these names today only too well remind us that they are shtetls no more, and that the shtetl as an East European phenomenon has disappeared. ¶ Taken in its geographical diversity, the shtetl is the ‘Forgotten Continent – East European Atlantis’, with its unique civilization. Like Atlantis, the shtetl shaped and continues to shape the imagination of thousands of people, Jews and non-Jews alike. Like Atlantis, the shtetl was not only a locality but also a culture, with its peculiar language, religion, education system, family structure, economy, and way of life. Like Atlantis, the shtetl gave birth to dozens of myths – political, ethnic, religious, social, artistic, and literary. Like Atlantis, the shtetl



Novogradok, market square, before 1939, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

became a metaphor and a utopia. And like Atlantis, the shtetl created a great civilization – and then vanished. ¶ This book, put together by a group of enthusiasts from Poland, Belarus and Ukraine, reconstructs the shtetl by presenting its historical development and geographical diversity. This book focuses on how the shtetl lived and transformed through the centuries, and discusses how the shtetl died, moribund and exhausted, modified by Soviet social engineering or wiped out by the Holocaust. Quite remarkably, this book also indicates what survived at the sites of the shtetls – that which still reminds us about the Jewish presence. These remnants consist of old and new monuments, ruins, cemeteries, reconstructed or rebuilt synagogues, all elements of Jewish communal infrastructure now transformed into an ordinary urban infrastructure with almost no traces of their previous function or belonging. This book is a reconstruction of the reality which is no longer present,

but which left behind palpable traces of its presence. It is as limited as any reconstruction, but also seeks to serve as a guide. A short yet well-informed encyclopedic source one can use to delve deep into the history and culture of the shtetl. ¶ In addition to books about the shtetl, such as the nostalgic *Life is with People*, and hundreds of the books edited by the diasporic shtetl groups throughout the world, recent projects have been launched worldwide focusing on the shtetl as a Yiddishland, as a ‘Memoryland’, and as a ‘Journeyland’. All these projects are pilgrimages to the Holy of Holies of what the Jewish civilization before the Holocaust was all about. ¶ In a quest for new identities, Russian-Jewish intellectuals from St. Petersburg Jewish University and European University (Valeri Dymshits) organized regular ethnographic expeditions to the sites of the former shtetls to interview Ukrainian, Moldavian, Jewish and Russian surviving dwellers

Synagogue in Dubno, before 1939, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



who remember the pre-World War II shtetls. Conducting annual month-long expeditions to Podolia and Volhynia starting from the late 1980s, these scholars amassed a formidable archive of information on the synagogues, on the Yiddish language of the surviving Jews, on the tombstones dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, on Jewish shtetl art and architecture, and on the modern Jewish life of what once was the shtetl. Preliminary results of their expeditions appeared in three Russian-language source books on the shtetls, including *100 Shtetls*, which exists only in Russian. ¶ In an attempt to revive the shtetl as an inseparable part of Jewish and Polish culture, Polish scholars contributed to the establishment of the grandiose POLIN: Museum of Polish Jews, which has a virtual component in the form of a sophisticated yet user-friendly web-site on the Polish shtetls, containing a multitude

of archival information, statistical and historical data, as well as many photographs. The site and the museum have a policy of free access to information, and invite submissions of documents from anybody who wishes to participate. This participatory policy contributes heavily to the growth of their photographic and documentary archive, which can be found at <http://www.sztetl.org.pl>.

¶ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, dozens of FSU archives declassified most of their collections and made them available to the public. Immediately thereafter, a group of scholars from the Central Archives of the History of Jewish People in Jerusalem (Binyamin Lukin et al.) launched an ambitious project aimed at microfilming thousands of documents related to shtetl life in big and small archives throughout East Europe, in Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Russian Federation, Estonia and Belarus.





The amassed information in hundreds of thousands of microfilms has been meticulously catalogued, tagged, and indexed. This collection continues to grow, as newly discovered collections of Jewish documents from smaller archives are steadily being added to the project.

🕒 American-based historians of East Europe (Jeffrey Veidlinger and Dov-Ber Kerler) launched a project aimed at reviving and visualizing the surviving Yiddish-speaking shtetl dwellers. Accompanied by a professional cameraman, they spend several months each year in Eastern Europe, moving from one former shtetl to another and recording their Yiddish-language dialogues with the shtetl-dwellers. Their project is important not only as an ethnographic and socio-linguistic experiment, but also as an unparalleled attempt to preserve the memories of those who still remember the pre-Holocaust shtetl, or remember the memories of those who lived in a pre-Holocaust shtetl.

**The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre**, which was founded by Tomasz

Pietrasiewicz in 1992, has been uncovering the Jewish heritage of Lublin and its surrounding towns (former shtetls) through documentation, education and artistic activities. 🕒 The Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre focuses mainly on a collection of photographs and oral histories, putting a strong emphasis on education. This is carried out through workshops for students and teachers which the Centre organizes on a regular basis. Every year the *Following Isaac Bashevis Singer Traces Festival* visits former shtetls, as well as educating others about the Nobel Prize winner for which the festival is named. A significant part of the growing digital program at the Centre is their website, a compendium of knowledge concerning the heritage of Lublin Jews in particular. Another significant component of the activities on offer at the Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre is the *Forgotten Continent Program* and the *Shtetl Routes Project*, both of which offer a rich and detailed insight into the lives and aspects of those Jewish peoples who lived in these unique historical

[A] Hechalutz Members at Training Farm "Kibbutz Tel Hai", Siemiatycze, Poland, 1934, the Beit Hatfutsot Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Tamar Even Or

[B] Actors on location during the shooting of the film *In poylishe velder* [yid. In Polish Woods], directed by Jonas Turkow, 1929, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

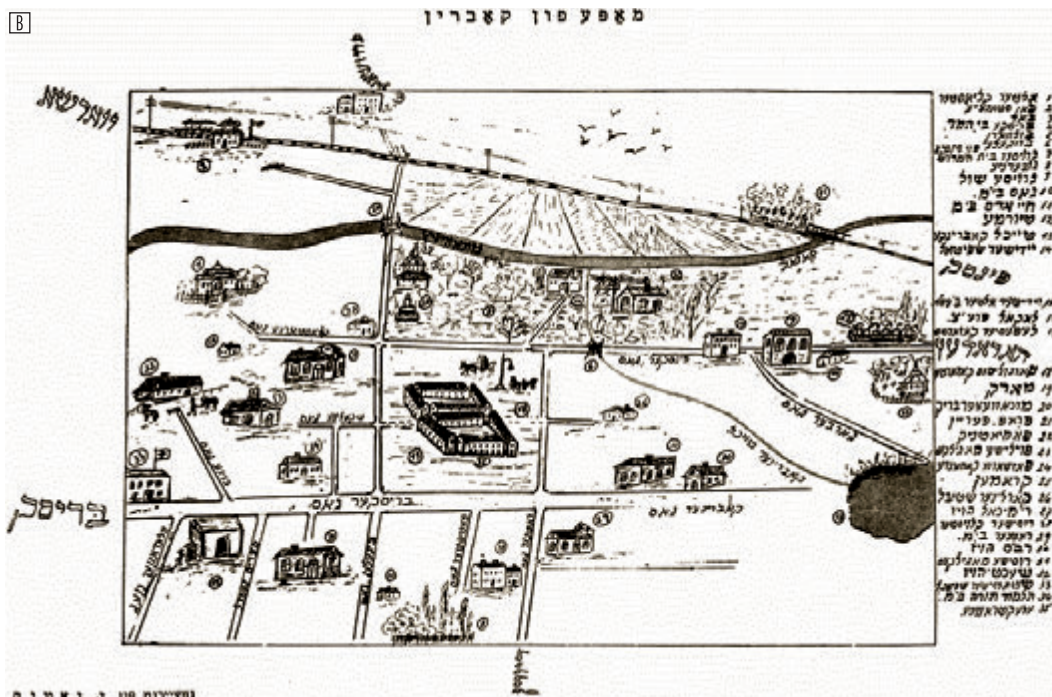


communities. ¶ A group of dedicated and energetic Polish activists from the Lublin-based Brama Grodzka contributed significantly to the exploration of the 'East European Atlantis', by organizing field research seminars, summer schools and conferences about the shtetls, as well as conducting professionally guided tours to the various sites of former shtetls in Ukraine, Belarus and Poland. ¶ During these tours in particular, young professionals from Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, Israel, Canada, Germany, Russia, Lithuania and the United States of America had a unique opportunity to learn about the shtetl within the shtetl. To study inscriptions on tombstones at the oldest Jewish cemeteries and to study the architecture of the early modern synagogues at the actual sites of these synagogues. They also explored various ways through which the shtetl created what is known today as Polish, Ukrainian or Belarusian urban

infrastructure, that is, how Jews helped create modern East European towns. ¶ This book incorporates the results of those projects in different ways, drawing heavily from the documentary evidence already amassed and field work of many of these groups, first and foremost being Brama Grodzka of Lublin. At the same time, this book occupies a unique place in the context of the revival of interest toward the shtetl, as it focuses on what the shtetl really was over the centuries. Of course, it also incorporates testimonies that depict how the shtetl was remembered or imagined. ¶ This book shows the shtetl as a shared cultural legacy of the many peoples inhabiting East Europe, including Jews, Poles, Belarussians, Ukrainians, Germans, and Tatars. A unique contribution to the study of versatile forms of civilization, this book takes the reader on a journey through what can be called the 'East European Jewish Atlantis'.



[A] Unidentified family, before 1939. Photo by Abraham Zylberberg, collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))



[B] Map of Kobryn, from *Kobryn; an interblik ibern yidishn Kobryn* [Yid. Kobryn; an overview of Jewish Kobryn], ed. Melech Glotzer, Kobryn Book Committee, Buenos Aires 1951

# Shtetl Routes Through Poland





# Sejny

Lith. Seinai, Rus. Сейны, Yid. סײַני

*It was blue here.  
Up there there were polychrome paintings.  
This is the balcony where my mother  
and younger brothers were standing.*

Max Furmański

In 2000, a bespectacled man with a small moustache stopped in front of the White Synagogue in Sejny. Max Furmański had been born in Sejny in 1934. After surviving the Holocaust as a concentration camp prisoner and partisan, and losing his whole family he left Poland in 1945, swearing he would never come back. But in 2000, he did come back here to show his hometown to his wife and son. Furmański remembered the synagogue very well: as a young boy he used to come here with his grandfather. Now, after a moment's hesitation, he went inside again. ¶ A group of young people dressed in the traditional clothes of Hasidic Jews were

singing Hasidic melodies. Furmański, who had been a rabbi in Argentina for many years and then a cantor in the United States, had arrived in Sejny, and had entered the synagogue, just as a theatre performance based on S. An-sky's play *The Dybbuk* was being rehearsed there. ¶ Max started to talk with the young people in the synagogue. Afterward, walking around the town, he found the place where his family home had been and met his childhood neighbour. Two years later, he came back again to attend the unveiling of a memorial stone at the Jewish cemetery in Sejny. He performed at concerts together with the Sejny Klezmer Band.

”Over there, at the riverside, there were booths where girls changed their clothes, and we spied at them through the knot holes. ¶ Max Furmański

## **Dominicans and the White Synagogue** ¶

As the town belonged to the Vilna (Vilnius) monks, the permission to build the first synagogue in Sejny was granted by the Dominican Order. As a means of promoting economic development, the Dominicans had been encouraging Jewish merchants and craftsmen to settle in Sejny stating

in 1768. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews constituted more than 70 percent of the town population. ¶ The synagogue was erected in 1788, a year after the Jews settling in Sejny had been granted the right to do so. That original wooden “shingle-roofed synagogue with a colonnade” was replaced in 1885 by a new one – the White Synagogue, built on the



The White Synagogue in Sejny, 1902; collection of the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations" Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

initiative of Rabbi Moshe Betzalel Luria. According to unconfirmed reports, Wawrzyniec Bortkiewicz, Prior of the Dominican Order in Sejny, joined the rabbi in carrying the image of the Ten Commandments into the newly erected building.

**Two schools ¶** In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the famous theologian and philosopher Moshe Yitzhak Avigdor became the town rabbi. He soon founded a yeshivah (Talmudic academy), next to which the community established a Hebrew high school run by Tuvye Shapiro – this school became one of the most important centres of the Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment movement) in Lithuania, bringing renown to the town. Apart from religion, the school offered classes in geography, mathematics, Russian, and other comprehensive subjects that were

rarely found in the curricula of Jewish schools at the time. The most prominent Lithuanian rabbis, followed by students from all over the Russian Empire, came to study at the yeshivah, while many enlightened scholars visited the school or studied there. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the gymnasium was closed, and the building was turned into a post office. The yeshivah, too, was closed by the Tsarist authorities, and Reb Avigdor was banished. Afterwards, the building housed a beth midrash and a cheder, and it may also have served as the seat of the rabbinate. ¶ One of those who studied at the Tuvye Shapiro's school was **Morris Rosenfeld** (1862–1923), a poet born into the family of a Jewish fisherman in the nearby village of Boksze.



[A] The Furmański family in front of their house in Krzywa Street, Sejny, 1930s; collection of the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations" Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))



[B] Sejny. A view of the town from the tower of the Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1920; collection of the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations" Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

In 1882, **Morris Rosenfeld** emigrated to the United States, where he became one of the so-called "sweatshop poets." He published poems about the difficult fate of the workers. Written in Yiddish, they were translated into English, Polish, Russian, Spanish, German, and French. His poem *My Little Boy* became a popular folk song. Rosenfeld was called a "millionaire of tears." He died in poverty, but his funeral in New York was attended by more than 20,000 people.

**Hard times** ¶ At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most inhabitants left Sejny because of difficult economic and social conditions. They emigrated mainly to the United States. As a result, the town's population fell from more than 4,500 in 1895 to 3,412 in 1931, and the percentage of Jews decreased from 75 to 24 percent (817 people).

**Bakers' strike** ¶ In March 1930, bakeries in Sejny stopped working. Boruch Dusznicki, the owner of the largest local bakery, as well as his competitors, Walter Epsztejn and Michel Borowski, went on strike to protest against the government's decision to lower bread prices. After a few days, they were forced to resume work – it is not known whether or not they succeeded in negotiating

**A** Morris Rosenfeld, before 1923; collection of the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations" Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

**B** On the other side of the street, the Museum of the Sejny Land (28 Piłsudskiego St.) features a collection of Judaica from Sejny. Photo by Krzysztof Bielawski, 2006; digital collection of the Virtual Shtetl ([www.szteftl.org.pl](http://www.szteftl.org.pl))



for higher prices. ¶ The Jewish organisations functioning in Sejny at that time included trade unions: the Jewish Merchants' Union and the Jewish Crafts-men's Union. A Sejny branch of the Jewish Sports Association "Maccabee," with Joel Mącznik as chairman, was well known in the entire region. Its sports field was located where the municipal hospital now stands.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ On September 24, 1939, Soviet troops entered Sejny. They retreated after less than three weeks, only to be replaced by German occupying forces on October 13, 1939. As early as November 1939, the Jews of Sejny were deported to "the strip of no man's land" between Poland and Lithuania, and from there they

spread to nearby towns on both sides of the border, and shared the fate of other Jewish inhabitants. Most of them were murdered after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war (June 22, 1941).

**Jewish cemeteries** ¶ There is no trace left of the old Jewish cemetery, which was founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on what is today Zawadzkiego St. But off the road to Augustów, just outside Sejny in the neighbouring village of Marynowo, there is another Jewish cemetery, founded in 1830. All its gravestones were destroyed during or after the war. In 2002, a plaque was erected there, with an inscription reading: "In memory of the Jews of Sejny – from the residents of Sejny."

**”** *It is a miracle that I am alive. It is a miracle that I came back to Sejny. It is a miracle that I am standing at this stone and saying the Kaddish. I am so grateful that I am here with you and that together we are honouring the memory of those who can't come back.* ¶ Max Furmański





**Present day ¶** Today, the county town of Sejny has a population of 6,000, mainly of ethnic Poles and Lithuanians; there is no Jewish community. There are several small hotels and restaurants in town, and thanks to the picturesque location among the lakes of the Suwałki Lake District, agritourism accommodation is easily available in almost every nearby village.

**Borderland ¶** In 1990, a group of young artists looking for a place to hold meetings and events stopped in front of Sejny's abandoned Shoe Manufacturing Plant – the building that had once served as a yeshivah – and the empty, newly-renovated White Synagogue nearby (used in the past as a fertilizer warehouse and a depot for municipal vehicles). It was here that they set up the “Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations” Centre. This has evolved into an experimental cultural centre



combining reflection on identity and memory issues with hands-on cultural activism in the local community of the borderland. ¶ Founded by Krzysztof Czyżewski and his associates, the Centre has become one of the most important places in Poland that encourages reflection on Polish and Polish-Jewish history. Together with local children, members of the Center created a performance piece entitled *The Sejny Chronicles*, an evocative theatrical portrayal of life in old multicultural Sejny, based on the memories of local residents. They also formed the Sejny Klezmer Band, whose musicians include young residents of the town. The publishing wing of the Borderland Centre was the first in Poland to publish Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbours*, which describes the murder of Jews in the town of Jedwabne by their Polish neighbours. These and other activities by the Centre have inspired continuing public debate on Polish-Jewish relations.

[A] Max Furmański at the commemorative matzevah at the Jewish cemetery in Sejny, 2002; collection of the “Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations” Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

[B] The performance of *Sejny Chronicles*, 1999; collection of the “Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations” Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

[A] In 2011, the "Borderland" Foundation opened the International Centre for Dialogue in the nearby village of Krasnogruda. Located in the former manor house that belonged to the family of Czesław Miłosz, a Nobel Prize laureate in Literature, it brings together people from around the world. Collection of the "Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations" Centre ([www.pogranicze.sejny.pl](http://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl))

[B] Sejny, buildings of former Hebrew school, jeshivah and synagogue, 2014. Photo by Krzysztof Bielawski, digital collection of the Virtual Shtetl ([www.sztetl.org.pl](http://www.sztetl.org.pl))



## Surrounding area

**Krasnogruda** (8 km): a manor house (17th c.), the venue of cultural events organised in the summer by the Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations Centre. ♣ **Krasnopol** (13 km): a former synagogue, currently a shop (1850); a Jewish cemetery located on a hill, about 8 km southeast of the village. ♣ **Puńsk** (23 km): a former wooden synagogue, currently a dwelling (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the rabbi's house in Mickiewicz St.; the former Lithuanian Culture Centre (20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1877–1881); a parish granary (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a cemetery chapel (1820). ♣ **Suwałki** (30 km): a former prayer house, a cheder, a Hebrew school and a rabbi's house (next to residential buildings); a former Jewish hospital and a nursing home (the building of the former Municipal Community Centre); a Jewish cemetery surrounded with a memorial wall of matzevot (1825); the wooden All Saints' Orthodox Church (1891–1892); the Lutheran Church of the Holy Trinity (1838–1841); St. Alexander's Co-Cathedral (1825). Suwałki is the birthplace of Abraham Stern – a national hero of Israel. ♣ **Wigry** (38 km): a Camaldolese monastery (1667); Wigry National Park (42 lakes, forests with a network of water, hiking, and biking trails). ♣ **Jeleniewo** (42 km): a Jewish cemetery

(18<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (1878); a wooden bell tower (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Augustów** (44 km): the former beth midrash (next to the Tax Office); a Jewish cemetery (1800); the Old Post Office (1829); a house at 28 Rynek Zygmunta Augusta (1800); barracks (1890s); the Augustów Canal (1824–1839). ¶ **Bakałarzewo** (49 km): a Jewish cemetery (1850s) south of the town, near Lake Szumowo; St. James the Apostle Church (1936). ¶ **Szczebra** (49 km): a plaque commemorating the Jews executed in the Suwałki region; mass graves of victims. ¶ **Filipów** (54 km): a Jewish cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Mariavite cemetery (1906); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1841–1842). ¶ **Przerośl** (57 km): a Jewish cemetery (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a wooden bell tower (1790). ¶ **Bridges in Stańczyki** (67 km): one of the highest railway bridges in Poland (1912–1918). ¶ **Augustów Forest**: one of the most extensive virgin forests in Poland, straddling the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. It boasts approx. 100 species of vascular plants, 2,000 species of animals, and trees that are more than 200 years old. The most precious part of the forest is protected by the Wigry National Park. Another attraction is the 102-km-long Augustów Canal connecting the basins of the Vistula and the Neman Rivers.



**Former White Synagogue** (1860–1870), now exhibition hall, 41 Piłsudskiego St., tel. +48 87 516 27 65, sekretariat@pograniczne.sejny.pl ¶ **Former yeshivah** (Talmudic academy) (1860s), 39 Piłsudskiego St. ¶ **Former Hebrew gymnasium** (high school), now the seat of the **Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations Centre** (1850s), 37 Piłsudskiego St. ¶ **Jewish cemetery**, 1 Maja St. ¶ **Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, former Dominican church (1610–1619), 1 Św. Agaty Sq. ¶ **Church of Our Lady of Częstochowa**,

Worth seeing

former Evangelical church (1844), 4 Zawadzkiego St. ¶ **Bishops' Palace**, now housing the Museum of the Sejny Land (1850s), 28 Piłsudskiego St., +48 87 516 22 12 ¶ **Town Hall** (1846), 25 Piłsudskiego St. ¶ **Lithuanian Cultural Center**, 9 July 22<sup>nd</sup> St., +48 87 51 62 908

# Krynki

Bel. Крынкі, Yid. קריניק

*From Krynki, I brought wine and mead brewed by widow Yocheved to my inn, a beverage famous for miles around.*

Yekhezkel Kotik, *Meyne zikhroynes* (Yid.: My Memories), vol. 1–2, 1913–1914

In the Grodno Forest, among freshwater springs near the former Jagiellonian trade route that extended from Vilnius through Grodno and Lublin to Cracow, lies the town of Krynki.

**Travellers' stopover** ¶ At the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, a manor house belonging to the Grand Duke of Lithuania was built in Krynki – one of the stops on the route from Vilnius to Cracow. The advantageous geographical location of the town attracted settlers as well as travellers who needed places to stay. As a result, in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the small town boasted 43 inns! The first Jews who appeared in Krynki came from Grodno and Brest, and they took up the occupations of inn-keeping and running breweries. ¶ According to the 1639 privilege issued by King Władysław IV, the Jewish community of Krynki was given the right to buy plots of land; build houses, inns, and taverns; and work in trade, craft, alcohol production, cattle slaughtering, and agriculture, as well as sell meat. The king's privilege also granted the Jews of Krynki the right to have a “public display” of Judaism – that is, to establish

a cemetery and build a synagogue and a mikveh (ritual bath). ¶ One of the town's characteristic features is its market square: hexagonal, with twelve streets radiating from it. This unique shape, which replaced a rectangular market that was destroyed by fire, was designed by the Italian architect Giuseppe de Sacco during the rebuilding of the town in 1775. The work was commissioned by the Court Treasurer of Lithuania, Antoni Tyzenhaus, the then lessee of the Grodno economy (royal table lands). It is the only market square of this kind in Poland and one of only a few in Europe.

**Places of prayer** ¶ The first wooden synagogue in Krynki burned down in 1756 and was replaced by another wooden synagogue, also destroyed in a fire. In 1787, the construction of a stone synagogue began. This synagogue partially survived to this day. The Great Synagogue was a huge building made of granite with a beautiful wood-carved aron ha-kodesh. The Nazis turned it into a repair shop for tanks during World War II. In 1944, it was partially destroyed by withdrawing German troops and, eventually, blown up in the 1970s by local





communist authorities who claimed it



was in danger of collapse. Today, all that remains of the building are the ruins of the foundation (5 Garbarska St.).

[A] The aron ha-kodesh (holy ark) in the main synagogue in Krynki, before 1939; collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

[B] The synagogue of Slonimer Hasidim in Krynki, currently a warehouse, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

The **Belarusian Triologue** Festival, which has been held since the 1990s, is organised by the "Villa Sokrates" Foundation established by Sokrat Janowicz (1936–2013), a Belarusian writer who grew up and lived in Krynki for many years. The crux of the festival is Belarusian culture – in Poland, in Belarus, and in the diaspora – but local Jewish culture and heritage is also in the focus. The event attracts distinguished Belarusian and Polish artists and intellectuals. In 2014, Triologue featured an artistic happening under the guidance of Mirosław Bałka – a noted Polish sculptor – during which the area surrounding the foundation of the Great Synagogue was cleared of vegetation. Despite this, the ruins were quickly overgrown again by weeds and bushes.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jenta Rafałowska-Wolfson, a Grodno merchant, founded a two-storey brick synagogue for the Slonimer Hasidim (10 Czysta St.). It was called the Yentes Beth Midrash, after its founder. The building also housed a religious school. The followers of the tsadik of Stolin had a house of prayer in Krynki, and Hasidim from Kock and Kobryń also lived in the town. ¶ In the neighbourhood called "Kaukaz" (Causasus), which was inhabited mainly by poor Jewish workers, a square-based

one-storey brick synagogue with a hipped roof was built in 1850 (5 Piłsudskiego St.). This house of prayer, known as the Caucasian beth midrash, owes its name (as does the neighbourhood as a whole) either to Jews who came to Krynki from the Caucasus (the so-called Mountain Jews) or to merchants importing hides from the Caucasus for local tanneries. Destroyed during World War II, the building was renovated and converted into a cinema and cultural centre that is still functioning.



**[A]** The “Caucasian” synagogue in Krynki, at present the Municipal Cultural Centre, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**[B]** Jewish cemetery in Krynki, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**The cemetery** ¶ Generations of Jews from Krynki were buried in the cemetery (Zaułek Zagumienny St.). Today, it is one of the biggest and best-preserved Jewish graveyards in Podlasie (around 3,000 matzevot in an area of more than 2 ha). It consists of two parts: new and old, separated by an alley several metres wide. The oldest identified tombstones date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The cemetery is enclosed by a stone wall. The original wooden entrance gate has not been preserved. In the western part of the new cemetery, there are two unmarked graves from World War II.

**Tanneries** ¶ In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Krynki experienced an industrialization boom that started with the expansion of textile, and later (thanks to the nearby springs and watercourses) the tanning industries. Already in 1827, Josif Giel, a Jewish entrepreneur, opened a manufactory processing sheep wool and producing flannel. He was followed by other entrepreneurs, mainly Jews and Germans. Towards the end of the 1870s there were, in Krynki: eleven textile factories, six tanneries, four dye houses, two distilleries, three mills (including one bark mill), and a brewery. Berek Kryński

owned the only spinning mill in the county, and it processed 800 puds (12,800 kg) of yarn in 1872. ¶ In the eastern part of the town, along Graniczna St., an industrial quarter with factories was created. In 1913, Krynki had 9,000 residents and nearly 100 tannery workshops. Most of them were destroyed during World War II; only the ruins of one building have survived until today.

**“Crooked pipe”** ¶ Several dozen metres from the fork of Pohulanka and Graniczna streets, there is a tube well that the residents of Krynki call “the crooked pipe.” Out of about a dozen pre-war deep-water intakes, this is the only one that still functions. Wells were drilled for the needs of tanneries by a company that belonged to Gendler Ponta. High pressure water flowing from “the crooked pipe” has a low mineral content and is very tasty. Legend has it that it has medicinal properties: indeed, water from Krynki is rumoured to have healed Queen Jadwiga’s stomach



Three tanners at work. The elderly man in the foreground is wearing traditional Jewish clothes. Photo by Alter Kacyzne, published in *Forverts* daily (*Yid. Forward*, January 1, 1927), collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

complaints in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was brought to her in Cracow by the future king, Władysław Jagiełło, who stopped at the court in Krynki on his way from Vilnius to Cracow, then the royal capital, and drew miraculous water from the local springs to take with him.

**“The Republic of Krynki”** ¶ The tough living and working conditions in industrial Krynki sparked the early development of the socialist labour movement. The first strikes occurred in the mid-1890s, when Jewish and Christian tanners from Krynki demanded pay rises and a reduction of the working day to 10 hours. Towards the end of January 1905, protesting workers took control of the town, an episode remembered as “the Republic of Krynki.” The clashes lasted for four days. Outraged by the bloody suppression of demonstrations in Saint Petersburg by the Tsarist police, the residents of Krynki, led by Jewish tanners, seized control of a police station, a post office, and the seat of local authorities. They encountered some resistance when trying to take over the depot where vodka was stored, but they managed to

chase away a guard and poured barrels of vodka down the drains. A strike committee was formed which established what came to be known as the first Soviet. The tsarist police could not curb the workers’ resistance and had to summon the regular troops. After a few hours of fighting, the protesters were forced to surrender. Many participants in the strike were sent to prison or to Siberia.

**“Mother Anarchy”** ¶ Some of the town’s young Jewish residents shared not only socialist but also anarchist views. These activists organised protests, marching through the town dressed in black clothes and carrying black flags, but they were met with the disapproval of a majority of residents. Violent incidents took place. During the festival of Pesach, 1906, a group of anarchist teenagers shot Shmuel Weiner, a factory owner, on his way back from the synagogue in Krynki. The same year, on a separate occasion, 15-year-old Niomke Fridman threw a bomb from the women’s gallery on the main room of the beth midrash, where a meeting of local entrepreneurs was in progress. He was arrested but managed to escape and

shortly thereafter assassinated the chief of the prison in Grodno. Cornered by the police, he shot and killed himself. ¶ **Yosl Kohn** (1897–1977) became an anarchist activist and a newspaper columnist. In Krynki, he attended a cheder and a Russian school. In 1909, he emigrated to the United States, where he published with *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (Yid.: Free Workers' Voice). As a poet, he published his works in the almanac *In-zikh* (the name inspired one of the most distinguished modernist poetry groups, "Inzikhistn" – the Introspectivists, whose members were, among others, Aaron Leyeles and Jacob (Yankev) Glatstein). ¶ Another figure brought up in the revolutionary atmosphere of Krynki at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the educator, social activist, and writer **Sarah Fell-Yellin** (1895–1962), the daughter of a local blacksmith. Before she emigrated to the

United States in 1920, she taught at a Jewish school and organised aid for children who had been orphaned and deprived of their homes as a result of World War I. She started a women's self-defence group against pogroms and worked in left-wing organisations. She continued her educational and social activity as an émigré in the United States, teaching at the Yiddish socialist Arbeter Ring schools (Yid.: Workers' Circle). She also established a periodical called *Kalifornier Shriftn* (Yid.: Californian Notes). Her poems were published in the communist gazette *Morgen Fraykheit* (Yid.: Morning Freedom) and in *Yiddishe Kultur* (Yid.: Jewish Culture). She published nine volumes of poetry, including *Af di fligl fun hoylem* (Yid.: On the Wings of Dreams), printed in Poland by the Jidysz-Buch publishing house.

*A shy sky-blue violet / peeks from a snowy garden – / should it come out now from the shadow / or wait a little longer? // A much-loved sunray is already wandering, / over the sky bright and warm, / it's wandering, pensive, over the roof, / over the garden, where the sky-blue violet is waiting. // A caress – snow is already melting, / and a kiss – the flower is already happy: / This is how the sky-blue violet became one / with the sky's limpid breath. //*

Sarah Fell-Yellin, From the volume *Likhtike vayzer*

**A shrinking town** ¶ World War I and its aftermath brought the economic development of Krynki to a halt. The town suffered serious damage, and redrawn borders cut tanneries off from their traditional markets. According to the census of 1921, Krynki had only 5,206 residents. ¶ Social and cultural life flourished in the town, however, and seats in the board of the Jewish religious community were held by Orthodox Jews, Zionists, and socialists from the Bund. The presence of Jews who were illegal

communists and anarchists also made its mark on the town. Such activists, however, dissociated themselves from the Jewish religious community.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Krynki was seized by the Soviet army. German troops marched into the town in June 1941 and that autumn set up a ghetto. The ghetto consisted of two parts that extended between the Krynka River, the market square, and Kościelna, Cerkiewna, and



1 Maja Streets. About 6,000 people were pushed into the ghetto, including those transported from other locations (such as Brzostowica Wielka). The liquidation of the ghetto began on October 2, 1942; 5,000 Jews were deported to the camp in Kolbassino. During the liquidation, some people attempted armed resistance. In his book *The Struggle and Annihilation of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Bernard Mark reports: "Jews from Krynki (according to one Polish policeman), contrary to the usual docile behaviour of the masses, responded to the German action with salvoes of rifles and revolvers fired by the Jewish self-defence." Only 260 Jews were left in Krynki after deportation; more than three months later, on January 24, 1943, they were transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka.



**Present day** ¶ Air raids and the military campaign of 1944 destroyed two-thirds of Krynki's urban area. Once a dynamic industrial centre, Krynki, depopulated, was downgraded to the status of an ordinary communal village after 1955 and did not regain city rights until 2009. Today, it is a town of 2,500 people very close to the Polish-Belarusian border. There is a restaurant in the centre of Krynki and agritourism farms function in the vicinity.

Remains of the Great Synagogue at Garbarska street in Krynki, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Remains of the **Great Synagogue** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Garbarska St. ¶ Former **prayer house of Slonimer Hasidim** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.), 10 Czysta St. ¶ Former "**Caucasus**" **Beth Midrash** (1850), currently housing the Municipal Cultural Centre, 5 Piłsudskiego St. ¶ Spatial layout of the town (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Church of St. Anne** (1913), a bell tower (19<sup>th</sup> c.), a wooden presbytery, 1 Nowa St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Cerkiewna St. ¶ **St. Anthony's Chapel** (wooden, 1872) in the Orthodox cemetery, Grodzieńska St. ¶ Remains of the **manor complex** and the **park** of the de Virion family (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.), Kościelna St.

Worth seeing

**Kruszyniany** (11 km): a wooden mosque (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Muslim graveyard – mizar (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of St. Anne (1984–1985); an Orthodox church (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Polish Tatar Centre of Education and Muslim Culture. ¶ **Sokółka** (26 km): a Jewish graveyard with around 1,000 matzevot and 27 sarcophagi (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.); a former mikveh in Sienna Street; the Museum of Sokółka Land; St. Anthony's Church (1848); St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Church (1853); St. Paul's Graveyard Chapel (1901); an Orthodox graveyard (19<sup>th</sup> c.), a wooden presbytery at the corner of Józefa Piłsudskiego St. and Ks. Piotra Ściegiennego St. (1880). ¶ **Palestyna** (34 km): established in 1850; one of three Jewish colonies near Sokółka inhabited by settlers preparing themselves to live and cultivate land in the Land of Israel (1918–1937). ¶ **Jałówka** (35 km): a Jewish graveyard (19<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox church (1956–1960); ruins of the Church of St. Anthony (1910–1915); the

Surrounding area

Church of Transfiguration (1859); a parish graveyard (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Sidra** (44 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Church (1705); a church bell tower (1780); ruins of a fortified castle (1566); ruins of a Calvinist church (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.); ruins of a watermill (1890); the Eynarowicz family manor house (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Królowy Most** (45 km): a holiday village located on the Świętojańskie Hills Trail and the Napoleonic Trail; the Orthodox Church of St. Anne (1913–1939); the Roman Catholic Chapel of St. Anne (1857). ¶ **Michałow** (41 km): Film, Sound, and Old Photography studio; a Jewish graveyard in the forest, two km from the town (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Orthodox Church of St Nicholas (1908); the Church of Divine Providence (1909). ¶ **Janów** (50 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Dąbrowa Białostocka** (56 km): a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a stone tower mill (1924). ¶ **The Sokólskie Hills**: a protected area of postglacial landscape with unique diverse landform and a picturesque moraine wall stretching from the village of Jałówka to Podkamionki. Amid this picturesque landscape are a trail of wooden Orthodox churches as well as the Tatar Trail, which features sites related to centuries-old local Muslim communities. ¶ **Grodno, Belarus** (64 km): the Choral Synagogue (1905); a Jewish cemetery with approx. 2,000 gravestones; a Tarbut school, the seat of the former Jewish community, a hospital and a former yeshiva; the Grodno Museum of the History of Religion; the Museum of the History of Jews from the Grodno Region (or Museum in Troitskaye, due to be opened in the synagogue); the Orthodox Church of Saints Boris and Gleb (12<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Discovery of the Holy Cross (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Bridgettine monastery (mid-17<sup>th</sup> c.).



# Knyszyn

Bel. Кнышин, Yid. קנישין

*I am not the king of your consciences.*  
Sigismund II Augustus

**The king's heart** ♣ In 1572, King Sigismund II Augustus, the last ruler of Poland and Lithuania of the Jagiellonian dynasty, died in his residence in Knyszyn. He was interred at the Wawel Castle, in Cracow, but his heart remained in the Knyszyn Forest and is reported to have been buried in the crypt of Knyszyn's church. After his death, the king's hunting manor where he spent a total of 500 days became deserted, and the fish ponds located near the manor were no longer maintained. More than two hundred years later, the Jews of Knyszyn obtained permission to establish a cemetery on the former royal dykes. It is now one of Poland's most picturesque graveyards. ♣ The king's first documented visit to his Knyszyn estate took place in 1532. Jewish settlers appeared here in the 16<sup>th</sup> century because the local royal residence required infrastructure which Jews were able to create. Jews were allowed to lease breweries, taverns, and inns, which

numbered several dozen. In 1568, King Sigismund II Augustus granted municipal rights to Knyszyn. It was then that the town hall, baths, and the weights-and-measures office were erected and the streets were paved. Thursdays, when Jews from the surrounding villages were coming to town to hear brief reading of the Torah, were designated as market days. In 1672, 100 years after the death of Sigismund II Augustus, Knyszyn's citizens obtained a privilege *de non tolerandis Judaeis*. As a result, the Jewish residents of Knyszyn were moved outside the town walls and had to create their own quarter on the nearby royal land called Ogrodniki (between today's Szkolna St. and Tykocka St.). Only a few families lived there at first, but the community grew in number, so that towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century more than 200 Jews lived in Knyszyn, constituting more than 20 percent of the town population.

*Privilegium de non tolerandis Judaeis* (Lat.: *privilege for not tolerating the Jews*) was a privilege granted by the monarch to a town, land, or larger area, that prohibited Jews from settling within its bounds. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, such a privilege was granted to several dozen out of 1,000 Polish towns and cities. As late



Jan Matejko, *Death of Sigismund Augustus in Knyszyn* (oil on canvas, 1886); collection of the National Museum in Warsaw

as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one in five towns in the Kingdom of Poland had a privilege *de non tolerandis Judaeis*. This often led to the emergence of Jewish quarters nearby, such as Kazimierz near Cracow, which had an external municipal jurisdiction (e.g. in Lublin or Cracow). It sometimes happened that such Jewish districts received an analogous privilege *de non tolerandis Christianis*, but in these cases the aim was often to ensure the safety of the inhabitants and to prevent conflicts between Jews and Christians. The final legal abolition of municipal privileges limiting Jewish settlement took place in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and coincided with the adoption of the emancipatory regulations.

In Knyszyn, the privilege ceased to be in force at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and from that time it became legal for Jews to live in the city. In the Ogródniki quarter, a synagogue, a mikveh and a ritual slaughterhouse were built, and Knyszyn's Jews began to bury their dead on the dykes that remained where the royal fish ponds had been situated. In 1786, they were given legal permission – or, in fact, an order – to bury their dead

in that particular place. Today, the only trace of the Renaissance royal residence is in fact the former royal ponds where the Jewish cemetery is located. More than 700 matzevot have survived. The oldest documented tombstone dates back to 1794. The unique combination of the ponds and the cemetery have resulted in a site with exceptional scenic appeal. The cemetery is worth visiting particularly in spring, when there is





[A] Sunday at the market in Knyszyn, 1930s; collection of King Sigismund Augustus Regional Society of Knyszyn



[B] Jewish cemetery in Knyszyn, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[C] Israel Beker's painting *My Grandparents*, reproduced from the album *Stage of Life* by courtesy of Ms Lucy Lisowska, President of the Centre for Civic Education Poland–Israel in Białystok ([www.bialystok.jewish.org.pl](http://www.bialystok.jewish.org.pl))

still standing water in the former royal ponds.

**Industrial development** ¶ From 1795 to 1807, the town was under Prussian rule. This period can be regarded as the beginning of the development of industry in Knyszyn, as it was then that many German families came to live there. Textile factories, cloth finishing lines, tanneries, and distilleries

were established. With time, German factories were taken over by the Jews. One of the most active among them was Lejba Ajzenberg, who owned a tannery, a soap factory, and a rag recycling plant. Another Jew, Tanchiel, owned a steam textile factory, a spinning mill, and a cloth finishing line. Gersh Rozenblum also owned a cloth factory and a tannery, and Leib Grobman owned a cloth factory and a brewery.

In 2013, Laura Silver, the author of the book *Knish: In Search of the Jewish Soul Food*, found traces of her ancestors in Knyszyn. According to one of the legends surrounding origin of the knish (Pol. knyszka), it was in Knyszyn that this type of meat-stuffed dumpling, or pierogi, originated and took its name. Jewish emigrants brought the knish to the United States, where it became a popular food item and even found its way into mass culture: An itinerant

knish vendor appears, for example, in Sergio Leone's film *Once Upon a Time in America* with music of Ennio Morricone and Robert De Niro starring.

### Israel Beker's escapes to

**Knyszyn** ¶ Knyszyn has been immortalised in the paintings by Israel Beker (1917–2003), an actor, stage manager, and artist from Białystok. His grandparents lived in Knyszyn, in Białostocka St. Beker survived World War II in the Soviet Union and later found himself

in a DP camp in Germany. In 1948, he left for Israel, where he became an actor and director at the National Theatre of Israel, the Habima Theatre. In 1979, he published the album *Di bine fun mayn lebn* (Yid. The Stage of My Life), in which he described his life in words and paintings.

“ I spent many years of my childhood with my grandfather – who lived in a small village near our town. It was called Knyszyn. My grandfather was a farmer. He used to come to our town with his two fine horses harnessed to his cart. On his way home he used to take us, his grandchildren, to his village – to his fields, orchard, stables, the enchanted forest, the flowing river nearby – in short, to mother nature. That is where I took refuge from the illness which distorted my legs, from the “HEDER” and the terrible striking hands of the “Rabbi,” and from a house full of children. I used to run away from home, to my grandfather in Knyszyn, on foot; a small child walking alone 20 miles. I knew the way very well – every little corner, hill and valley – and I would reach my destination as evening fell, tired and exhausted: I am here. I would stand and look my grandparents straight in the eyes – and then would be handed a glass of warm milk straight from the cow – and grandmother would say, “Look at that little imp – he is here again.” ¶ I never spoke about it – but in my paintings I started revealing myself. It is a story in colours and canvases. This is my life.

**Knyszyn's synagogues** ¶ The first wooden synagogue in Knyszyn was built in Tykocka St. (at the corner of Tykocka St. and Szkolna St.) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its earliest mention dates back to 1705. The building burned down in the fire that destroyed the town in 1915. After this the Beth Yeshurun (Heb.: House of Israel) Synagogue – remembered as the main prayer venue of Knyszyn's Jews – was built in what is now Szkolna Street. Greta Urbanowicz recalls that the synagogue stood on a small elevation, set back from the street but parallel to it. It was traditionally oriented, with a large entrance door to the west and an

aron ha-kodesh (holy ark) to the east. It was a two-storeyed red brick building, with larger windows on the ground floor, smaller ones on the first floor, and a mansard roof. The total capacity of the building was about 2,500 cubic meters. Beth Yeshurun Synagogue was destroyed by the Germans during World War II. ¶ In the 1920s, the community built another synagogue, the Orah Haim (Heb.: Way of Life). Synagogue was built in Grodzieńska St., at the back of the market square. It represented the nine-bay type of synagogue, with four pillars surrounding the bimah and supporting the vault. The building's thick walls were



made of yellow brick and decorated with lesenes and cornices. Large windows illuminating the single-storey main hall gave the building its character. In the two-storey western part of the building there were women's galleries with a separate entrance from the south. The main entrance was from Grodzieńska St. The synagogue was covered by a hip roof covered by ceramic tiles. In 1943, German Nazis took over the synagogue and, having bricked up its windows, converted it into a warehouse, which it remained after the war. Plans to establish a cultural centre in the synagogue were never implemented, and the building was completely demolished in the late 1980s.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After two years of Soviet occupation, the Germans entered Knyszyn in June 1941. It was then that, as in nearby towns and villages, some of the

town's Polish inhabitants attempted to carry out a pogrom against their Jewish neighbours. However, as memories written down after the war by Knyszyn's Jews reveal, tragedy was prevented thanks to the determination of the local parish priest Franciszek Bryks (who proclaimed in his homilies not to persecute Jews and help them) and representatives of the local intelligentsia. When the local bandits painted Stars of David on Jewish houses those Poles inspired by the local priest stopped them. ¶ On November 2, 1942, German authorities ordered all Jewish residents of Knyszyn to present themselves at the town square. From there, 1,300 Jews were transported to Białystok and then to the Treblinka extermination camp. Seventy-four people who tried to escape were murdered on the spot and buried at the Jewish cemetery. In 2012, at the initiative of the Regional Society of Knyszyn, their burial place was marked

Knyszyn, 1930s, a view from the direction of Beth Yeshurun synagogue, a 3D model prepared as part of the Shtetl Routes project by Polygon Studio, 2015, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[A] Orach Haim Synagogue, a view from the 1970s; collection of King Sigismund Augustus Regional Society of Knyszyn

[B] Polish and Israeli young people tidying up the Jewish cemetery in Knyszyn together, 2014. Photo by Ewelina Sadowska-Dubicka



with a memorial stone. ¶ Several dozen people managed to escape the deportation. One of them was Samuel Suraski, a shoemaker from Knyszyn, in his twenties at the time. Together with his four siblings, he was hidden by his Christian workmate Czesław Dworzańczyk. In the 1950s, the Suraskis emigrated to Israel,

but they maintained correspondence with the Dworzańczyk family. In 2007, several years after her grandfather's death, Samuel Suraski's granddaughter Hadas found the descendants of the Dworzańczyks and saw to it that they were awarded a Righteous Among the Nations medal.

**The Righteous Among the Nations** title has been awarded by the Israeli Yad Vashem Institute since 1963. The honoured person is officially recognized by the Institute and the authorities of Israel as one who risked his or her life to save Jews

during World War II. ¶ The Righteous receive a medal with an inscription reading: "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire." By 2015, 25,685 such distinctions were granted. Among the people with the "Righteous" title there are 6,532 citizens of Poland, 2,515 citizens of Ukraine, and 608 citizens of Belarus.

**Memory** ¶ Over 80 percent of Knyszyn's buildings were destroyed during the war. Today, the town has 2,500 residents. Every year, it plays host to Israeli young people from kibbutz Tirat Zvi, where Samuel Suraski lived. Together with their Polish peers, they clean up the Jewish cemetery at the royal ponds. ¶ There are several agritourism farms in Knyszyn as well as an unguarded campsite. Further information about accommodation can be found



by contacting the Tourist Information Centre, located in the town hall at 39 Rynek St., tel. +48 85 727 99 88, e-mail: [cit@knyszyn.pl](mailto:cit@knyszyn.pl) ¶ Information about Knyszyn's history and heritage can be provided from Monday to Sunday by members of King Sigismund Augustus Regional Society of Knyszyn, tel. +48 39 903 31 42.

Regional History Chamber in Knyszyn is located in an old wooden house from 18<sup>th</sup> c., 2014, Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Jasionówka** (15 km): a Jewish cemetery, about 380 matzevot (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Korycin** (23 km): a Jewish cemetery; the Church of the Invention and Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1899–1905); a park complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a post mill-type wind mill (1945). Each June (since 2008), Korycin has hosted the National Strawberry Days festival. ¶ **Wasilków** (27 km): Renaissance urban layout; a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Catholic cemetery (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1853); the Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord (1880–1883); the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Święta Woda (since the 18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Białystok Countryside Museum** (Skansen) (27 km): an open-air ethnographic museum, about 40 buildings and other architectural facilities from the area of Podlaskie Voivodeship. ¶ **Goniądz** (28 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a wooden water mill (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Chapel of St. Florian (1864); the Church of St. Agnes (1922–1924); the Cemetery Chapel of the Holy Spirit. ¶ **Suchowola** (36 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (1884–1885); a wooden tower mill (20<sup>th</sup> c.); Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko Memorial Room. The town is recognized as the Geographical Center of Europe. ¶ **Supraśl** (39 km): the Orthodox Monastery of the Annunciation to the Most Holy Mother of God and the Holy Apostle John the Theologian (16–17<sup>th</sup> c.); the fortified Orthodox Church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary (1503–1511); St. John the Theologian Orthodox Church (1888); the Palace of the Archimandrites – currently the Museum of Icons (1635–1655); the Buchholtz Palace – currently the Secondary School of Visual Arts (1892–1903); Zachert's manor (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); weavers' wooden houses – the Gardener's House (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Jansen's factory complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the "Wierszalin" Theatre. ¶ **Grajewo**

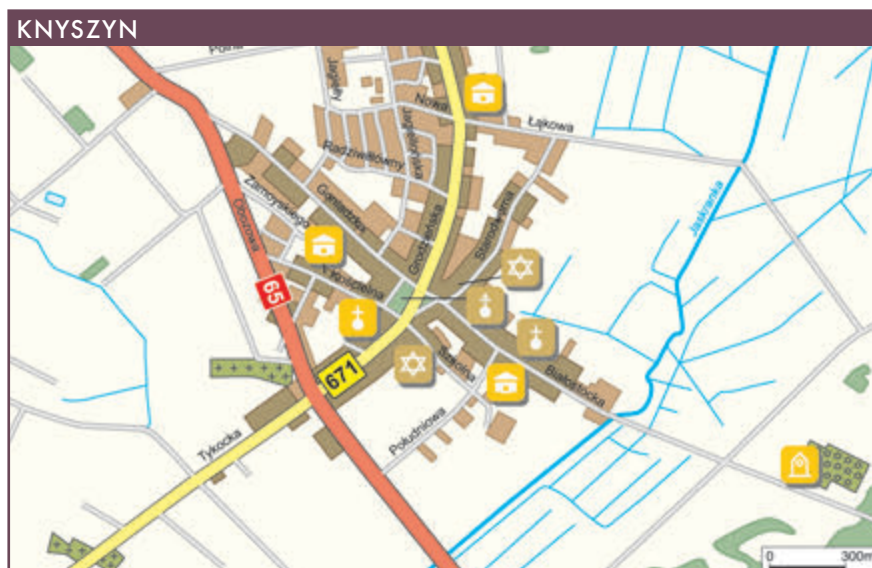
Surrounding area



(51 km): the former synagogue, currently housing the local Community Centre; Holy Trinity Church (1879–1882); a bell tower next to the church (1837); the parish cemetery (1810); the Wilczewski family tomb chapel (1839); the railway station (1873); a water tower (1896). ¶ **Radziłów** (51 km): the mass grave of the 800 Jewish victims of the pogrom which took place on July 7, 1941 (Piękna St.). ¶ **Wąsosz** (54 km): the Church of the Transfiguration (1508–1532); the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1625); a memorial to the victims of a pogrom of the Jewish population, in which about 1,200 Jews were killed on July 5, 1941. ¶ **Szczuczyn** (59 km): the urban layout (circa 17<sup>th</sup> c.); a monastery complex (1697–1711); the former Piarist college (1706); the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1701–1711); the Museum of Firefighting; the house of “Ozerowicz the Jew” (grain merchant) (1853); Polish Post Office buildings (1863); Szczuka family house (1690); a Jewish cemetery with a memorial to the victims of the 1941 pogrom. ¶ **The Knyszyn Forest**: a landscape park preserving pine and fir forests and boreal landscape, similar to the nature of the south-western taiga.

Worth  
seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Białostocka St. ¶ **The town urban layout** (16<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Roman Catholic Church of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist** (1520), 3 Kościelna St. ¶ **Wooden granary** (1818–1820), 3 Kościelna St. ¶ **Hospital building** (1910), 96 Grodzieńska St. ¶ **Wooden house of the Klatt family** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.), 6 Kościelna St. ¶ **Remains of the manor park** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Białostocka St. ¶ **Monument to King Sigismund II Augustus** in the town square.



# Tykocin

Bel. Тыкоцин, Yid. טיקין

*Sometimes we had to paddle across the prayer room in boats to take the Torah scrolls out of the aron ha-kodesh.*

*This is what happened during the previous flood in 1938.*

Account by the Rabbis Arie Rawicz,  
Shulman Simcha, and Menachem Tamir (Turek),  
in: *Sefer Tiktin* (Hebr.: The Book of Tykocin), Tel Aviv 1959

## The Holy Community of Tiktin ¶

In 1522, the Voivode of Troki, Stanisław Gasztold, invited nine Jews from Grodno to come and live in Tykocin. In the privilege issued on that occasion, the Jews were given a place to live in an area located “in the Kaczorowo quarter, beyond the bridge” and received permission to build a synagogue. Space was marked out for a cemetery “beyond the gardens, on the first hill across the river.” The Jews were also allowed to build trading stalls near the town hall where they could engage in all kinds of trade. From that time on, Jews could settle in Tykocin and, thanks to a variety of beneficial privileges, the number of Jewish inhabitants increased quickly. ¶ In 1571, some 59 Jewish, 236 Polish, and 62 Ruthenian families lived in Tykocin, as well as one Lithuanian family. The town was divided into two parts: western

– Christian, and eastern – Jewish, which were connected by a street running along the Narew River. The central point of the Jewish quarter, called Kaczorowo, was the synagogue complex. In 1642, the main synagogue was established. The building conforms to the traditional Polish style characteristic of that period: it is a nine-bay synagogue with a bridal canopy-like bimah whose four corner pillars support the vaulted ceiling. The massive brick structure, erected on a square ground plan, was initially topped by a concave roof with an attic. However, after a fire in 1736 the roof was replaced with a mansard-type one. On two sides the synagogue is adjoined by women’s galleries, and on the southwestern side, by a tower that once housed a prison for disobedient members of the Jewish community and also served as the rabbi’s dwelling.

The beautiful synagogue was pillaged and destroyed during World War II. It was rebuilt in the 1970s, and since November 1, 1976, it has been home to a branch of the Podlasie Museum, focusing on Jewish history and traditions. The museum’s head office is situated in the former yeshivah, or Talmudic academy, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and also rebuilt after being destroyed in World War II. Visitors to the synagogue can admire its painted interior décor and ornaments, while the women’s gallery has an area designated

**A** Zygmunt Zych Bujnowski, *Old Synagogue in Tykocin*, (oil painting, 1926), collection of the Museum Podlaskie, branch in Tykocin

**B** The synagogue's interior (museum exhibition), Tykocin, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



for temporary exhibitions. The museum is open six days a week, from Tuesday to Sunday, and attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year (tel. +48 85 718 16 13, +48 509 336 597, [synagoga@muzeum.bialystok.pl](mailto:synagoga@muzeum.bialystok.pl)).

There were other Jewish prayer houses in Tykocin, but they have not survived.

” The “Hevrah Humash” Beth Midrash was located in a small building next to the synagogue (now it is an empty square between the Villa Regent Hotel and the foundations of the stalls in Piłsudskiego St.). The Jews who came here to pray were those unable to study the Talmud, so they limited themselves to studying the “parashat ha-shavua” (a weekly portion of the Torah). Most of them were hard-working labourers. It was only on the Sabbath that they could devote their time to these study sessions, and the only text they could comprehend was the Humash (Pentateuch). On Saturday, before dawn and long before the morning prayers, they would gather in their bet midrash and study the reading for that week. After studying all that there was to study, even before the morning prayer began, they would go to the house of their friend, baker Menachem Kobyliński,



[A] Monument to Stefan Czarniecki, Tykocin, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Stained glass window with an image of the Star of David in the former house of Haim Żółty in Kaczorowska St. in Tykocin, 2014. Photo by Józef Markiewicz, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[C] The most interesting wooden buildings in Tykocin form a so-called "Wooden Architecture Route," marked out and described by the Centre for Studies on the History and Culture of Small Towns. The Foundation's head office is located in one of the beautiful 18th century bourgeois houses, at 10 Czarnieckiego Square, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

where they had some cake and a cup of hot tea. The building was completely destroyed during the Holocaust. ♣ Translated from: Małgorzata Choińska, *A Walk Around Jewish Tykocin* – [www.shtetlroutes.eu](http://www.shtetlroutes.eu)

## Rabbi Maharam and Rebecca

**Tiktiner** ♣ The kahal (Jewish community) in Tykocin had jurisdiction over smaller communities within the range of several dozen kilometres: these included nine communities in the Land of Bielsk Podlaski (Tykocin, Białystok, Boćki, Orla, Jasionówka, Augustów, Goniądz, Knyszyn, Rajgród), four communities in the Mielnik Land (Konstantynów, Łosice, Niemirów, and Rossosz), and Siemiatycze in the Drohiczyń Land.

As one of the 13 zemstvos (regions), it sent its delegates to the meetings of the Council of Four Lands (Hebr.: Va'ad Arba' Aratzot) – the self-governing umbrella organization that decided on the internal affairs of Jewish communities in the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and represented the entire Polish Jewry before the Polish king and royal treasurer. The lost protocols of the Council of Four Lands were neatly reconstructed by the 20<sup>th</sup>-century



An amateur theatre group from Tykocin staging William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 1920. Collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv; courtesy of Edna Meshulam



scholars on the basis of the copies preserved in the communal records of Tykocin (Pinkas kehillat Tiktin). ¶ **Menachem David ben Yitzhak**, also known as the **Maharam** from Tykocin, was a local rabbi in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He authored many commentaries and rabbinic responsa, among them the *Sefer Mordechai* (Hebr.: The Book of Mordechai), published in Cracow in 1597. ¶ Another historical figure from Tykocin is **Rebecca**, daughter of Meir from Tykocin (b. before 1550 – d. 1605). She spent most of her life in Prague. Rebecca became famous as the author of a book written in Yiddish, entitled *Meynekes Rivke* (Yid.: Rebecca's Nursemaid), published in Prague in 1609. Addressed to Jewish women, the book inspired piety and dealt with the role of women in the family and society as well as with the upbringing of Jewish children and the need to provide them with education, both religious and secular.

**Grandfather with a mace** ¶ In 1658, King John Casimir granted the

estate of Tykocin to Grand Crown Hetman Stefan Czarniecki in recognition of his contribution during the Polish-Swedish War. Czarniecki's grandson, Jan Klemens Branicki, redeveloped the town by giving it a more urban shape, which can still be seen today. In the middle of the town stands a statue of the Hetman. As mentioned in the Memorial Book of Tiktin (Tykocin), the local Jews nicknamed the monument *Zeide mit bulave*, meaning "Grandfather with a mace."

¶ The treasures of Tykocin include its numerous surviving wooden houses. One of them still has a colourful stained-glass window with an image of the Star of David, which was installed by the pre-war owner of the house – Haim Żółty. Also, the Zamenhof family comes from Tykocin. This fact is commemorated by a plaque on the family home of Markus Zamenhof, the father of Ludwik – the creator of Esperanto.

**Firefighters and actors** ¶ At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the economic situation had become so bad that more



than half of the inhabitants of Tykocin were forced to leave the town. Many emigrated to the United States, where they settled in big cities. As a result, the Vaad Yotzei Tiktin (Council of the Tykocin émigrés) association was established in Chicago. Meanwhile, social and cultural life revived in the town itself. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish and Christian inhabitants of Tykocin together established a fire brigade. This was soon joined by an orchestra made

up of 30 musicians, with Abraham Turek as a conductor (1872–1954). New libraries were formed, theatre performances were staged, and new political parties were set up, including the Zionist Hibbat Zion (Heb.: Love of Zion) and also a local branch of the socialist Bund. In 1925, the Jewish community of Tykocin, together with a group of Poles invited for the occasion, celebrated the opening of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In the mid-1980s, the Tykocin Amateur Theatre was established, with a view to revive the town's interwar theatrical traditions. The performances revolve around the history and tradition of Tykocin, its former religious customs and traditions (observed at Christmas and during Passion Week) as well as Jewish culture and tradition. The performances staged so far include Leon Schiller's *Pastorałka* (Pastorale) as well as *Gorzkie żale* (Bitter Lamentations), *Purymowe łakocie* (Purim Delicacies), and Sholem Aleichem's *Inside Kasrilovka, Three Stories*. For many years, the curator and director of the theatre has been Janusz Kozłowski; the author of the performance pieces is Ewa Wroczyńska, the long-time director of the Tykocin Museum.

### The Siemiatycki brothers ¶

Tykocin was the hometown of the Siemiatycki brothers: Haim and Zeidel, both of whom received a traditional rabbinic education at the local yeshivah.

¶ Haim (b. 1908) became a poet and writer. In his poems, he praised the beauty of nature. In 1929, he moved to Vilnius, where he published volumes of poetry: *Oysgeshtrekte hent* (Hands Reaching Out, Warsaw 1935) and *Tropns toy* (Dewdrops, Warsaw 1938). In 1939, Haim received the I. L. Peretz Literary Award. In September 1943, Haim was shot dead in a mass execution in Ponary near Vilnius. At this place German SD, SS and Lithuanian Nazi collaborators murdered approximately 100,000 people in the period

between July 1941 and August 1944. The victims were mainly Jews (70,000) but also Poles (between 2,000 and 20,000), Russian POWs (8,000) and people of various other nationalities. ¶ Zeidel Siemiatycki returned to his hometown after completing his rabbinic studies in Tykocin, Łomża, and Mir and became a local teacher. Later, he moved to Warsaw, where he served as a rabbi and an activist of the Agudas Yisroel party, which represented Orthodox Jews. In 1938, Zeidel became a rabbi at the famous Volozhin (Wołożyn) yeshivah, and during World War II he moved back to Mir. In late 1940, together with several hundred students from the Mir Yeshivah, he travelled by Trans-Siberian train to Vladivostok and then by ship to

The memorial at the site of the mass execution of Tykocin's Jews, the Łopuchowo Forest, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajka, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Japan. In 1943, he found himself in London, where, known as Zeidel Tiktiner, he continued his activity as a rabbi and lecturer.

### World War II and the Holocaust

At the end of 1939, Tykocin was occupied by Soviet troops, which were stationed there until June 1941. Part of the Polish and Jewish population of Tykocin was deported to Siberia. When the German-Soviet war broke out, the town found itself in the German occupation zone. As a result, on August 25–26, 1941, almost all the 2,500

Jews of Tykocin were marched to the Łopuchowo Forest, located 6 km from the town, where they were killed by an SS Sonderkommando from Białystok. Their mass graves are now marked with symbolic matzevot. Every year, the place is visited by thousands of people, mainly by Jewish youth from Israel.

**The cemetery** One of the oldest and largest Jewish cemeteries in Poland is located in Strażacka St. in Tykocin. It is believed to date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but only a few matzevot survive, with the oldest legible stone from 1754.

**”** *The old Jewish cemetery was covered with heavy old matzevot from hundreds of years back; there were graves of rabbis, geonim, and all the other eminent figures of their time. They were graves that one would approach after taking off one's shoes, with fear and great respect. They were graves that gave rise to various legends, with matzevot half-ruined with age, and with cracks where those in need put their kvitlech with their trembling fingers and instantly felt great relief in their aching hearts.* **”** Menachem Turek, *“The Life and the Holocaust of the Tykocin Jews during the German Occupation,”* in *Sefer Tiktin* (Hebr.: The Book of Tykocin), Tel Aviv 1959

**Present day** Today, Tykocin has a population of about 2,000 people. Thanks to the charming atmosphere of

this small town, its well-preserved urban layout, its beautiful natural surroundings, and the museum located in the

former synagogue, Tykocin stands as an important centre of cultural tourism. It serves its visitors with several restaurants, small hotels, and many

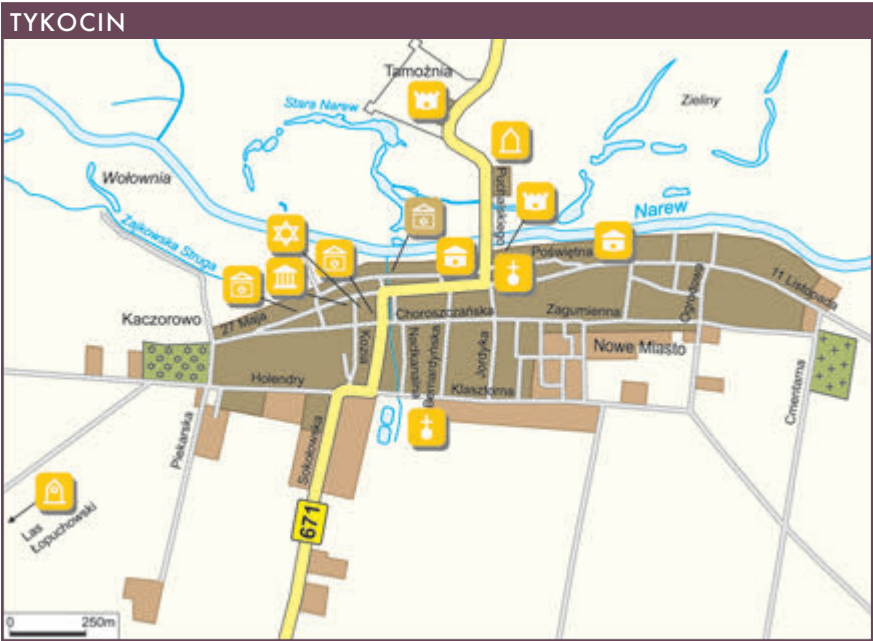
guesthouses scattered around the area. One of the local hotels, Villa Regent (3 Sokołowska St.) even offers its guests a mikveh.

Worth seeing

**Synagogue complex** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), now a museum, 2 Kozia St., tel. +48 85 718 16 13, +48 509 336 597, [synagoga@muzeum.bialystok.pl](mailto:synagoga@muzeum.bialystok.pl) ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Strażacka St. ¶ The urban layout with low, richly ornamented buildings (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Baroque parish Church of the Holy Trinity** (1742–1749), 2 11 Listopada St. ¶ **Former military boarding school** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Poświętna St. ¶ **Catholic cemetery** (1792) with the Gloger family chapel (1885), 2 11 Listopada St. ¶ **Former Bernardine monastery complex** (1771–1790), now the Social Welfare Home, 1 Klasztorna St. ¶ **Castle** (15<sup>th</sup> c., partly reconstructed in 21<sup>st</sup> c.), 3 Puchalskiego St.

Surrounding area

Tykocin lies between the Biebrzański National Park to the north and the Narew National Park to the south. The Podlasie Stork Route runs through the area. ¶ **Kiermusy** (5 km): European bison breeding farm; the so-called Manorial Labourers’ Living Quarters; the reconstruction of the 1832 Polish-Russian border; the reconstruction of the 15<sup>th</sup>-c. Amber Castle. ¶ **Choroszcz** (21 km): a Jewish cemetery (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Branicki Castle, now the Museum of Palace Interiors (1745–1764); the water tower (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Dominican monastery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Protection of the Mother of God (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Białystok** (30 km): Jewish cemeteries (18<sup>th</sup> c., 19<sup>th</sup> c., 20<sup>th</sup> c.) among which only one, so-called Bagnówka (19<sup>th</sup> c.), is preserved with about 2,400 tombstones; Piaskover Beth Midrash Synagogue, now the head office of the Zamenhof Foundation (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Beth Samuel



Synagogue, now the training centre of the Provincial Police Headquarters; the Cytron Synagogue, now the Słędziński Gallery; the Białystok Manufacturers' Trail (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Branicki palace and park complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Church (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Metropolitan Basilica of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Łapy** (33 km): the grave of a Jewish girl who was thrown out of a train bound for the Treblinka extermination camp, along the railway line between Łapy and Osse; "Osse" railway housing estate; "Wygwizdowo" railway housing estate. ¶ **Suraż** (40 km): the urban layout: the Polish (lacki) marketplace, the Ruthenian (ruski) marketplace (15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (1865); Władysław Litwińczuk's private Archaeological Museum; the Legacy of Generations Museum; the Museum of Chapels. ¶ **Jedwabne** (42 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.) next to the scene of the 10 July 1941 pogrom, when hundreds of Jews were herded into the local synagogue and burned alive by their Polish neighbors. ¶ **Wysokie Mazowieckie** (44 km): a Jewish cemetery with about 60 tombstones (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. John the Baptist (1875); a former Uniate Orthodox Church, now the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1798). ¶ **Zambrów** (48 km): a Jewish cemetery with about 100 tombstones (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to the approx. 2,000 Jews from Zambrów executed by the Nazis in the forests near the villages of Kołaki Kościelne and Szumowo; a Catholic cemetery (1795); Holy Trinity Church (1879); the Regional Historical Chamber. ¶ **Łomża** (54 km): the Jewish hospital, now the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Secondary School (1857); the former "Centus" Orphanage for Boys and Girls, 7 Senatorska St.; two Jewish cemeteries (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the town hall (1822–1823); St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral (1504); the cathedral cemetery: Roman Catholic, Augsburg Evangelical, and Orthodox (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Capuchin Church and Monastery (1770–1798). ¶ **Giełczyn** (62 km): a memorial place to the approx. 12,000 Jewish victims of the mass murders carried out by the Nazis in 1941–1944; the Giełczyn Forest. ¶ **Czyżew** (62 km): the synagogue in Piwna St., currently a warehouse (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Jewish cemetery (1820); the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1874); a wooden villa, 12 Mazowiecka St. (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the manor park (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Szumowo** (63 km): a wooden synagogue moved from Śniadowo, now the parish house (circa 1933). ¶ **Nowogród** (68 km): Adam Chętnik Heritage Park (30 buildings moved from the Kurpie Forest); a Jewish cemetery; the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **The Biebrza National Park**: The largest national park in Poland, it encompasses one of the most pristine peatbogs in Central Europe. ¶ **The Narew National Park**: The park protects the marshy Narew River Valley with its abundant fauna and flora, a region sometimes called the Polish Amazonia. ¶ **The Podlasie Stork Trail**: The trail is inspired by the white stork presence and combines trails available on a bicycle or horseback, in a kayak or traditional push-boat, or even by car.

# Orla

Bel. Вуорля, Ukr. Орля, Yid. אָרלע

*Once a week, peasants from nearby villages would come to the fair in order to sell and buy goods in little stalls at the market in Orla.*

Sylvia K. Kaspin,  
*Memories of Things from the Past*, 1986

## Under the eyes of magnates ¶

Jews lived in Orla from the 1650s. It was probably the Tęczyńskis – the owners of Orla at the time – who brought Jews here. The Radziwiłłs, the subsequent owners of the town, also supported Jewish settlement. In the 1614 privilege, Krzysztof Radziwiłł permitted “people of all estates, Christians of all denominations as well as Jews,” to settle in the domain of Orla. The 1616 inventory notes the existence of 17 Jewish houses and a wooden synagogue. Favourable conditions resulted in the growth of the town Jewish population, especially as the nearby royal towns – Bielsk, Kleszczele, and Brańsk – prohibited Jews from settling within their walls. ¶ The Jews of Orla experienced prosperous times in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was then that – like Tykocin – Orla became one of the most important trade centres in the Podlasie region. Merchants from Orla maintained direct relations with numerous towns in Poland-Lithuania and with towns outside its borders, such as Breslau (now Wrocław), Königsberg (Pol.: Królewiec, now Kaliningrad, Russia), and Frankfurt on the Oder. The Orla Jews had their own merchant vessel in Mielnik on the

Bug, 60 km away, and used the river network as a reliable freight trade route. In 1780, Izabela Branicka, the wife of the hetman, King Stanisław August Poniatowski’s sister, then owner of Orla, promulgated a special statute regulating disputes between Jews. The statute specified the competence of the rabbi and kahal authorities, including the manner of their election. It is one of the few surviving legal acts on the functioning of a Jewish community in the Old Polish period.

## Orla 350-year-old synagogue

¶ The old synagogue building, surviving to the present day, bears witness to the high status held by the local Jewish community. Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the synagogue was one of only a few stone buildings in Orla. One legend has it that it was converted from the building of a Calvinist church that once existed in the town. Princess Radziwiłł is rumoured to have enabled the Jews to purchase the building provided they collected 10,000 three-groszy coins overnight. The Jews were so determined that they collected that amount within an hour. This tale, however, bears no





**[A]** The Great Synagogue and wooden prayer houses, 1930s. Over the entrance to the synagogue, an inscription from the Book of Genesis is visible: "How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Photo by D. Duksin, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

**[B]** Participants in a training workshop for *Shtetl Routes* tourist guides inside the synagogue in Orla, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajka, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



relation to the historical reality. ¶

The stone synagogue was built in the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but archaeological research has revealed that a small wooden synagogue had stood in the same place earlier. About 100 years after the foundation of the synagogue, women's galleries were added on each side of the building: wooden at first, and then made of brick. The synagogue combines Renaissance and Baroque

styles. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the building was given a classical facade with a frieze resting on two columns. Unfortunately, the furnishings of the synagogue, including the large aron ha-kodesh, have not survived. Still, preserved to this day are remnants of colourful polychrome wall paintings with vegetal and animal motifs, as well as four columns surrounding the place where the bimah stood. Before the war, the square in front

of the synagogue was called the school square, and the synagogue complex also included two wooden houses of prayer, the rabbi's house, and a mikveh. All the buildings burned down in a great fire that swept Orla in 1938. Although this priceless example of Jewish heritage has survived the turmoil of wars, it still awaits full scale repair after incomplete renovation work in the 1980s. The owner of the synagogue since 2010 has been the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŻ).

**In the interwar period** ¶ In the early 1920s, Orla was still a predominantly Jewish town, with Jews constituting about 70 percent of its population. They owned nearly all of the local trade and

services: Henach Werbołownik served as the local doctor, Moshe Rabinowicz was the local pharmacist, and Dawid Lacki was the local dentist. There were several Jewish organisations, including a branch of the youth organisation He-Halutz, as well as a Jewish financial institution, the Jewish Popular Bank. What unfolds in the accounts of Orla's eldest residents is a picture of peaceful coexistence between Christians (a minority in the town) and Jews (the majority), without serious trouble. Contacts between the two communities, however, were usually commercial, though a common school helped them become closer. The town was very poor, and poverty was an experience shared by its inhabitants of all faiths and nationalities.

“One day, on a Saturday, mother was washing clothes. Suddenly, blood gushed forth from her. Daddy was not at home because he had gone to play cards. I thought Mummy was dying. I ran to my neighbour Herszek's place, knowing that his wife was a nurse, of sorts. I said mother was having a hemorrhage. She took her bag right away, put some ice in it, and ran to see my mother. I went to fetch Daddy, and he ran to fetch the doctor, who was a Jew. He put ice over the wound, and then he gave me 10 zlotys, which was a lot of money at that time, and said, “Go to the chemist's and get injections.” The chemist was also a Jew and opened the shop even though it was already night. The doctor later said that we could pay when we had the money. ¶ Memories of Maria Odziejewicz – an account from the Oral History Archive of the History Meeting House and the Karta Centre (AHM-1901). Fragments are available for listening at [www.audiohistoria.pl](http://www.audiohistoria.pl)

In the interwar period, the main employers in Orla were the four Wajnsztejn brothers, who owned a tilery. The landed estate they had bought towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the largest non-parcelled-out part of the legacy left by the Radziwiłłs. The tilery employed more than 100 people, both Jews and Christians. After the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939, the Wajnsztejns were deported to Siberia, and their company

was nationalised. Almost all of them managed to survive the deportation and left for Palestine after the war. Interestingly, the head of what was then a Soviet tilery was another Jew, who came from the distant regions of the Soviet Union. Tiles continued to be produced in Orla until the early 1990s, but the factory no longer played the same important role in the town's life.

**A** Men studying the Torah at the house of learning (beth midrash), Orla, 1930s. Photo by D. Duksin, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

**B** A pre-war prescription by pharmacist M. Rabinowicz from Orla. Collection of Wojciech Konończuk

**C** Members of the Orla branch of Hashomer Hatzair. Digital collection of Wojciech Konończuk, archive of the Agricultural Club in Orla





” *Getting a job in Wajnsztejn brothers’ tilery meant considerable promotion. There was no better employment in Orla. All the workers called themselves “fabricants,” as they were a head above peasants in the hierarchy. They had better work conditions and earned more. Wajnsztejn was very much respected because he was good to the workers. In 1937, he went to a bicycle factory and bought each of his employees a bicycle. Some of them commuted to work from villages near Orla.* ¶ Memories of Eugenia Chmielewska – an account from the Oral History Archive of the History Meeting House and the Karta Centre (AHM-1873). Fragments are available for listening at [www.audiohistoria.pl](http://www.audiohistoria.pl)

**THE GREAT FIRE OF ORLA IN 1938** ¶ On May 18, 1938, in a wooden house near the market square, a local Jewish woman was boiling linseed oil to make oil varnish. She interrupted that for a moment, as someone came into her shop to buy horseradish. The wind, strong that day, knocked over the boiling oil. This set the house on fire, and the flames quickly spread to neighbouring houses. Almost the entire densely built-up centre of Orla burned down within a few hours. Fire consumed 550 buildings, including 220 Jewish houses, 25 houses belonging to Orthodox Christians, and 3 belonging to Catholics. For months afterwards, many Jews with no roof over their heads lived with their Christian neighbours. The current urban layout of Orla differs from what it was before the fire. The former high-density housing, typical of a Jewish shtetl, was replaced by newly marked-out streets. The market square remained, but there is now a park where the Jewish trading stalls once stood.

**Christians in defence of Jews** ¶ An incident that attested to the friendly coexistence of Jews and Christians (mainly Orthodox ones, as only a dozen or so families were Catholic) in pre-war Orla took place in about 1937 and recurs in the recollections of several of the town’s eldest citizens. It was then that a group of between 10 and 20 members

of endecja (a right-wing political movement), armed with clubs and probably from the region of Łomża, arrived in Orla. Their intention was to destroy Jewish stores. Local Orthodox Christians stood in defence of “their” Jews and effectively stopped the assailants, who never returned to the town.

” *I used to know Jewish girls: Haya and Bluma. We were friends. On the Sabbath, I would often go with them for a walk to the Black Forest near Orla. When the Soviets came, a few of our boys married Jewish girls. My family was the only Christian family living in the Jewish quarter. We lived on close terms with our neighbour Liba, who ran a shop. When we were in need, she would never refuse to help us. When the ghetto was established, we were resettled to a different part of Orla.* ¶ Memories of Aleksandra Dęboróg – a fragment of an account from the Oral History Archive of the History Meeting House and the Karta Centre (AHM-3036). Fragments are available for listening at [www.audiohistoria.pl](http://www.audiohistoria.pl)

**“Jewish oil tycoon”** ¶ **Haim Kahan** (Kamieniecki) was born in Orla in 1850. His father was a local melamed (teacher in an elementary Jewish school) and at the same time a fishmonger. As a teenager, Haim left his native town and moved to nearby Brest-Litovsk, and later to Königsberg. Kahan began to work in the oil trade, taking advantage of the period of prosperity for this raw material. He quickly became one of the major figures in this line of business in Russia. His main competitors were the famous Nobel brothers. Kahan traded in oil extracted from under the Caspian Sea; he had his own oilfields, too. His company, “Petrol,” had branches in Baku, Kharkov, Warsaw, Brest, and a number of cities in Western Europe. When Kahan died in 1916 he was one of the richest entrepreneurs in the Russian Empire, with a reputation, too, as a philanthropist who generously supported Jewish organisations. After his death, in an article entitled “Jewish oil tycoon,” the Warsaw daily *Nasz Przegląd* wrote: “He was a truly remarkable man and an exceptional type of person. A restless spirit with inexhaustible energy. A head always full of projects and ideas.”

**The tsaddik of our times** ¶ Aryeh Levin was born in Orla in 1885, into a large traditional Jewish family. From his earliest years, he was very eager to learn and was initially taught by Orla’s rabbi. As in the case of Haim Kahan, the hometown quickly became too small for Levin. At the age of 12, he left for the famous yeshivah in Slonim and then went on to study at yeshivas in Volozhyn and Brest. At 20, he emigrated to Eretz Israel. He continued his education in Jerusalem and became a rabbi there. Levin quickly became famous as a charismatic teacher and a protector of Jewish political prisoners held by the British. In the independent State of Israel, he came to be regarded as one of the greatest spiritual authorities and was nicknamed “the tsaddik of our times.” Even though he was an Orthodox rabbi, he also enjoyed respect among non-religious Jews, as attested by the title of “an honorary citizen of Jerusalem,” which he was granted. He died in 1969, and his funeral was attended by thousands of people,

including the President and the Prime Minister of Israel.

### **“Little Orla” over the Ocean** ¶

In the second half of the 19th century Orla’s Jews began to emigrate in large numbers, mainly to the United States. In 1891, they set up a compatriots’ association in New York – the Independent Orla Benevolent Society, with a membership of several hundred people. Emigrants helped their compatriots in the old homeland, for example, after the fire that swept Orla in 1938. The organisation existed until 1984.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ There were two Jewish cemeteries in Orla. The older one was located directly behind the synagogue. By the mid-19th century, it became too small, and the Jewish community obtained permission from the Russian authorities to establish a new, larger one. It was located about 700 metres north of the old cemetery, on a small hill off the road to Szczyty-Nowodwory. During World War II, the





[A] Young people in front of the school in Orla, 1920s. Digital collection of Wojciech Konończuk, archive of the Agricultural Club in Orla



[B] Members of the "Jedność" Eggs and Poultry Cooperative packing eggs, Orla, 1930s. Photo: D. Duksin, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

[C] Aryeh Levin — a 1982 Israeli postage stamp, collection of Wojciech Konończuk

old cemetery and a part of the new one were destroyed by the Nazi Germans, and matzevot were used to build roads, with Jews as a slave workforce. Even after 1945, local inhabitants used some of the surviving tombstones for construction. Just a few matzevot – overgrown with vegetation and partly covered by soil – have survived to this day. The area of the former cemetery is not fenced or walled in, or marked in any way.

## World War II and the Holocaust

On the eve of World War II, more than 1,500 Jews lived in Orla. After September 17, 1939 (Soviet invasion of Poland), many Jewish refugees arrived from central Poland. During the Soviet occupation, several of the richest Jewish families were deported to Siberia, and in 1940 some young people were conscripted into the Red Army. The beginning of the end of Jewish Orla was the outbreak of the German-Soviet war

on June 22, 1941. Apart from the recollections of many Christian inhabitants, what helps reconstruct the history of that period is a miraculously preserved account by Orla's last rabbi, Eli Helpern. Only a few pages long, it was written in 1943 in the Białystok Ghetto, just a few days before Helpern was murdered. The rabbi described the reign of terror set up by the Nazi Germans after they entered Orla on June 22, 1941: The Jews had to shave off their beards and the women had to have their braids cut off. We all had to wear round yellow signs on our breasts and backs. Jewish houses were marked with yellow signs [...]. Every day, 400 Jews would go to work for which they received no remuneration, having to do humiliating activities and tasks. A tribute of 500 grams of gold, 3 kilograms of silver, and 40,000 roubles was also imposed on the community. In March 1942, the entire Jewish population was segregated in a ghetto, a small area in the centre of Orla surrounded by a wooden fence. Cramped conditions, hunger, and disease caused high mortality. The rabbi concludes his memories as follows: We did not expect that which

would happen – the liquidation of the town in November 1942. On Monday, November 2, the Jewish quarter was surrounded. We were told we would be deported to the Black Sea coast or to the Caucasus to work: it was no use grieving over the houses and goods left behind, for we would find the same there, left by the evacuated inhabitants of those areas. As a result, some of the women hiding in the Christian part of the town reported voluntarily. We were transported to the ghetto in Bielsk – 1,450 people, in peasants' wagons. It was there that the truth about the evacuation became clear to us: until then, we had still believed the tale about the Black Sea. On Friday, 1,450 Jews of Orla were marched to the railway station and severely beaten on the way. They were forced into freight cars, 150 people per car. A little more than 100 Jews were transported to the Białystok Ghetto; the others were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp, where they were murdered. The rabbi was right in writing about the "liquidation of the town" – more than 70 percent of Orla's residents vanished in just a few hours.

**THE LAST JEW OF ORLA** ¶ **Józef (Josel) Izbrucki** was a member of a family who had lived in Orla for generations. His father ran a bakery in the market square. In 1940, he was drafted into the Red Army, a fact that saved him from the Holocaust. He returned to these parts after the war, settled in the nearby town of Bielsk Podlaski, and worked as a coal trader. He never emigrated, even though his children left Poland after the governmentally-orchestrated antisemitic campaign of 1968. On one occasion, when visiting a shoemaker in Bielsk, he saw a Torah scroll from the synagogue destroyed by Germans which was used for the shoe manufacturing. He bought it and gave it to a Bielsk Jew now living in Israel who visited the town of his birth in the 1980s. The Torah was restored by the descendants of Bielsk's Jews, who presented it to a new synagogue in Efrata, in Gush Etzion region to the south from Jerusalem. ¶ Józef Izbrucki is one of the people featured in *Jewels and Ashes* (1991), a book of memory and reportage

by Arnold Zable, a noted Australian writer who is himself a descendant of Orla's Jews. In 1945, [Izbucki] had returned to a shtetl that was Judenrein. It was as if all those he had known had vanished overnight. [He] moved to Bielsk, married a Polish woman, and became wedded also to the streets of the town. Decade upon decade he had followed a familiar route, in horse and cart, delivering coal [...]. Meanwhile, one by one, the few remaining Jews had left to begin life anew, in lands far removed. ¶ Arnold Zable, *Jewels and Ashes*, New York 1991.

**Present day** ¶ In present-day Orla it is difficult to find many traces of its one-time numerous and influential Jewish inhabitants. Only the old synagogue, the key to which is kept at the community office, majestically towers over the former market square. Inside the building, visitors can see a small photographic exhibition prepared in 2007 by the Association of Friends of the Orla Land. Cultural events are occasionally held in the synagogue, and several local history enthusiasts explore the history of Orla's Jews. Students – members of the Regional Club functioning at the Orla Land School Complex – recorded the memories of several dozen of the

local eldest citizens about life in Orla before the war. Short videos made by the students, based on the memories they collected, have won prizes at several national competitions. The Oral History Archive of the History Meeting House and the Karta Centre has a collection of several dozen in-depth accounts by Orla inhabitants covering predominantly pre-war times. On the basis of these recollections, a memorial book is in preparation that seeks to portray life in the town in the interwar period and during World War II. ¶ Accommodation can be found at several agritourism farms in Orla and in nearby villages.

Former **synagogue** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 2 Spółdzielcza St., (Information about the keys in local cultural center, tel. +48 857392059, gok-orka@wp.pl). ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Polna St. ¶ **Wooden Orthodox Church of St. Michael the Archangel** (1797) with a bell tower (1874), Kleszczelowska St. ¶ **Wooden Orthodox Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius** at the cemetery (1870), A. Mickiewicza St.

Worth  
seeing

**Szczyty-Dzięciołowo** (5 km): the larch-wood Orthodox Church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (18<sup>th</sup> c.); "Szczyty" Centre for Education and the Promotion of Belarusian Culture ¶ **Bielsk Podlaski** (13 km): a medieval hill fort; a Jewish cemetery with about 100 tombstones; the town hall (18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Basilica of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1784); the former Carmelite church and monastery (1779–1794); the wooden Orthodox Church (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Hajnówka** (21 km): Rabbi Yehuda Leib's wooden house; wooden buildings in Kosidłów, Warszawska, and Ks. Ignacego Wierobieja Streets; a railway crossing guard's house (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.); remnants of the Ordan reservoir (reportedly built by Jews under the name of "Jordan"); Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (the venue of concerts during the annual International Orthodox Church Music Festival); modern Catholic and Orthodox churches. ¶ **Kleszczele** (22 km): a Jewish cemetery; the wooden Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas

Surrounding  
area

(1709); a railway station building (1900); the Orthodox Church of the Dormition (circa 1870); the Church of St. Sigismund (1907–1910). ♣ **Boćki** (25 km): an old mikveh on the Nurzec River (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); remains of a Jewish cemetery (fragments of matzevot embedded in the fence of the Catholic cemetery); the Church of St. Joseph and St. Anthony (1726); the Orthodox Church of the Dormition (1819–1824). ♣ **Narew** (32 km): the wooden Church of St. Stanislaus (1775); a wooden bell tower (1772); the Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1882); a cemetery chapel (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Catholic cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (in the forest, about 2 km from the village). ♣ **Teremiski** (38 km): the Jan Józef Lipski Open University and the Jacek Kuroń Educational Foundation. ♣ **Narewka** (39 km): a Jewish cemetery on a hill beyond the town, with more than 100 tombstones (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker (after 1860); a wooden Baptist church; a Catholic church (the 1970s); the Tamara Sołowieicz Gallery. ♣ **Białowieża** (43 km): an obelisk on the palace embankment, commemorating King Augustus III's hunting lodge (1752); the palace park (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Museum of Nature and Forest of the Białowieża National Park; a railway station (1903); a wooden manor house (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a porcelain iconostasis in the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas (1895);

the Church of Saint Therese

(1927); remains of the foundations of a wooden synagogue (1910). ♣ **Zabłudów** (46 km): a Jewish cemetery; the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1805–1840); the Orthodox Church of the Dormition (1847–1855); a Catholic cemetery and St. Roch's Chapel (1850); St. Mary Magdalene Chapel (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **The Białowieża National Park**: Europe's last primeval forest and Poland's oldest national park, included in the UNESCO List of Biosphere Reserves and in the UNESCO World Heritage List.





# Siemiatycze

Ukr. Сім'ятичі, Bel. Семятычы, Yid. סעמיאַטש

*The Sabbath filled houses in Siemiatycze with angels and guests...*

Michel Radzyński, *Di megile fun mayn lebn* (Yid. The Scroll of My Life), Lima 1989

**Thursday Fair** ¶ Since 1542, Thursday has been a market day in Siemiatycze. Situated on the bank of Mahomet River, the town was granted the privilege of holding these Thursday fairs in the town charter issued by King Sigismund II Augustus. On a summer Thursday in 1934, one of these market days was captured in a photo by Jankiel Tykocki (1881–1941), a local photographer, cultural activist and town councillor. He opened his photographic studio in the early 1900s, and for many years took photos capturing the life of the town and its inhabitants. Tykocki and his whole family were killed on June 23, 1941 by the Nazis in the village of Wierceń, near Siemiatycze.

**Ban of Excommunication** ¶ Information about the first group of Jews to settle in Siemiatycze, who were brought there from Lithuania by the then owner of the town, Katarzyna née Tęczyńska, dates back to 1582. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the local Jewish community came under the kahal in Tykocin. However, as the town developed, this kind of relationship became more and more burdensome, and the community strove for independence. As a result, in 1691, during a session of the Council of Four Lands in Jarosław, the elders of the Siemiatycze kahal were publicly put under the ban of excommunication for insubordination:

“Listen, you entire holy community! The leaders and chiefs of the Four Lands announce and make it public to all those present at this grand session held on market day [that] they throw off the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven; they do not listen to the voices of their parents or teachers of the Grand Court of the Holy Kahal of Tykocin; they throw off the yoke of the royal power, and they fail to perform their tax duties. They do not share in the tribulations of the whole Israel during these hard times; they do not listen to any exhortations or warnings, which they consider ridiculous. Therefore, let them be excommunicated, isolated and separated from the entire community of Israel. [...] And, unless they come to the Grand Court of the Tykocin kahal to pay the poll tax they owe to the Grand Court, and unless they accept all the decisions concerning previous times, let them forever remain under a dreadful excommunication like this one. And let this statement and ban be announced in all the communities of the Four Lands, so that they are

Thursday market day in Siemiatycze, 1934. Photo by Jankiel Tykocki, private collection of Antoni Nowicki, made available courtesy of the Nowicki family ([www.siemiatycze.com](http://www.siemiatycze.com))



*punished in front of everyone and so that they do not dare to act like this again.* ¶ Abraham Gawurin, *Dzieje Żydów w Tykocinie 1522–1795* (The History of the Jews in Tykocin, 1522–1795), Warsaw, before 1939

In 1726, another ban of excommunication (herem) was issued against them (the reason, again, was tax matters). This was lifted after the rabbis of Siemiatycze expressed their apologies. Only four

years later, in 1730, with the decline of the power of the Council of Four Lands, the Siemiatycze kahal gained independence from the Jewish community of Tykocin.

In 1697, brothers **Gedalia and Moshe from Siemiatycze**, followers of the crypto-Sabbatean sect, set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. They were members of the so-called "Brotherhood of the Pious," a group of several dozen supporters of a preacher and ascetic Yehudah the Hasid, who believed that Shabbetai Tsvi a Jewish pseudo-messiah who had converted in 1666 to Islam and died ten years later, was still fulfilling his messianic role in a clandestine manner and was about to resurrect to lead the Jews to the land of Israel in the wake of redemption. The group, convinced that Shabbetai Tsvi, the messiah they believed in, was soon to come, set off from Siedlce to Jerusalem. While wandering through Moravia, Germany, Tirol, and Venice, they were joined by several hundred of crypto-sabbatean supporters, and, on October 14, 1700, they reached Jerusalem. Later, Moshe became a teacher in a yeshivah in Jerusalem, while Gedalia returned to Europe as an emissary of the Ashkenazi Jewish community of Jerusalem. In 1716, in Berlin, he published a book in Hebrew titled *Sha'alu Shalom Yerushalayim* (Heb.: Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem), in which he described the history of Yehudah the Hasid's pilgrimage as well as the living conditions of the oppressed and impoverished Jewish community in Jerusalem at that time.



[A] The synagogue in Siemiatycze, 1930s. Photo by Jankiel Tykocki, private collection of the late Antoni Nowicki, made available courtesy of the Nowicki family ([www.siemiatycze.com](http://www.siemiatycze.com))

[B] The synagogue and the Talmudic house in Siemiatycze, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko

[C] Inside the synagogue in Siemiatycze, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

**The new order** ¶ When, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Anna Jabłonowska née Sapieha became the owner of the Siemiatycze estate, she undertook intense efforts to rebuild and

re-order the town's spatial structure. One of her undertakings was to establish a new Classicist-style palace and to build an alleyway connecting her new residence with the town hall and market square.

The palace has not survived: it was burnt down during the January Uprising of 1863. The only remnant of the grand residence are two sphinxes standing on the sarcophagus-shaped plinths of what used to be the palace gate.

The alley (now Pałacowa Street) connecting the palace with the market square ran through the Jewish cemetery, which was still in use at that time but was abolished to make way for the alley despite dramatic protests by the Jews. Instead, Duchess Anna Jabłonowska marked out

a site for a new cemetery beyond the town, on the left bank of the Kamionka River.

**The Great Synagogue** ¶ Situated in the southwestern part of the town, about 150 m away from the main market

Oil painting by Józef Charyton of the marketplace in Siemiatycze in the interwar period, 1974. Photo by Marcin Korniluk, collection of the Bioregion Association ([www.nawschodzie.pl](http://www.nawschodzie.pl))



square (today Jan Paweł II Square), the synagogue was established to replace the wooden synagogue destroyed during the 1797 devastating fire. Decades later, it was one of the few buildings that did not burn down during the battle of Siemiatycze at the time of the 1863 January Uprising. ¶ The synagogue is a two-storey, Classicist building with a rectangular plan (25×19.5 m) and a hip roof. It had a square, two-storey men's hall on the east side and a vestibule for men on the west side (with the entrance from the south). The upper part of the men's hall was surrounded on three sides (all but the eastern side) by open galleries resting on columns and posts. These served as women's galleries. The interior

of the synagogue was decorated with polychrome paintings, whose remnants were still visible as late as 1958. During World War II and afterwards, the building was used as a warehouse. In 1961–1964, it was renovated and turned into a local community centre and gallery. The original fittings and furnishings of the synagogue have not survived, except for the Torah scroll, which can be seen in the Diocesan Museum in Drohiczyń (20 km from Siemiatycze). On both the inside and outside of the synagogue, plaques commemorating the Jewish community have been placed. At present, the building is the property of the Municipality of Siemiatycze.

In one of the rooms of the former women's gallery there are paintings by **Józef Charyton** (1909–1975), a self-taught painter from Siemiatycze who, after the war, created a series of about 500 paintings and drawings that depict scenes of the Holocaust as well as document the everyday life of the Jewish community before World War II. Charyton was born in the village of Krupice near Siemiatycze, but the family moved to Wysokie Litewskie (Vysokaye) – a village situated a dozen or so kilometres away. His father had a mill there, and Józef worked as





The gate of the Jewish cemetery in Siemiatycze, 2014. Photo by Marcin Korniluk, collection of the Bioregion Association ([www.nawschodzie.pl](http://www.nawschodzie.pl))

a photographer, a local official, a portraitist, and a church painter. In 1938, he prepared the vault where the exhumed corpse of the last Polish king, Stanisław August Poniatowski, was deposited. More information about Józef Charyton can be found in Marian Brandys's short story *Strażnik Królewskiego Grobu* (The Guard of the Royal Tomb. A Story of Józef Charyton from Siemiatycze), Warsaw 1984.

“He grew up in a small borderland town, whose population was mainly Jewish. He went to school with Jews, a Jewish saleswoman sold him food. A Jewish tailor patched his clothes, he bought paint brushes and paints in a small Jewish shop. Dark-complexioned Jewish boys and Jewish girls with sweet black eyes posed for his first biblical paintings. He got used to and became attached to that noisy and industrious crowd of people. He had friends among them; they were part of his life. And then he became a silent witness to their tragic end. He saw how the Nazis exterminated them. He saw how inhumane humiliation and suffering were inflicted on them and how they died a sudden death or perished after constant torment and torture. ¶ He did not resume painting right after the war as he was busy doing other things and devoted himself to teaching. But one night the murdered Jews from his hometown came to visit him in a dream. And then they would come every night. They did not say a word but just stared at him, as if demanding something from him. So he bought some brushes and paints and started painting them. At first, he would paint only the ones he knew: Goldberg the tailor, Ruchla the dairywoman, Szmulowicz the shop owner, the beautiful Chana from the confectionery shop, who had once posed for his painting “Judith and Holofernes.” Later came the time when he began to paint those he did not know by name but whose appearance he still remembered... ¶ Following the events of 1968, when the Jews began to hastily leave Poland, painting Jewish portraits became a moral imperative for Charyton. ¶ A few weeks before his death, he wrote: ¶ “I have paid my dues with my Jews,” he wrote, “and they have stopped visiting me at night because I have already painted them all”

[A] Donation certificate for the construction of the Hebrew Kadimah primary school in Siemiatycze, 1935, private collection of the late Antoni Nowicki, made available courtesy of the Nowicki family ([www.siemiatycze.com](http://www.siemiatycze.com))

[B] The Kaczy Dolek district in Siemiatycze, view from the church tower, 1930s. Photo by Jankiel Tykocki, private collection of the late Antoni Nowicki, made available courtesy of the Nowicki family ([www.siemiatycze.com](http://www.siemiatycze.com))



**Around the synagogue** ¶ Next to the synagogue stands the former Talmud-Torah, which used to house a school, a kahal meeting room, and the central office of the kahal court. The building was erected in 1893 in the neo-Baroque style with elements of Secession decoration. At present, it houses

a vocational training school. ¶ Other former Jewish prayer houses operated in Wesola, Fabryczna, Drohiczyńska, and Małopolska Streets. There was also a prayer room in Belkies's tile works. In Ciechanowska St., by the Mukhavets River, there was a mikveh.

**THE TILE CAPITAL AND THE "CLAY ELDORADO"** ¶ That is what Siemiatycze used to be called before the war, because of the Jewish-owned tileries. The Jews of Siemiatycze contributed greatly to the development of the industry producing tile and functional pottery. The owners of these plants included people named Belkies, Radzyński, Gorfajn, Dajcz, Maliniak, Szyszko, and Małach. The first tile works opened in 1890, and eventually about 30 tileries operated, both in the town itself and in the vicinity: currently there are only three. Dajcz's tile works, which opened in 1906, was the biggest of its kind in Siemiatycze and, at one time, the

biggest tilery in Poland (five storeys tall, covering several hectares, and with an underground conveyor belt). Today, only its ruins remain, near the cemetery.

**The “Jutrzenka” kibbutz** ¶ In the 1920s, Zionist organisations founded the Shaharia (Yid.: Morning Star) kibbutz-hakhsharah. It was a centre meant to prepare young halutsim (pioneers – agricultural settlers), through hard physical work, to emigrate and settle in the British-mandate Palestine. About 130 people (30 women and 100 men) underwent training there. Young Jews from Siemiatycze and the vicinity worked in the fields of Polish farmers and in the Wertheim brothers’ sawmill. They grew crops and raised animals on an independent farm created by the halutsim. Some of the hakhsharah (training camp) members earned a living by transporting goods and materials on horse-drawn carts or by working in tileries. Their earnings were collected into a common fund. The residents of the kibbutz lived on a frugal diet; for example, they ate meat only once a week. However, despite the tough living conditions, the *Memorial Book of Siemiatycze* recalls that the hakhsharah was filled with a joyous atmosphere.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The cemetery was established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the eastern part of the town, in what is now Polna St. (The road leading to it is marked with a signpost in Wysoka St.). The cemetery is surrounded by a wall which still has its original gate made of so-called tsarist red brick. On it there are four brick Stars of David and memorial plaques commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. The dozen or so tombstones that have survived were used to build a lapidarium wall commemorating the Jews of Siemiatycze. The rest of the cemetery is overgrown with trees. Searching in and around town for Jewish gravestones, the Siemiatycze Bioregion Association has found dozens of fragments, which have also been built into the lapidarium. Members of the Kotler and Kramer families who survived the Holocaust have funded a commemorative plaque. Today, the cemetery is the property of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.

Siemiatycze had several Jewish schools, both religious and secular. The most important one was the Kadimah, a Hebrew school belonging to the Tarbut Association. Its head was Yehudah Kohut, who managed to raise sufficient funds to have a modern school building established. The official opening ceremony took place in 1938. A few years later, Yehudah Kohut was murdered, together with his pupils, in the Treblinka death camp.

## **World War II and the Holocaust**

¶ Before the outbreak of World War II, some 4,303 Jews lived in Siemiatycze. In the autumn of 1939, this number increased to more than 7,000, after the influx of refugees from western Poland.

In August 1942, the German occupation authorities created a ghetto in Siemiatycze (within the square formed by Górna, Wysoka, Koszarowa, and Słowczyńska Streets) for the Jewish inhabitants of the town and neighbouring

areas. The ghetto functioned for a little more than three months. On November 2–9, 1942, all the inmates of the Siemiatycze ghetto were deported to the Treblinka II death camp (approx. 90 km away from Siemiatycze) and killed there.

¶ In July 1944, when the German occupation was over, the few Jews who had survived – about 100 people – began to return to the town. The time was far from peaceful, however, and there were cases of robberies and murders. After April 6, 1945, when 28 Jews were attacked in Yuda Blumberg's house in Berka Joselewicza St. by an armed group (probably associated with nationalistic anti-communist resistance movement NSZ), claiming that they are attacking Jews because the Jews allegedly cooperated with new communist government, all the remaining Jewish inhabitants of Siemiatycze left town. The history of the Jewish community of Siemiatycze, which had made up 60 percent of the town pre-war population, thus came to an end.

**Present day** ¶ Present-day Siemiatycze is a county town in the Podlaskie Voivodeship, where about 15,000 people live. Each Thursday, market day, the area next to the Jewish cemetery is filled with people. If you are a Polish-speaker, the place is worth visiting not simply to buy something but, above all, to hear people speaking the beautiful Podlasie dialect. Another interesting fact is that, just beyond the wall of the cemetery, there is a small, dilapidated house built entirely from stove tiles. It is one of several buildings of this type in the town. ¶ Anyone wishing to explore this area may turn for help to the various tour guides at the Tourist Information Centre (3A Jana Pawła II Square, tel. +48 780 158 959), which is open from May to September. The centre offers information about accommodation and catering in the town and its vicinity, as well as about tourist routes and local cultural offerings.

#### Surrounding area

**Sarnaki** (13 km): a Jewish cemetery (1742); a parish church (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Stanislaus (wooden, 1816); the Podczaski manor house (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); Józef Szummer's brick brewery (1903–1905); historic crosses and chapels (about 250 examples). ¶ **Góra Grabarka** (Mount Grabarka) (14 km): St. Martha and Mary Convent (1947), 3 monastery Orthodox churches, more than 7,000 votive crosses. ¶ **Drohiczyn** (16 km): The Diocesan Museum with the Torah scroll from Siemiatycze; a Jewish cemetery with about 70 tombstones (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1682–1715) and the Franciscan monastery (1737–1751); All Saints' Church and the Benedictine Convent (1734–1738); St. Nicolaus Orthodox Church (1792); The Holy Trinity Cathedral (1696–1709); the Jesuit Monastery and the Jesuit College (mid-17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Mielnik** (20 km): a synagogue, currently an art gallery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the castle hill with the remains of the castle's Holy Trinity Church (15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Transfiguration (1912–1920); the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God (1825); an Orthodox cemetery; the Chapel of the Protection of Our Lady (wooden, 1776). ¶ **Milejczyce** (23 km): a synagogue, now disused (1927); a Jewish cemetery (1865); St. Stanislaus Church (wooden, 1740); the cemetery; Orthodox Church of St. Nicolaus (wooden, 19<sup>th</sup> c.); Orthodox Church of St. Barbara (1900). ¶ **Łosice** (33 km):



a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.), renovated at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> c.; a lapidarium made from a few dozen matzevot retrieved from the town's squares and streets; Church of St. Sigismund (1906–1909). ¶ **Ciechanowiec** (38 km): a synagogue, now the head office of the Culture and Sports Centre in Ciechanów (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the old Jewish cemetery with about 30 tombstones; the new Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.) with a memorial to Holocaust victims; the Orthodox Church of the Ascension of the Lord (1864); Holy Trinity Church (1731–1737); the monastery and hospital complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.); The Fr. Krzysztof Kluk Museum of Agriculture; the Mazovia and Podlasie Open-Air Museum. ¶ **Treblinka** (77 km): The memorial and Museum of Combat and Martyrdom in the former death camp. ¶ **The Podlasie Bug Gorge Landscape Park** encompasses part of the Bug Valley stretching from the Toczna River to the estuary of the Krzna River in the village of Neple – a perfect area for cycling and canoeing. ¶ **The Bug River** valley and the slightly undulating Drohiczyń Plateau are criss-crossed by tourist routes, such as the Moszczona Valley Trail, the Molotov Line Bunkers Trail, the Bug River Trail, and the January Uprising Trail.

Worth seeing



Former **synagogue** (1797), now the gallery at the Siemiatycze Culture Centre, 1 Zaskolna St. ¶ Former **Talmud-Torah School** (1900), 10 Pałacowa St. ¶ **Jewish cemetery**, Polna St. (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** with the former Missionaries' Monastery (1719–1727), 2a 3 Maja Street. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul** (1866), 3 Gen. Władysława Sikorskiego St. ¶ **Statues of sphinxes** at the former entrance gate to the palace of Duchess Anna Jabłonowska and at the General Secondary School building. ¶ **Orangery** (1860), burnt down during the January Uprising of 1863, rebuilt in the 1980s. ¶ **Classicist houses**, Pałacowa St. (nos. 14, 19, 25, 28). ¶ **Ruins of the tilery complex** (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Multi-denominational cemetery** (1805): Augsburg Evangelical Chapel (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), St. Anne's Chapel (1826–1827), Romana Rogińskiego St. ¶ **World War I cemetery**.

ess Anna Jabłonowska and at the General Secondary School building. ¶ **Orangery** (1860), burnt down during the January Uprising of 1863, rebuilt in the 1980s. ¶ **Classicist houses**, Pałacowa St. (nos. 14, 19, 25, 28). ¶ **Ruins of the tilery complex** (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Multi-denominational cemetery** (1805): Augsburg Evangelical Chapel (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), St. Anne's Chapel (1826–1827), Romana Rogińskiego St. ¶ **World War I cemetery**.

# Międzyrzec Podlaski

Bel. МендзырэчПадляскі,  
Ukr. Межиріччя, Yid. מעזעריטש

*On the wall of our youth club it was written:  
'Ignore your father's preaching, remember your  
mother's teaching'.*

Maszka Grynberg – a line from  
*A Klayne Amerike* film, 2002

**Little America** ¶ Where in today's Poland can you find a town of fewer than 18,000 people that boasts 6 libraries, 3 cinemas, several choirs, an orchestra, a theatre, 42 schools, more than 200 industrial plants, and 12 different periodicals? Yet that was Międzyrzec Podlaski before the war. Located at the confluence of the Krzna and the Piszczka

Rivers, Mezeritch, as it was called in Yiddish, was one of the region most rapidly developing towns. Its prosperity rested on pig bristle, from which brooms and brushes were manufactured and sold all over Europe and Russia. Just before World War II, the exports from Międzyrzec were estimated at six to nine million US dollars.

” *Sorting bristle was not easy. It was a seasonal job that got more intensive in winter, during the pre-Christmas slaughter of animals. Jewish bristle workers laboured in small low-ceilinged houses. On the tables along the walls there were iron combs used for combing raw pig bristle. People worked standing by the light of oil lamps that hung above their heads. First, they sorted the bristle and then they cleaned it with iron combs. Clouds of dust were floating in the air [...]. The stench of pig hair mixed with the smell of kerosene.* ¶ Translated from: Mateusz Borysiuk, *Spółeczność żydowska Międzyrzecza Podlaskiego w okresie międzywojennym* (The Jewish Community of Międzyrzec Podlaski in the Interwar Period), in: Jewish Studies. Almanac year II (2012) No. 2.

**The Land of Abraham** ¶ The town origins date back to the 1390s, when Władysław Jagiełło granted the Międzyrzec estate to Abraham Chamec, a knight from Małopolska (Lesser Poland). Afterwards, Międzyrzec belonged to the wealthiest aristocratic families, including the Tęczyńskis, the Sieniawskis, the Czartoryskis, and the Potockis. In the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, it

had a marketplace with a town hall, an Orthodox church, a Catholic church, several butcher-stores, the town administrator's house, and a parish school, as well as a mill and a brewery. Jews may have arrived in Międzyrzec already in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though the earliest surviving reference to them was made in 1533 in the *Lithuanian Metrica*, which mentioned one Awram Ajzykowicz,



accused of taking in pledge some items stolen from a royal courtier. The Jews lived in a district called Szmulowizna, located southeast of the market, where today's Mydlarska, Jatkowa and Nasuta Streets cross. They worked in trade and crafts and also ran taverns that served beer and spirits. Międzyrzec was conveniently situated on the Brest – Łuków trade route to Małopolska and had its own customs house. The 1583 carriage book recorded the names of three Jews who traded in salted fish (Moszko Abramowicz, Cadek Jehudycz, and Chechło Szachnowicz). From 1598, a salt shop operated in town. It was the only establishment of that kind located in the borderland of Lithuania and the Crown. Międzyrzec was also known for its beer, served on the tables of Lublin and Brest. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the local Jewish community boasted its own synagogue, beth midrash, bath-house and hospital, but the community still reported to the Tykocin kahal. In 1624, Jan Tęczyński (the then town owner) granted the Jews the exclusive privilege to sell alcohol. They also engaged in

tanning, leasing, and collecting various tolls and fees for the town owners, such as dyke taxes, bridge tolls, and tolls on cattle slaughter or tar trade. ¶ The wars of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century hindered the development of the Podlasie region, and the population of the towns of Podlasie decreased by half. In 1674, the Jewish community in Międzyrzec stood at 207 people, or about 21 percent of its overall population. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a new kahal was set up, independent of the one in Tykocin, and the new town owner, Helena Sieniawska née Lubomirska, confirmed the existing privileges that allowed the Jews to run marketplace stores and taverns. In 1718, she also granted them permission to build a stone synagogue, a hospital, a weights-and-measures house, a school, and the rabbi's house, and to establish their own communal cemetery. The old wooden buildings in the Jewish quarter were partly destroyed during a fire in the town. In 1761, the municipality received

[A] The wooden houses at Graniczna street in Międzyrzec Podlaski, 2015. Photo by Tal Schwartz

[B] A soyfer (scribe), 1925. Photo by Alter Kacyzne, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

consent from Wołłowicz, the Bishop of Łuck, to erect a brick synagogue after the wooden one burnt. As a result, the

Great Synagogue accommodating 3,000 people was built. It was completely destroyed during World War II.

Międzyrzec was the hometown of **Shalom ben Yaakov ha-Kohen** (1771–1845) – an enlightened Hebraist, editor, and poet. His first book, *Mishleh Agur* (Eng.: Parables of Agur), was a collection of moralistic fables and tales aimed at teaching Hebrew to Jewish children. At the age of 17, he left the town to study in Berlin and then went to London, where he attempted to establish a Jewish school, with no success. In London, he published *Shorshei Emunah* (Eng.: Foundations of Faith), a Hebrew catechism. Afterwards, he lived and worked in Vienna and Hamburg. At that time, Shalom ha-Kohen was one of the most famous poets writing in Hebrew; he was the author of the allegorical drama *Amal ve-Tirzah*, several collections of poems, hymns, and odes, as well as commentaries on religion and the history of Jews in the time of the Maccabees.

In 1778, there were 717 Jews living in Międzyrzec, which constituted 40 percent of the town's population. It had a brick synagogue, a beth midrash, a bathhouse, a hospital, several cheders, and the rabbi's house. In 1782, the town's new owner, Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, confirmed trade privileges for the Jews and promised to construct 12 new brick stalls for Jewish merchants. The town was known for the fur trade and bristle production. Numerous tanneries, brush workshops, and bristle sorting plants operated there. After the Third Partition of Poland (1795), Międzyrzec fell under Austrian rule. The new administration took over the revenues from inspecting kosher meat production, instituted the so-called "candle tax," abolished the rabbinical court, and prohibited Jewish doctors from practicing. The Jews were given German names and submitted to conscription duties. ¶ After the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the Międzyrzec area became part of the Kingdom of Poland. The town growth was spurred by the building of a rough

road and a railway connecting Warsaw and Brest. From 1829, a watermill owned by David and Aron Wajnberg was in operation. Many families earned their living from making different kinds of brushes. Jewish factories that produced matches, pen-holders and agricultural equipment also were opened. And there were tanneries, wire and light bulb plants, two new copper foundries owned by Salomon Cirles, a smithshop owned by Lejbk Mintz, breweries, several vinegar and tile stove factories, three soap stores, and two wadding shops and carding mills. In 1827, Jews constituted 65 percent of local population, and in the 1864 census, 80 percent. ¶ The town had a synagogue, 10 prayer houses, 45 cheders, a hospital and various Jewish voluntary philanthropic and professional associations (guilds). Jews were involved in public life and supplied weapons to insurgents during the January Uprising (e.g. Szymon Goldberg and Jelko Winderaum). The first proto-Zionist organisation was established in Międzyrzec already in 1882, while the late 19<sup>th</sup>





century saw the rise of the Jewish labour movement. In 1904, the Jewish Fire Society, later renamed the Volunteer Fire Brigade, was organised. In 1915, a power plant was opened at Finkelstein

brothers' mill. The town was an important economic hub in Congress Poland, with profits from the export of brushes and bristles earning it the nickname "Little America."

Voluntary Fire Brigade in Międzyrzec Podlaski, before 1939, reproduction from *Sefer Mezeritch* (The Book of Międzyrzec Podlaski), Israel 1978

**WHO PROTECTS WHOSE HOUSES?** ¶ A Jewish volunteer fire brigade had operated in the town before the war. However, its mission to rescue people's property gave rise to quarrels instead of earning the brigade any respect. When the houses of Catholics caught fire, firefighters were accused of arriving too late, even if they managed to save the owner's house. On the other hand, every success in putting out a fire ravaging Jewish property was taken as evidence that the brigade only protected its own people. The last straw was a fire in the Potocki Palace. Unfortunately, it broke out on the Sabbath, when it was harder for the firefighters to band together. Although they arrived in time, they were not spared unfavourable comments and criticism. Some anti-Jewish members of the Międzyrzec community decided to set up a Polish fire brigade, which was to protect Christians not so much against fires as against the Jewish firemen, who could not be counted on. ¶ Based on Josef Czepeliński's memories, from *Sefer Mezeritch*, Israel 1978.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought an upsurge of cultural and social activity. Charitable organisations (e.g. Beth Lehem – the House of Bread), banks

(Merchants' Bank and People's Bank), libraries, choirs, an amateur Jewish theatre, and Mendel Szpilman's "Klezmer" brass band – at the volunteer fire brigade

A poster announcing a charity ball organised by the Voluntary Fire Brigade of Międzyrzec Podlaski, 1923, collection of the National Library (www.polona.pl)

– were all established at that time. Local people eagerly attended theatre performances and meetings with writers. Międzyrzec hosted Sholem Asch and Y.L. Peretz, among others. In 1913, Jankiel Rajsze Zilberberg opened the first local cinema, called “Iluzjon.” Educational and cultural associations committed to adult education, such as the Freiheit or the Zionist Tarbut, and the Kultur-Liga operating under the auspices of the Jewish Labour Bund, were very active. In about 1915, a Hasidic court was founded by the Hasidic master (tsaddik) Meir Shlomo Yehuda Rabinowicz (1868–1942), son of the tsaddik of Biała Podlaska, Yitzhak Yaakov. Alongside numerous cheders and the Talmud Torah elementary school run by the community, there was also a religious school for girls, Bet Yaakov, and several private secular Jewish primary schools. The private coeducational primary school was opened in 1916, followed by the Secondary School Society for the Youth of the Jewish Faith, established a year later. In 1923, the Society received permission to run a coeducational high school. Międzyrzec was also home to youth organisations working under the auspices of political parties, such as Hashomer Hatzair and Gordonia. A branch of the Jutrznia Workers’ Association for Physical Education, founded in 1926, had about 100 members, active in sports and boasting its own brass band. Before World War II, there were 12 full-time communal employees: a rabbi, two lower rabbis, two kosher butchers, two cantors, a secretary, a bookkeeper, a cashier, and two janitors.

**Newspapers** ¶ An important manifestation of the town’s cultural



activity was its vibrant publishing world. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 16 different Jewish periodicals and other titles were published in Yiddish. Some of them, e.g. *Blihung* (Bloom), were only one-time publications. Brought out in 1913 and intended as a literary periodical, it comprised 46 pages and contained a collection of poems and short stories written by young Międzyrzec residents. Interestingly, two future newspaper editors made their début there. *Blihung* was edited by Abraham Gelman, a local teacher and translator. One of the longest-running periodicals were four weeklies and two fortnightlies; they were published for just over a year. Additionally, some publications came out on an off-and-on basis. According to Adam Kopciowski, the individual editions and publications printed in Międzyrzec (1,043 in all) constituted 9 percent of all publications in the Lublin region. *Mezeritcher Vokhnblat* (Międzyrzec

Weekly), published in 1926–1929 (290 issues), was devoted to the interests of Jewish associations, as well as to the local political, cultural, and economic life. Afterwards, it was transformed into *Unser Mezeritcher Vokhnblat*, which continued until the end of 1930. Both papers were edited by Menashe Himlszejn and printed by the Rogożyk printing house. Another title, *Podlasyer Tsaytung* (Podlasie Newspaper) started as a daily edited by a different person every week. But after three years, Moszko Feldman became its permanent editor. *Podlasyer Tsaytung* was printed by the “Radio” printing house between 1932 and 1937. A more politically involved newspaper, associated with the Zionist movement, was the *Mezeritcher Trybune* (Międzyrzec Tribune), which came out between 1928 and 1932 (194 issues, printed by the “Radio” printing house). Another periodical, *Mezeritcher Lebn* (Międzyrzec Life) (1933–1937) was influenced by the Folkists. The prices of these periodicals ranged between 10 and 20 Polish grosze. Apart from these, there were also specialised publications; for example, the *Mezeritcher Klaynhendler* (Small Shopkeeper of Międzyrzec), which contained articles and reports on trade only, or the *Mezeritcher Arbeter Informator* (Międzyrzec Workers’ Factbook). Information about the life of the town could also be found in regional papers; for example, in the *Podlasher Panorame* or *Lubliner Togblat*.

**A walk around Międzyrzec** ¶ The town has kept its 15<sup>th</sup>-century urban layout to this day. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the wooden buildings were replaced by brick ones. Today, the main square is

surrounded by houses with wrought-iron balconies. To the left of St. Joseph’s Church, which is located in the marketplace, there is also the former municipal building dating back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the former Sobelman hotel is opposite the church. The narrow streets and passages spanned by arches characteristic of the former Jewish quarter have been preserved around the southeastern part of the market square. Particularly beautiful are the wooden houses located in Graniczna St. From Jana Pawła II (John Paul II) Square, it is worth taking a left turn into Warszawska St., where at numbers 2–4 there is a former Jewish hospital, still in use. Built in 1846–1850, and modern for that time, it was equipped with 60 beds available for any of the town’s residents, regardless of their religion. In Warszawska St. it is also worth seeing the buildings of the former inn and mounted postal service station (1823), where Tsar Alexander II and Romuald Traugutt (commander of the January Uprising), among others, stopped for the night. At the corner of Kościelna and Łukowska Streets, the former fire station has survived, erected in 1925 as the headquarters of the Jewish Volunteer Fire Brigade. The brigade’s equipment was stored on the ground floor, while the first floor featured a 300-seat auditorium used by the Olimpia cinema-theatre. Not only film showings were held here but also theatre performances, dances, and public readings. A one-storey building at Staromiejska St., which now houses a police station, was home to another cinema, “The Casino”, founded by Symcha Mandelbaum. The silent films shown there were accompanied by music performed by local musicians.



The synagogue in Międzyrzec Podlaski, western and southern elevations, 1919, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Science

**Synagogue ¶** The main synagogue, built in 1761–1779 to replace the former wooden one, is situated in what today is Nassuta St. Its construction was financially supported by the Czartoryski family, who owned the town at that time. The building was the focal point of the Jewish quarter. It featured three storeys and two women's sections – northern and southern. The men's section had a lower part added to it later, covered by a hip roof. Opposite the synagogue, to the west, there was the communal beth midrash, founded as early as the 1560s. The original wooden building burnt down in 1718 and had to be rebuilt in 1761. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it was destroyed by fire again, and then rebuilt with the help of the Czartoryski family. In 1942, the synagogue was devastated, and in June 1943, it was blown up by the Germans. According to witnesses,

the remaining rubble was used to build a forest road to the villages of Żerocin and Sitno. In the 1960s, blocks of flats were built on its site. ¶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Międzyrzec was one of the largest and fastest-growing towns in Podlasie. The Jewish community had its synagogue, beth midrash, nursing home, children's home, ritual poultry slaughterhouse, ritual bathhouse, library, kahal board office, rabbi's and cantor's houses, as well as ten prayer houses that belonged to various Jewish professional guilds. Tailors, for example, met at 18 Szkolna St., carters – at 67 Warszawska St., and shoemakers – at 70 Brzeska St. The town had about a dozen Hasidic prayer rooms, including those serving the followers of the tsaddikim from Góra Kalwaria, Radzyń, Sokołów, Łomża, Biała Podlaska, and Łomazy.

**THE BURNING ISSUE ¶** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, traditional Jews of Międzyrzec came under the influence of Hasidic movement. In 1840, Moszko Tajtelberg, a mit-naged (Yid.: misnagid), or opponent, of Hasidism living there, came up with an



interesting idea on how to curb this new movement. He sent a written request to the government commission, asking it to ban the Hasidim from smoking in batei midrash (study houses), a practice that was common among them. The Hasidim also responded with a letter, in which one Rafał Goldman, on behalf of 400 people, defended smoking, using numerous religious quotations that indicated the need for legalising it in batei midrash. The commission, however, was not to be misled and agreed with Tajtelberg. Today, the correspondence concerning this matter allows historians to give a more accurate estimate of the size of various Jewish religious groups in Międzyrzec. ¶ Based on: Marcin Wodziński *Oświecenie żydowskie w Królestwie Polskim wobec chasydyzmu* (Jewish Enlightenment in the Kingdom of Poland and the Hasidism), Warsaw 2003

**The cemetery** ¶ Minz (1807), Preter (1835), Rosen (1843), and Rapaport (1846) are just a few of the names found on the 19<sup>th</sup>-century gravestones at the new cemetery in Międzyrzec. The cemetery was established in 1810 at 90 Brzeska St., opposite the Catholic one, replacing the earlier 16<sup>th</sup>-century cemetery, which was no longer used at that time. During the war, both cemeteries were devastated by the Nazis, who also carried out executions of Jews at the new cemetery. A monument funded in 1946 by Abram and Sarah Finkelstein from the U.S. commemorates the victims of those executions. Among the sandstone and granite gravestones, there are also two unique iron steles made by the local ironworks of the Szejmel brothers, probably the only ones of this kind in the Lublin region. About 300 matzevot from the old cemetery, the earliest one dating back to 1706, have been preserved here, and approximately 200 surviving gravestone fragments have been embedded in the new cemetery's wall, making up a kind of commemorative "wailing wall." Post-war gravestones can also be found – the most recent one, from 1973, belonging to Moshe Kaufman. Next to the cemetery, there is a building that used to serve

as a funeral home. The entrance to the cemetery is through a gate located in the yard of this house.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, about 12,000 Jews lived in the town, constituting 75 percent of the population. At the beginning of the war, the town was bombed by the German air force. The Soviet army entered Międzyrzec at the end of September 1939, only to give way to the German army a few days later. About 2,000 Jews, mostly young men, fled with the retreating Red Army. The Germans began to persecute the Jews soon after seizing the town, forcing them to work and confiscating their property. Meanwhile, Jews from Radzyń County and other Polish cities and towns, as well as from Vienna and Slovakia, were resettled in Międzyrzec. This boosted the town's Jewish population to 17,000 and subsequently to 24,000. On May 25, 1942, about 800 Jews were transferred from Międzyrzec to the Treblinka death camp. On August 1942, hundreds of sick and infirm Jews were executed in the marketplace, and nearly 11,000 were transferred to Treblinka. Those who remained in the town were confined to a ghetto



[A] A cast iron matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Międzyrzec Podlaski, 2015. Photo by Tal Schwartz



[B] The main synagogue: the aron ha-kodesh, before 1939, reproduction from *Sefer Meziitsh le-zecher kedoshei irenu hi'd*, ed. I. Ronkin and B. Heler, Israel 1978

established on August 28, 1942 between Brzeska, Warszawska, Szkolna and Żelazna Streets. The majority of ghetto inmates worked in forced labour camps in the area, others were made to work on the irrigation system of the Krzna and the Rogoźnica Rivers, as well as to build roads and an airport in Krzewica. The Germans also took over the brush factories, which employed about 1,000 people. In September and October 1942, the Jews from Wołyń, Parczew, and Radzyń were resettled in Międzyrzec. The majority of them were later transferred to Treblinka (on October 6–9, October 27, and November 7–8). In November 1942, the Nazis established the so-called residual ghetto, in which the surviving Jews from the Radzyń County and a group of bristle workers from the Warsaw Ghetto were

confined. Further transports, which took place on April 30 and May 2–3 and 26 were sent to Majdanek. Some 200 Jews who tried to avoid transfer to the camp were shot at the Jewish cemetery. The last execution was carried out on July 18–19, 1943, when the remaining 179 Jews were killed in retaliation for the death of two Germans in the Piaski suburb. The ghetto was liquidated and the entire Jewish quarter destroyed.

**THE ATTIC** ¶ For 13 months, a group of 10 Jews – men and women of various ages – remained in hiding in the attic of a house in the marketplace that served as the Gestapo headquarters during the occupation. The attic was just 70 cm high at its highest point. Although they suffered from hunger and disease, they still celebrated Pesach and Purim, and even fought ideological disputes, as an Orthodox Jew and communists were confined in the same room. This story was heard and documented by Ephraim Sidor, an Israeli writer, playwright, and satirist, whose parents came from Międzyrzec. It served as the basis for a play titled *Mezeritsh* (Międzyrzec), written by Sidor and Itzik Weingarten and staged by the Cawta Theatre in Tel Aviv in 2004. At the request of the Former Residents of Międzyrzec



[A] The "Prayer" Memorial, 2015. Photo by Tal Schwartz



[B] Międzyrzec Podlaski, passage at Jatkowa street, 2015. Photo by Tal Schwartz

Podlaski Association, Sidor filmed a documentary called *A Kleyne Amerike* (A Little America), telling the story of this thriving town in Podlasie and its destruction.

**The post-war period** ¶ At the beginning of 1945, 129 Jews lived in Międzyrzec, 71 of whom had been born there. Later that year, many survivors returned from the Soviet Union, but few decided to stay in Międzyrzec. On May 19, 1946, Yisroel Zylbersztejn

(a former guerrilla fighter) and Genia Adlerstein from Biała Podlaska (a former Auschwitz-Birkenau prisoner) were murdered not far from the Sokule train station (near Międzyrzec, on the way to Biała Podlaska). Faced with a growing threat of violence, most Jews left.

Israeli Association of Former Residents of Międzyrzec Podlaski, in cooperation with young local people from the Volunteer Fire Brigade, the memorial represents a female figure wrapped in a prayer shawl (tallit). It was made by the world-renowned Israeli sculptor Yael Artzi, who was inspired by the image of her own mother praying. A poignant moment during the ceremony was a song performed by Sława Przybylska, a famous Polish singer born in Międzyrzec Podlaski.

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**Jewish cemetery**, 90 Brzeska St. ¶ **Old Town Marketplace** (15<sup>th</sup> c.) with the “Prayer” sculpture commemorating the Jews of Międzyrzec. ¶ **Potocki Palace** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 63 Lubelska St. ¶ **Church of St. Nicholas** (1477) with a presbytery (1818), 6 Łukowska St. ¶ **Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul** (1772–1774), 61 Lubelska St. ¶ **Church of St. Joseph** (1564), 11 Staromiejska St. ¶ **Hospital** (1846–1850), 2–4 Warszawska St. ¶ **Catholic cemetery**, Brzeska St.

**Biała Podlaska** (29 km): the palace and park complex (17<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Anne (1572); the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Bialska Academy building (1628); the Museum of Southern Podlasie; a former synagogue at Łazienna





St.; a former Jewish hospital, now the Registry Office; a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Komarówka Podlaska** (24 km): a Jewish cemetery at Krótka St. ¶ **Wohyń** (26 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); former Uniate Chapel of St. Dmitri, now Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel (wooden, 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Anne (1840). ¶ **Łuków** (32 km): the Regional Museum; the Piarist monastery (18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> c.), the Transfiguration of Jesus Collegiate Church (1733–1762); the Bernardine monastery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 18<sup>th</sup> c.), Exaltation of the Holy Cross Church (1665–1770); a wooden cemetery; Church of St. Roch (1829); an old beth midrash, now the seat of the Municipal Social Welfare Centre (MOPS); the new Jewish cemetery on Warszawska St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a monument at the execution site in the Malcanów Forest. ¶ **Łomazy** (39 km): a Jewish cemetery on Brzeska St. with a monument and two graves holding the ashes of Jews killed in the nearby “Hały” Forest during the ghetto liquidation; the wooden house of a rabbi in Małobrzaska St.; the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1907); the wooden Eastern Catholic (Uniate) Chapel of St. John at the cemetery (first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); Studzianka, Małaszewicze, Ortel, and Lebedziew – Muslim culture centres; Tatar cemeteries in Studzianka and Lebedziew. ¶ **Rossosz** (42 km): Church of St. Stanislaus (wooden, 1908); a Uniate cemetery (1840–1913); an Orthodox cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; a memorial to the local Jews. ¶ **Siedlce** (42 km): the Ogiński Palace (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Stanislaus (1740–1749); a Jewish cemetery on Szkolna St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Talmud Torah school building at 4 Browarna St.; a former private prayer house at the corner of Bpa I. Świrskiego St. (formerly Długa St.) and Pusta St.; the Regional Museum. ¶ **Konstantynów** (44 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the palace and park complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1905–1909); a Uniate cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor house and farm (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Orthodox Church of Our Lady of Protection, converted into a school (1833). ¶ **Janów Podlaski** (44 km): Janów Podlaski stud farm; Holy Trinity Church (1714–1735); Church of St. John the Baptist (1790–1801); Lutsk Bishops’ Palace (1770); the Wygoda park site (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Terespol** (61 km): the road and rail border crossing to Belarus; Holy Trinity Church (1863); Orthodox Church of St. Apostle John the Theologian (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the cemetery; Orthodox Chapel of the Resurrection (1892); a memorial to the victims of rail transports to concentration camps during World War II; remnants of a Jewish cemetery. ¶ **Brest** (Belarus, 72 km): a city at the border between Poland and Belarus; the ruins of the Great Synagogue (1851–1861, rebuilt in 1959); the “Ekdish” synagogue on the site of the former “Groyse shul” synagogue on Sovetskikh Pogranichnikov St., run by the Jewish community of Brest; the “Fajwel” prayer house at 14 Dzerzhinskogo St.; a synagogue, a Sunday school and a kosher canteen at 72 Kuibysheva St.; Isaac Hendler’s printing house building; the building of the “Takhkemoni” school, attended by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, among others; the Brest Fortress (1833–1842); the ruins of the White Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Museum of Railway Technology; St. Simeon’s Orthodox Church (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Church (1856); the Tryszński Cemetery (before 1900). ¶ **The Bug River**: one of the last major unregulated rivers in Europe, the border river between the European Union and non-EU countries over a stretch of 363 km. In its middle section it has picturesque bends, steep banks, gorges, and small sandy coves perfect for canoeing.

# Włodawa

Bel. Уладава, Ukr. Влодава, Yid. וולאָדאַווע

*Eyes keep looking, they want to capture everything, to resurrect everything; everything as it used to be?*

Haim Kliger (Kiryat Giora), *At the graves of the fathers*, in: *Sefer zikaron Wlodawa*, Tel Aviv 1974

Located at the meeting point of the Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarussian lands, Włodawa attracts visitors with its nostalgic atmosphere of a borderland shtetl, the rich natural scenery of Polesie, and the town's multi-ethnic history, which appeals to the imagination especially during the annual Festival of Three Cultures. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Włodawa was still a bustling and crowded town. A vast array of traders' wagons rolled through its marketplace, languages from around the world could be heard at the stores and trading stalls, and – after dark – young people would gather to engage in (among other things) heated debates on revolution. The town was an important trade centre and a river port on the Bug. In 1819, it was the fourth largest city in the Lublin region. Today, it has around 13,000 residents.

**The town development** ¶ The first mention of Jews in Włodawa dates back to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The town location at the intersection of land and water routes facilitated trade with Volhynia, Podolia, and the port of Gdańsk. At first, local Jewish community reported to the Jewish community in Brest; the main

occupations of local Jews were forestry production (wood, tar, wood tar, charcoal, lumber), grain trade, and freight trade down the Bug River. The development of crafts began towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the town was destroyed during the Cossack and Swedish wars. The Jewish community suffered significantly, particularly during the 1648 Cossack Revolution. During the reconstruction of the town, its owner Rafał Leszczyński (the father of Polish King Stanisław) granted the Jews numerous privileges as a means of stimulating the redevelopment of trade and services. In 1684, he allowed the Jewish community to build a cheder, a wooden synagogue, and a butchery (Pol.: jatka) "on the court's lands." Four years later, he passed statutes regulating inhabitants' privileges vis-à-vis the court. Like other residents of Włodawa, Jews were required to keep night watch and provide financial support to the army quartered in town. The 1693 inventory indicates that about half of the 197 houses belonged to Jews. The community was big enough to separate from Brest and establish its own independent kahal. Soon, however, the town was destroyed



again, during the Northern War (1700–1721), and, in 1716, it encompassed only 75 plots of land, of which 41 belonged to Jews. ¶ After the Congress of Vienna (1815), Włodawa, included in the Kingdom of Poland dependent on Russia, was located on the border with the Russian Empire. Generally, Russian regulations limited the development of border cities, but this was not so much the case with Włodawa. Włodawa became a central county town and by 1819, it became the fourth largest town in the Lubelskie Voivodeship (Palatinate) – after Lublin, Hrubieszów, and Tarnogród, and ahead of Chełm and Zamość. In subsequent years, its population increased from approx. 3,300 in 1809 to approx. 15,200 in 1913. This increase was a direct result of the growing number of Jews, from 1,079 to 12,557 (83 percent of the total population). Jews were attracted to the town by Włodawa's famous market fairs, the border crossing, and its customs house, all of which provided considerable opportunities in trade with the

Russian Empire. ¶ Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a railway line between Chełm and Brest was laid through Włodawa. Brick buildings began to dominate the town architecture; streets and the market square were cobbled; and the first kerosene and then electrical street lighting was installed. Tube wells were also built, and the town saw the beginnings of a small industrial base. The outbreak of World War I halted this development. In 1922, the Jewish Synagogue District of Włodawa consisted of only approx. 6,000 people, of whom 1,200 had active voting rights. The kahal managed a synagogue, a beth midrash, two prayer houses, a mikveh, a Talmud Torah school, a cemetery, a poorhouse, and the plot of land where there had been a hospital. There were also a dozen or so private – often Hasidic – prayer houses. ¶ After World War I, a committee to support war refugees was established, as well as an orphanage, which functioned until 1939. Educational, sports, and cultural organisations began to develop.

A street stage in Włodawa, the photo published on 8 November 1931 in *Forverts* (Forward) daily, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The first drama club was established at the end of World War I. For some time, there were also a choir and two klezmer bands. The majority of the local Jews were fairly traditional and reluctant to endorse any innovative trends; nonetheless, with the secularization process Włodawa gradually came under the influence of Zionism. In 1922, the first Zionist scouting organisation, Hashomer Hatzair, was established; it was replaced by a more militant Beitar in 1928. In 1925, young people created a hakhsharah (training) kibbutz in the nearby village of Tomaszówka to prepare volunteers to go to Palestine. Young people met in a place belonging to a Zionist organisation in Wyrkowska St. (now Tysiąclecia St.), where lectures, heated debates, literary meetings, and Hanukah performances and Purim balls were held. There was also a library with a collection of 1,000 items. Towards the end of the 1920s, a Włodawa-Chełm weekly, *Unzer Shtime* (Our Voice), began to be published.

**Trade ¶** The main occupations of Włodawa's Jews were trade, lease-holding, and crafts. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, people traded in horses, sheep, and various other types of cattle imported from the Ukraine during annual trading fairs organised specifically for this purpose. In 1673, the town had four butchers, three tailors, and two of each: goldsmiths, furriers, and barber-surgeons. In the following years, Jews ran 18 distilleries, breweries, and malt houses. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, timber processing and trade developed, with the first steam-powered sawmill built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were also flour mills, groat mills, and a power

plant located near Zabagonie St. (now Kraszewskiego St.). Most workshops and shops were located around the market square and the building containing marketplace stores known as the "Czworobok" ("Quadrangle"), dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and referred to by Jews as "Habrum" (probably meaning "unification" or "fraternity"). Erected on a square plan with a courtyard in the middle, this building can still be found in the centre of Włodawa. ¶ Almost 85 percent of locally sold goods comprised food, textile products, metal products, and essential machines. A typical feature of Włodawa was the way sales around the "Czworobok" were separated: to the west, there were stores retailing clothing and sewing supplies; to the north, stores with heavy-duty tools; to the east, wholesale cloth and fabrics; and to the south, stores with pre-cooked ready-to-go foods and Israel Shmuel Grizspan's restaurant, popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Craftsmen were united into guilds, and from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into corporations and trade unions. The kahal did not have extensive financial resources. Pre-war Jewish houses were mostly made of wood, placed next to one another. In each of them there were several apartments of one/two rooms. Only a few wealthier residents owned brick tenement houses and stalls around the market square. Trade revenues were the main source of income for the kahal, which is why its authorities favoured local merchants and introduced special regulations concerning, for example, the salt or fish trade. Purchasing larger amounts of these products was punishable by the kahal law, and violators could even be denied burial at the graveyard or excommunicated.



### Transport and port on the Bug ¶

Today, the Bug River is used mainly for recreational purposes; however, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the river served an important trade route for freighting grain, honey, and lumber from Podolia and Volhynia to other parts of the country. Carrying, among others, a famous ecotype of pine called *sosna matczańska* (mast pine), Jewish rafts with timber floated downstream to Gdańsk. On the way back, they transported textiles, craft goods, and colonial commodities. Rafts could float on the river from Busk, and the river was navigable from the mouth of the Rata. Until 1939, passenger ships – the “Bug Flotilla” – plied between Dorohusk, Włodawa, and Brest. Trade flourished along the river; granaries, warehouses, river ports, and harbours were built. The remains of a port can still be seen in the nearby village of Kuzawka (23 km). ¶ The Jews of Włodawa were also involved in land transport. In 1937, 14 private droshkies owned by Jews were stationed along the way to the railway station. To transport goods, the Jews used 4 carts for long distances and 23 for short distances. The railway, the nearby border crossing, and the customs house facilitated trade with Russia. A railway line between Chełm and Brest (on the Polish side) operates to this day. On the other, eastern side of the Bug, there is a pre-war railway station called “Włodawa,” which is part of the still functioning Belarusian railway line to Brest.

**The synagogue complex** ¶ Jewish cultural heritage in Włodawa is represented by the important synagogue complex west of the marketplace. This consists of a brick prayer house founded



A courtyard in a Jewish quarter in Włodawa, 1918–1939, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

by the town owner Jerzy Flemming as well as two 20<sup>th</sup>-century beth midrash buildings – an old one and a new one, both of which currently house the Łączna–Włodawa Lakeland Museum. The synagogue was built in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a Baroque style, with two corner annexes and a unique mansard roof. The older beth midrash was erected in 1915–1916 incorporating some walls of a former building. The interiors of both buildings were partly damaged, but both have retained some of their initial design and survived World War II as warehouses. The newer beth midrash was added in 1928, and at present it is used as an office and a venue for temporary exhibitions organised by the Museum. ¶ The synagogue in Włodawa features a polychromatic, neo-Baroque, stucco aron ha-kodesh – the holy ark – one of the best-preserved artefacts of this type in Poland. The rich three-storey framework of the Torah ark is covered



Former synagogue in Włodawa, currently the residence of the museum, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

at the bottom with images of musical instruments and quotes from Psalm 150: Praise Him with the blast of the horn; praise Him with the psaltery and harp, Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe. Its central part features a bas-relief of a menorah and a quote from Psalm 5: I will bow down toward Thy holy temple in the fear of Thee. On the right, the hands of a kohen (Temple-serving priest) in the blessing gesture

can be seen; on the left, there is a basket of fruit symbolising Shavuot. The frieze is topped with the date of construction of the aron ha-kodesh (1934) and two griffins flanking the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which were originally designed as windows through which "the light of the Torah" could shine. Seventeen concrete steps lead up to the niche for the Torah scroll, where today a Hanukah eight-branch candelabrum lit during the holiday of Hanukah also stands.

**THE FESTIVAL OF THREE CULTURES** ¶ Each year in September, the centre of Włodawa – between the Church of St. Louis, the synagogue complex, and the Orthodox Church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary – fills with people who come here to attend the Festival of Three Cultures. Organised by the Łęczna–Włodawa Lakeland Museum and held since 1995, the three-day festival offers a rich roster of cultural events: concerts, scholarly meetings, arts-and-crafts workshops for children, food and wine tastings, exhibitions, and theatrical performances. The festival symbol is a tree with three colourful branches growing from one trunk, symbolising the town's Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox traditions.

**Cemeteries** ¶ Over the centuries, Jewish burials took place in three locations in Włodawa. The oldest cemetery – believed to have been established as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century – was located west of the

synagogue. According to the town Yizkor Book, the Jews killed at the hands of Cossacks during the Khmelnytsky Uprising in 1648–1649 were buried here. This is how Alexander Cohen, enormously



[A] The interior of the synagogue in Włodawa, before 1939, collection of the National Library ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

[B] The neo-Baroque aron ha-kodesh in the synagogue in Włodawa, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko

exaggerating the magnitude of the events but perhaps accurately conveying Jewish feelings about it, commented on these events in a chapter of his book *The Legends of Włodawa: Blood streamed down the streets of Włodawa in 1648–1649*. Tens of thousands of Jews left this world, which was filled with hatred and sheer venom. In this graveyard, there are bones of saints killed by murderers and blood spilt in broad daylight before everybody's eyes. Another cemetery, mentioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was located between Wiejska, Krzywa, and Podzamcze Streets. It was completely devastated during the Nazi occupation during World War II, and then it was used as a storage area by a local cooperative. The third cemetery,

established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was shaped like an irregular quadrangle and encompassed three hectares. Matzevot from this cemetery were destroyed during the war, and some were used by the occupation authorities to pave squares and roads and to regulate the Włodawka River. Located between present-day Mielczarskiego, Jana Pawła II, and Reymonta Streets, it now functions as a town park, and a monument commemorating the Jewish community of Włodawa was recently erected there. At the edge of the park, there is also one gravestone: that of a Jewish partisan, Hersh Griner, who died in the 1960s and asked in his will to be buried in the Jewish cemetery in Włodawa.

**THE MACCABEE ORCHESTRA** ¶ In 1922, a wind orchestra was formed at the newly established Maccabee sports club. Initially, it consisted of only 12 musicians, led by bandmaster Shmuelke Feldman. The number of musicians soon increased to 42, and the band was led by Josef Minc. Wearing navy blue and white uniforms, the orchestra performers appeared at events such as the town parades during the holiday of Lag Ba-Omer (in Jewish tradition, the 33<sup>rd</sup> day after Passover,



Members of the Maccabi Orchestra, 1927, reproduction from *Sefer zikaron Włodawa ve-ha-seviva Sobibor*, ed. Shimon Kanc, Tel Aviv 1974

when mourning regulations are lifted, three-year old children can have their first hair-cut and young pairs can get married), the consecration of a new synagogue in Parczew, and a visit to Chełm by Yitzhak Grünbaum, a Jewish Member of the pre-war Sejm (parliament). In 1927, during the meeting of the Beitar (Zionist youth movement of Revisionist trend) in Warsaw, the Włodawa section won a national competition of musical orchestras. The orchestra existed until the end of the 1930s.

## World War II and the Holocaust

At the beginning of the war, the Jewish community consisted of 5,600 people (60 percent of the population). In the first days of September 1939, the town was bombed twice, and it came under German occupation from October 1939 to July 1944. The new authorities created a forced labour camp in 1940 and, a year later, a ghetto, where Jews from the Netherlands, Austria, and other cities of the General Government also were confined. Over the two years of the ghetto's operation, its population varied from a few hundred to 9,000 people. They were forced to work on land drainage and forest management. Deportation to the Sobibór death camp began in May 1942, during the holiday of Shavuot.

Further round-ups and transports were organised by the Germans in July, October, and November 1942. The last transport – which put an end to the Jewish community in Włodawa – took place on May 1–3, 1943. The town holds anniversary ceremonies each year at the beginning of May to commemorate these events and their victims.

**Sobibór** The Museum of the Former Nazi Death Camp in Sobibór is located 16 km south of Włodawa. Sobibór was one of three death camps built exclusively for extermination of Jews in Operation Reinhard (Nazi plan to exterminate Jews in the territory regulated by the General Government), among Bełżec, near Zamość, and Treblinka,



north of Warsaw. At least 170,000 people were murdered here in 1942–1943, including most of Włodawa's Jews. The camp also received transports from the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, Bohemia, and Slovakia. On October 14, 1943, a group of 260 people – led by Leib Feldhendler and Aleksander Peczerski – staged an uprising and managed to kill some of the SS personnel, seize arms, and escape to the forest.

Most were captured or killed by search squads. Thomas Blatt – one of the few survivors – kept a diary and later wrote his memoirs. He worked with the author Richard Raschke to locate and interview other survivors and participants in the revolt. Raschke's 1983 book *Escape from Sobibor* was used as the basis of a 1987 TV movie by the same name, which Blatt also worked on as a writer and which won two Golden Globe Awards.

“*I spent half a year in Sobibór. Finally, on 14 October, in one hour, we killed all the Germans with knives and axes, we took away their weapons and started an open uprising. ¶ Polish Jews knew they would be killed, but those who came from abroad did not realise this and, when they got off the train, they were told that they had been brought to a beautiful place, a forest, where they would receive flats, but first they had to undress and take a bath for sanitary reasons. Not suspecting anything, people entered the gas chambers voluntarily and, once they did so, it was too late to get out. ¶ As soon as the Germans came, I started to write. I knew the situation was getting worse. Initially, I wrote everything, but then I realised it didn't make sense. I lost my notebook once, then I burnt another and then I started to write again. Later, when I was taken to Sobibór, I began to write again. Once a German threw it into a well full of water, all the pages were destroyed. When I left the camp – I started to write again. I asked my Christian friends to keep it for me and, after the war, I managed to collect some 40 percent. Then I wrote a book. ¶ Thomas Blatt — fragments of Oral History from the collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, 2004*

**MENDELE MORGENSTERN** ¶ He was the last rabbi of the town of Włodawa. He was elected at the age of only 23, in 1939, after the death of his father Moshe Baruch, who died of wounds received during the German bombardments. Together with other Jews, Morgenstern was confined to the ghetto in Włodawa, where – despite the difficult conditions – he continued to perform his religious duties. He was one of the people who initiated the collection of the bodies of Jews who died in the transports to Sobibór from railway embankments, and he personally supervised burials at the Jewish cemetery. In July 1942, by order of the Germans, he brought his children to the assembly point for people transported to Sobibór. He declined the offer to leave them and return to the ghetto. He was killed in August 1942, in Sobibór.

**ARNOLD BOGUMIL EHRLICH** ¶ The distinguished biblical scholar and researcher Arnold Bogumil Ehrlich was born in Włodawa in 1848. Well-versed in the Bible and the Talmud, he worked in the Berlin Royal Library and, at the age of 30, emigrated to the USA. Reportedly, he could speak 39 languages.

Memorial Mound located in the Museum of the Former Nazi Death Camp in Sobibór, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" (www.teatrnn.pl)



In 1899–1901, he published a three-volume work, *Mikra Ki-fshuta* (The Bible Literal Meaning), a critical analysis of the Bible. Together with a German professor, Franz Delitzsch, he translated the New Testament into Hebrew. He also translated the *Book of Psalms* into German. He died in New York in 1919.

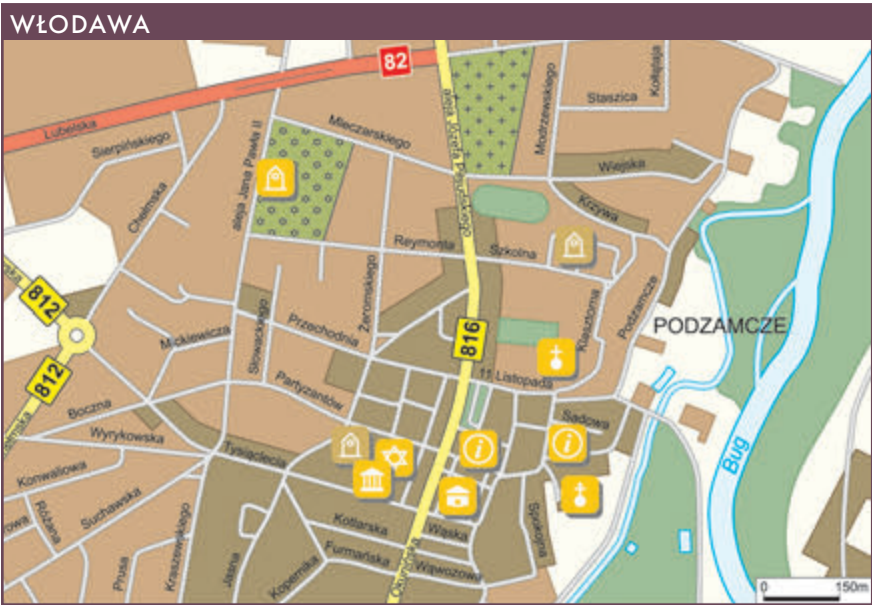
#### Surrounding area

**Adampol** (6 km): the hunting lodge of the Zamojski family, currently a clinic (1913–1928); a monument commemorating the labour camp and several executions of Jews in 1941–1943. ♣ **Różanka** (7 km): the remains of a palace and manor complex (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Augustine (1908–1913); a former centre of folk weaving. ♣ **Luta** (13 km): a memorial to Jews murdered in a forced labour camp. ♣ **Sobibór** (18 km): The Museum of the Former Nazi Death Camp in Sobibór, a branch of the State Museum at Majdanek. ♣ **Sławatycze** (25 km): The Care of Our Lady Orthodox Church (1910–1912); an Orthodox graveyard (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary (1913–1919); a Jewish cemetery, Polna St.; a mass grave of people killed during the deportation of the Jewish community in 1942. ♣ **Hola** (29 km): the wooden Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva and St. Anthony of the Caves (1702); the bell tower of an Orthodox church (1898); the Skansen of Material Culture of Chełm Land and Podolia. The Hola fair is held in July. ♣ **Romanów** (29 km): a manor house, currently the Museum of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Anne's Chapel (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Jabłeczna** (31 km): a monastery complex: An Orthodox monastery (1838–1840) with a miraculous icon of St. Onuphrius (15<sup>th</sup> c.), a gate bell tower (1840), a monastery building (around 1840), the former house of the monastery governor (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); wooden chapels of the Dormition of the Theotokos and the Holy Spirit (1900–1908); a wooden Uniate church, currently the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord (1752); two post mills (Pol.: koźlak) (1889, 1926); a granary (1889). ♣ **Sawin** (31 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord (1731–1740); a hospital with a poorhouse (1757). ♣ **Sosnowica** (35 km): the Sosnowski family manor (18<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Church (1797); the Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1891–1893); cemeteries: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Wereszczyn** (37 km): a monument commemorating the execution of approx. 150 Jews; a wooden manor house (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Church of St. Stanislaus the Bishop and Martyr and the Holy Trinity (1783); the tomb of the Rulikowski family (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the

19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Uhrusk** (39 km): The Church of John the Baptist (1672–1676); the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1849); a RomanCatholic cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the former palace of the Niemiryecz family, currently a branch of the University of Life Sciences in Lublin (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Kodeń** (44 km): The Shrine of Our Lady of Kodeń, Queen of Podlasie and Mother of Unity, located on the site of the former residence of the Sapieha family: the Calvary of Kodeń, an Orthodox church – currently the Church of the Holy Spirit (16<sup>th</sup> c.), the Basilica of St. Anne (1629–1635); a monastery complex of Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, with rose gardens; Placencja Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Kostomłoty** (50 km): the wooden neo-Uniate Church of St. Nikita (1631); the wooden Orthodox Church of St.Seraphim of Sarov (mid-20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **The Polesie National Park** ¶ **The Bug River Cycling Path**

Former **synagogue complex** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), currently the Museum, 7 Czerwonego Krzyża St., +48 82 5722 178, poczta@muzeumwlodawa.pl ¶ **Pauline monastery**: The Church of St. Louis (1739–1780), the monastery building (1711–1717), 7 Klasztorna St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (1840–1842); an Orthodox graveyard (19<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox presbytery (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 11a Kościelna St. ¶ **Cemeteries: Uniate and Roman Catholic** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Wyzwolenia Ave. ¶ The building housing a complex of stalls known as the “Czworobok” (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.), in the middle of the market square. ¶ **The panorama of the town** as seen from the bank of the Bug River.

Worth seeing



# Kock

Ukr. Коцьк, Yid. קאָץק

*One travels to Kock dancing.*

A 19th-century Hasidic folk song

*People have souls, not clockworks,*  
**Menachem Mendel Morgenstern**  
(1787–1859), a Hasidic tsaddik from Kock (pronounced “Kotsk”), used to say. For many years, the town was one of the major centres of Hasidism in Poland and home to a Hasidic dynasty famous for its ardent and enthusiastic piety. Its founder, Menachem Mendel Morgenstern, was most likely born in Biłgoraj. He was tutored, among others, by the famous Hasidic master Simcha Bunem of Przysucha and Jacob Isaac Horowitz, called the Seer of Lublin. In 1829, he settled in Kock. During his teaching sessions, he strove for a synthesis of the rigorous rabbinic regulations and most poetic mystical visions, of the Talmud and Kabbalah, and also pursued secular learning and medieval natural philosophy. He taught that there is but one Divine revelation and but one God’s will, and that a Hasid’s duty is to do everything to learn their hidden

meanings. In 1839, he experienced a revelation, after which he decided to burn all his manuscripts and spend the rest of his life in seclusion, isolated in a bricked-up chamber next to the prayer room in his house in Kock. Many of his followers left him at that time, although some of them stayed in town, acknowledging the leadership of the tsaddik’s descendants after his death. His son David (1812–1873), and grandson Izrael (1840–1905) succeeded him as the rabbis of Kock and the rebbes of the local Hasidic court. ¶ The teachings of Menachem Mendel were popularised by the Vienna-born Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, in his *Tales of the Hasidim* (published in 1903–1904). The Kock tsaddik’s definition of idolatry, as written down by Buber, was cited in Pope Francis’ first papal encyclical, published in 2013 by the Vatican: *Idolatry is ‘when a face addresses a face which is not a face’* (Lumen Fidei, 13).

”**God’s dwelling** ¶ “Where does God live?” – asked the Kotzker rebbe to the surprise of the several learned men staying as guests in his house. They laughed at these words: “What are you saying, rabbi? The world is full of His wonders!” ¶ But he answered his own question: “God lives wherever you let Him in.”





“**Different customs** ¶ A Hasid of the rebbe of Kotzk (Kock) and a Hasid of the rebbe of Chernobol were discussing their ways of doing things. The disciple of the Chernobol rebbe said: ¶ “We stay awake every night between Thursday and Friday; on Friday, we give alms in proportion to what we have; and on the Sabbath, we recite the entire Book of Psalms.” “And we,” said the Hasid from Kotzk, “stay awake every night as long as we can; we give alms whenever we run across a poor man and happen to have money in our pockets, and we do not say the psalms it took David seventy years of hard work to write, all in a row, but [we recite them] according to the need of the hour.” ¶ Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, in: M. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. Olga Marx, New York 1991, edited.

A view of Kock from the road, watercolour by Zygmunt Vogel, 1796, collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

**The tsaddik’s house** ¶ At the intersection of Wojska Polskiego, Warszawska, and Polna Streets there is a wooden house with a distinctive polygonal turret that allows a view in all directions. However, this so-called “tsaddik’s house” was not where Menachem Mendel lived – it was built at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presumably as a post office. From the beginning of the 1930s, however, it was home to the court of the last of Kotzker (Kock) tsaddikim – Izrael Lejba and

Abraham Josek Morgenstern, Menachem Mendel’s great-grandsons. ¶ The court of the first tsaddik of Kock was presumably located in Białobrzeska (today Joselewicza) St., near the residence of Duchess Anna Jabłonowska and Aleksandra d’Anstett, who presented Menachem Mendel with two building plots in 1837. To this day, there are wooden buildings there that might be old enough to remember Kock’s first tsaddik and the Hasidim making pilgrimages to see him.

Duchess Anna Jabłonowska is one of those amazing women of the 18<sup>th</sup> century whose personalities left a lasting mark on the landscape of the towns they owned. The duchess rebuilt Kock and gave it a new urban profile. A new marketplace was founded, with a network of streets radiating from it. A new

The tsaddik's house in Kock, known as *rabinówka*, 2010. Photo by Mirosław Koczkodaj, collection of Duchess Anna Jabłonowska née Sapieha Community Centre in Kock



town hall and other buildings were constructed in the marketplace, and the church in the southern frontage was rebuilt in a new style. For herself, Jabłonowska had a palace erected in place of the former castle, surrounded by a large park with exotic flora. The designer and supervisor of the construction works was Szymon Bogumił Zug, a distinguished architect of the classicist period. The court of the duchess became a meeting place for eminent representatives of Poland-Lithuania's cultural world of the day: scholars, writers, poets, painters – and even King Stanisław August Poniatowski.

**The Jewish community ¶** The first Jews arrived in Kock in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Many residents of the town were killed during the 1648 Cossack Revolution. After the wars of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, the town slowly regenerated, and Jews began to return as well. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Maria Wielopolska, the owner of the town and niece to Queen Maria Kazimiera (King John III Sobieski's wife) issued a document in which she obliged local Jews to perform duties to the town the same way Christians did: to provide organized help in case of fires, to keep night watch, and to repair roads, bridges, and dams. ¶ A hundred years later, Duchess Jabłonowska designated the northern quarter of the town to be

a Jewish district. It was there that the most important buildings of the kahal were located – the synagogue and the mikveh. In a special "Proclamation" published in 1773, the duchess also regulated matters for the Jews regarding judiciary matters and kahal elections, and also the rules for resettling elsewhere and trading in certain types of commodities. The earliest known statistics for the Jewish population of the kahal and town of Kock date from around that time, the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They prove that the kahal consisted of the town of Kock, plus three other small towns (Serokomla, Wojciechów, and Adamów), and 40 nearby villages; the number of its members was estimated at about 800, and they all reported to the Kock kahal.

**The synagogue** ¶ Before World War II, the synagogue stood in the north-eastern part of the town, on the road leading north from the marketplace (now Piłsudskiego St.), at the place where the road leading to the Jewish cemetery branches off near the statue of Kościuszko. The synagogue was a large brick building that combined the functions of a prayer venue and Jewish communal authorities gathering. Referred to in 1933 as the Great Synagogue, the building was erected in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It burnt down in 1899 but was soon rebuilt. The kahal budget for 1926–1927 included expenses for whitewashing and painting the synagogue, repairing its floors, and putting in glass windows. In 1930, a sum of money was allocated “to A. Cukier for the examination of the synagogue Torah scrolls and the synagogue itself,” and in 1931–1933, a sum of 140 złoty was allocated “for electrical wiring.” ¶ The communal budgets from the interwar period mention two prayer houses in addition to the synagogue, one of which was located in the same building as the synagogue. ¶ The mikveh stood opposite the synagogue, on the west side of Szkolna St. It was a brick building from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It burnt down with the synagogue in 1899 but was rebuilt before World War I.

**Social organisations** ¶ Numerous organisations, societies, and political parties – both Polish and Jewish – emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the interwar period. It is well preserved in the memories of the local population how, during the 1905 revolution, Jewish workers on



The seal of Kock's Rabbi B. W. Rappaport, 19<sup>th</sup> century, collection of the National Archives in Lublin

strike blew up the warehouses of a local distillery. All Jewish political parties of note, from Zionists to communists, had established their branches in Kock. The Bund and Hashomer Hatzair were quite popular among the Jews of Kock. Among the trade unions, two most influential were the tailors' union and the purse-makers' union. The purse-makers' activities included looking after the public library, where local people could read the works of contemporary Yiddish authors and Yiddish translations of European literature. The library hosted multiple soirées at which young people of all political persuasions met. Daily, weekly, and monthly papers as well as magazines were distributed – according to the Memorial Book of Kock, almost every young person bought a paper. In the town council, consisting of more than 20 members, almost half of the seats were filled by Jews.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ It is not known where the Jewish cemetery was located before the new urban layout of Kock was implemented in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A new cemetery was established outside town, one kilometer northeast of the centre, amid fields gently sloping towards the south-west. The oldest preserved matsevah dates back to 1819. It is in this cemetery that



**A** A panorama of Kock's main square on a market day; the synagogue is visible in the top right corner, 1920s, Maria Kowalewska's collection in the digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**B** Ohel of Menachem Mendel Morgenstern at the Jewish cemetery in Kock, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



successive tsaddikim of the Morgenstern dynasty were buried, starting with Menachem Mendel in 1859. An ohel was erected over their graves, built of brick, with a hip roof. Before the war, the cemetery was surrounded by wire spread between wooden poles, and there was a custodian's house near the gate. The dead from Adamów, Serokomla, and Wojcieszków were also buried here. The cemetery was expanded before the war, to occupy an area of 2.2 hectares. During the war, it was partially devastated. The German troops forced the Jews to remove the matzevot from the cemetery and used them to pave the roads leading

to the palace and to build a jail in the palace courtyard. The Nazis carried out executions in the cemetery, too. After the war, local people uprooted the remaining sandstone matzevot and pulled down both the ohel and the custodian's house. In 1958, the land was ploughed and planted with trees. In 1987–1990, the ohel was gradually rebuilt and the cemetery was fenced again. Today, about 30 matzevot can be found there. The keys are kept by Roman Stasiak, living in the first house beyond the cemetery.

### **The legend of Berek Joselewicz**

At the opposite side of the town from





Memorial to Berek Joselewicz, 2010. Photo by Tomasz Młynarczyk, collection of Duchess Anna Jabłonowska née Sapieha Community Centre in Kock

the cemetery, on the road to Białobrzegi, there is another important grave – that of **Berek Joselewicz** (1764–1809), a colonel of the Polish Army and the commander of an uhlan squadron. Berek was killed in Kock in 1809, during the battle fought by Polish forces led by Prince Józef Poniatowski against the Austrian army. Born in Kretinga in Lithuania, the son of a horse trader, Berek was described by the Governor of Eastern Galicia, Gausruck as a man of cheerful disposition and enterprising spirit. He travelled throughout Europe as the agent for Bishop Ignacy Jakub Massalski, a local landowner, and on his travels witnessed key historical events, including the French Revolution. During the 1794 Kościuszko Uprising, Berek proposed forming a Jewish Light Cavalry Regiment to help the insurgent leaders against Russian invasion which led eventually to the Third Partition of Poland. Berek was supposed to recruit about 500 men into it to defend the Warsaw district of Praga. At Joselewicz's request, these Jewish soldiers were allowed to observe their

religious laws and wear their traditional Jewish beards; they were granted access to kosher food and the right not to work – or fight – on the Sabbath (whenever possible). ¶ After the failure of the uprising, Joselewicz was taken captive, found himself on the Polish territory in the Austrian Partition, served in the Polish Legions in Italy and in the army of the Principality of Hanover, and immediately returned to Poland after the Duchy of Warsaw was established. ¶ A mound was erected over Berek Joselewicz's grave. In 1909, Count Edward Żółkowski, the owner of the local estate – still under Russian rule at the time – erected a monument set on top of the mound to commemorate Berek as an outstanding Polish patriot. In the interwar period, Berek Joselewicz became a symbol of the active presence of Jews in Polish history and, at the same time, a hero for the Jewish scouting movement, such as the assimilation-oriented Berek Joselewicz Scout Troops and the Zionist scouting organisation Hashomer Hatzair.

**Berek Joselewicz and Menachem Mendel** appear together as characters in a novel by Joseph Opatoshu, titled *In Polish Woods* (In Poylishe



Velder/*W polskich lasach*, Yiddish edition 1921, Polish edition 1923), set in Kock before the January Uprising. Jonas Turkow directed a feature film based on this book in 1929, but the movie has not survived.

In 1927, a Citizens Committee was appointed to build a vocational training and an elementary school in Kock to be named after Joselewicz as a form of memorial. The project was launched under the honorary patronage of Poland's leader, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, and the committee was comprised of the leading representatives of the local Jewish and Christian communities: Mayor Marian Otton Górczyński, Municipal Councillor Moszek Goldband, Rabbi Josef Morgenstern, Prelate Marceli Glinka, Kock's parish priest; Mojżesz Dawid Wajnberg, the head of the Jewish community in Kock; Marcin Stępień, the principal of the elementary school; and Town Councillor Jojna Zygielman. ¶ After several years of fund-raising, the school was finally built – the main part of the building was completed by the summer of 1939. Further work was interrupted by the German occupation. The school opened after the war, and to this day the building is part of the school complex in Kock.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ On September 9, 1939, during the first bombing of the town, the last tsaddik of Kock, Israel Leib Morgenstern, was killed together with all his family in the orchard near their house. ¶ The last battle of the September Campaign was fought near Kock during October 2 to 5, 1939, between the Independent Operational Group "Polesie" commanded by Gen. Franciszek Kleeberg and the victorious German 13<sup>th</sup> Motorised Infantry Division. ¶ After entering the town, the Germans very quickly began implementing repressive measures aimed predominantly against the Jewish population. In November 1939, they rounded the Jews up in the synagogue and ordered them to pull it down. The prayer house and the mikveh were destroyed in the same way. Resettlements of Jews to Kock began from both nearby and more distant towns (Lubartów, Suwałki). Toward the end of 1940, a ghetto was established in the northern part of the town, where all

Jews were confined. The liquidation of the ghetto began near the end of 1942. It was preceded by two mass executions in the summer that year – more than 200 people were shot dead in each of them.

In the autumn, the Jews were marched to Łuków, from where they were transported to the Treblinka extermination camp and murdered there.

” In November 1942, the Jews from Kock were sent to Treblinka. Lieutenant Brand ordered that they were to travel to the train station on peasant wagons.

*And so the wagons rolled all day long... / Hersz Buczko was there, riding, the one who ran a groat mill. / There rode Szlomo Rot, who made the best ice cream. / There rode Jakow Marchewka, who sold lemonade. / There rode Cyrla Opelman, who imported the most elegant fabrics, and her competitor, Abram Grzebień. / Cyrla Wiernik, the one from the market square, from the haberdashery store, was there on the wagons, and Szlomo Rosenblat, her neighbour, dealing in women's haberdashery, was there too. / There was Henoch Madanes, an ironmonger... / ... and there was Lejb Zakalik, the mill owner, with his brother, children, and grandchildren... / Hanna Krall, Tam już nie ma żadnej rzeki (There Is No River There Anymore), Warsaw 1998.*

The story of Apolonia Machczyńska, a Christian woman from Kock murdered by the Germans for helping the Jews, was recounted by Hanna Krall and is referred to in (A)pollonia, a play directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski. The première of the play took place in 2009 at the Nowy Teatr in Warsaw and was one of the major theatrical events in Poland in recent years.

**Present day** ¶ Present-day Kock is a charming little town in Lubartów County, inhabited by about 3,500 people. It has several pubs and two small hotels which also function as wedding reception venues. Agritourism farms in the vicinity also offer accommodation. The Anna Jabłowska née

Sapieha Community Centre in Kock (tel. +48 81 859 11 10, +48 501 699 518; domkultury.kock@wp.pl) is a partner of the Shtetl Routes project. They are guiding also in the new multimedial Kock Historical Museum, which is presenting multicultural history of the town.

**Berek Joselewicz grave** (1809), at the road towards Białobrzegi. ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), with tsaddik's ohel, Św. Jana Chrzciiciela St. ¶ **Tzaddik's house** (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), Wojska Polskiego St. ¶ **Kock Historical Museum** (in the building of the library), 6 Marcina Stępnia St. ¶ **Church of the Assumption of Mary** (1779–1782), 15 Księżnej Anny Jabłowskiej Sq. ¶ **The Palace of Duchess Anna Jabłowska née Sapieha** (1770), 1 Tadeusza Kościuszki St. ¶ **The complex of the town wooden and brick buildings** (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), including the tsaddik's residence. ¶ **A war cemetery** with a memorial to the soldiers who perished in the **Battle of Kock**, the last battle of the September Campaign of 1939, Kleeberga St.

Worth  
seeing

## Surrounding area

**Firlej** (10 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Church of the Transfiguration (1880). ¶ **Radzyń Podlaski** (21 km): the old Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.); the new Jewish cemetery (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Church (1641); the Potocki palace and park complex (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Szlubowski Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Michów** (18 km): The Church of the Assumption of Mary (16<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial (2013) at the site of the destroyed Jewish cemetery. ¶ **Lubartów** (24 km): a Jewish cemetery (1819); the Sanguszko Palace with a garden (18<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Anne's Basilica (1733–1738); Capuchin monastery complex: Church of St. Lawrence, a monastery, and a garden (1737–1741). ¶ **Czemierniki** (20 km): urban layout (16<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (1703); a palace and park complex (1615–1622); the Church of St. Stanislaus (1603–1617). ¶ **Adamów** (21 km): a Jewish cemetery (20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Holy Cross (1796–1858). ¶ **Parczew** (41 km): a synagogue, currently a shop (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a wooden bell tower (1675); the Shrine of Our Lady Queen of Families (1905–1913). ¶ **Kamionka** (22 km): a Jewish cemetery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Weyssenhoff family tomb chapel (1848); the Zamoyski family tomb chapel (1890–1893). ¶ **Kozłówka** (24 km): The Zamoyski Museum – a palace and park complex comprising 14 buildings dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> c. as well as a 19-hectare park with a French-style garden. ¶ **Bobrowniki** (42 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1488, rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Dęblin** (43 km): a synagogue, currently a shop (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a fortress (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Church of the Merciful Christ (1781); the Air Force Museum; the Vistula River Railroad Station complex. ¶ **The Polesie National Park** ¶ **The Kozłówka Forest Landscape Park**





# Kazimierz Dolny

Ukr. Казімеж-Дольний, Yid. קאזמיר

*Even in terms of its landscape, Kazimierz belonged to the world of Polish Jews. It resembled a page from a women's prayer book with shining silver corners, or an old etching that anonymous Jewish masters from a bygone era engraved with great piety on the Polish soil, seeking to present vividly what Poyln means [...].*

Yehiel Yeshai'a Trunk, *My Life within Jewish Life in Poland*, Toronto 2007 (edited)

**The royal port** ♪ Picturesquely located at a crossing of the Vistula River, Kazimierz Dolny became a royal city already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The strategic position at the intersection of land and water trade routes stimulated its development. Grain brought here was transported down the Vistula to Gdańsk

and then further on to European ports. Local residents engaged in boat building and traded in grain, timber, wine, and salt. Granaries located near the river and richly ornamented Renaissance houses bear witness to the economic prosperity of the city in that period.

**ESTERKA'S LOVE** ♪ Even though some legends have it that Jewish merchants were present in this area already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, most likely the first Jews settled in Kazimierz Dolny in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. According to a popular legend, however, they were already living there in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The legend has it that King Casimir (Kazimierz) the Great – the last king of the Piast dynasty, who ruled from 1333 to 1370, fell in love with Esterka, the daughter of a Jewish merchant said to live here, and his love was reciprocated. The legend is mentioned by Jan Długosz in his famous 15<sup>th</sup>-century chronicle, and even though historians have not found evidence of her authenticity, Esterka became a symbol of Polish-Jewish coexistence. Visitors to Kazimierz before World War II, for example, could admire historical liturgical objects kept by the synagogue's custodians. These included a parochet and a Torah crown. According to local oral tradition, the parochet was embroidered by Esterka herself, and the crown was given to the synagogue by King Casimir. In reality, the parochet was most likely made in China in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**The market square** ♪ Painter Wojciech Gerson (d. 1901) recalled: *The market square is typical because it has traditional, wooden and stone arcades and a well in the centre, with a wheel of*

*considerable size and a long chain; the place is always swarming with schmoozing Jews, who are joined on Saturdays by Jewish women that like to dress up for the Sabbath and promenade around*

**A** Town houses near the market square in Kazimierz, 2015, photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**B** Kazimierz Dolny. Urban developments, with the southern frontage of the market square on the left and the shaded western frontage on the right, 1794, drawing by Zygmunt Vogel, collection of the Print Room of the Warsaw University Library



*the place.* ¶ The spatial layout of the city results from the fact that the town was chartered according to the Magdeburg law. The elements of the town centre – market square, churches, and a network of streets – were all located in a relatively small area. The castle, the tower, and the Franciscan monastery were erected on the hills surrounding the centre. When Jews arrived here in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was not much space left to establish a Jewish quarter. Jews settled east of the market

square – around the so-called Lesser Market. Nearby, there were a synagogue, a prayer house, a rabbi's house, and other communal buildings. Jews also lived in Lubelska Street – at the end of it, past the town's gate, there was a Jewish cemetery. With time, however, Jews settled throughout the town.

**The synagogue** ¶ The first shul in Kazimierz was wooden. A stone synagogue established in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was destroyed and



Synagogue in Kazimierz Dolny, 1916, photo by Juliusz Kłos, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences

rebuilt following the wars and other upheavals of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and once again destroyed towards the end of the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the present-day building dates back to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, except for the interior walls, which were replaced with new ones towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The synagogue was further renovated in the interwar period, when narthexes with women's galleries above them were added to the square prayer room on the southeast and southwest sides. The prayer room for men was covered with a dome-shaped vault built into the lower part of a timber roof truss and covered with polychrome paintings. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, next to the shul, stood small stores belonging to the kahal and rented to the Jews in exchange for payments made to the kahal's accounts. The synagogue was destroyed towards the end of World War II and rebuilt to a design by Karol Siciński in 1953 that restructured it inside for use as a cinema. The walls of the prayer room for men were built of

limestone and – as before the war – they were not plastered on the outside. The reconstruction included the Polish type of tiered hip roof covered with shingles and a wooden vault, but without the polychromes. In 2003, the synagogue came under the ownership of the Warsaw Jewish Community, which converted it into an exhibition space, souvenir shop, and guest house called Beitenu ("our house"). A memorial plaque commemorating the Jewish community of Kazimierz is set in the wall of the building.

**Fall and revival ¶** The period of prosperity of the Jewish community was cut short by the turmoil wrought by the series of wars in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century caused by the Ukrainian Cossacks, the Swedes, Rákóczi's forces, and Polish troops; fires and bubonic plague also took their heavy toll. In 1661, there were only seven Jewish houses in the city. The Jewish community could only start to rebuild after Kazimierz was granted a new charter, issued by King Jan III Sobieski in 1676.



“We decided that the Jews [...] shall be granted freedom and allowed to [...] relish the freedom enjoyed by other burghers and residents of the city. They shall have the privilege to trade in whatever products they find fit, such as salt, herrings, both wholesale and retail, to bake both rye and white wheat bread, to brew beer and mead, to build their own breweries or rent them from burghers; Jews shall be allowed to enjoy all privileges granted [to the dwellers] in the city and those granted to [dwellers in] other nearby crown cities. Moreover, we hereby allow them to buy plots of land and buildings as well as to renovate old ones and to establish buildings on plots of land that remain empty.”<sup>¶</sup>

The charter granted to Kazimierz on November 18, 1676 by King Jan III Sobieski

Tensions still existed, however. During the 1699 Corpus Christi festivities, clashes broke out on the marketplace when the Catholic Corpus Christi procession intersected with a group of Jews who were welcoming Rabbi Judah, a prominent sectarian and a leader of the crypto-Sabbatean movement in Poland, who had arrived in the city on that day. The city brought a lawsuit before the Crown Tribunal in Lublin against the elders of the Jewish community of Kazimierz for creating a disturbance to the Christian procession and injuring some of its participants.<sup>¶</sup> In the wake of the destruction caused by the Great Northern War, another official

document, issued in 1717, granted the Jews of Kazimierz considerable liberty in trade. The income they received implied that they had to pay a tax as high as 600 guilders in 1732–1733. In 1778, taxes were paid by 303 Jews living in the city and by 141 living in 27 surrounding villages, the town of Wąwolnica, and at one inn. In 1827, Kazimierz Dolny had 2,096 residents – including 1,197 Jews (57 percent of the population). Around 1882, the 3,297 residents of Kazimierz (including 1,784 Jews – 51 percent) lived in 250 houses, 89 of which were built of brick. This was exceptional among the predominantly wooden towns of the Lublin region.



### **Singing Hasidim of Kazimierz ¶**

In the 1820s, the Hasidic tsaddik **Ezekiel Ben Tzvi-Hirsch Taub** (1772–1856), a disciple of the Seer of Lublin and a highly gifted composer and musician, settled in Kazimierz Dolny. Ezekiel Taub's followers – known as the Kuzmir Hasidim – became famous for emphasising the messianic role of music and singing in Judaic liturgy, in accordance

with the tsaddik's saying: *I cannot feel the joy of the Sabbath if I do not hear a new melody*. The tradition of singing songs composed by the Hasidim of Kazimierz has survived to-date. In 1925, one of Taub's descendants – Shmuel Eliyahu Taub of Dęblin (1905–1984) – moved to Palestine with a group of his followers and set up an agricultural settlement.

“ Every third person in Kazimierz is a painter. ¶ Yakov Glatstein, *Wen Yash iz geforn* (When Yash Set Out), New York 1935

**Artists' colony ¶** The picturesque townscape and scenic landscape of river and hills attracted painters to Kazimierz Dolny already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it became a particularly favourite spot for artists from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The breakthrough came in 1909, when Władysław Ślewiński, a friend of Paul Gauguin and a professor at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, started bringing his students here for plein air painting sessions. Kazimierz soon took on the aura of a city of painters and became home to an artists' colony. Another professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, should also be given credit for this. Starting in 1913, he organised annual plein air painting sessions for young artists, Christians and Jews alike. Artists admired the town's “unique landscape,” “warm, familiar atmosphere,” “Polish beauty,” and “wistful poetry tugging at the heartstrings.” ¶ Writers and ordinary holidaymakers looking for a beautiful place to relax followed the painters. As a result, the landscape of Kazimierz was rendered numerous times in both literary and visual works. Among the visiting artists

there were many Jews. The town on the Vistula left its mark in the works of artists such as Maurycy Trębacz (1861–1941), Natan Korzeń (1895–1941), Roman Rozentel (1897–1942), Izrael Tykociński (1895–1942), Józef Gabowicz (1862–1939), Elias Kanarek (1902–1969), and brothers Ephraim and Menashe Seidenbeutel (1903–1945). Visiting painters became an integral part of the local environment, and their presence helped awaken many artistic talents among the native residents.

¶ One of these figures was **Shmuel Wodnicki** (1901–1971), a shoemaker born in Kazimierz, who at the same time worked as a painter. Dispirited by the difficult life in Poland, he emigrated to Palestine with his family in 1934 but continued painting the landscapes of Kazimierz until the end of his life. ¶ **Haim Goldberg** (1917–2004) was born into another shoemaker's family from Kazimierz. Already as a young boy, he observed artists and took his first steps as a painter. Thanks to contacts with artists established in Kazimierz Dolny, Haim enrolled in the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in the 1930s. He developed

as a mature artist after World War II and one of the key subjects in his works. the motifs from his native shtetl became

” *In the summer of 1929, Jakub Rotbaum and I appeared at a literary evening devoted to the contribution of Jews to contemporary poetry, which was held on the veranda of the guesthouse belonging to the Szenderowicz family. The evening had to be organised twice, since only half of the people who wanted to attend could enter the room. After my introduction, Jakub Rotbaum recited my Yiddish translations of poems by Julian Tuwim, Józef Wittlin, Bruno Jasiński, Anatol Stern, and Adam Ważyk and followed each poem with the reading of its Polish original. It was probably the only literary evening held in two languages – Yiddish and Polish – which, by the way, was attended by both Anatol Stern and Adam Ważyk. ¶ During all those years when Jakub Rotbaum spent his summer months in Kazimierz, he immortalised many people who lived there in his charcoal and ochre drawings. ¶ Szmuel Sznajderman, Artistic Family in Kazimierz, in: Pinkes Kusmir (The Chronicle of Kazimierz), Tel Aviv 1970*

**KAZIMIERZ IN FILMS** ¶ The character of the town and its surroundings also attracted filmmakers looking for settings that would suit films directed in Yiddish. This is where the blockbuster *Yidl Mitn Fidl* (Yiddle with His Fiddle, 1936) starring Molly Picon and directed by Józef Green and Jan Nowina-Przybylski, was shot. Some other films that were shot here include: *Lamed Vov* (One out of 36, 1925, dir. by Henryk Szaro), *In die poylishe velder* (In Polish Woods, 1929, dir. by Jonas Turkow) based on Joseph Opatoshu’s novel, and *The Dybbuk* (1936, dir. by Michał Waszyński). ¶ Many years after the war, the atmosphere of the pre-war shtetl – that was also an artists’ colony – was recreated in a Polish film titled *Two Moons* (Dwa księżycy, 1993, dir. by Andrzej Barański) based on short stories by Maria Kuncewiczowa. The history of Kazimierz Dolny was also immortalised in the documentary *Snapshots from Kazimierz* (Album Kazimierski, 2001, dir. by Tadeusz Pałka).

**Portraits of the town** ¶ The everyday life of Jewish Kazimierz was documented in photographs by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys (born Rotenberg, 1901–1990), a portrait photographer of the crème de la crème of Warsaw who spent his holidays here in the 1930s. His photographs of the pre-war Kazimierz are believed to be the first Polish photographic reportage. A permanent exhibition of these photos can be seen in the former synagogue. ¶ Many paintings of Kazimierz are displayed in the

Celejowska House – a branch of the Nadwiślańskie Museum. The Museum’s collections also include numerous photos and documents connected with the history of the local Jewish community. An interesting exhibition of Jewish liturgical objects can be seen in the Goldsmith Museum. ¶ Among numerous literary renditions of Kazimierz, two novels stand out: *The Shtetl* (1901) by Sholem Asch and *Lato* (Summer) by Adolf Rudnicki (1938). Jacob Glatstein included an interesting description of



Kazimierz Dolny, *Rozmowa* (A Conversation), 1931–1932. Photo by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, the collection of the National Library—[www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl)

the town from the early 1930s in his volume of reportage titled *Wen Yash iz geform* (When Yash Set Out, 1935). And a selection of texts about Kazimierz Dolny can be found in an anthology

titled *Kazimierz vel Kuzmir. Miasteczko różnych snów* (Kazimierz vel Kuzmir. A Town of Various Dreams, 2006, ed. by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska).

“The current ferryman, Haim, is fifty years old. He is tall and slender. His face is elongated, with a long white beard and a furrowed forehead. Haim is a child of water, he grew up by the water, and who knows – perhaps water will become his grave. [...] In summer, water is Haim’s only source of income. All week he is with his boat on the water, and the sail stands between clouds and their reflection on the water’s surface... Sabbath. Water respects Jewish customs, it observes the Sabbath as well as other holidays; it remains calm, and waves a kiss to one another. Haim is sitting with his wife at the door; he is praying and she is reading “*Tsene urene*,” a book of Biblical stories for women. They are telling the waves about God’s miracles and each wave catches a word, says “Amen,” and disappears in the distance. ¶ Sholem Asch, *A Shtetl*, Warsaw 1904 (translation edited)

“The *shtetl* had something particularly noteworthy: a market, an extraordinary market; people who were there looked as if they were on stage, there was always somebody on duty: carriers by day, dreamers by night. Somebody stopped – it seemed that the role required it; he turned into a side street to go about his business, which was known to everybody, since everybody knew everything about their neighbours – again, it seemed that he was acting according to an unwritten but obligatory script. From this market, which was seemingly the main source of life, one would go behind the scenes, in order to go back again

A 70-year old Haim the Ferryman stood at the helm of his boat and transported passengers across the Vistula River for 62 years; the photo was published on November 28, 1926 in the *Forverts* daily. Photo by Menakhem Kipnis, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



*after doing one's bit and bow down before the invisible forces. ¶ There was a river flowing below, there were ruins on the hills; nearby there were also ravines, numerous tobacco plantations, arable farming land, woods, and meadows; each fragment of the landscape was different, but invariably beautiful. In the ravines, gusts of gentle, warm wind would give one a feeling as if one had entered into a magical circle and as if the best long-forgotten characters were about to appear. People doubt whether miraculous places exist, but there were so many of them here. ¶ Adolf Rudnicki, Lato (Summer), Warsaw, 1938*

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, some 4,641 people lived in Kazimierz, including approx. 2,500 Jews. Relatively soon after the outbreak of World War II, as early as 1940, the Nazi Germans established a ghetto in Kazimierz, where the local Jews and the surrounding areas were ordered to move. It occupied a small area in the Jewish quarter around the Lesser Market. The Germans also created a forced labor camp in the brewery on Puławska St., which functioned from spring 1940 to fall 1942. Its inmates (more than 100 people) worked in a quarry and in the town. The pavements and stairs at the camp

as well as in the town (near the Gestapo headquarters in the monastery of the Reformati) were built by prisoners out of matzevot that had been uprooted from the Jewish cemeteries. In March 1942, the ghetto dwellers were transported to the ghetto in Opole Lubelskie and then to one of the death camps – probably to Bełżec. During the liquidation of the labour camp, the Jews who worked there were deported, and a dozen or so were shot dead in the autumn of 1943 at the new Jewish cemetery.

**The old Jewish cemetery** ¶ The cemetery is claimed to have been



established towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, near the road leading to Lublin (beyond the Lublin Gate, on Sitarz Hill). It was surrounded by a limestone wall, and those buried there included the tsaddikim of Kazimierz from the Taub dynasty – Ezekiel and Efraim. During World War II, the Germans forced the Jews to destroy this burial place, where – after the matzevot were taken away – various buildings were established. In 1954, a nearby school was extended in such a way that it partly overlapped the former graveyard area. The southern part of the cemetery – near Lubelska St. – was levelled and a school sports field was created there. The upper part of the graveyard with burial places and a ruined wall have survived. One matzevah in its lowest part still carries a fragment of a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century inscription.

**The new Jewish cemetery ¶** The new Jewish cemetery was established in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century near the road to Opole, in the area called “Czerniawy.” The plot of land allocated for it was located on a slope on the eastern side of the road and was purchased for the community in 1851 by Herszek Mandelsberg. The area was surrounded by a wall, and a pre-burial house was established inside. The cemetery was

rectangular and covered an area of 0.64 ha. It was the site of executions of a dozen or so people, Jews and Poles. In 1984, a “Wailing Wall” memorial was erected here. Designed by Tadeusz Augustynek, it is a long, high wall in the centre of the cemetery above the road, with a jagged vertical crack breaking it, symbolising the destruction caused by the Holocaust. Hundreds of broken matzevot that were recovered from all over the town were set into its face. In front of the wall, a group of several dozen complete matzevot stand on the grassy slope, and behind the wall, about 25 matzevot stand in a hornbeam grove.

**Present day ¶** Today, Kazimierz Dolny is one of the most important tourist attractions in Eastern Poland, with many hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants. The traditions of a summer resort and artists’ colony remain alive. Apart from cultural events such as the festival of Folk Bands and Singers, the Two Riversides Film and Art Festival, and the Alternative Music Festival “Kazimiernikejszyn,” the town’s cultural offerings include events evoking its Jewish history, e.g. the Klezmer Music and Tradition Festival (2006–2012) or the Pardes Festival, Encounters with Jewish Culture (since 2013).

“*I know people who have breakfast in Warsaw, lunch in London, and dinner in Paris. But they always come back to Kazimierz for the night. Because this is the city of their dreams...*” ¶ Anatol Stern

**Bochotnica** (5 km): castle ruins (14<sup>th</sup> c.); tomb of Jan Oleśnicki, Esterka’s legendary burial place (1532); the Krystyna and Władysław Pożaryski Wall, a former chamber rock quarry; a mill on the Bystra River (1870); a blacksmith’s shop (1890); the remains of a mill that belonged to Josek Fryd; memorials to the victims of the “Bloody Wednesday,” who were murdered on 18 and 24 November 1942. ¶ **Janowiec on the Vistula** (6/28 km): the remains

Surrounding  
area



of the Firlej Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Stanislaus (1350, reconstructed in the 16<sup>th</sup> c.); presbytery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the manor complex: a manor house from Moniaki (1760–1770), a granary from Podlodów (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.), a barn from Wylągi (around 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a manorial granary from Kurów (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a branch of the Nadwiślańskie Museum. ¶ **Puławy** (15 km): the Palace and Park Complex of the Czartoryski Family (1671–1677); a landscape park (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Temple of the Sibyl (1798–1801), the Gothic House (1809), the Chinese House (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Greek House (1788–1791); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1800–1803); Marynka's Palace (1791–1794); a granite boulder with a plaque in memory of 3,600 Jews of Puławy, placed at the site of former synagogues; the Czartoryski Museum; a military graveyard at Piaskowa St. with graves of 15 soldiers of Jewish origin.

¶ **Wąwolnica** (17 km): The Shrine of Our Lady of Kębło: the Church of St Adalbert (1907–1914); a Jewish cemetery, 3 Maja St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Nałęczów** (23 km): The Church of John the Baptist (18<sup>th</sup> c.); Spa Park: the Małachowski Palace (1760–1777), the Old Bathhouse (Stare Łazienki), a mineral water drinking room; the Stefan Żeromski Museum; the wooden Chapel of St. Borromeo, Armatnia Góra St. (1917–1919); wooden and brick villas (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), including villa "Osłoda" – a former Jewish hotel that belonged to the Tanenbaum family. ¶ **Markuszów** (29 km): the new Jewish cemetery (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Holy Spirit (1608); the Church of St. Joseph the Betrothed (1676–1690). ¶ **Czarnolas** (36 km): the manor house of the Jabłonowski family, currently the Jan Kochanowski Museum (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Jastków** (40 km): a manor house, so-called palace (1894) with a park; a wooden church (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a military graveyard (1915) with graves of Jewish legionnaires. ¶ **Kraśnik** (59 km): The Great Synagogue in Kraśnik (17<sup>th</sup> c.) and a beth midrash (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), Bużnicza St.; the mikveh building at 3 Bagno St.; the new Jewish cemetery (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.) in Szewska St. with a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust; Marian Shrine: the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (around 15<sup>th</sup> c.), the Monastery of Canons Regular (15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Holy Spirit (16<sup>th</sup> c.) with a wooden poorhouse building; The Museum of

Firefighting. ♣ **The Lesser Poland Gorge of the Vistula**, “Krowia Wyspa” (Cow Isle) and “Skarpa Dobrska” (Dobre Escarpment) nature reserves.

**Synagogue** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Lubelska St., with “Jewish Kazimierz” exhibition inside. Opening hours: 10:00–17:00, except Mondays and Tuesdays, group reservations: tel. +48 81 881 08 94. Website: [www.beitenu.pl](http://www.beitenu.pl) ♣ **The Nadwiślańskie Museum**, branch in the Celejowska House (1635), with a rich collection of paintings of pre-war Kazimierz and its Jewish residents; the room on the ground floor features mementoes of Jews from Kazimierz, e.g. a menorah, a Torah, and a Hanukkah lamp, 11/13 Senatorska St., 24-120 Kazimierz Dolny, tel. +48 81 881 01 04. ♣ **The Goldsmith Museum**, 2 Zamkowa St., has an exhibit of Jewish liturgical objects; tel. +4881 881 00 80. ♣ **Jewish cemetery** (19<sup>th</sup> c.) and “Wailing Wall” memorial, Czerniawy St. ♣ **Medieval layout of the town**, which was listed as a historical monument in 1994. ♣ **Ruins of the royal castle with a tower** (14<sup>th</sup> c.) in the northeastern part of the city, on the hill, Zamkowa St. ♣ **Stone fortified tower** (13<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamkowa St. ♣ **Parish Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Bartholomew the Apostle** (1586–1589), Rynek St. ♣ **Town houses** (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c.), 2, 10, 15, 18 Rynek St. ♣ **Reformed Franciscan Monastery and Church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin and St. Peter of Alcantara** (1680–1690), Klasztorna St. ♣ **Hospital Church of St. Anne** and the former hospital (1649–1670), Lubelska St. ♣ **Granaries** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Krakowska St. and Puławska St. ♣ **Summer houses and villas** (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.), Puławska Krzywe Koło, Lubelska, Szkolna, Krakowska, Małachowskiego, Czerniawy, and Góry Streets.

Worth  
seeing



# Wojślawice

Ukr. Войславичі, Yid. וואַיסלאָוויץ

*Wednesday was a market day in town.*

*The Jews usually prepared for that day all week.*

David Eines, *Yizker-bukh tsum fareybikn dem ondenk fun der horev-gevorener Yidisher kehile Voyslavits* (The Memorial Book of Wojślawice), Tel Aviv 1970

**Origins** ¶ In the early 1440s, Wojślawice was granted municipal rights. Shortly afterward, in 1445, Judka, a Jew from Wojślawice, acted as one of the litigants in a case registered at the court in Lwów. An independent Jewish community, however, was not established in Wojślawice until several decades later. In 1564, the list of poll-tax payers in Wojślawice comprised 125 Jewish residents. The first Ashkenazi Jew who is known to have obtained permission to settle in Zamość – in 1584 – was one Abraham of Wojślawice. In 1616, the Jewish community of Wojślawice applied for permission to build a new wooden synagogue in place of the old one, which had been destroyed in a fire.

**Scandals, thefts, and fires** ¶ The central figure in the first sex scandal reported in 16<sup>th</sup>-century rabbinic responsas was one Moshe Haim from Lithuania, who left his pregnant wife at home and married another woman in Wojślawice. Another case discussed in the early modern responsa focused on a Jew who joined the army as a dragoon and died in battle. Wojślawice suffered as a result of the invasions of

Khmelnitsky's Cossacks in 1648 and the Cossack and Muscovite forces in 1658. Not only Ukrainians and Swedes, Polish troops also committed abuses, sparking riots. These abuses were documented, for example, in a lawsuit filed on February 24, 1670, at the Crown Tribunal in Lublin. In this court case, Wojślawice Mayor Mikołaj Hupała and local townspeople, including Jews such as the inn-keeper Majer, as well as individuals named Mendel, Mendeluk, Zusman, Abraham, and Lejba, sued Royal Cavalry Captain Mikołaj Andrzej Firlej as well as other commanders unit headed by Feliks Potocki, the Voivode of Sieradz, for the damage that troops had caused to the town traders during the trade fair on June 23, 1668. According to the attached record, several homes were set on fire and, in addition, the soldiers violently attacked local Jews, demolishing and robbing the stores. ¶ Over the centuries, fires devastated Wojślawice regularly, once every few years. These are documented by numerous surviving records regarding the sites that were burnt. Despite these disasters, Wojślawice has one of the region's largest number of surviving architectural monuments





Market day in  
Wojślawice, 1931. Photo  
by Kazimierz Czernicki,  
digital collection of the  
Panorama of Cultures  
Association

in proportion to the size of the town. Sacred buildings of three faiths can be seen here – a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Roman

Catholic church, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox church, and a synagogue built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**A FALSE MESSIAH** ¶ **Jacob Leibovitz Frank** (1726–1791), the last great leader of the Jewish messianic movement inaugurated in the 1660s by pseudo-messiah Shabbetai Zvi in the Ottoman Empire, arrived in Poland in December 1755, to begin his prophetic Sabbatean mission. In 1756, he was expelled from Poland and, together with other followers of Sabbateanism, placed under the ban of excommunication by the rabbinical courts across Europe. Frank's crypto-sabbatean sect, after the death of Shabbetai Zvi, rejected the Talmud, preached redemption through sexual orgiastic behavior and sinning in general, and encouraged its members to undergo baptism to redeem the fallen divine sparks in the shards of Christianity. In 1760, following a denunciation and accusation of insincere conversion, Frank was arrested, tried, and sentenced by the consistory court to 13 years of imprisonment at the Jasna Góra Monastery. Frank left Poland in 1773, and in 1786 moved to Offenbach am Main. His story as a sectarian and heretic served as the basis for Olga Tokarczuk's 2015 novel *Księgi Jakubowe* (Jacob's Books) and Adrian Panek's 2011 film *Daas* (Knowledge). ¶ While, as a heretical Jewish sect, Frankism was not of great significance in the history of Judaism, some descendants of its followers, already assimilated and integrated into Polish society, played an important role in the history of Polish culture. This is because some members of the Catholic Church hierarchy saw in Frankism an opportunity to convert the "infidel" Jews. Some magnates also used Frankism as a proselytising tool – including a branch of the Potocki family that was connected with Wojślawice.

Marianna Potocka (née Daniłowicz) was the owner of the Wojślawice landed estate and a Catholic supporter of Frankism. In 1760, she invited family and followers of Jacob Frank to settle on her property. Potocka allotted the land steward's house situated on the road to Uchanie to Hannah Frank, the wife of Jacob, who at that time was held prisoner by Jesuits at the Jasna Góra Monastery. In addition to Hannah, several hundred Frankists came to live in Wojślawice. However, they were not welcomed in the town, where a traditional Jewish community fiercely opposed their presence. Indeed, the presence of the Frankists did provoke tragic events. In order to compromise the Jewish community and take control of the town, the Frankists were reported to have sent a Jewish woman one night to the Roman Catholic parish priest of Wojślawice. She falsely presented herself as the local rabbi's wife. She accused her supposed husband, and other rabbis, and the communal

leaders, and the entire Jewish community of the ritual murder of Mikołaj, the two-and-a-half-year-old son of a couple named Marcin and Katarzyna from the village of Czarnołoży. ¶ Adam Rojecki, the hereditary ruler (burgrave) of a Wojślawice that belonged to the Potocki family, lodged a complaint against the rabbis and elders of the community. They were arrested, imprisoned in Krasnystaw, and sentenced to death after a trial with testimony extracted under torture. The punishment was for them to be drawn and quartered, but – at the intercession of the Jesuits from Krasnystaw – the Jews who declared willingness to be baptised had their sentence changed to beheading and were subsequently buried with honours at the municipal cemetery. Rabbi Herszko Józefowicz managed to hang himself in jail. His body was tied to a horse's tail, dragged across the town, and burned at the stake; his ashes were scattered in the wind.

“ [...] *Then the bodies of all of them were handsomely laid in coffins, carried to the Church at the public cemetery in the suburb, where they reposed till the second day. As to the vile rabbi who strangled himself with a cord found in prison, his corpse, as ordered by the decree, was tied by the executioner to a horse's tail, dragged across the town, and burnt at the stake, and the ashes were scattered in the wind.* ¶ *The following morning, on the orders of the Most Honourable Pastor, who arrived from his estate specifically for that day, the bodies were carried to the cathedral in a crowded and candle-lit procession of schools, townsfolk, guilds, and fraternities; and after a wake of singing and many a Holy Mass, at the special request of one of the newly-baptised, upon the will of the Most Honourable Rt. Rev. Bishop and the Most Honourable Castellan and Chatelaine of Słońsk, they were transferred to the Church of Jesuit Frs; and after the usual rites performed by the same Most Honourable Rt. Rev. Bishop, were duly entombed there.* ¶ *Processus judicarius in causa patrati cruenti infanticidii per infideles judaeos seniores synagogae wojslawicensis Ac Alios In Officio Castrensi Capitaneali Crasnostaviensi Definitus Anno Domini 1761.*

The Jews of Wojślawice were then faced with a choice: either to undergo baptism

or to be banished from the town. As a result, Orthodox Jews fled, and about

300 Frankists accepted Christianization in the church in Wojsławice. The memory of these events was preserved in the local community and the phrase “the dissenters of Wojsławice” (Yid.: voislavitzer meshumedim) became a Yiddish idiom. After these events, an epidemic broke out, which Jacob Frank himself described in *The Collection of the Words of the Lord*, writing: [...] *In Woyslawic smallpox prevailed among the children of our people. Anyone who fell ill with it was doomed to die, and before someone caught it, a black bird flew to his house and stood [there]. That was a sure sign that someone in that house would fall sick.* The town’s citizens were seized with terror: they were convinced that the

unjustly accused rabbi had cursed them before his death. Decimated by the disease, the Frankists soon left Wojsławice, and Marianna Potocka had five roadside chapels dedicated to five saints built at entry points to the town and the palace. To this day, Wojsławice is thus protected by them: Chapels to St. John of Nepomuk, standing near the pond and protecting it from flood; to St. Florian, protecting it from fires; to St. Thecla, offering protection from fire and poor harvest; as well as to St. Barbara and St. Michael the Archangel – patron saints of good death. The bodies of the baptised Frankists who died in Wojsławice were buried at the local churchyard.

“Our house stood between the Catholic and Orthodox churches; I used to see the old Orthodox parish priest every day, and the young Catholic priest would even visit us and joke with my dad, who was a Hasid. He tried on my dad’s coat one day and said that he would come to pray in the vestibule of the synagogue. One day, that priest took me to the church crypt, where I saw glass coffins, and inside them I saw figures of rabbis that looked as if they were made of wax and had grey beards. They were lying there, wearing *shtreimels*, dressed in satin coats, wrapped up in silk straps. ¶ Yakov Tenenbojm, *In the Town of My Parents and Grandparents*, in: *Yizker-bukh tsum fareybikn dem ondenk fun der horev-gevorener Yidisher kehile Voyslavits* (The Memorial Book in Memory of the Jewish Community of Wojsławice), Tel Aviv 1970

**“For the Lord will rebuild Jerusalem”** ¶ The inscription – “For the Lord will rebuild Jerusalem” – is visible at the top of the synagogue’s eastern wall. The numerical values of the Hebrew letters used in this inscription add up to 5663 – the Jewish year that corresponds to 1902/1903 of the Gregorian calendar, when the new synagogue building was finally completed: its construction had begun in 1890, after the fire that had destroyed its wooden predecessor. In the 1940s, during the

German occupation, the synagogue was converted into a stable and a grain storehouse, and therefore, survived the war. At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, the local authorities of Wojsławice renovated the building and converted it into a library and registry office. Today, the building houses a memorial room with exhibits evoking the town’s multiethnic past. It is worth going inside to see the wooden vault over the main hall.



” *The synagogue was beautiful, colourful inside, and full of handmade ornaments.*  
 ¶ Irving Raab – a fragment of an oral history account from the collection of the  
 USC Shoah Foundation, 1997.

Next to the synagogue stands an inconspicuous wooden house, which in fact used to be one floor higher. In this house the rabbi of Wojślawice, Rabbi David London lived. He served as the rabbi for more than half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His sons, Berko and Arie Leib, took up rabbinical posts too – in Wojślawice and in Luboml. Historical records also record that his grandson, David Weitsfrucht-London, became the mayor of Luboml in 1915, during the Austrian occupation. Other local rabbis were Pinkas Bodenstein, Meir Weinsztein, and Shyia Kleinmintz. The last rabbi of Wojślawice, Yakov Tsitrinboim, died in October 1942 in the Sobibór extermination camp, together with most of the town's Jewish population. ¶ A bet midrash (house of study and prayer house), once stood in what is now an empty square on the west side of the synagogue. It was built in 1780, under an unprecedented favorable privilege allowing Jews to reenter the town that was granted by Marianna Potocka's daughter, Humbelina

Kurdwanowska, nearly two decades after the sharp economic decline caused by the expulsion of the Jews and the departure of the Frankists. It read: [...] *seeking to turn this decline so great [...] into a restoration of the town of Wojślawice, I see fit not only to permit the merchants, proprietors, traders, and artisans of all crafts who are of Jewish faith and wish to become my subjects, live in my domain, and adopt my rule in [...] Wojślawice not only to purchase plots of land and houses [...] and to build them up, but also to give them assistance to do so most easily and commonly. [...] I hereby grant and proclaim, in the above areas, a privilege to establish a synagogue and clergy with authority and power of other towns; to elect one from them to serve as a rabbi with the same privileges as in other neighbouring towns; [...] to build a school in the designated location. [In addition] cemeteries in the old location are instantly permitted; [...] and] the maintainance of fairs and markets is allowed, in accordance with the old law,*





Jewish cemetery in Wojsławice, 1931. Photo by Kazimierz Czernicki, digital collection of the Panorama of Cultures Association

*for all wares to be sold freely and without restriction. Unlimited licence is granted to make all kinds of alcoholic beverages and liquors in any quantities and to serve those, as well as to provide feed for horses and hay at inns.* The old Jewish cemetery established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that is mentioned in the privilege (okopisko) has not survived. At present, only the devastated site of the new cemetery, established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and located on a hill about 200 metres from Grabowiecka St., can be visited. Only a few remnants of gravestones can be found there.

**Arcaded houses ¶** To this day, a row of arcaded houses is lined up around the western side of the market square – the only surviving complex of buildings of this kind in the Lubelskie Voivodeship. The buildings in their present form were established in the early 1920s, but we know from documents that arcaded houses had stood here, on the same building plots, since the early times of the town in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The arcades provided protection against sunlight and rain; they also served as a showcase, the place for craftsmen and merchants living in these houses to display their wares and meet clients.

The last in the row of arcaded houses is the so-called “Fawko the shoemaker’s house,” where the family of Fajwel Szyld – a shoemaker, bootmaker, and hide trader – lived until 1942. Currently, this wooden house is maintained by the Panorama of Cultures Association, which since 2005 has initiated events that evoke the centuries of the town’s multiethnic past and hopes to establish a “Panorama of Cultures Meeting House” in the building.

According to the map included in the Yizkor Book in Memory of Wojsławice,

one of the arcaded houses housed a cheder.

” *In melamed Dawidek’s heder stood two long benches on which children would sit while the rebbe would teach them to read in Hebrew and to pray. He had two*

assistants who helped him bring the children there every day. On rainy days, when the town was covered with deep mud, the assistants would carry the children on their backs. At the heder, they also helped teach the first-graders, indicating letters on the alphabet board with a pointer, and teaching them capital letters. It sometimes happened that, when an assistant proceeded to explain to us what segol alef [sound “e”] and segol mem [sound “me”] were, we would suddenly hear the piercing sound of a goat bleating outside: meeeeeeh! We felt sympathy for the assistant, who had to struggle with all his might to out-cry the goat. And so, we learned vowel signs in no time at all. The goat helping them became engraved in our memory. ¶ In those days, there was not a single child in the town who did not learn at melamed Dawidek’s heder. ¶ Mendel Schaffer, *My Sixty Years of Life in Wojsławice*, in: *Yizker-bukh tsum fareybikn dem ondenk fun der horev-gevorener Yidisher kehile Voyslavits* (Yid.: *Yizkor Book in Memory of the Jewish Community of Wojsławice*), Tel Aviv 1970.

**Around the town square** ¶ The building that currently dominates the central square of Wojsławice is the new town hall, opened in 2014. Its form and location resemble that of the old Renaissance town hall destroyed in 1915 by the Russian army, which used scorched

earth tactics while retreating from the Kingdom of Poland. Until World War II, the town square was a marketplace that would fill up every Wednesday with people wearing different types of clothing and speaking different languages: Polish, Yiddish, and Ukrainian.

” Wednesday was a market day in town. The Jews usually prepared for that day all week. Peasants from the entire vicinity would arrive, each of them bringing something for sale, and with the money they earned from this they bought the goods they needed from the Jews. This kind of fair had been a custom for many years. The peasants would usually come with a horse and cart and bring sacks of grain. Young and old men and women carried woven baskets, bags, tin egg holders, and bundles of onions. On their carts they had sacks of potatoes, hens, and all kinds of fruit. By hand or by cart, everyone carried something for sale. ¶ The marketplace where the fair was held was a large square in the heart of the town. It was there that horse, cattle, and pig trading took place. Racket and tumult would rise up to the sky. Horses neighed, cattle mooed, sheep lay bound on carts with hay, bleating and growling. Trade continued all day long, everyone bought or sold something. ¶ David Eines, *Fairs, Thieves, and Jewish Rich Men*, in: *Yizker-bukh tsum fareybikn dem ondenk fun der horev-gevorener Yidisher kehile Voyslavits* (Yid.: *Yizkor Book in Memory of the Jewish Community of Wojsławice*), Tel Aviv 1970

According to the 1921 census, the population of Wojsławice included 1,187 Catholics, 444 members of the Orthodox Church, three Evangelicals, and 835 Jews. Both Christian and Jewish residents recall their coexistence in the

town as generally peaceful. ¶ The houses around the town square were mostly inhabited by Jewish craftsmen and merchants. On the northern side of the square there was a bakery, run by Hannah Erlich. During World War I her son,



Haim Jankiel, joined the Third Brigade of the Polish Legionnaires at the age of 17 and went through the entire combat campaign with it. He was awarded the

Cross of Independence and the Cross of Valour and served in the Polish Army until 1932.

A panorama of Wojślawice, 2012. Photo by Dariusz Kostecki, digital collection of the Panorama of Cultures Association

“*In our town, in Wojślawice, when it was May 3rd before the war, people would gather near the community office. With the firemen's band, we would march together to the [Catholic] church for a mass, and from that church we would go to the Orthodox church – for there were all kinds of people there; from the Orthodox church we would go to the synagogue and there again we attended a celebration. Then, from the synagogue, we would go to listen to the speech at the statue of Kościuszko, and then back to the community office.*” The account by Stanisław Burda – Oral History Archive of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Wojślawice 2004

## World War II and the Holocaust

“In October 1939, Soviet troops entered Wojślawice, and German troops took the town over two weeks later. The synagogue and prayer houses were desecrated, and the Jewish residents were routinely humiliated. In the autumn of 1942, the Jews living in Wojślawice were forced to walk to Chełm, where they were to be deported to the Sobibór

extermination camp. The deportees were led by the last rabbi of Wojślawice, Yakov Tsitrinboim. Several dozen people avoided deportation, but they were soon discovered and shot in the meadow behind the bakery. In 2015, thanks to cooperation between the Society of Enthusiasts of Wojślawice and the Jewish Cemeteries Rabbinical Commission, the exact place of their burial was found.

**Present day** ¶ Currently, about 1,500 people live in Wojsławice. After the nationalization in the post-war period, the Orthodox church building has been returned to the Orthodox parish in Chełm and occasionally serves various religious purposes. At the synagogue, the local authorities have established a memorial room. The local heritage is

evoked at the Meetings of Three Cultures festival, organised since 2007 by the Society of Enthusiasts of Wojsławice. Several agritourism farms function in the vicinity, such as Dom Gościnny in Stary Majdan, which was awarded the title of “The Tourist Gem of the Lublin Region” in 2013. As in the past, an open market takes place every Wednesday.

#### Worth seeing

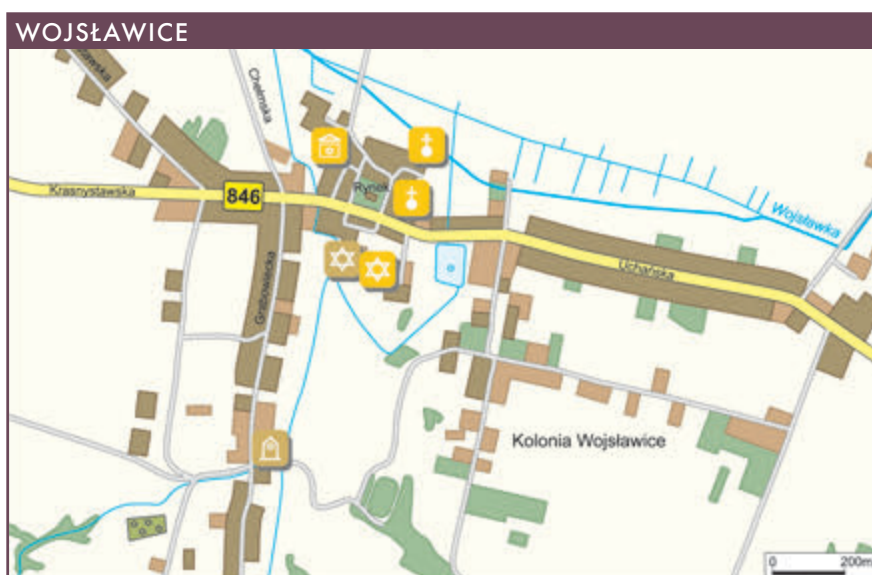
Former **synagogue**, currently a museum (1890–1903), 20A Rynek St., tel. +48 82 5669153, wojslaw-gci@o2.pl ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Grabowiecka St. ¶ **The town's urban layout** (15<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Parish church complex**: the Church of St. Michael the Archangel (1595–1608), a belfry (1763), and a presbytery (1840); 100 Rynek St. ¶ **Prophet Elijah Orthodox Church** (1771); the bell tower next to the Orthodox church (1914); Rynek St. ¶ **Votive chapels** dedicated to St. Barbara, St. Michael, St. Thecla, St. John of Nepomuk, and St. Florian (1762). ¶ **Arcaded houses** on the town square, the one of few last surviving complex of arcaded houses in Poland (1920s), Rynek St. ¶ **Parish cemetery** (1793–1803), Chełmska St.

#### Surrounding area

**Uchanie** (8 km): the castle hill; the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1625); the Jewish cemetery in Podgórze St. (16<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Bończa** (10 km): a Calvinist church, currently the Church of St. Stanislaus (1577); the Orthodox Church of Our Lady of Good Protection (1877–1881); an early medieval fortified settlement; a palace and park complex, currently a residential care home (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Grabowiec** (13 km): the remains of a medieval castle; a wooden house, formerly the Municipal Culture Centre (1898); the Church of St. Nicholas (1855); the parish cemetery (1792–1798); a mass grave of 30 Jews murdered in 1942, located in a gorge outside the town; the local Regional Museum; grave of Władysław Czachórski in the churchyard. ¶ **Sielec** (15 km): the remains of the Uhrowiecki Castle (14<sup>th</sup> c.); the manor house of the Rzewuski family, currently a primary school (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a column with a figure of the Mother of God (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Kraśniczyn** (15 km): a Jewish cemetery (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); remains of manorial buildings at the curve of the Wojsławka River; an inn, currently a private house, Kościuski St. (1895). ¶ **Surhów** (22 km): the Cieszkowski Palace with wall paintings by Nicola Monti, currently a residential care centre (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Luke (1820–1824). ¶ **Chełm** (29 km): Chełm Hill (Górka Chełmska): a hill fort (14<sup>th</sup> c.); foundations of the Orthodox Church of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (1884); the cathedral complex on the Castle Hill (Góra Zamkowa): the Basilica of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1735–1756), the Basilian monastery, the Uniate Bishops' Palace, Uściługska Gate (1616); the beth midrash, 8 Kopernika St. (1914); a Jewish cemetery (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.); tenement houses in Lubelska St., incl. Majer Bronfeld's print shop; the former Piarist Church of the Dispersion of the Apostles (1753–1763); the Orthodox Church of St. John the Theologian (1846–1849); the Kretzschmar Palace, currently the Registry Office (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.); Chełm Museum; Chełm Chalk Tunnels. ¶ **Strzelce** (24 km): the Du Chateau family manor (1908–1911); the hunting palace of the



Zamoyskis in Strzelce-Maziarnia (1903). ♣ **Hrubieszów** (32 km): the 13-dome Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1873); “Du Chateau” manorial complex, currently housing the Staszic Museum (circa 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Gołachowski family manor (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Kiesewetter family manor (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the cloth hall, known as sutki (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (1905); Dominican monastery complex (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Jewish hospital building, 31 Partyzantów St. (1844). ♣ **Horodło** (35 km): Dominican monastery complex (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Polish Catholic Church of the Resurrection of Our Lord (20<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Union of Horodło Mound (1861); Jagiellonian Bulwarks, a fortified settlement on the Bug; remnants of the new Jewish cemetery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Dubienka** (37 km): the town hall (1905); a Byzantine (Ruthenian) Catholic church (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Most Holy Trinity (1865); a Jewish cemetery with the tomb of tsaddik Uri Feivel (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Dorohusk** (42 km): the Suchodolski Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Mother of God and St. John of Nepomuk (1821). ♣ **Strzyżów** (42 km): the Lubomirski Palace (1762–1786); the former wooden Uniate Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1817); a complex of sugar mill buildings (1899). ♣ **Komarów-Osada** (43 km): a Jewish cemetery near the road to Tyszowce (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to 248 Jews murdered in the local ghetto; Holy Trinity Church (1904–1911); the Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows and St. John the Evangelist (circa 18<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Świerże** (46 km): the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); remnants of the Jewish cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Kryłów** (52 km): remnants of the Ostroróg Castle (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1859–1960); a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Tyszowce** (54 km): Church of St. Leonard (1865–1869); craft-related buildings (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamłynie St. and Jurydyki St.; a memorial to the Confederation of Tyszowce; the new Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Volhynian Polesie**: a belt of land east of Chełm as far as Ukraine, with three landscape parks and 12 nature reserves.



# Izbica

Ukr. Ізбиця, Yid. איזביצע

*My first home was in Izbica; this is where I was born. This was my inheritance – yerushe, as you say in Yiddish – my great-grandfather had built the house and passed it on to the following generations.*

Thomas Blatt – a fragment of Oral History from the collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Lublin 2004

**The Jewish capital ¶** The earliest mentions of Izbica date back to 1419. It was a village in the parish of Krasnystaw and was spelt Istbicza in documents. In 1539, the village became the property of Hetman Jan Tarnowski. In 1548, the Tanowskis established Tarnogóra, a new urban centre across the Wieprz River. Izbica remained a village until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1662, its population numbered 23 farmers, all of them Catholics.

¶ A new town charter was granted to Izbica in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when Antoni Granowski, the head of the Tarnogóra town council, received a privilege from King Augustus III to establish a town in Izbica and to settle Jews in it. This decision was probably dictated by a local conflict between Christians and Jews that in 1744 led to the expulsion of Jews from Tarnogóra, where the *de non tolerandis Judaeis* privilege came into force. From the beginning of its existence, thus, the town of Izbica was inhabited exclusively by Jews; Christian peasants lived in a separate village, also called Izbica. The entirely Jewish character of the town was a unique case in Poland. ¶ This Jewish town was one of the smallest towns in Poland-Lithuania,

and it grew up on the route from Lublin to Lviv. Due to its small size, it did not develop a distinct network of streets until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the eve of the Polish partitions (1772–1795), Izbica numbered 29 dwelling houses located around the market square, inhabited by 150 people; it had three breweries, and starting in 1754, several modest market fairs were permitted to be organised.

¶ Also in 1754, a Jewish cemetery was established. In 1765, the kahal of Tarnogóra, to which Izbica's Jews still belonged, had 204 members. The kahal was moved to Izbica 10 years later. The town did not have a separate civic municipal administration. Although 19<sup>th</sup>-century town plans do show a town hall construction site, the building was never actually erected. The kahal's elders probably settled municipal matters together with the owner of the estate.

**A town by the road ¶** In the 1830s, a new road was built leading from Warsaw through Lublin and Zamość to Lwów. It ran through Izbica, and thanks to this road the town gained importance as a centre of local craft and commerce. Though Izbica never developed into



Houses in Lubelska Street in Izbica, 1940. Photo by Max Kirnberger, collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin

a larger urban centre, the population grew constantly; moreover, until World War I, it was inhabited almost exclusively by Jews. In 1810, only 173 people lived in Izbica, but by 1827, the town already had 407 residents, and 30 years later their number reached 1,600. In 1860, the town had 117 houses, of which 80 were considered stone houses (for

their construction, limestone was used). These buildings were laid out around the market square and along the road leading to Tarnogóra, with inns situated at their rear. There was a mill, a sawmill, a bentwood furniture factory, tanneries, and a comb factory. Twenty years later, Izbica's population reached 2,077.

“**Hasidim** ¶ *Though we don't practice the traditions of the Hasidic Jews, on the Sabbath we often host visiting Hasidic rabbis because my father is considered one of the leaders of the community. Our family's dinner guest this evening is a rabbi from the town of Radzyń. I can easily identify his affiliation with a quick glance at the unusually colored tzitzis that he wears: whereas nearly all Jewish men wear white tzitzis, he dons the hallmark blue tzitzis of the Hasidic Jews from Radzyń and Izbica.* ¶ Philip Bialowitz, *A Promise at Sobibór*, Madison 2010

In the 1840s–1850s, tsaddik **Mordekhai Yosef Leiner** (1801–1854), a disciple of tsaddik Menakhem Mendel Morgenstern of Kock (Kotzk), ran his own Hasidic court in Izbica, and it is Mordekhai Yosef Leiner from whom the still-existing Hasidic dynasty of Izbica and Radzyń descends. Tsadik Judah Leib

Eiger of Lublin was Leiner's disciple, and Mordekhai Yosef's son, Gershon Hanokh Leiner, founded a Hasidic court in Radzyń Podlaski. In the interwar period, a local court functioned in Izbica, run by Hasidic rabbi Tzvi Rabinowicz from the dynasty of Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (Przysucha).

Members of Izbica's Judenrat, with the synagogue building in the background, 1940. Photo by Max Kimberger, collection of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin



“On one occasion, so-called more enlightened Jews arrived from the nearby town of Zamość. More enlightened meant a little more assimilated, a bit like the intelligentsia or students. They came on bicycles on Saturday, which was a sin! And they weren't wearing hats, either! This was not acceptable in Izbica. I only remember that some of the Orthodox Jews – “Yeshivabuchers” [Talmudic academy students –eds.] – chased these cyclists until they disappeared across the town's boundary. ¶ Thomas Blatt – a fragment of Oral History from the collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Lublin 2004.

**The synagogue ¶** The earliest mentions of a bet midrash, reportedly located behind the houses in the north side of Izbica's market square, date back to 1781. It was probably there, in its place, that the first wooden synagogue was built in 1819. In 1855, a stone

synagogue was established at the same location. It burned down in 1879, but was rebuilt soon afterwards. The building was pulled down completely in 1943–1944, already after the town's Jews had been murdered.

**THE TENT OF MEETING ¶** In 1925, Rabbi Pinkhas Elijah Herbst of Izbica began to publish a periodical devoted to rabbinical and Talmudic issues. Published in Hebrew, this monthly was entitled *Ohel Moed* (Tent of Meeting). The publisher's main objective was to spread knowledge based on Talmudic learning among young rabbinical scholars.

“(...) each significant Jewish town in Poland typically has at least a few families who have been the trusted bakers of the Passover matzo for generations. In Izbica one of these families is the Klyds, from which my mother and her four siblings were descended (...). The large scale of the [matzo-baking] operation also means that for



*the four weeks before the annual holiday, our home is overrun by about twenty of Izbica's prettiest young girls, handpicked by my mother to assist in the meticulous baking process.* ¶ Philip Bialowitz, *A Promise at Sobibór*, Madison 2010.

### **Religious, social, and political life** ¶

During the revolution of 1905, a strong centre of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was established in the nearby Tarnogóra, and its influence spilled over into Izbica. Polish PPS activists were able to mobilize the Jewish residents of Izbica to take part in a strike and a demonstration, but the high level of danger posed by the Russian garrison in Krasnystaw prevented any major revolutionary outbreaks. ¶ On the eve of World War I, the population of Izbica amounted to 4,451 inhabitants, almost all of them Jews. After the war, Poles also settled in the town. According to the 1921 census, there were 2,865 Jews, 219 Poles, and one Ukrainian in Izbica. Most of local Jews

were Orthodox, and the pace of Jewish life was regulated by tradition: the rabbinic law overruled the Polish law. Many Jewish families used no language but Yiddish, and although there was a Polish primary school in Izbica, not all Jewish children attended it. Some of the boys from Hasidic families finished their education at the elementary school (cheder) level. On the way from the town centre towards the cemetery, one can still see a house that preserves a traditional sukkah (Heb. booth), a kind of balcony with an opened roof, used during the feast of Sukkot. At the entrance to the path leading to the cemetery, the one-time funeral home serves now a residential building.

“On a Saturday evening, when the Sabbath was over, I remember there was a tradition of everyone going out to the main street for a stroll, from one end to the other. Whole families. People would dress up in their best clothes and celebrate the end of the Sabbath. I would never go, but my mother always would, with my younger brother – she took him by the hand and they strolled back and forth. That was traditional.” ¶ Thomas Blatt – a fragment of Oral History from the collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Lublin 2004

**Poor, but at home** ¶ Izbica was a poor town, without a sewage system until the outbreak of World War II. Water was supplied by a few artesian pumps and three wells. Not all of the houses had electric lighting. Izbica was a town of craft and trade in which small tanneries, oil mills, and sawmills played

an important role. In the 1930s, Izbica's only industrial plant of considerable size was established – a state-owned clinker brick factory, where Jews were not employed. By 1939, the population of the town reached about 4,500 inhabitants, of whom 92 percent were still Jews.

“What did they do for a living? There were some three oil mills and two tanneries, there were various kinds of shoe repair shops and tailor's shops, there were locksmiths and mechanics, there were two sawmills, there were beerhouses, there were six



A leaflet advertising the Cwekin beerhouse in Izbica, 1932, collection of the National Library of Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ At the outbreak of World War II, Izbica was initially seized by German troops. Towards the end of September 1939, the Red Army entered the town, but only for a brief period. Fearing German repression, a group of Jews from the town left Izbica with the withdrawing Red Army. From 1940, Jews began to be resettled to Izbica from the western regions of Poland, which had been incorporated into the Reich: from Koło, Łódź, Kalisz, and Konin. In 1941, about 1,000 Jews from Lublin were resettled here. The living conditions rapidly deteriorated. A local station of the German Security Police for the County of Krasnystaw

libraries, there was a cinema, and there was an amateur theatre. Cultural life was highly vibrant. There was a fire brigade in Izbica, with a Pole as its commander. Later, a Jew was the commander. When there was a fire, they would arrive with an extinguisher and pump the water manually to put it out. ¶ Thomas Blatt – a fragment of Oral History from the collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Lublin 2004.

was established in Izbica, with Kurt Engels as the head and Volksdeutscher Ludwig Klemm as his deputy. It was they who first organised the arrest of representatives of the Polish and Jewish intelligentsia from Izbica and Tarnogóra and subsequently launched the mass persecution of Jews. On Engels's order, the Jewish cemetery was razed and the matzevot were used to build a jail and pave the streets.

**The transit ghetto** ¶ In March 1942, after the beginning of Operation Reinhard, the Germans turned Izbica into the largest transit ghetto in the Lublin District. By the end of May, more than 10,000 Jews from Bohemia, Slovakia, Austria, and Germany were deported here. The local Jews were deported mainly to the Bełżec extermination camp, while Izbica became the place where Jews from the County of Krasnystaw and from Zamość were concentrated. By November 1942, about 24,000 Polish and other Jews passed through Izbica to be deported to the extermination camps in Bełżec and Sobibór and to the Majdanek concentration camp. During the brutal deportations, hundreds of people were murdered in the streets and on the railway platform. Many – mainly



The ohel of tsaddik Mordechai Yosef Leiner (1801–1854) and his family in the Jewish cemetery in Izbica, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

foreign Jews, who did not know the local language and had no personal contacts in the vicinity – died in Izbica of hunger and epidemic diseases. ¶ On November 2, 1942, the transit ghetto was liquidated. About 2,000 Jews remaining in Izbica were taken to the Jewish cemetery

and shot dead. A month later a ghetto was established again, this time for about 300 Jews caught in hiding places and in nearby forests. On April 28, 1943, they were transported to the Sobibór extermination camp. This put an end to Jewish Izbica.

“*Ordnung, Ordnung!*” he (the SS man) bellowed like a madman. “*Order, order!*” The two policemen echoed him hoarsely, firing straight into the faces of the Jews running to the trains. Impelled and controlled by this ring of fire, they filled the two cars quickly. [...] The military rule stipulates that a freight car may carry eight horses or forty soldiers. Without any baggage at all, a maximum of a hundred passengers standing close together and pressing against each other could be crowded into a car. The Germans had simply issued orders to the effect that 120 to 130 Jews had to enter each car. These orders were now being carried out. Alternately swinging and firing with their rifles, the policemen were forcing still more people into the two cars that were already overfull.” ¶ Jan Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, Boston 1944

**Memorials** ¶ The site of the mass execution of November 1942 was commemorated in the 1960s and 1970s with the symbolic outlines of three mass graves (which do not coincide with their actual area). Next to them, there is an obelisk with a representation of the Ten Commandments. Nearby, there

are individual memorials: a plaque commemorating Gertrude Mitterbach (a Jewish woman converted to Christianity) and a monument in honour of the families of all murdered Jews, erected in 1967 by Fr. Grzegorz Pawłowski (Jakub Hersz Griner) and his brother Haim Griner. Haim survived the war in the



A house with a pre-served sukkah, Izbica, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Soviet Union, and Jakub managed to escape from Izbica in November 1942 before the final execution, in which his parents and sisters were killed. He survived thanks to his command of the Polish language. Later on, he converted to Catholicism and became a Catholic priest in 1958. He serves the Catholic community of Israel from 1970. ¶ In 1995, at the initiative of the Leiner family, the ohel of tsaddik Mordekhai Yosef Leiner and his family members was rebuilt at the cemetery. Since 2004, the Jewish cemetery in Izbica has been cared

for by young people from the local middle school and the Kassel-based German organisation Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz. In 2006, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage (FODŻ) and the German television station ARD had the former jail pulled down. Fragments of the matzevot that the Germans had used to build it were transported to the cemetery. Some of them, with the original colours preserved, were set into the walls of tsaddik Leiner's ohel. The oldest matzevah fragment is dated to 1785. In 2006, the Foundation and the German Embassy funded a monument at the cemetery to commemorate the extermination of Jews in Izbica. The monument has the form of a stele with inscriptions in Polish, German, and English. ¶ On a little green square across the road from the cemetery stands a small obelisk erected in 2007 by a German and Jewish organisation from Würzburg that commemorates the Jews from Würzburg and from all of Franconia deported to Izbica in the spring of 1942.

Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Fabryczna St. ¶ **Town houses** (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.) in the market square and in Lubelska St. ¶ **Clinker works** (1929), Fabryczna St.

Surrounding area

**Orłów Murowany** (7 km): Count Kicki's palace (19<sup>th</sup> c.) surrounded by a park; ruins of fortifications (16<sup>th</sup> c.); and Church of St. Cajetan (1920s). ¶ **Krasnystaw** (13 km): a synagogue (Czysta St.); foundations of a mikveh; the former Perelmutter's mill; the Zygelczyper, Baumfeld, Binder, and Fleszer family town houses; a Jewish cemetery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.), Rejowiecka St.; the former Jesuit monastery complex: the Church of St. Francis Xavier (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Jesuit college (1720) currently the Regional Museum, the episcopal palace (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the former new Augustinian complex; the Church of the Most Holy Trinity (1837–1839). ¶ **Gorzków** (18 km): the former synagogue, currently a school (1930s); the area of the former Jewish cemetery (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), on the left side of the road to Chołupnik; church of St. Stanislaus (1623); a gate bell tower (1801); the parish cemetery. ¶ **Krupe** (19 km): ruins of a castle (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor house built by Jan Michał Rej (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of Our Lady of Częstochowa, erected as an Orthodox church (circa 1905); "Arianka" – a pyramid-shaped brick tomb, mausoleum of Paweł Orzechowski (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Skierbieszów**



(20 km): “Zamczysko” (“Castle”) Hill (14<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1610); St. Kilian’s Fair (held annually in July since the 16<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Żółkiewka** (25 km) – Church of St. Lawrence (1776) with a belfry gate; the wooden Greek Catholic Church of St. Michael the Archangel, (currently the Polish Catholic Church of St. James). In the nearby villages of Dębnie, Olchowiec, Zaburze, Średnia Wieś, Wola Żółkiewska, and Chłaniów, remnants of old manor houses of the nobility have survived. ¶ **Rejowiec** (26 km): the Ossoliński palace and park complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the so-called Mikołaj Rej house (1720); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Josaphat (1906–1907); the Uniate Church of St. Michael the Archangel, currently a Roman Catholic church (circa 18<sup>th</sup> c.); pumps in the market square (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Fajslawice** (32 km): the Church of St. John of Nepomuk (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a churchyard; the manor and park complex of the Florkowski family (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the old parish cemetery on the Arian Mount (Ariańska Góra) with the Florkowski family chapel and Hakenszmit chapel; three World War I cemeteries (in Dziecinin, Boniewo, and Suchodoły). ¶ **Stołpie** (39 km): ruins of a tower (circa 12<sup>th</sup> c.), the oldest Polish monument east of the Vistula. ¶ **Siedliszcze** (44 km): the wooden manor house of the Węgliński family (1760); an Orthodox church, currently the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Jasna Góra (1904); an electric mill (1928); an open-air museum at the Community Cultural Centre. ¶ **Bychawa** (55 km): a synagogue (1810); an old Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.), 7 Kościuszki St.; ruins of a palace in Podzamcze (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.), Pileckiego St.; the Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Francis of Assisi; town houses along the main streets. ¶ **Skierbieszów Landscape Park** protects a subregion of the Grabowiec Watersheds (Działy Grabowieckie) and features a diverse landscape perfect for horse riding and biking excursions. The upland areas are criss-crossed by river valleys, surrounded by deep gorges, cliffs, and slopes. Forests constitute 21 percent of the Park’s area. There are 14 natural monuments and several nature reserves in the Park.



# Szczebrzeszyn

Ukr. Шебрешин, Yid. שֶׁבֶרֶשִׁין

*"What is the name of this place?" he thundered.*

*[...] The old man started to mumble. The commander screamed: "Speak up! Speak up!" And when the old man still didn't stop mumbling he was struck in the face, knocking out a tooth. The old Jew bent down to pick up his tooth and said sadly, in Hebrew, "Sheber-shin." Broken tooth: Sheber-Shin.*

Philip Bibel, *Why My Town Had Two Names*, in: *Tales of the Shtetl*, Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library, 2004

**Sheber shin** ¶ In the Middle Ages, Szczebrzeszyn was one of the most important fortified settlements in the Principality of Galicia–Volhynia. When Red Ruthenia was annexed to the Polish Crown in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Szczebrzeszyn was described as a "Ruthenian town." At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Dymitr of Goraj, the new owner, granted the town Magdeburg rights. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Jews began to settle in Szczebrzeszyn, giving rise to one of the oldest Jewish communities in the present-day Lubelskie Voivodeship. In 1507, the Szczebrzeszyn kahal already paid coronation tax. In 1560, the then owner of the town, Andrzej Górka, confirmed the rights and duties of the Jews: this included the amount of tax they had to pay, as well as issues concerning the jurisdiction of the courts. Further documents, which mandated the same treatment of Jews and Christians, were issued by Stefan Báthory (1583), then by Stanisław Górka, and finally by Jan Czarowski (1593), who exempted the rabbi from the house tax and payments for the mikveh. These rights were confirmed in 1597 by the new owner of the town, Jan Zamoyski, who also exempted Jews

from paying rent for the shul and the cemetery. ¶ In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Szczebrzeszyn became famous as the home of learned men, writers, and rabbis. Women were not neglected: Gumpekh of Szczebrzeszyn won renown thanks to his book for women covering various legal aspects of Purim and Pesach, published in 1555 in Italy. He also wrote poetic short stories that were included in prayer books for women. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Isaiah Menakhem – son of Isaiah of Szczebrzeszyn – became the Rabbi of Cracow, the largest Jewish community in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Szczebrzeszyn kahal gradually declined in importance, giving way to the dynamically developing Jewish community in nearby Zamość.

**The oppression of the times** ¶ In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town sustained heavy damage from enemy armies. Notably, the devastating attack of the Khmelnytsky's Cossack rebels was bemoaned by Meir, son of Samuel of Szczebrzeszyn, in a poem entitled *Tsok ha'itim* (The Oppression of the Times), printed a year later in Cracow.



A view of Szczepieszyn, before 1939, collection of the Szczepieszyn of Cultures Foundation

It is a chronicle in verse based on the reports of fugitives and the author's own experiences. Meir of Szczepieszyn had authored an earlier poem entitled *Shir Mizmor le-Yom ha-Shabbat* (A Psalm for the Sabbath, 1639). ¶ Szczepieszyn's economic development was encouraged by a charter issued in 1673 by King Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki that allowed the Jews of Szczepieszyn to produce and sell liquor. In 1676, the 216 taxed residents of the town included 61 Jews. In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, three sessions of the Va'ad Arba' Aratzot (The Council of Four Lands) were held in Szczepieszyn. In 1749, the town council made an agreement with local Jews and issued a decree allowing them to produce candles in exchange for payments to the municipal budget. In the spirit of the rising enlightenment era, the document barred Jews from preparing written agreements in Hebrew – all provisions were to be written down in Polish. It also reaffirmed the obligation to pay taxes into the treasury of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In 1765, records show that some 444 people in the entire Jewish community (the town and nearby

villages) paid a per capita tax (two zlotys). At the time, the Szczepieszyn kahal was medium-sized when compared to other kahals in the Land of Chełm: it was smaller than the kahals of Zamość (1905 taxpayers), Chełm (1418), Luboml (1226), Hrubieszów (1023), or Turobin (985). Similar-sized communities existed in Kryłów (470) and Rejowiec (437), and there were 11 kahals smaller than that of Szczepieszyn.

**The synagogue** ¶ A wooden shul may have been erected in Szczepieszyn already in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but the earliest mention of the building dates back to 1588. The stone Renaissance-style synagogue with an attic and a butterfly roof that was built at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was destroyed before 1770. In the 1770s, it was rebuilt in its present form – with a Polish tiered roof. The building, located southeast of the marketplace in today's Sądowa St., is an example of a synagogue with the main prayer room at its centre. The main men's room is adjoined by two-storey women's galleries on the northern and southern sides, by a two-storey annexe on the western side

[A] The synagogue in Szczepieszyn, present day seat of the Municipal Cultural Centre, 2013. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

[B] The synagogue in Szczepieszyn, first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, collection of the Szczepieszyn of Cultures Foundation



that once housed a men's narthex and a meeting room, and by a third women's gallery on the first floor, added later, and once reached by wooden stairs. In 1940, the synagogue was burned down by the Germans. After the war, it was partially demolished, and then, between 1957 and

1963, it was reconstructed to serve as the municipal cultural centre. It continues to function in this fashion. A stone aron ha-kodesh and the Renaissance ornaments of the main room have survived inside the building.

**”** We sat together. I held on to a new tallis [prayer shawl] given to me that morning. Grandpa adjusted the prayer shawl so it would be clearly visible. He told me to stand up straight, and when it was my turn to read the Torah, the hazzan (cantor) sang out: “Ya’amod, Pinkhas ben Boruch Ha-Kohen.” (Philip, the son of Boruch, the Kohen,



is called up to the Torah). I stepped up and proudly pronounced the blessing. ¶ Philip Bibel, *What Does it Mean to Be a Kohen?*, in: *Tales of the Shtetl*, Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library, 2004

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The Jewish cemetery located on Cmentarna St. is one of the oldest and most interesting Jewish burial sites in Poland. Established in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it has preserved its unique character. There are more than 3,000 matzevot dating from 1545 to 1939. In 2007, the cemetery came under the ownership of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage. ¶ Just behind the entrance to the cemetery, one can see two grave-stones engulfed by a spreading elm tree. The inscriptions on them are completely effaced. According to popular legends – and even to a plaque placed here in the 1990s – these are the gravestones of two famous figures connected with Szczeczeszyn but who lived in different periods, Issakhar Ber and Simkha ha-Kohen Rapoport. Prof. Andrzej Trzciński, who conducts research on the Jewish cemetery, discovered, however, that the matzevot of these two men actually stand in a different section of the graveyard. ¶ Issakhar Ber ben Naftali ha-Kohen was known to his contemporaries as Berman Aszkenazi of Szczeczeszyn and was the author of religious works that were re-printed many times. These included *Matanot kehunah* (The Gifts of Priesthood), a collection of commentaries on the Midrash Rabbah (collection of rabbinical pedagogical narratives) published for the first time in Cracow in 1587, and *Mareh Kohen* (The Priest Watches), an alphabetical index of the



biblical motifs and quotations appearing in the kabbalistic *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Radiance), published for the first time in 1589. Artistic in both form and content, the inscription on his grave-stone mentions his life's work; it does not, however, contain the date of the scholar's death – according to his biographers, he died between 1590 and 1608. ¶ Simkha ha-Kohen Rapoport died in Szczeczeszyn in August 1718, at the age of 68, when he was on a journey from Lublin to Lwów (now Lviv) where he was to become the head of the rabbinical court. *The inscription on his matzevah reads: This is the grave of a famous teacher, the light of Diaspora, master of the sons of Diaspora, our teacher and mentor Simkha ha-Kohen Rappoport; may the memory of this just and holy man be for a blessing; the head of the rabbinical court of the communities of Dubno, Grodno, Lublin, he was later appointed head of the rabbinical court of the community of Lwów in place of the Hakham Zvi* [a leading rabbinic authority in Brody and Lviv, stalwart opponent of Sabbateanism and

A matzeva at the Jewish graveyard in Szczeczeszyn, 2013. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Yakov Reifman, portrait reproduction from *Sefer zikaron li-kehilat Shebreshin*, ed. Dov Shuval, Haifa 1984

the father of the illustrious rabbi Yaakov Emden – eds.]. *Here he departed from this world when they were on a journey, and it occurred on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Av in 478 [1718]. He had sons and sons-in-law – rabbis, pillars of science, and the great ones of the generation. He promised that all the descendants of his loins to the tenth generation who come to his grave would be made happy.* ¶ The oldest gravestones in the cemetery can be found in the eastern section, near the northern wall. The oldest preserved matzevah marks the grave of Yekhiel, son of Moses. Its inscription reads: *This is the grave of a righteous man, our teacher Yekhiel, son of Moses, of the blessed memory. May his soul be bound in the bond of life. His soul departed from this world on Tuesday, 26 Nisan, year 305 (April 9, 1545).* Other 16<sup>th</sup>-century matzevot include, among others, the gravestones of Hannah,



daughter of Abraham (d. 1552); Roza, daughter of Menakhem (d. 1572); Hannah, daughter of Elijah (d. 1578); Isaiah, son of Meshulam Flavius (d. 1579 or 1580); Israel, son of Isaiah (d. 1588); [...] daughter of Joseph, wife of Israel (d. 1591); Sinai, son of Isaac (d. 1595).

” *The cemetery was overgrown with tall grasses and fruit trees. The winds and birds had deposited seeds from nearby orchards. No one ever ate the fruit, as the roots reached deeply into the earth; it was said that they were nourished by the people buried there. When somebody was taken seriously ill, women visited the graves of their ancestors and prayed to their souls asking to intercede on her behalf with the Almighty, which Jews at the time regarded as the last resort. Their sobbing was so loud and plaintive that they could awake the dead – which they probably meant to do.* ¶ Philip Bibel, *Beth Olam*, in: *Tales of the Shtetl*, Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library, 2004, (edited)

**Men of the Haskalah** ¶ Thanks to its location near Zamość, Szczepieszyn became home to several significant representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah. These included **Yakov Reifman** (1818–1895) – a teacher, polyglot, and author of numerous scholarly publications. He settled in Szczepieszyn in 1834 when he was 19, after marrying a woman who lived there. In his father-in-law’s house, he found a rich library,

which helped him broaden his horizons and transformed a yeshivah student into one of the leading representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment. His works were published in Warsaw, Vilnius, Berlin, Vienna, and Saint Petersburg. They included a volume of critical Talmudic studies, *Takkanot ha-bait* (Household Regulations), and a book entitled *Toldot rabenu Zekharia ha-Levi* (Life of our Rabbi Zekhariah ha-Levi). Even though

Yakov Reifman lived in Szczecbrzeszyn until the end of his life and appeared to lead the life of a provincial Jew, his work was recognised around the world. The noted Jewish philanthropist Sir Moses

Montefiore presented him with a golden chalice with an engraved dedication, and the Hebrew poet Judah Leib Gordon wrote a poem dedicated to him:

*Wherever I turn, I see his ghost / which is looking for light and fire in the nooks of the Torah  
/ I have not forgotten you, brother – who could forget you / how many Yakov Reifmans are  
there in this Jewish world? / Very few*

But even though Reifman was recognised around the world, he died in poverty. Isaac Bashevis Singer contributed a beautiful text about him to The Book of Memory of the Jewish Community of Shebreshin. ¶ Another follower of the Haskalah, Lejb Sziper, was one of the town's wealthiest residents. In 1853, he established an agricultural colony called Sziperówka on the land he leased near Szczecbrzeszyn, where he employed farm workers.

**The social life of the shtetl** ¶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of social organisations began to develop in Szczecbrzeszyn and other towns. These included, for example, the “Bikur Holim”

Society for Caring for the Sick and the Savings and Loan Association, which helped petty merchants and craftsmen – Jewish and Christian – by providing them with free loans. Politically active groups included Zionists and socialists, among others. Members of the Jewish socialist party, the Bund, actively participated in the revolution of 1905, in cooperation with the Polish Socialist Party. During one illegal strike, Russian soldiers shot three demonstrators. ¶ In the 1931 elections to the town council, representatives of Jewish parties – mainly Zionists and the Bund – won 11 seats. Cultural life also developed in the town; a Jewish library, a drama circle, and a choir were all founded in 1917.

“A new wind began to blow in the shtetl. In 1914, with the beginning of World War I, a new society was beginning to take shape. Parties were founded, workers organisations and trade unions arose. Calls for equality, brotherhood and national revival were heard. ¶ An uprising occurred among the youth. Seeing a new way of life in the shtetl, young people abandoned the bet hamidrash and the shtibl, threw off the long kapote and the “Yiddish hitl”, and put on a suit and hat. [...] ¶ I remember that every Saturday, when we went out for a walk, the Bundists walked in one group singing the “Shvueh”(Yid. “The Oath”, which lyrics were written by S. An-sky), and the Zionists in another group, singing Zionist songs. When the two groups encountered each other, they quickly separated, as if they were enemy armies. [...] ¶ That is how Jewish youth lived and acted. Parents could not accept the new spirit of the times and rejected all new trends. ¶ Yehuda Kelnar, *How We Have Thrown Away the Long Kapotas*, in: *The Book of Memory to the Jewish Community of Shebreshin* (trans. by Moses Milstein from: Sefer zikkaron le-kehilat Shebreshin), Haifa 1984, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)



## World War II and the Holocaust ¶

The Germans were the first to enter Szczepieszyn on September 13, 1939. Then, after 27 September, the Soviets took over the town, but just for about two weeks. After re-entering Szczepieszyn on October 6, the Nazi Germans began to persecute Jews. From 1940, they forced Jews to work on the construction of a military airport in nearby Klemensów. In November 1940, the Germans set fire to the synagogue and the surrounding houses. In May 1942, mass executions at the Jewish cemetery began. As the result, more than 1,000 people were killed during these mass killings. Deportations began

at that time, too. In March 1942, trains crammed with Jews being transported to the extermination camp in Bełżec started passing near Szczepieszyn. Several hundred Jews from Szczepieszyn were sent there in transports in August and October 1942. The last transport to Bełżec took place on 21 October 1942. After that day, many Jews hiding in and near Szczepieszyn were caught and shot at the Jewish cemetery. ¶ Zygmunt Klukowski, director of the hospital in Szczepieszyn, kept a diary in which he documented everyday life at the time of mass murder; it formed a day-by-day account of unspeakable horrors.

“**October 21, 1942 ¶** I intended to go back to Zamość. I got up early to get ready for the journey. Suddenly, I heard and saw through the window some strange commotion in the town, even though the streets were virtually empty. It turned out that the “relocation” of Jews – or, more precisely, their liquidation in Szczepieszyn – began at six o’clock. [...] Armed military policemen, the SS, and the Navy-Blue Police were chasing, tracking, and discovering Jews around the town. Jews were herded into the market and grouped in front of the town hall. They were found in the most diverse of hideaways; gates and doors were broken, shutters were destroyed, hand grenades were dropped into





A drama circle, under the auspices of the Jewish library in Szczeczeszyn, presenting a performance entitled *Two Worlds: A Drama in Four Acts* by Max Nordau, 1928, reproduction from *Sefer zikaron li-kehilat Shebreshin*, ed. Dov Shuwal, Haifa 1984

some basements and flats. Revolvers, rifles, and machine guns located in various places were fired. People were beaten, kicked, and abused in an inhuman manner. ¶ Zygmunt Klukowski, *Zamojszczyzna 1918–1943*, Warsaw 2007

On the initiative of the Szczeczeszyn Jews Landsmannschaft in Israel and the Diaspora, a memorial to the Jews of Szczeczeszyn and the vicinity murdered by the Nazis during World War II was erected at the Jewish cemetery in 1991. After 2011, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage erected another monument there and built a stone wall along Cmentarna St.

### The last Jew of Szczeczeszyn

¶ After the war, many Jews of Szczeczeszyn who survived the Holocaust emigrated to the Israeli city of Haifa, where, to this day, one can meet former residents of the shtetl and their descendants. Only one Jew chose to remain in Szczeczeszyn: Jankiel Grojser, born in 1904, a soldier of the Polish Armed Forces and a participant in the September Campaign, defending Poland from

the Nazi invasion. He was sent to Siberia, which he left with Anders' Army (Polish Armed Forces in the East created in the Soviet Union and then passed under British command). ¶ With this army he fought against Germans in the Battle of Monte Cassino (17 January–18 May 1944). After the war, he came back to Szczeczeszyn and – despite the destruction of the Jewish community in the Holocaust – he decided to stay. Grojser found a job in an agricultural cooperative, distributing beverages to local clients. He also took it upon himself to care for the Jewish cemetery. After his death in 1970, due to the lack of rabbi, he was buried in the Catholic parish graveyard but his grave bears the Star of David. ¶ Today, Szczeczeszyn has a population of 5,000. Its attractive location near the Roztocze Landscape Park has made it a local tourist centre. The memory of the

Jews from Szczecbrzeszyn is preserved by the cultural centre located in the

synagogue, and by local teachers and local non-governmental organisations.

Numerous short stories by Nobel prize-winning author Isaac Bashevis Singer are set in the Lublin region. One of his best-known characters is Yasha Mazur – the Magician of Lublin and protagonist of the book by that name. His characters live in the region's small towns. It is thanks to them that Biłgoraj, Goraj, Frampol, Tyszowce, Szczecbrzeszyn, Józefów, and Piaski have become familiar names to readers worldwide. And what do present-day residents of these towns know about their history and lore? Do they remember the Jewish neighbours who lived among them for hundreds of years? These are some of the questions that have inspired the artistic and educational project called "Following I.B. Singer's Traces" carried out by the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre. The "Magician's Friends" – artists from various countries and various artistic disciplines – travel on a special bus (like a modern circus wagon) to meet people in a number of different places in the region. They entertain, teach, and evoke a world that no longer exists. The project is supported by local authorities, schools, and cultural institutions. ¶ For more information, please visit [www.sladamisingera.teatrnn.pl](http://www.sladamisingera.teatrnn.pl)

#### Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Cmentarna St. ¶ **Former synagogue** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a cultural centre, 3 Sądowna St., tel. +48 84 6821060, [mdk@szczecbrzeszyn.pl](mailto:mdk@szczecbrzeszyn.pl) ¶ **Church of St. Nicholas the Bishop** (1610–1620), 1 Wyzwolenia St. ¶ **Filial Orthodox Church of St. George Parish** (late 12<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Sądowna St. ¶ **Franciscan monastery** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a hospital, 1 Klukowskiego St. ¶ **Christian graveyard** (18<sup>th</sup> c.) with the Chapel of St. Leonard (1812), Cmentarna St.

#### Surrounding area

**Klemensów** (3 km): the Zamoyski Palace (1744–1747) – this is where parts of the Oscar-winning film *Ida* were shot (2012). ¶ **Zwierzyniec** (11 km): a Jewish cemetery (circa 1928),





"Following I. B. Singer's Traces" Festival in Szczepleszyn, 2011. Photo by Joanna Zętar, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

158 Monopolowa St.; the Church of St. John of Nepomuk "on the isle" (1741–1747); buildings that belong to the managing body of the Zamoyski Family Fee Tail (Trust), 1. Browarna St.; the plenipotentiary's villa (1880–1891), 1 Plaźowa St.; brewery (1806), 7 Browarna St.; the only monument in the world commemorating success in combatting a plague of locusts; the "Borek" estate of wooden houses (1920s and 1930s); The Educational and Museum Centre of the Roztocze National Park; Echo Ponds; the Polish Konik breeding centre in Florianka.

¶ **Nielisz** (15 km): an artificial lake on the Wieprz River (1990s); the wooden Church of St. Adalbert (1859). ¶ **Radecznica** (16 km): the Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua with a Benedictine monastery (1685); the "on the water" chapel near the spring of St. Anthony (1824). ¶ **Guciów** (16 km): the private "Zagroda Guciów" Ethnographic and Nature Museum. ¶ **Zamość** (21 km): much of the former Jewish quarter with buildings from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c.; the former synagogue, 9 Zamenhoffa St. / 14 Pereca St. (17<sup>th</sup> c.), recently restored and currently the Synagogue Centre managed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage; buildings of the former mikveh and the kahal house with a cheder, 5 and 11 Zamenhoff St.; the former shul in Reja St., currently a kindergarten; the new Jewish graveyard (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) at Prosta St. with an obelisk built of preserved gravestones (1950); the Zamość Museum; the town hall (1591); the Grand Market; the Water (Wodny) Market; the Salt (Solny) Market (the original Jewish quarter); Armenian town houses (mid-17<sup>th</sup> c.); a complex of city walls with gates and bastions (16<sup>th</sup> c.); The Zamoyski Academy (1639–1648), currently the Jan Zamoyski General Secondary School No. 1 (1579–1586); the Cathedral of the Lord's Resurrection and St. Thomas the Apostle (1587–1598); the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1637); the Stefan Miller Zoological Garden. ¶ **Turobin** (26 km): St. Dominic's Church (circa 1530); a bell tower-crypt (18<sup>th</sup> c.); an old presbytery (1921); graveyard chapels of St. Elisabeth and St. Mark. ¶ **Łabunie** (35 km): the Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. Dominic (1605); the Zamoyski Palace (1735); castellan's residence (kasztelanka), a pavilion, a park with a monastery graveyard, currently the seat of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary; the palace and park complex in Łabuńki Pierwsze (19<sup>th</sup> c.): a palace, two outbuildings and park; "Ecomuseum – Christmas oil mill" of the Kostrubiec family, Ruzów ¶ **The Roztocze National Park**: 9 nature paths, hiking and cycling routes, canoeing on the Wieprz River.

# Józefów Biłgorajski

Ukr. Юзефув, Yid. יוזעפֿעוו

*Books printed in Józefów met with resistance from the state and from the rabbinical censorship. In a letter to Zamoyski, one censor called them “highly” sensitive.*

Hanna Krall, *The Blue*, in: *There is No River There Anymore*, Cracow 2001

**Paper and printing ¶** In the village of Hamernia, near Józefów, visitors can still see the ruins of an old paper mill that the nearby forest has absorbed. The mill was built in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on the Sopot River, next to the blacksmith shop and the copper foundry. Every year, it produced 4,000 reams of quality paper made mostly from linen rags and plant fibres in order to spare the local forest. The paper was watermarked with the Zamoyski family's coat of arms because Józefów, founded in 1725, belonged to the Zamoyski Estate. ¶ Jews had lived in Józefów since the beginning of its existence and constituted a majority of the town's population. An inventory in 1789 listed 70 Jewish homes. ¶ Around 1820, Szaja Waks, one of the leaseholders of the local paper mill, brought in typographers from the Slavuta (Volhynia) printing press and set up a printing house of his own in Józefów. The establishment, which, as did Slavuta press, relied on its own paper, soon became one of the most important printing companies in the Kingdom of Poland. Hebrew books and official forms printed there were exported to other Polish regions, as well as to Russia,

Bessarabia (today Moldova), Wallachia, and even to Istanbul. Destroyed over the years by floods and fires, the paper mill and printing house were rebuilt several times and operated until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1865, the Zecer brothers, Barukh and Shlomo, opened another printing house and later took over the one established by Szaja Waks, while Moshe and Mendel Sznajdmesser (Sznajdermesser) from Józefów set up two printing houses in Lublin.

**Life in Józefów ¶** The Jewish quarter of Józefów extended south of the market square, and the first wooden synagogue – and a Jewish cemetery – probably date back to some time between 1734 and 1744. Decades later, the buildings that belonged to the Jewish community were listed in The Measurement Report of the Town of Józefów (1785). These were: a wooden synagogue, a steam bath, a Jewish school, and a rabbi's house. ¶ The wooden synagogue, located in the southwestern part of the settlement, burnt down in 1850. A stone synagogue was built on its site in the 1870s and still stands there, at the corner of Górnicza St. and Krótka St. This Baroque prayer





house was built with limestone from the local quarry. It contained a two-storey prayer hall for men on its eastern side. On its western side, there was a wooden corridor with the women's section above it: this was dismantled in 1945. ¶ In 1941, the synagogue was devastated by the Nazis, and after the war it served as a storehouse for the local agricultural cooperative. In 1964, its roof collapsed,

destroying the original ceiling. Today, after the extensive refurbishment carried out between 1985 and 1991, and then again in 2014, the former synagogue houses the Municipal Public Library and guest rooms. The former prayer hall features a partially preserved stone niche for aron ha-kodesh and a row of arcaded niches in the walls used in the past for bookcases.

The market square in Józefów, 1906. Reproduction from *The Arcaded Buildings of the Lublin Region Towns* by J. Górak, Zamość 1996

**Shlomo Kluger** (1783–1869), later known as the Maggid of Brody, was one of the Józefów rabbis who served from 1815 to 1821. He wrote 375 books – a number that corresponds to the numerical value of his name according to the gematria. Shlomo Kluger was followed by Haim Eliezer Waks (1822–1829) – the author of *Nefesh haya* (The Living Soul), Tzvi Hirsch Minc, Zeev Yitzhok, and Shalom Joseph Hertzshark. The last rabbi of Józefów was Szymon Parzęczewski, Shalom Joseph Hertzshark's son-in-law. He took office in 1924 and was murdered together with other Józefów Jews in the Holocaust.

### Gravestone for the Torah ¶

A Jewish cemetery established in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century is located to the south from the synagogue. It was originally surrounded by a stone wall with the gate facing the town. Today, the cemetery has about 400 stone matzevot. The oldest

ones (dating back to 1762) are located to the right of the entrance. The cemetery has separate sections for the graves of men and of women, and it features a unique gravestone for a buried Torah scroll, which lost its ritual qualities, dating from 1842. The largest number



[A] The synagogue in Józefów, now the Municipal Public Library, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko; digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Rabbi Shalom Joseph Hertzshark. Reproduction from *Sefer Zikaron li-Kehilat Jozefow in-li-kedosheihq*, ed. by Azriel Omer-Lerner and David Shtokfish, Tel Aviv 1974/1975

of matzevot date from 1907 to 1940; remnants of polychrome decoration are still visible on the most recent ones. Traditionally facing the east, here they are oriented west. The place was devastated during World War II. Today, it is owned by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage, which enclosed the cemetery with a fence in 2015. ¶

Not far from the cemetery there is one of Józefów's greatest attractions – the quarries, which have been in use since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that is, at least since the town's incorporation. Originally, this was a sizable outcrop, but by now most of the stone has been excavated, creating a picturesque rocky area.

“ He remembered Józefów, a small town near the border of Galicia, where he had spent 50 years of his life and enjoyed high esteem among the Hasidim. [...] He started asking about how he could get there, but people only shrugged their shoulders, and everybody said something different. Some claimed that Józefów had burned to the ground and no longer existed. On the other hand, some wandering beggar who had once been there maintained that the residents of Józefów had never been better off, and that they ate white hallah even on working days. ¶ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Old Man*, New York 1953

**The Seer of Józefów** ¶ Józefów was the birthplace of famous Hasidic Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz (1745–1815), later known as the Seer of Lublin (the Hozeh). His father Eliezer held the position of the rabbi of Józefów. As a young boy, Yitzhak was betrothed to a daughter of the tavern-keeper in Krasnobród and forced to marry her. But soon after the wedding ceremony he set off to visit the courts of Hasidic

tsaddikim. He studied under famous rabbis: Shmelke Horowitz in Sieniawa, Dov Ber in Międzyrzecz (Mezeritch), Yitzhak Meir in Berdyczów (Berdychiv), and, finally, under Elimelekh in Leżajsk. ¶ But Yaakov Yitzhak came into conflict with Elimelech and decided to establish his own Hasidic court. At first, he taught in Łańcut, where his prayer chamber has been preserved in the vestibule of the main synagogue. In the 1790s, he



moved to Lublin, and it was there that his fame flourished. First, he lived in the nearby settlement of Wieniawa, and then he moved to Szeroka St. – the main street of Lublin's Jewish quarter. He was in constant conflict with the Chief Rabbi of Lublin, Azriel Horowitz, a fierce opponent of Hasidism who was mockingly dubbed the Iron Head. ¶ There are many legends about the life and work of the Seer of Lublin. One of them concerns the circumstances of his mysterious death, which happened during the Napoleonic Wars. Several Hasidic tsaddikim (rare supporters but mainly the opponents of Napoleonic reforms) believed that the wars would usher in a war of Gog and Magog, predicted in the Bible, and thus hasten the Messiah's coming. Three rabbis began to pray for that war: Yitzhak Yaakov Horowitz, Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (who supported Napoleon), and the Maggid of Kozienice (who opposed Napoleon). Shortly thereafter, however, following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, all three of them died. A Hasidic legend has it that this was the

punishment for the sin of pride, and that the Seer of Lublin was knocked to the pavement from a second-floor window as he was levitating in fervent prayer. His ohel is located at the old Jewish cemetery in Lublin.

**Tradition and education ¶** According to the 1921 census, 1,056 out of Józefów's 1,344 inhabitants declared themselves as Jews. Most of them were observant and very pious. In the inter-war years, the Jewish community was administered by the representatives of the Orthodox Jews, associated with the Agudas Israel party – the first political organization of Orthodox Jewry uniting Hasidim and Litvaks, their opponents. The municipality maintained a Talmud Torah school and a yeshivah with about 50 students, some of them from other towns. In 1926, the Mizrachi (religious Zionists party) set up a branch of the Yavneh network of schools, while in 1928 Agudas Israel opened a modern Orthodox-type Bet Yaakov school for girls. The influences of many of the

Matzevot at the Jewish cemetery in Józefów. 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



A group of Tarbut school pupils. Reproduction from *Sefer Zikaron li-Kehilat Yozefov veli-kedoshaha*, ed. by Azriel Omer-Lerner and David Shtokfish, Tel Aviv 1974/1975



Hasidic dynasties of Poland and Galicia competed in Józefów, and there were many Hasidic prayer houses – shtiblekh

– in town. Secular organisations such as He-Halutz or the Bund were formally active until the late 1920s.

**” Demons in the ruins of the printing house ¶** *It happened in 1926. The municipal authorities issued a new directive aimed at improving the town’s appearance. Today, we would call it urban renewal or town revitalisation. The old printing house owned by the Zecer and Renner families had become an utter ruin over the years. People believed that the place was haunted and that demons revelled there at night. And even though, thanks to education, superstitious beliefs in evil spirits had radically faded away, the authorities decided to tear down the ruins of the printing house, probably just to be on the safe side to prevent an evil spell. Or perhaps there were elections ahead? No one knows. In any case, the owner of the place did not rush to comply with the demolition order. After she ignored the official notification for the third time, the authorities decided to hire a building contractor to demolish the building, and to charge the owner for the work. Thanks to the local “female intelligence service” that had launched an active whispering campaign, it became known just how large this sum would be. And I would kindly ask you not to laugh, because the information was very detailed and true-to-fact. Some miraculous chance – not at all accidental, I believe – brought the chosen contractor to the door of a Jewish house next to the ruins that happened to be a tavern. The contractor apparently assumed that a hearty swig of ‘siwucha’ [home-made brandy – eds.] would help him see what he had to do more clearly. His vision along these lines, no doubt, was becoming sharper with every glass he drank. As he was diving deeper and deeper into the depths of the decanter, he started to boast to the tavern keeper about the money he would receive as soon as he finished his job. The sum of 500 zł was at stake! This news travelled at head-spinning speed and reached a neighbour of the printing house owner. Smart enough to recognize that the situation had become really serious, she hired a man named Ephraim,*





An arcaded house in Józefów, 1935. Photo by J. Świeży; reproduction from: J. Górak, *Podcieniowa zabudowa miasteczek Lubelszczyzny* (The Arcaded Buildings of the Lublin Region Towns) by J. Górak, Zamość 1996

who promised to pull the building down for 200 zł, clearly a much smaller sum. So, on the night before the workers hired by the town were to come, Ephraim set to work. It was very dark in the ruined building, but he did not want to light a lantern for fear of drawing attention. By breaking a hole through the roof tiles, he made a “window” in the roof and carried on by the light of the full moon. ¶ But all the romance of working by moonlight suddenly evaporated when a loud shriek cut through the nocturnal silence. This was another resident of Józefów, Kremer, who happened to be passing by the ruined building in a cart. Seeing tiles flying out from nowhere and falling on his head, he started to scream at the top of his voice: “Heeeelp! Heeeelp! Demons, demons!” Then, dumbfounded, Kremer witnessed what seemed to be a genuine miracle: instead of evil spirits emerging from ruins that were notorious as a devil’s nest, he saw his fellow townsman, Ephraim. It was not easy to calm the hysterical cart driver and persuade him that it really was Ephraim, a kosher Jew from Józefów – and not the demons – who was hurling the roof tiles. ¶ This is how the story about evil spirits in the old printing house and the legend about demons ended. It should be added that other workers arrived before sunrise. They were Jews who had agreed to give Ephraim a hand. They joined forces and managed to tear the building down, and when the contractors hired by the municipality came in the morning to do the work, everything had been done and dusted. Needless to say, the Jews did it better and faster than the Gentiles. So, the municipality authorities couldn’t do any more damage. They could not even count on evil spirits. ¶ Ed. by Yaron Becker based on Ephraim Wermstein’s text in *Sefer zikaron Jozefow* (Memorial Book to the Community of Józefów), Tel Aviv 1974

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the town was occupied for some days by the Red Army. When it retreated, several hundred Jews managed to flee eastward. In March 1941, the Nazis set up a ghetto in Józefów for the Jews from the town and neighbouring villages. Around 600 displaced people from western Poland were

confined there as well. Famine and disease became rampant in the ghetto. In May 1942, more than 100 Jews were shot by a group of the Gestapo officers. The largest mass execution took place on July 13, 1942, when more than 1,500 people – mostly women, children, and the elderly – were shot on Winiarczykowa Góra (Winiarczykowa Hill); hundreds



A quarry in Józefów, 2009. Photo by Piotr Sztajdel; digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

of young men were deported to labour camps in Lublin. The execution site is now fenced and marked with a memorial stone. Those few Jews in Józefów who survived the massacre were joined by residents of neighbouring towns and villages. But mass executions continued – 70 Jews were shot on October 21, 1942 – and in early November 1942, ghetto survivors were deported to the Bełżec death camp. Only a few lived through the war. ¶ On 1 June 1943, the Nazis attempted to “pacify” Józefów. They bombed the town, but were stopped by Home Army troops. On July 24, 1944, the town was liberated from German

occupation by the Red Army. The story of the Holocaust in Józefów was detailed by Christopher R. Browning in his 1992 much-acclaimed book *Ordinary People. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the “Final Solution” in Poland*.

**Today** ¶ Józefów is a small town that offers ample opportunities for the development of tourism and active recreation. Attractively located at the meeting of the Roztocze National Park and two landscape parks – the Krasnobród Park and the Solska Forest, Józefów is called the cycling capital of Roztocze.

#### Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Pogodna St. ¶ **Former synagogue** (1870), 10 Krótka St.; now a library (tel. +48 84 6878289, [mbpjozefow@interia.pl](mailto:mbpjozefow@interia.pl)). ¶ **Town hall** (1775), Rynek St. ¶ **Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (1886), 11 Wojska Polskiego St. ¶ **Quarries**, south of the town centre.

#### Surrounding area

**Górecko Kościelne** (6 km): five tourist routes; Church of St. Stanislaus, built of larch wood (1768); the “Upon the Water” chapel (17<sup>th</sup> c.); 500-year-old oak trees. ¶ **Hamernia** (7 km): “Czartowe Pole” nature reserve; ruins of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. paper mill that belonged to the Zamoyski family estate. ¶ **Bondyrz** (13 km): two wooden water mills (19<sup>th</sup> c.); village bathhouse (1928); the wooden Church of Divine Providence (1948–1949); the Museum of the World Association of Home Army Soldiers; a manor complex and a wooden water mill (1936) in Adamów. ¶ **Osuchy** (13 km): the largest partisan cemetery in Europe, set up after the battle fought by the

Home Army (AK) and Peasants' Battalions (BCh) against the Germans on 25–26 June 1944. ¶ **Krasnoblód** (16 km): the Dominican monastery complex (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.); Krasnoblód Calvary; the Museum of Sacred Art, formerly a granary (1795); an aviary; the “Upon the Water” wooden chapel; Chapel of St. Roch (1943); Jewish cemeteries (mid-16<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Leszczyński Palace (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.), currently the Janusz Korczak Rehabilitation Sanatorium for Children. ¶ **Susiec** (22 km): the Church of St. John of Nepomuk; a wooden watermill (1925); four hiking tourist routes. ¶ **Tomaszów Lubelski** (33 km): the Baroque Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, built of larch wood (1627); “Czajnia” wooden teahouse (1895); Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas (1890); the Regional Museum; the Memorial Exhibition Room devoted to the Communist Terror; a Jewish cemetery with an ohel of 3 tsaddikim from Tomaszów, a memorial to the fallen, and a “wailing wall”. ¶ **Narol** (35 km): a palace with an Italian-style garden (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1790); a Greek Catholic church (1899) and a graveyard with stone crosses from Brusno; a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Bełżec** (40 km): Museum and Memorial (the former Nazi death camp for Jews, operating in 1941–1943, in which approx. 600,000 people were killed), opening hours: 9am–6pm (summer), 9am–4pm (winter), <http://www.belzec.eu/en>; the Greek Catholic Church of St. Basil (1756); the Church of Mary Queen of Poland. ¶ **Łaszczów** (55 km): ruins of a synagogue (1770); a prayer house (late 18<sup>th</sup> c., now a cinema); remains of a Jewish cemetery (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.); a monument to the murdered Jews (1990); a former Jewish house at the market square; the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.) with a bell tower, a presbytery, a crypt, and an organist's house (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); remains of the Szeptycki palace complex (1736–1758) connected to a manor house in Nadolce with a system of ponds. ¶ **Hrebenne** (35 km): the Greek Catholic Church of St. Nicholas (1600); a wooden bell tower (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor complex (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a school. ¶ **The Krasnoblód Landscape Park**: nature reserves: “Saint Roch” and “Skrzypny Ostrów”; peat bog in “Nowiny” reserve.

# Biłgoraj

Ukr. Білгород, Yid. בילגאָרײַ

*We stopped at an inn to sip hot tea and to munch on the hot onion and poppyseed rolls for which the Lublin province was famous.*

Israel Joshua Singer, *Of a World That Is No More*, 1946

**To people of all estates** ♪ King Stefan Báthory granted permission to Adam Gorajski, a Calvinist, to found a private town, which subsequently came to be known as Biłgoraj, and placed the town under Magdeburg law. The 1587 charter allowed people of all estates, i.e. Poles, Ruthenians, and Jews, to settle there. Gorajski founded a Calvinist church and, most likely, also an Orthodox parish

(turned Uniate by the 17<sup>th</sup> century). In 1616, Jews were granted a separate privilege by Adam Gorajski's son Zygmunt, reinforced in 1634. This privilege allowed Jews to settle in town and to establish their own synagogue, community buildings, and a cemetery, as well as to deal in real estate. Until 1694, Jews who lived in Biłgoraj reported administratively to the kahal of Szczebrzeszyn.

Biłgoraj residents worked in the profitable trade of sieve-making from at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, selling their products in the country and abroad. Jews also took up sieve-making and door-to-door selling. The opportunity to make good money significantly contributed to the town growth and the prosperity. Today, Sieve-maker's Farmstead, a branch of the Biłgoraj Land Museum, is one of the local tourist attractions. It is housed in a preserved wooden sieve-maker's house dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, at 32 Nadstawna St.

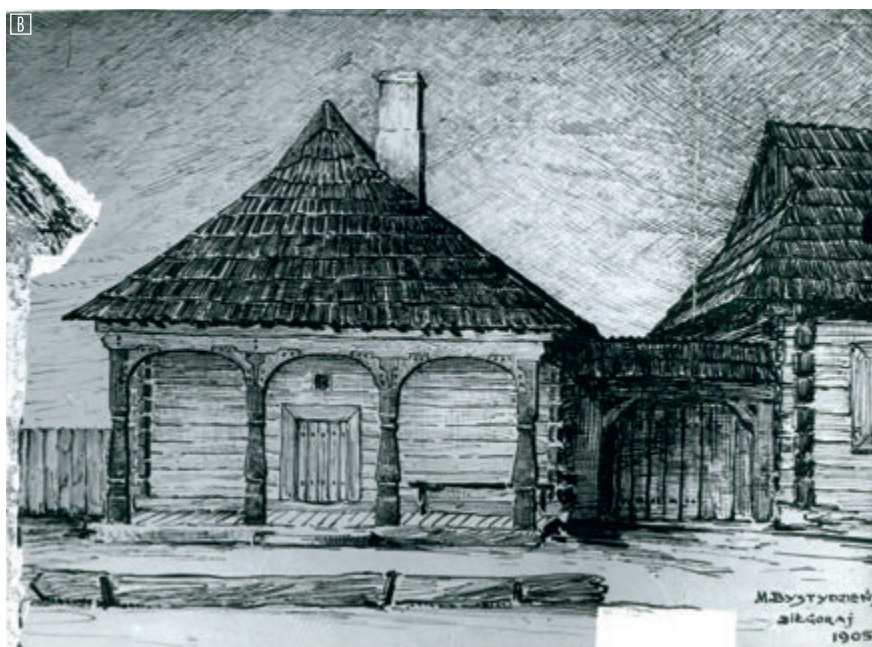
During the 1648–1649 Khmelnytsky's Cossack Revolution, the Cossacks ravaged Biłgoraj and neighbouring towns such as Tarnogród and Frampol, slaughtering local population, including many Jews. In addition, Biłgoraj was not spared the onslaught of the Swedish forces and Polish and Lithuanian armies that swept through the region around the same time. Nevertheless, Biłgoraj slowly revived and in the second

half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century an independent Jewish community was established locally. According to the tax records, the Biłgoraj kahal (encompassing the town of Biłgoraj and neighbouring villages) included 661 tax-paying Jews in 1765, and 508 in 1790 (351 in the town and 157 in the villages). Judging by the number of "heads" paying taxes, this was a medium-sized community compared to others in the Lublin region.





**A** A wooden sieve-maker's house dating back to 1810, 2012. Photo by Piotr Lasota, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**B** An arched house in Bilgoraj. Photograph of a 1905 drawing by Maksymilian Bystyński, 1917. Photo by S. Rakowski, the National Library collection ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

In 1819, Bilgoraj was home to 1,671 Christians (Catholics and Uniates) and 616 Jews, who constituted 27 percent of the population. ¶ The kahal was headed by its elders: Rubin Mendlowicz in 1721; Leib Herszkowicz, Rubin Zolkowicz, and David Gerszonowicz in 1728; Berek

Lewkowicz, Zelik Michalewicz, and Icek Joszkowicz in 1732. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the following people served as shkolniks (synagogue beadles): Hersh Boruch and Anshel (Ankiel) Amt (1810–1825); Majlech Tober and Mojżesz Tauberman (both noted in

1825); and Bendyk Wenberg (Beniamin Wamberger) and Icek Rytner – the signatures of the latter two are found under the 1818 communal budget. Avigdor Meizels served as the rabbi of Biłgoraj from around 1773 until 1819, succeeded by his son-in-law from Szczepieszyn – Nathan Perlmutter (1819–1864), also known as Nathan Note, son of Tzvi Hirsch from Berlin. Even before Nathan died, he was succeeded by Nachum Palast (1860–1877), who later was removed as a result of fraud accusations and replaced by Shmuel Engel. Engel, in turn, was deported to Austrian Galicia in 1884, as he was not a citizen of the Kingdom of Poland. Shmuel Engel was succeeded by Jakob Mordechai Zylberman (from 1884 to 1913), who had earlier served as a rabbi of Poryck (now Pavlivka, Ukraine) and Maciejów (now Lukiv, Ukraine). ¶ In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Biłgoraj's Jewish communal institutions included a large brick synagogue (built in 1875 on the

site of an earlier wooden synagogue), three brick religious schools dating from around the early 1900s, a bathhouse with a mikveh, three cemeteries, a Talmud Torah school, and a poorhouse. In addition, there were at least four private houses of prayer. The synagogue, the religious schools, the bathhouse, the rabbi's house, a slaughterhouse built in 1927, and the poorhouse formed a communal complex that stood southwest of the market square, between Lubelska and Nadstawna Streets. All these buildings were destroyed at the beginning of World War II and in the 1960s; residential houses now stand in their place.

**The Singer family** ¶ In 1889, Rabbi Jacob Mordechai Zylberman's daughter, Basheve, married a young Hasidic rabbi from Tomaszów Lubelski – Pinkhos Singer. Three of their children took up writing and made Biłgoraj famous all over the world.

“There was our grandmother always on the go, always busy making fruit-jam and fruit juice, and gooseberry tarts and preserves. There was that old-fashioned oven in the kitchen, in which a tremendous fire was kept going from morning to night; it was never allowed to die down for a single instant. ¶ Of course, it was a house full of plenty, but it was more than that – it was a house full of untouchables. All the cherries, the blueberries, the black currants; all the plums, raspberries, and blackberries were put away for the winter time and were not to be touched. One might have thought that summertime was a season of slavery, and that all the delicious things that grow ripe in the sunshine were only intended to be put away and enjoyed in the winter. It was so silly! ¶ In other respects, her grandmother was not really a bad sort. Anyway, she fed her family on the fat of the land-fish and meat and soup aplenty. ¶ Esther Kreitman, *The Dance of the Demons*, New York 1954, translated from Yiddish by Maurice Carr

Esther Kreitman (1891–1954), the oldest of the Singers' children and Rabbi Zylberman's granddaughter, was born in Biłgoraj. Her childhood was

not particularly happy. At the age of thirteen, she was married off to a jeweler, and together they moved to Antwerp and then to London. Although she was

the first one in the family to take up writing, it was not until 1936 that her novel written in Yiddish, *The Dance of Demons*, was published. Her other published works were *Briliantn* (London,

1944) and *Jiches* (London, 1949). She was a noted Yiddish writer in England and also translated classical works of English literature into Yiddish.

“When we came to Rejowiec, the coachmen from Biłgoraj quickly swarmed over us. A flock of them with whips in hand clutched at our bundles as they tried to draw us to their wagons. – “Well, Missus, do we go?” – “We’ll just water the horses and off we go!” [...] The sandy Polish roads were scraggly and plain, but to me they seemed rife with beauty. Cows grazed along the roadsides, foals pranced over the meadows. Peasants laboured in fields and, as we passed, we exchanged the timeworn greetings: “God bless you!” – “Thanks be to God!” ¶ Israel Joshua Singer, *Of a World That Is No More* (Yid.: *Fun a welt wos iz nishto mer*), New York 1946, translated from Yiddish by Joseph Singer

**Israel Joshua Singer** (1893–1944), the second Singers’ child, was also born in Biłgoraj. A prose writer, playwright, and journalist who wrote in Yiddish, he received a traditional religious education but also mastered secular subjects on his own. After the Singer family moved to Warsaw in 1908, he befriended Alter Kacyzne, a photographer and Yiddish writer, and the sculptor Abraham Ostrzega, among others. He made his literary début in 1915 with stories published in *Dos Yiddishe Vort* (Yid.: Jewish Word). During the Russian revolution, he stayed in Kiev and Moscow. After returning to Warsaw in 1921, he began working for the newspaper *Folks-Tzaytung*. In 1924 and 1926, he travelled across Poland, writing for national and international newspapers. In 1926, he toured the Soviet Union; the result of his journey was a volume entitled *Nay-Rusland* (Yid.: The New Russia). Between

1922 and 1925, he published several plays and collections of short stories, and was a correspondent for the daily *Forverts* (New York) and *Haynt* (Warsaw), then the most idely read and popular Yiddish newspapers in the world. For some time, he was a co-publisher of *Di Yiddishe Welt* (Yid.: Jewish World) and then a member of the editorial board of *Literarishe Bleter* (Yid.: Literary Pages). His position in the Jewish literary world was established with the novel *Yoshe Kalb* (1932), a dramatic portrayal of human passions against the backdrop of a Galician Hasidic court. The attacks he faced after publishing another novel, the controversial *Brothers Ashkenazi*, made him emigrate to the United States in 1933. He settled in New York, where he published with the New York daily *Forverts*, which issued his childhood memoirs, *Fun a welt wos iz nishto mer* (Yid.: Of a World that Is No More).

“I heard my mother sing the praises to Biłgoraj, but the town was even prettier than she had described. It was surrounded by dense pine forests that looked like a blue ribbon. Fields and gardens stretched between houses here and there. In front of them grew thick trees with tangled branches and leaves such as I had not seen in Warsaw, even in



Concert at Singer's bench, organised during the "Following I. B. Singer's Traces" Festival, 2011. Photo by Joanna Zętar, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



*the Saxon Garden, which I sometimes took a peek at through the fence. The town smelled of fresh milk, of bread straight out of the oven, and of an unusual calm. It was hard to believe that there was some war going on and an epidemic sweeping the country. My grandpa's house was not far from the synagogue, the house of learning, the mikveh, and the cemetery. It was an old wooden loghouse, whitewashed, and with a bench standing before its low-placed windows. ♪ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Mayn tatns beis din shtub* (In My Father's Court), 1979*

**Isaac Bashevis Singer** (1904–1991) was the most famous of the Singers' children – a writer, essayist, and literary critic who wrote in Yiddish. The author of many novels, collections of short stories, four volumes of memoirs, and more than a dozen books for children, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1978, the only writer in Yiddish to have been honoured with that award. Singer was born in Leoncin, where his father was a rabbi. From 1917 to 1923, he lived with his mother and siblings in Biłgoraj, which served as a model for many sites portrayed in his works. It was his older brother, Israel Joshua, also a writer, who inspired him with an

interest in literature and creative writing. Between 1923 and 1933, I.B. Singer worked in the Warsaw editorial office of *Literarische Bleter*, where in 1925 he made his début with a story in Yiddish *Oyf der elter* (In Old Age). Under the pen name of Yitzhok Tzvi, he published a series of interviews with well-known writers and artists and also translated works of world literature into Yiddish. In 1935, he published his first novel, *Der Sotn in Goraj* (Satan in Goraj). Then, he emigrated to the USA and from 1949, he regularly contributed to the New York daily *Forverts*. I.B. Singer wrote in the Neo-Romantic mode, but his works were often coloured with grotesque



fantasy, sometimes of expressionist but more often with mythological subtexts. He drew heavily on Jewish folklore and mysticism, including Kabbalah, Midrash, and agadeta (Talmudic narratives and parables). His works, set in Poland and in America, included novels such as *Familie Muskat* (The Family Moskat,

1950) and *Der kuncn-macher fun Lublin* (The Magician of Lublin, 1960), as well as collections of short stories and autobiographical works. Some of these have been adapted for the stage (e.g. The Magician of Lublin in Poland) and film (e.g. The Magician of Lublin, 1977; Yentl, 1984; Enemies, 1990).

“ I met a watchmaker, Todros (Lang), who had a chat with me about God, nature, the primal cause (the driving mechanism behind the creation), and also about some other secular subjects. He loaned me an old German textbook on physics. In the courtyard of my grandpa’s house, there was a place sheltered on three sides. An apple tree grew there. I was sitting under this tree on a bench or stump and studying an old physics textbook. I felt like one who sees without being seen. I saw a synagogue, a bet midrash, and acres of land with fields stretching all the way to the pine forest. The owls were hovering over the synagogue roof, performing their dances, and above it all, the blue sky stretched like the parokhet [a cover for the holy ark – eds.] during the Days of Awe. The golden sun cast bright and warm shadows. It seemed to me that I was an ancient philosopher who had locked himself away from the world and become immersed in all the wisdom and divinity. ¶ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Profiles*, in: *Khurban Białgoraj* (Yid.: Destruction of Białgoraj), Tel Aviv 1956

The youngest of the Singer children, Moshe (1906–1946), became a Hasid and chose the career of a town rabbi. When his father died in 1929, he succeeded him as a rabbi in Stary Dzików in Subcarpathia (40 km south of Białgoraj). After the outbreak of World War II, he fled with his mother to the USSR, where both of them died in Dzhambul (Kazakhstan).

**New century ¶** As elsewhere, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new political parties emerged such as the Bund and the Zionist party, but also social organisations and cultural institutions (theatre,

library) also appeared in Białgoraj, as well as the scouting units. New cheders were set up to accommodate the growing religious families, and soon their number grew to a dozen. These were attended by boys, while Jewish girls went to a Polish state school. The 1905 revolution in Russia and later World War I, both of which resulted in large scale population movements, had a major impact on the development of political parties and Jewish organisations in Białgoraj and also played a role in developing the Jewish printing and publishing industry there.

Printing houses owned by the Mordko Werner family late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and by the Kaminer family in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century played a crucial role in spreading political and cultural news and mobilizing Białgoraj Jews around political slogans. The biggest Jewish printing press was owned by Nathan Kronenberg, who moved it from Piotrków to Białgoraj in 1906. It specialised in publishing popular religious

works. In 1923, the Kronenberg's printing press issued Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Salamandra* magazine, which he edited and which included his two debut works.

**”** *In 1923, on Thursday, which was a market day, Rabbi Israel Meir ha-Kohen, may his memory of a righteous be for a blessing, arrived in Biłgoraj to print his book “Mishnah Berura.” (The rabbi, the founder of the famous yeshiva in Raduń, was better known as Hafetz Haim, and the book, used and studied since then by every observant Ashkenazi Jew, was his major commentary on Yosef Karo’s “Shulkhan Arukh”). On Friday morning, he drove to the printing house and asked Nathan Kronenberg, of blessed memory, to find him a minyan for the Sabbath so that he could pray, as was his custom – but on the condition that nobody would know that he was in town. Being a modest man, he did not want any honours. But the news of his arrival in Biłgoraj spread like wildfire. On Friday evening and Saturday morning, people from the whole town came for a prayer, and later for the Sabbath meal. ¶ Abraham Kronenberg, Żydowska drukarnia (Jewish Printing House), in: *Khurbn Biłgoraj* (Destruction of Biłgoraj. Memorial Book), Tel Aviv 1956.*

During World War I, many local people left the town: its population dropped from more than 11,000 (including 5,595 Jews) in 1913, to about 5,600 (3,700 Jews) in 1921. After the war, Biłgoraj was hit by a cholera epidemic. It was then when Rabbi Jacob Mordechai Zylberman moved to Lublin, where he died in 1916. He was replaced briefly by Rabbi Haim Hokhman, who came to Biłgoraj from Krzeszów, which had been destroyed by the war.

**How did the Jewish community function?** ¶ After Poland regained independence, the synagogue-controlled districts were reclassified as Jewish religious communities. In Biłgoraj, it was not until 1921 that a fully organised Jewish community was revived. Its membership consisted of 4,835 Jews, including about 3,700 living in the town itself. Josef Zylberman, the oldest son of the former Rabbi Jacob Mordechai, was chosen as the new rabbi, with Haim Hokhman as his assistant rabbi. Josef died in 1926 and was succeeded briefly by Hokhman, and

in 1927, by Mordechai Rokeach from the Belz Hasidic dynasty. Some details on how the community functioned in those years can be found in the surviving community financial records. These show that the communal funds (from slaughterhouse revenues and contributions of the wealthiest members) were used to support the chief rabbi, as well as to pay the salaries of other community officials – the assistant rabbi Haim Hokhman, secretary Aron Bergman, kosher butcher Lejzor Morensztajn, assistant butcher Wolf Wajnberg, slaughterhouse supervisor Hemia Szuldiner (who also supervised the baking of the matzah), janitor Abram Szuldiner, caretaker Zyndel Altbaum, and teachers: Kloc and Rycer. In the late 1920s, the community maintained three schools (“Talmud Torah”, “Yavneh” and “Zichron Yakov”), a poorhouse, and the Gmilut Hesed free loan society. Communal money was also used to renovate the bathhouse, the synagogue, and the prayer houses, as well as to build a poultry slaughterhouse, to purchase land to expand the cemetery,



Poster announcing a football game for the Class "B" championship of the Lublin district between KSZS Biłgoraj and WKS Zamość, 1939, National Library collection ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

and to build a house for the rabbi (as Rabbi Jacob Zylberman's widow lived in the old one). ¶ In Biłgoraj, the Jews lived mainly in houses located on the market square or on nearby streets – Lubelska St., Nadstawna St., and Morowa St. They owned most of the stores, shops, and artisan workshops, including those that made sieves. In the 1920s, new political

establishment and social and cultural organisations emerged alongside those that had existed in Biłgoraj before. These were the Agudas Israel and the Mizrachi as well as different factions of the Zionist party and the leftist parties. A branch of the Association of Jewish Craftsmen was opened, and a Jewish bank and free loan society were set up.

“The end of World War I brought the revival of timber trade. Wealthy Jews, merchants trading in timber, purchased large tracts of forest from both the state and Count Zamoyski. They used the wood to manufacture building-blocks and railway sleepers. Peasants from the surrounding villages were employed as carpenters or carters transporting the logs. After the wood had been processed, it was sold to large corporations or to the state, which bought railway sleepers. Large quantities of wood were also exported abroad. ¶ Sz.I. Szper, A. Kronenberg, *Timber trade*, in: *Khurbn Biłgoraj* (Destruction of Biłgoraj), Tel Aviv 1956

**Tensions** ¶ Although Jews constituted a majority of the town population, they represented a minority in the municipal administration and in local governmental institutions. Before World War I, not a single non-Christian was allowed to become part of in the municipal administration. This policy partly resulted from the Russian

occupation and from the segregationist policy of the post-1919 Polish government that by and large barred the Jews from governmental and administrative positions. Jews were elected to the town council for the first time in the interwar period, but they never formed a majority there. Sometimes administrative procedures were used to discriminate

against Jewish candidates; for example, in 1924, Jews were not allowed to run for the town council on the pretext of having insufficient command of Polish. In addition, specifically Jewish organisations were sometimes formed in direct response to the anti-Semitism found in

some Polish institutions. This was the case with the Jewish library and reading room, founded in 1936 to counter the anti-Jewish attitudes that were prevalent in the public library run by the Polish Educational Society.

“*The first Jewish cemetery in Biłgoraj was located just at the western wall of the synagogue. You could still find two matzevot there, illegible as they were; the cemetery was overgrown with grass and goats grazed in it; off to the side there was one tree, as if it had been left there to guard the place. Children used to say that once, when one of its branches was broken off, a voice could be heard: “Do not tear off my beard” – a sign that the place once held the grave of some holy man.* ¶ A. Kronenberg, *Plac synagogałny (Synagogue Square)*, in: *Khurbn Biłgoraj (Destruction of Biłgoraj)*, Tel Aviv 1956.

**Jewish cemeteries** ¶ The oldest Jewish cemetery was probably established in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Located west of the synagogue, on what is now Lubelska St., it was ravaged during World War II and then built over in the 1960s. ¶ Around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, another Jewish cemetery was established south of the market square, at the intersection of Morowa St. (now 3 Maja St.) and Polna St. During World War II, it too was devastated and its fence demolished in 1941; the old oak trees were cut down, and the gravestones removed: they may have been used to pave roads. The cemetery site was built over with barracks, and in the 1980s, the UN Secondary School buildings and a sports field were constructed there. ¶ The remains of one Jewish cemetery still survive. The most recent Jewish cemetery in Biłgoraj, known as “on the Sands”, located on today’s Konopnickiej St. It was established in the early 1800s, quite far to the south from the town centre. Before World War II, it measured 2.5 hectares (around six acres), and

during the war it was the site of executions. It was also devastated: its fence was pulled down, and gravestones were removed. After the war, the bodies of Jewish people exhumed from elsewhere in the town and the surrounding areas were buried there. Over time, the cemetery area was divided into parcels. The Construction Materials Production Factory was built on the largest parcel in the 1970s. ¶ Then, in the 1980s, a small portion of the cemetery was marked off and fenced, and a number of preserved gravestones were placed there. This was an initiative carried out by the family of Art Lumerman, a Biłgoraj Jew living abroad. In addition, a monument in the form of a wall with embedded fragments of gravestones was erected to commemorate the Holocaust victims.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ Before the outbreak of World War II, Biłgoraj’s population grew to more than 8,000, including about 5,000 Jews (60 percent). In the first weeks of September 1939, the town was bombed twice and





A fragment of a matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Biłgoraj, 2010. Photo by Marta Krawczyk

set on fire in several places. After an abrupt Red Army occupation, the Nazi Germans arrived in early October. They immediately began taking repressive measures against civilians, particularly against Jews: beatings, humiliations, forced payments, restrictions, and forced labour. Late in 1939, a Judenrat, headed by Szymon Bin, was founded. A few months later, the occupying forces shot its members dead for failing to carry out their commands. Biłgoraj received transports of Jews from Austria (mainly from Vienna) who were helped by a Relief Committee organised in the town. In June 1940, a ghetto was set up and all Jews were confined there. As time went on, violence against the Jews escalated – many were sent away to Tarnogród and Goraj and executed. The spring of 1942 marked the beginning of deportations to concentration camps. The first transport of Jews from Biłgoraj was sent

to Majdanek, then, starting from August, all further transports were directed to the extermination camp in Bełżec, where most of Biłgoraj Jews died. The ghetto was liquidated in January 1943. Only a few Jews from Biłgoraj survived the war; one of them was Rabbi Mordechai Rokeakh, who managed to reach Israel, helped by Hungarian Jews. He died there in 1949.

**Present day** ¶ Today, Biłgoraj is a county seat with a population of more than 27,000 and with a thriving timber industry. Every year it hosts cultural events that commemorate the Nobel Prize laureate I.B. Singer. These include the I.B. Singer Recitation Contest and the “Following I.B. Singer’s Traces” Festival. The sieve-making tradition is evoked in open-air performances, “The Sorrowful” and “The Joyful,” which reenact the farewell and welcome given to the sieve-producers in the past.

Biłgoraj was the birthplace of **Shmuel Atzmon-Wircer**, an Israeli actor and theatre director who has been named an honorary citizen of Biłgoraj and Tel Aviv. Born in 1929, he spent his childhood in Biłgoraj and is always happy to return to his hometown. To open the Singer Festival in 2014, he directed a performance entitled *The Last Love* based on a story by I.B. Singer, in which he also starred, along with Stefan Szmidt and Alicja



"The Town on the Trail of Borderland Cultures," a replica of the wooden synagogue of Volpa, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Jachiewicz-Szmidt of the "Borderlands 2000" foundation in Biłgoraj. The documentary *A Common Meal Is Good, as It Brings Together the Estranged* (dir. by Piotr Szalasza, 2007) examines Shmuel Atzmon-Wircer's life story.

“When I think about my childhood in Biłgoraj, I think about learning letters, literature, and languages. As an eight-and-a-half-year-old boy, I already could speak three languages. I could write in two, as Yiddish was not written, it was only spoken. But I could write in Hebrew, and in Polish, of course.” Shmuel Atzmon-Wircer – recording from the Oral History collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, Biłgoraj 2006

**A Town on the Trail of Borderland Cultures** ¶ In 2015, a life-size replica of the elaborate, destroyed wooden synagogue of Volpa (now in Belarus) was constructed in Biłgoraj. Intended as a museum and education centre, it will constitute part of a culture park called “A Town on the Trail of Borderland Cultures” that revives the architecture and culture of old shtetls

and other villages. The wooden houses around the synagogue include a replica of the family home of I.B. Singer's grandparents, which serves as a museum and exhibition venue. This unique cultural, commercial, and residential development was built at the initiative of Tadeusz Kuźmiński, a Biłgoraj businessman and president of the Biłgoraj XXI Foundation, whose head office is at 9 I.B. Singera St.

Surrounding  
area

**Frampol** (17 km): barn buildings at Polna, Orzechowa, Kościelna, and Ogrodowa Sts. (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery at the intersection of Cmentarna and Ogrodowa Sts. (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of Our Lady of the Scapular and St. John of Nepomuk (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Tarnogród** (21 km): Church of St. Roch, built of larch wood (1600); a synagogue (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery on Nadstawna St. (20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Transfiguration (1750–1777); the Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity (1870–1875); Kościuszko Mound (1917). ¶ **Goraj** (23 km): a Jewish cemetery at Cmentarna St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Bartholomew

the Apostle (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 14<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Janów Lubelski** (3 km): former Jewish two-storey houses (Rynek St.); a Jewish cemetery (Wojska Polskiego St.); the Shrine of Our Gracious Lady of the Rosary; a former Dominican monastery complex (1694–1769); several houses that belonged to the Zamoyski Family estate in Zamojska St; the former prison and court buildings (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Regional Museum; the Museum of Photography and the Narrow-Gauge Railway Open-Air Museum; the “Zoom Nature” recreational and educational complex at the Janów Lake. ¶ **Krzyszów** (41 km): the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1895); a wooden bell tower (1898); a Jewish cemetery in the southwestern part of the town (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to 1,500 Jews murdered in the Chojnik forest north of the town; the “Blacksmith’s Farmstead” open-air museum in Krzyszów Górny. ¶ **Ulanów** (41 km): the Polish Rafting Museum; a Jewish cemetery at T. Bula St. (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the former mikveh building (currently a fire-station); the Municipal History Museum; the wooden Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Barbara (1643); Holy Trinity Church (wooden, 1660); wooden houses (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Modliborzyce** (45 km): the Church of St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr (1644–1664); a synagogue (1760); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Janów Forests** ¶ **The Solska Forest**

**Replica of the wooden synagogue of Volpa** (2015), 9 I.B. Singera St., tel. +48 691 032 140, fundacja@bilgoraj21.pl ¶ **I.B.Singer’s bench** (2009), T. Kościuszki St. ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), M. Konopnickiej St. ¶ **Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 3 Maja St. ¶ **Church of St. George** (1790–1793), formerly a Greek Catholic and Orthodox church, 3 Ogrodowa St. ¶ **Sieve-maker’s Homestead** (mid-19<sup>th</sup>c.), a branch of the Regional Museum, 32 Nadstawna St. ¶ **Bilgoraj Land Museum**, 87 T. Kościuszki St., tel. +48 84 686 27 33, muzeum.bilgoraj@op.pl.



Worth seeing

# Wielkie Oczy

Ukr. ВеликіОчи, Yid. וויעלקאָטש

*Every Friday, the shammas of the synagogue announced a wake-up call at five o'clock, in complete darkness, to wake the Jews up for morning prayer, shouting: "Get up, come and pray to the Creator."*

Tzvi Orenstein, *To Remember, Not to Forget*, Tel Aviv 2005

The settlement of Wielkie Oczy, located near two large ponds from which its name derives, was founded in the 1520s. It soon became the property of Peter Mohyla, the future Orthodox Metropolitan of Kyiv and the founder of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and of his brother Moses, a candidate for the throne of Moldavia. The next owner of the town, Andrzej Modrzejowski, obtained the Magdeburg rights for Wielkie Oczy in 1671, and probably around that time then that the Jews started to settle there. ¶ Jews lived in most of the houses listed in the 1752 inventory. Prominent among them was Gdal Szymonowicz, who resided in the town hall building and was the leaseholder of two mills, a winery, and an inn located in the town hall. Other residents of Wielkie Oczy included such Jews as baker Moszko Szawłowicz, tailor Szymon Gierszunowicz, shopkeeper Mendel Berkowicz, salt-trader Judka Erszkowicz, and stallholder Majer Rzeźnik.

**Rabbi Mordekchai ben Shmuel of Kutno** ¶ Mordekhai, son of Shmuel, of Kutno (born circa 1715 – died after 1772) was the most prominent rabbi

of Wielkie Oczy and the first to be known by name. As a young man, he distinguished himself by his sharp mind, piety, and deep love for studying the rabbinic sources. He arrived in Wielkie Oczy around 1735, invited by the local kahal to take the position of the town rabbi. Known as a dedicated follower of the Judaic legal stringencies, he refined many religious regulations and introduced new ones into everyday life of the local Jewish community. His works include *Dover shalom* (Herald of Peace) and commentaries on the Book of Psalms and the Books of Prophets. These writings have not survived, and Rabbi Mordekhai's renown rests on his theological treatise *Sha'ar ha-melech* (The Royal Gate), a collection of 13 theological and moral essays connected with the dates and holidays of the Jewish calendar. The first edition of this treatise was published in Żółkiew (Zhovkva) in 1762, and the latest – in Canada in 1997.

**Synagogue** ¶ A house of prayer must have already existed early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as recorded in documents from 1735 and 1763 that note that even the oldest inhabitants no longer





[A] Postcard showing a fragment of the town square on a market day in 1911, published by Jakub Just, collection of Krzysztof Dawid Majus ([www.wielkieoczy.itgo.com](http://www.wielkieoczy.itgo.com))



[B] The market square in Wielkie Oczy, 1918–1939, property of A. Schimdt, collection of Krzysztof Dawid Majus ([www.wielkieoczy.itgo.com](http://www.wielkieoczy.itgo.com))

remembered when it had been built. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two stone prayer houses in Wielkie Oczy: an old bet midrash and a synagogue built in 1910, both of which burnt down during World War I. The prayer houses in Wielkie Oczy were seriously damaged during a fire and then rebuilt in 1927. It was designed by architect Jan Sas Zubrzycki, famous for his churches and public buildings and thanks to money received from an American immigrant, Eliyahu Gottfried. The bet midrash

was pulled down during World War II, while the surviving synagogue building served after the war as a warehouse for the communal cooperative. Abandoned in the 1990s, it was listed on the 2009 register of historical monuments. From 2011 to 2013, the Wielkie Oczy Communal Office renovated the building, and now the former synagogue houses the Community Public Library and the Memorial Exhibition Room.



[A] The synagogue in Wielkie Oczy, currently the Community Public Library, 2015. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)



[B] The 1917 design of a synagogue in Wielkie Oczy. Drawing by Jan Sas Zubrzycki, collection of Krzysztof Dawid Majus (www.wielkieoczy.itgo.com)

“Just behind the market square, on the southern side, there was a synagogue and an old prayer house, which was called bet midrash. It was an old stone one-storey building, with the bimah in the centre and the aron ha-kodesh on its eastern wall. All around, there were wooden tables and benches. On the shelves, there were holy books for the study of the Talmud and for prayer. On the tables stood candlesticks used to illuminate the interior. Most of the space was taken up by a large brick heating stove. Behind it, a man called Lippe had his bed. His job was to light the stove in winter and keep the synagogue clean. Prayers were held in this prayer house every day, also on all holidays and Sabbaths. It was possible to come in to read and study the Talmud at any time of the day. Women would go to the women’s section by climbing up the wooden stairs, and they took part in the Sabbath and holiday prayers sitting in the balconies that overlooked the main hall. Across the road there was a Great synagogue. It was a large white one-storey building, the pride of the local Jewish community. Prayers were held there only on Sabbath. In winter, it was cold inside because the building was not heated. Weddings took place on the steps of the main entrance, where a huppah was put up. Also, funeral processions stopped there on their way to the cemetery to say a prayer. There were windows of coloured glass in the synagogue; a festive cold prevailed there. The bimah made of wrought iron had a large seven-branched candelabrum. On this platform, facing eastwards, stood the hazan, or whoever led the prayer. Next to him, there was the rabbi’s place. I remember a curtain, a parokhet of purple velvet embroidered with golden Hebrew letters that covered the aron ha-kodesh – the holy ark where the Torah scrolls were kept. ¶ A story told by Ryszard Majus (1924–1995), a Jew from Wielkie Oczy (ed. by Krzysztof Dawid Majus), translated from Polish text available at: <http://wielkieoczy.itgo.com/Memories/RM.htm> (edited for clarity – eds.).

**Isaac’s transformation** ¶ In 1806, the young Hasid Isaac Erter (1792–1851) married Haya Sarah, a daughter of a respected family from Wielkie Oczy, and went to live with his parents-in-law.

Soon, he befriended Joseph Tarler, who also came to live in Wielkie Oczy. This well-educated, erudite man, who could speak several languages, introduced Isaac to medieval Jewish rationalist



[A] The trademark of B. Henner's photographic studio placed on the back of a photo, 1897, the National Library collection ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

[B] A portrait of Michał Szczepański. Photo taken by Baruch Henner, a photographer born in Wielkie Oczy, 1907, the National Library collection ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

philosophy and the literature of the Jewish Enlightenment. As a result, young Isaac left the town to see the world. He became a doctor and a writer, as well as one of the leading representatives of the Haskalah movement in Galicia. He penned Hebrew satires. The most famous one, *Gilgul ha-nefesh* (Transmigration of the Soul), describes the incarnations of a soul from a Hasid to a frog, to a cantor-drunkard, to a fish, to a tax collector, to an owl, to a Kabbalist, to a mole, to a corruptible gravedigger, to a dog, to a jealous rabbi, to a fox, to a Hasidic tsaddik, to a donkey, to a doctor, to a turkey, and, finally, to, a well-connected and foolish rich man telling the writer of his previous incarnations. Erter's collected works were published posthumously under the title of *Ha-tsorefet le-vet Yisrael* (The Watchman of the House of Israel, Vienna 1858) and

reissued many times. *My eyes did not light up in this darkness*, Erter later wrote about his Hasidic upbringing, but in fact it is in the small traditional town of Wielkie Oczy that he underwent intellectual and spiritual transformation.

**Photographer ¶ Baruch Henner** was born in Wielkie Oczy in 1842. In 1864, he opened a photographic studio in the market square in Przemyśl. As a young boy, Baruch went to a religious school, but this did not prevent him from also attending a secular school and from taking up photography and graphic arts; indeed, he became an outstanding professional and artist. He studied with the famous French photographer Louis Lumière, among others, and also became well-known in other countries: He held the prestigious title of the Court Photographer at the Imperial Court





A small grocery shop in Wielkie Oczy, 1916, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv

in Vienna, among others. He received awards at exhibitions in Vienna (1873), London (1874), and Lwów (1877). Baruch Henner died in Przemyśl on February 2, 1926.

### Industrialist and philanthropist

¶ In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the trade increased in Wielkie Oczy, with most stores run by Jews. The town also had two tanneries, two brickyards, a steam mill, a slaughterhouse, four distilleries, and almost fifty craftsmen. Yet the proverbial Galician poverty of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century forced many to emigrate. One of them was **Eliyahu Gottfried**, born in Wielkie Oczy in 1859 into the poor family of Baruch and Szajndel Gottfried. In 1890, he emigrated to the U.S. in search of work and a better life and settled in New York, along with his wife Rachel. He set up a small bakery,

which became one of the largest U.S. baking companies, the Gottfried Baking Company. Eventually, he also became a vice-president of the American Palestine Line Inc., a ship company providing passenger service between New York and Haifa. Eliyahu Gottfried was actively involved in the Zionist movement, spending considerable sums of money on this activity and frequently travelling to Palestine. Moreover, he was a well-known philanthropist, who financed, for example, the rebuilding of the Wielkie Oczy synagogue, destroyed during the war in 1915. Gottfried visited Wielkie Oczy on several occasions and helped poor Jewish families there. He died of heart disease in 1932 and was buried at New York's Mount Carmel cemetery. He was survived by seven children.



In 1903, Jewish immigrants from Wielkie Oczy founded the *Erste Wielkie Oczer Kranken Untershtitzn Ferayn* (Yid. The First Wielkie Oczy Society for the Sick and Needy) in New York. The Wielkie Oczy Foundation continues to operate today. This non-governmental organisation was founded by Krzysztof Dawid Majus (son of Ryszard Majus from Wielkie Oczy and initiator of many activities connected with the town cultural heritage; he is the author of the Wielkie Oczy monograph and of the unique memorial website [wielkieoczy.itgo.com](http://wielkieoczy.itgo.com)).

“**Everyday life** ¶ The house where I was born on February 4, 1924, stood in the market square. It was a one-storey building made of red brick and covered with tiles. This house was built by my grandfather. All the houses in the marketplace were one-storey, made of brick or wood. In almost every one of them there was some store, or a workshop, a bakery, or a shoemaker’s. And all of them belonged to Jews. The house of Mrs. Linowa, which was next to ours, was the only exception. In that house there lived a Polish family, who manufactured and sold sausages and meat products. The only two-storied building in the square housed the offices of the local council. Grass grew on the square and a dirt road went across it. In the middle of the square there was a well with a wheel. From there, water was carried in pails to the houses. Acacia trees grew around the square. ¶ Streets without names radiated from the square. The street that led to the neighbouring town was called “The Street to Krakowiec,” and so on. One of the streets ran to the Jewish cemetery and another one to the Catholic cemetery. In these streets, there were small houses with roofs of tar paper, tiles, or thatch, where farmers lived. These were Poles and Ruthenians, who owned the surrounding fields. Farm buildings were located close to their houses. Jewish people who worked as tailors, tinkers, or cattle traders, also lived in some of these houses. The town population consisted of Catholic Poles, Greek Catholic Ruthenians, and Jews. The Poles spoke Polish, the Ruthenians spoke Ukrainian, and the Jews spoke Yiddish. Most of them, of course, also knew Polish and Ukrainian. ¶ There was no electricity in Wielkie Oczy. We lit oil lamps at night. There were no lights in the streets. The only place with electricity was the mill. There was no water supply system either. Water was stored in buckets. Toilets were outside the houses and you had to go there to relieve yourself. This was a small problem in summer, but a much bigger one in winter. There were no paved roads or sidewalks. When it rained, people walked in the mud. Also, horse-drawn carts rolled through the mud, as no road was paved. Just sand. Only in a few places, the sides of the roads were covered with planks for pedestrians; we called these “trottoirs.” We used wood to heat stoves. We did not know coal. The only means of transport was the horse-drawn cart. The nearest railway station, situated in the county town of Jaworów, was about 20 km away. ¶ A story told by Ryszard Majus (1924–1995), a Jew from Wielkie Oczy (ed. by Krzysztof Dawid Majus), translated from Polish text available at: <http://wielkieoczy.itgo.com/Memories/RM.htm>

According to the 1921 census, the population of Wielkie Oczy was only 80 percent of what it had been at the

beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; this was the result of the devastation brought about by World War I. The census



Judaica exhibition in the Wielkie Oczy synagogue, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

listed 274 houses and 1,668 residents, including 806 Poles (48 percent), 547 Jews (33 percent), and 314 Ukrainians (19 percent). The town recovered slowly and lost its position as a regional commercial centre in favour of nearby Krakowiec. The Jewish residents of Wielkie Oczy joined Krakowiec-based organisations, such as a credit cooperative of the Central Union of Credit Cooperatives. In 1935, Wielkie Oczy lost its status as a town. In the late 1930s, anti-Semitic sentiments and ethnic tensions came to characterise political and social life all over Poland. One of these anti-Semitic incidents is described in Mieczysław Dobrzański's book, *Gehenna of Poles in the Rzeszów Land 1938–1948* (*Gehenna Polaków na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1938–1948*, Wrocław 2002): *On a high*

*fence that surrounded the property of a Jewish baker in Wielkie Oczy, one night in 1938, someone wrote a slogan in large metre-high black letters, reading "Jews go to Palestine." We saw it in the morning as we were going to school. A group of Jews were standing in front of it, and they were deeply shocked.*

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The cemetery was established about 300 metres away from the synagogue, on the street that went southward from the town square towards Krakowiec. It dates back to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today, around 100 gravestones are preserved at the cemetery, but its size suggests that perhaps as many as 3,000 people may have been buried there.

In September 1914, after the Russian forces had seized Wielkie Oczy, the only Russian soldier killed during the operation was buried at the Jewish cemetery. He was a religious Jew, and a tsarist army officer asked Rabbi Naftali Hertz Teomim to bury him at the local cemetery in accordance with the Judaic religious rites.

During World War II, the Jews who went into hiding seeking to escape the April 1942 deportation were executed at the cemetery and then buried in mass graves. The Nazi Germans devastated the cemetery, and after the war local residents took away the matzevot to use them for different purposes. In 1978, an obelisk was erected on the edge of the cemetery near Krakowska St. at the site of the mass grave of 41 Jews from Wielkie Oczy who were shot here during World War II. In 2000–2001, works were started to clear the cemetery from wild vegetation, a fence was put up around it, all the matzevot found throughout Wielkie Oczy were gathered, and a monument commemorating the local Jewish community was erected.

**The last rabbi** ¶ Jonah Teomim was born in Wielkie Oczy in 1885, as one of the seven sons of the town's long-time rabbi Naftali Hertz Teomim. After his father's death in 1916, he took over his position and served as the town rabbi in the interwar period. He was a Hasid and a follower of the tsaddik of Belz. He held the honorary title of the Gabbay of Eretz Yisrael, i.e. the one responsible for raising funds for the Jews in the land of Israel (British Mandate Palestine). In 1943, he was murdered by the Germans, along with the town's other Jews.

Marek Wizenblit from the town of Bychawa in the Lublin region stayed in Wielkie Oczy during the war. At first, he worked on a local farm, and then he remained in hiding in the area. After the war, he adopted the name "Urban," which he received from a man at whose place he had found shelter. He became a professor at the Agricultural University of Wrocław and described his experiences in the collection of memories titled *Poland, Poland*, published by the Jewish Historical Institute in 1992.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ German troops entered Wielkie Oczy on September 12, 1939. After two weeks, they gave up most of the land east of the San River to the Soviet Union. The Red Army entered the town on September 28, 1939, and in November 1939 the area was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, its inhabitants becoming USSR citizens. The administration and economy were organised in accordance with the Soviet model, which meant the dominant role of the communist party, the presence of the NKVD, and deportations of the politically suspicious inhabitants. ¶ The German-Soviet war began in the morning of June 22, 1941, with an attack by the German forces along the entire German-Soviet border. The Germans entered Wielkie Oczy the next day, destroying and looting the place, compelling Jews to forced labour, and killing them in individual and mass executions. In August 1941, a Judenrat was established. In June 1942, the Jews of Wielkie Oczy were transported to ghettos in Yavoriv (274) and Krakowiec (168). In December 1942, those from the Krakowiec ghetto were relocated to Yavoriv, where they were all murdered by the Nazis on 16 April 1943.



A matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Wielkie Oczy, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

#### Surrounding area

**Present day** ¶ Today, Wielkie Oczy is a village with a population of about 800, located a few kilometres from the Krakowiec border crossing to Ukraine. There are some agritourism farms in the

area, and the Green Velo bicycle trail runs through the village. The synagogue has been recently restored and serves as the town's library with a memorial room.

**Lubaczów** (16 km): urban layout; wooden and brick houses (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a town hall, court building, a mill, a granary, and a former pharmacy (19<sup>th</sup> c.); remnants of buildings on a castle hill (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Stanislaus (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Nicholas Greek Catholic Church (1883); a cemetery (Kościuszki St.); mass graves of about 2,000 Jews executed by the Germans in 1943, located at the so-called parish field between Dachnów and Mokrzyca.

¶ **Oleszyce** (21 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.) at 3 Maja St., with about 300 matzevot; a mass grave of 115 Jews shot by Germans, with a memorial plaque; a town hall with a yard (1727); the former Uniate Church of St. Onuphrius (1809), the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (16<sup>th</sup> c., reconstructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the remains of the Sieniawski palace complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Chotyniec** (25 km): the Greek Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God (wooden, 1615). ¶ **Cieszanów** (27 km): Church of St. Adalbert (1800); a synagogue (1889), now housing a cultural centre; St. George Greek Catholic Church (1910); a Jewish cemetery with the ohel of tsaddik Simcha Ezekiel ber Halberstam. ¶ **Stary Dzików** (38 km): St. Dmitri Greek Catholic Church (1904), where some of the scenes for Andrzej Wajda's *Katyń* were shot; Holy Trinity Church (1781); ruins of a masonry synagogue (late 19<sup>th</sup>-c.). ¶ **Radruż** (40 km): St. Paraskeva Orthodox Church (late 16<sup>th</sup> c.); included in the UNESCO Heritage List; two cemeteries with stone crosses from Brusno and with the Andruszewski family crypt; St. Nicholas Orthodox Church (wooden,



1931), now a Catholic church. ¶ **Medyka** (47 km): a border crossing to Ukraine; a masonry synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c., no longer used), the Pawlikowski Family palace and park complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a wooden church (1607–1608). ¶ **Przemyśl** (56 km): the eclectic-Moorish-style New Synagogue (1905), currently a library; the synagogue in the Zasanie district (1890–1892), private property; a Jewish old people's home in Rakoczego St.; several memorials to Holocaust victims; the “new” Jewish cemetery at Słowackiego St. with about 700 matzevot; the Casimir Castle (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), the Lubomirski Palace (1885–1887), Greek Catholic Bishops' Palace (1898–1900), housing the Museum of Przemyśl Land; the Museum of Bells and Pipes; church and monastery complexes of the Franciscans, Carmelites, Reformati, and Bernardine sisters; the Byzantine-Ukrainian Cathedral of St. John the Baptist (1626–1632); Byzantine-Ukrainian and Orthodox churches, a Jesuit college and forts of the Przemyśl Fortress (1853–1856). ¶ **Southern Roztocze Landscape Park**: part of the eastern Roztocze featuring an irregular belt of limestone and sand hills that form large hummocks and plateaus, riven with dry ravines and the valleys of small rivers. Its noteworthy feature is the juniper forest, which is protected in the Sołokija reserve.



Former synagogue (1910), now library, 14 Rynek St., tel. +48 793 020 808, gbp.woczy@interia.pl ¶ Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Krakowiecka St. ¶ Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted, church and monastery complex (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Krzywa St. ¶ St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Orthodox Church (1925), Rynek St. ¶ Fortified manor house (17<sup>th</sup> c.), now housing the Community Office, 2 Leśna St.

Worth seeing

# Łańcut

Ukr. Ланьцут, Yid. לאנצוט

*It smells of Paradise here...*

Naftali Tzvi Horowitz

**Stopover** ¶ One day in May, in 1827, tsaddik Naftali Tzvi Horowitz was traveling with his Hasidim from the town of Ropczyce to the city of Lublin. They were going through the town of Łańcut when, just as they were passing near the Jewish cemetery, Naftali Tzvi had his carriage stop. He looked around, absolutely delighted, and said, *It smells of Paradise here...* He died soon afterwards, and the Hasidim built him an ohel in the Łańcut cemetery. When visiting Łańcut, one can learn many other similar stories.

## **On the route from Lesser Poland to Ruthenia** ¶

The town of Łańcut sits on the old route leading from Lesser Poland to Ruthenia, in the gentle rolling area between the Carpathian Foothills and the Sandomierz Valley. The town's original name, Landshut, was connected with the influx of German colonists, who settled in that area (There is a town in Germany called Landshut). Łańcut was granted its town rights either by Casimir the Great around the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century or, a little later, by Otto Pilecki of Pilcza. In 1385, the owner of the town was Pilecki's daughter, Elżbieta Granowska, who later married King Władysław

Jagiello. ¶ The centre of the town is the trapezium-shaped market square, with several streets radiating from it. To the north from the market place a parish church was built, not far from where the Pileckis' castle once stood. Damage to the town sustained in the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to the private wars of local nobility, made its then owners, the Stadnicki family, move their residence east of the old town centre. The next owner, Crown Marshal Stanisław Lubomirski, extended the castle considerably, so as to make Łańcut his main residence.

**The Jews of Łańcut** ¶ The first mention of Jewish inhabitants in Łańcut can be found in documents from around the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. However, as early as 1583, the new town owners, the Pilecki family, forbade Jews to settle there. This was an exceptional situation, as such bans were mostly imposed in royal cities. In 1600, there were five Jews among the town's 180 taxpayers – a little more than 3 percent. The conditions for Jews to settle in Łańcut did not become more favourable until the Lubomirski family took ownership of the town in the



[A] Inside the Łańcut synagogue, 1797, drawing by Zygmunt Vogel, collection of the Cabinet of Prints in of the University of Warsaw Library

[B] Synagogue in Łańcut, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[C] The interior of the synagogue in Łańcut, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The new owners were aware of the beneficial impact the presence of the Jews had on the town development. Documents dating back to that period mention Jews as buyers of plots of land and houses in the town. The Lubomirskis received help from the Jews in financial matters such as loans, payment collection, the lease of marketplace fees and bridge tolls, the lease of propination rights (the right to distill and sell alcoholic beverages), breweries, taverns, and mills. ¶ The Swedish and Transylvanian (Rakoczy's troops) invasions of Poland in the

mid-17<sup>th</sup> century destroyed Łańcut and put a stop to settlement for many years, but, in the fourth quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the local Jewish community began to revive. In 1677, Stanisław Herakliusz Lubomirski issued a document in which, among other things, he ordered all the Jews to become well-equipped in case it was necessary to defend the town and recommended the collection of municipal taxes also from Jewish tenants. In 1684, as many as 33 Jewish families were noted in Łańcut. The life of this Jewish community revolved around the already existing wooden synagogue, mentioned

for the first time in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The synagogue burnt down and was rebuilt many times. Łańcut also had a mikveh and a cemetery located beyond the fortifications, northeast of the town. The municipal record books from 1685 contained information about the following kahal elders: Bonas (Boaz) Ickowicz, Michel Sapsowicz, and Szloma Lazarowicz Załoski. Froim Boruchowicz was the town rabbi at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or perhaps at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ The town revival and its important status in the Jewish world stemmed from a session of the Council of Four Lands that took place

here in 1707. However, the conflicts over financial matters between the town owners and the community led to a decree in 1710 by Franciszek Lubomirski which forbade lending money on interest (usury) and which resulted in Jewish expulsion in 1719. Three years later, however, Teodor Lubomirski cancelled the ban by issuing a new privilege granting Jews the right to build houses and to trade freely within the town limits. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the bishop of Przemyśl forbade the Jews of Łańcut to organise weddings on Sundays and ordered them to close their stores on main Christian holidays.

” **The synagogue** ¶ *And so, it is the night of Kol Nidre. Yom Kippur. Huge candles have been put into chests filled with sand. Their red flames keep flickering up and down. An air of solemnity reigns over the place. The synagogue is bursting with a crowd of praying people. The Jews, dressed in their white coats and yellowish taleysim are standing and swaying back and forth monotonously. All of them are deep in prayer, making their pleas to God. The prayers of the cantor, and the laments of many elderly men are reverberating inside the synagogue. It is the Judgement Day. And then, again, there comes the festival of Rejoicing in the Torah. How different the atmosphere is now: from all corners and recesses of the synagogue comes the singing of the children, adults, and elderly people. Here comes a procession with Torah scrolls: “Oh, our Eternal God, have mercy and redeem us.” Everyone is walking around with scrolls of the Torah in their hands; their hearts filled with joy. Children are following the Torah scrolls and waving flags. The faces of the adults are radiant with joy. The whole of the synagogue looks as if it itself would like to participate in this joyful celebration.* ¶ Michael Walcer (Hadar Ramataim), *The Great Synagogue in Łańcut*, in: *Lancut; kiyem un khurbn fun a yidisher kehile* (Lancut; the Life and Destruction of the Jewish Community), Tel Aviv 1963

Most likely the earliest Jewish quarter situated northeast of the town centre. Łańcut’s infrastructure was developed after Stanisław and Izabella Lubomirski took over the ownership of the town in 1745. It was then that the centre of the Jewish quarter moved to the area between the marketplace and the castle, its main building being the brick

synagogue financially supported by Stanisław Lubomirski in 1761, which was erected west of the nearby castle complex. ¶ In 1765, the dynamically developing Łańcut kahal had 829 taxpayers, which was fewer than in the neighbouring kahals of Rzeszów, Sieniawa, Przeworsk, and Leżajsk. The most significant rabbis were Zvi Hirsch



Meizlich [Meisel] (1758–1767), Moshe, the son of Yitzhak, and the grandson of

Yehuda Leib – the rabbi of Cracow, followed by his son, Tzvi Hirsch Lipschitz.

” *Be as bold as a leopard, as light as an eagle, as swift as a deer, and as strong as a lion in doing the will of your Father in Heaven.* ¶ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pirke Avot 5: 23.

This was one of the inscriptions on the walls of the synagogue in Łańcut, the famous line which gave rise to many animalistic images on the walls and ceilings of Polish synagogues. ¶ The synagogue building was renovated in 1896, and again in 1910. Most probably, it was then that it received its classicistic, modest form. The interior consists of a two-storey main prayer room, adjoined on the western side by a porch and the kahal room (also known as “the Lublin synagogue” because of the “Seer of Lublin” who used to pray there). The women’s gallery was on the first floor. There was also a wooden women’s gallery, no longer existing, at the northern side of the men’s hall. ¶ The decorations of the interior of the synagogue single out this building making it one of the most important in Poland. The walls of the men’s prayer room and the bimah are covered with colourful stuccowork and polychrome, created in several stages – from the 1760s, through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1909–1910 and 1934–1935. The stuccowork was probably completed already in the 1760s. It has elements of the Rococo style. On the canopy of the bimah there are stucco images of four symbolic crowns (that of the Torah, that of priesthood, that of royalty, and that of a good name, also following the line

from Pirke Avot ethical tractate), as well as polychromes depicting six biblical scenes: the temptation of Adam, Cain’s murder of Abel, Noah’s Ark, Abraham’s sacrifice, a synagogue menorah, and a table for the shewbread (the twelve loaves placed every Sabbath on a special golden table in front of the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem Temple). The wall decorations include the texts of prayers and inscriptions commemorating the sponsors, images of Jerusalem, musical instruments, the signs of the Zodiac, and animal and floral motifs. There is also a modest polychrome ornamentation in the kahal room. ¶ During World War II, the Potocki family prevented the destruction of the synagogue by the Nazis, although the synagogue building served as grain warehouse. After the war, a group of local heritage enthusiasts saved it from demolition. It was restored in the 1980s/90s. At present, the custodian of the synagogue is the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage. The building is an important point on the **Hasidic Trail** – a tourist route following the footsteps of the Jews in southeastern Poland. For information about the trail or visiting the synagogue, please telephone +48 22 4366000 or e-mail: [fodz@fodz.pl](mailto:fodz@fodz.pl)

” *The house of learning was always open. The door locks, which had never been used, were covered with rust. The house of study had become a sanctuary for*

merchants from the narrow streets of Łańcut, who found this place quite pleasant to stay in as it gave protection against the cold in winter and against the heat in summer. In the morning, prayers were said in minyans and individually. Jews would also come here to study a little, or to look through the Humash [Pentateuch – eds.]. And so, the voices of those who were praying mingled together with the voices of those who were studying the Torah, but they did not disturb one another because they were all preoccupied with their own business. There was also a third sort of Jew visiting the house of learning. They were those who would come here for a chat, or for a talk about politics, trade, or kahal matters. ¶ Pinchas Goldman, *The Great Bet Midrash*, in: *Lancut; kiyem un khurbn fun a yidisher kehile* (Lancut; the Life and Destruction of a Jewish Community), Tel Aviv 1963

**JOSEPHINE REFORMS** ¶ Legal acts concerning Jews, known under the German name Toleranzpatent, were issued in 1781 by Joseph II (1741–1790), the Emperor of Austria (1780–1790). The emperor issued his Edict of Tolerance for the Jews of Vienna and Lower Austria, and subsequently other edicts followed for other parts of the monarchy (for Galicia in 1785 and 1789). The reforms followed the ideology of enlightened absolutism. They sought to better integrate the Jews into the state by decreasing the segregation of the Jews, removing the Jews from activities considered harmful and non-productive, facilitating their access to secular education, and making them more useful to the state. To this end, in 1784–1785, the Jews were forbidden to lease land, inns, breweries, produce and sell alcohol and were instead encouraged to establish agricultural farms. A whole series of legal acts referring to particular spheres of life culminated in the patent of May 17, 1789, called Die josephinische Judenordnung. Under this act, the Jewish self-government that had existed until then was abolished. Religious communities were created instead on the basis of kahals (141 in Galicia and two in Bukovina), and a separate judiciary was established. New arrangements were introduced that promoted trade, craft, industry, the purchase of real estate, and higher education. In 1787, the Jews were ordered to adopt German family names, and compulsory schooling was introduced. A year later, Jews were included into the military conscription pool and had to serve in the army. ¶ Based on: J. Tomaszewski, A. Żbikowski, *Żydzi w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura. Leksykon* ¶ (Jews in Poland. The History and Culture. The Lexicon), Warsaw 2001, [www.sztetl.org.pl](http://www.sztetl.org.pl)

**Hasidim** ¶ First Hasidism settled in Łańcut in 1770. For two years, a famous tsaddik lived and taught in Łańcut – Elimelech, son of Eleazar Lipman, who later moved to Leżajsk and came to be known as **Elimelech of Leżajsk**. He was the author of a series of books, the most important was *Noam Elimelech*, sometimes considered to be the first Hasidic

book. ¶ At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, another famous tsaddik, Yaakov Yitzhak Horowitz (d. 1815), arrived in Łańcut, where he got married. He was a disciple and, later, a rival of Elimelech of Leżajsk. Shortly after his marriage Yaakov moved to the village of Czechówka near the town of Wieniawa (both today districts of Lublin), where he gained his honorary



nickname “the Seer of Lublin.” The small chamber in the Łańcut synagogue where “the Seer” met with local Jews, is called “the Lublin synagogue.” At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Łańcut was still under the strong influence of Hasidism, represented by Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro, kabbalistic commentator and the founder of the Hasidic dynasty in Dynów. His son, Eleazar, was the next rabbi of Łańcut (1816–1865), succeeded by Eleazar’s son Simkhah (until 1912).

**The Jewish community in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries** ¶ The Jews of Łańcut earned their living mostly by crafts and trade, including trade in grain, timber, potash, and cloth. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were seven Jews among Łańcut’s nine bakers, and there were as many Jewish tailors. One of the eight local butchers was Jewish, and one Jewish weaver lived in the

town, too. Eight Christians and six Jews had licences to sell alcohol in Łańcut. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all Łańcut taverns were run by Jews; their owners were Sander Glana, Elias Sona, Lazar Wolkenfeld, Gieca Worcel, and Berek Baumberg, the richest of them all. ¶ The development of the town Jewish community was halted in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Napoleonic Wars, epidemics (1827, 1831), and a large fire in 1820. The conditions for the town development, including that of its Jewish community, became more favourable after a railway reached Łańcut in 1859, as well as after Galicia gained autonomy in 1867 as the result of the political reforms adopted with the rise the dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire. A new Jewish cemetery was established in 1860. ¶ Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the influence of the Haskalah began to be felt in Łańcut, and the first political parties

Amateur orchestra “Hazamir” and its conductor Moshe Feilchuss. Founded in May 1914, in its heyday in the 1920s and 1930s it had 70 members. Łańcut, 1925, collection of Beit Hattfutot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv



Cottages in Ogródowa Street in Łańcut, 1917, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

and secular social organisations emerged too. In 1880, Łańcut had 3,483 inhabitants, including 1,587 Jews (46 percent). By the outbreak of World War I, its population grew to about 5,500, including 2,000 Jews (35 percent). The Jewish community had representatives on the town council. In 1910, a new Jewish bath was opened; nowadays, the bathhouse building stands at the corner of Tadeusza Kościuszki St. and Ottonaz Pilczy St. (it is the seat of St. Brother Albert's Aid Association). ¶ World War I affected Łańcut's townspeople, in particular the Jewish owners of most big and small shops, workshops, public houses, and inns, who suffered pillage at the hands of the passing troops. Many inhabitants left the town to avoid warfare.

**Musical traditions ¶** The Jewish community of Łańcut could boast eminent cantors, who were also invited to other towns. In 1914, a Jewish musical association called "Ha-zamir" (Heb.: Nightingale) was founded and an orchestra too. Originally composed of seven members, the orchestra, founded by Tzvi Ramer, gradually expanded to a band of more than thirty wind instruments performers. As Sefer Lancut recalls, Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro was initially against the orchestra because boys and girls played together in it. However, within time, the rabbi's reservations were overcome, and the "Ha-Zamir" orchestra would sometimes give concerts during Zionist celebrations in the synagogue in Łańcut as well as in other towns of Galicia.

In 1988, Haim Tekhelet made a documentary about the orchestra, *Hazamir Does Not Sing There Anymore: The Story of the Jewish Community of Lancut*. Every year, in May, Łańcut is the venue for a Music Festival – one of the most important





Bnot Trumpeldor gymnastic team, reproduction from *Lancut; chayeyha ve-churbana shel kehila yehudit*, ed. Michael Wolcer and Nathan Kodish, Tel Aviv 1963

in Poland presenting a broad spectrum of classical music. For many years now, master string classes for school children and students have been organised here.

## Knowledge, Power, and

**Worker** ¶ After the establishment of independent Poland following World War I, the number of Łańcut's inhabitants had fallen by nearly 1,000 people – in 1921, there were 4,518 inhabitants on record, including 1,925 Jews (31 percent). By the outbreak of World War II, the number of Jews had risen to about 2,750. Most of the approximately 170 stores, shops, stalls, public houses, and workshops were located at the marketplace and its environs. ¶ In the interwar years, the influence of Hasidism remained strong, especially that of the Rokeach Hasidic dynasty from Belz. However, it was also a time of social activism, including among the Jewish community. Branches of new political parties, social and cultural organisations, trade unions, sports clubs, and banks were established. In 1930, a Jewish Community Centre was erected and became the seat of institutions such as “Da’at” (Heb.: Knowledge) library. Jewish sports clubs also were founded.

Sefer Rymanów mentions two clubs: “Kraft” (Yid.: Power) and “Ha-poel” (Heb.: Worker). The former was Zionist, and its members were young Jewish people from relatively wealthy families, whereas the latter attracted poor Jews with socialist views and oriented its activity towards the poor strata of the community. In subsequent years, “Kraft” changed its name to “Trumpeldor” (in memory of Josef Trumpeldor, a hero of the Russo-Japanese war and a pioneer of the Jewish self-defence in Palestine). After the outbreak of World War II, the sports clubs ceased activity – with the exception of “Trumpeldor,” whose members also included Jewish policemen. The members of this club, wearing white and blue club colours, had football competitions until as late as the spring of 1940.

**Cemeteries** ¶ There are two Jewish cemeteries in Łańcut. The old one (in Stanisława Moniuszki St.) was founded in the second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, northeast of the town, outside the

town walls. It was gradually expanded over the years. During World War II, it was destroyed, and all matzevot were removed. Nowadays, the area of the cemetery is fenced and wooded, and there are two ohels in it: one of tsaddik Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropczyce (d. 1827), and the other of a local rabbi, Eleazar Shapiro (d. 1865). The new Jewish cemetery (in Romualda Traugutta St.) was founded in 1860, south of the town, near a Christian cemetery (existing since circa 1800). This cemetery was also destroyed during the war. Fragments of several dozen matzevot from the Łańcut cemetery are preserved and displayed in the synagogue porch. During the war, the cemetery was the scene of countless mass executions of Jewish people. After the war, the area of the cemetery was fenced, and a memorial to the Jewish victims of Nazi German terror was erected.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ The outbreak of World War II triggered the persecution of the local Jewish community. The synagogue was set on fire, but it was extinguished thanks to the local count Alfred Antoni Potocki's intervention. Soon after that,

the German occupation authorities ordered the relocation of the Jews to the Soviet occupation zone; some of the Jews took advantage of that opportunity. In time, German actions against the Jews escalated: Jewish shops and workshops were closed and forced labour was introduced. Jews from Kalisz, Łódź, Chorzów, Katowice, and surrounding villages were resettled to Łańcut, and the number of Jews in the town rose to about 6,000. A ghetto was established in January 1942, and it was liquidated in stages, from June to August 1942. The Jews were transported to Sieniawa, Pełkinia, and, eventually, to the death camp in Bełżec. Groups of Jews who did not leave or who remained in hiding were executed at the new Jewish cemetery. Few Jews in Łańcut survived the war.

**Present day** ¶ Today, Łańcut is a county town – and important tourist center – in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, with a population of about 15,000. Tourist Information Office is located in the Menege building at 3 Maja St., tel. +48 17 225 48 50; +48 606 455 724, pat@mdk-lancut.pl

Worth  
seeing

**Synagogue** (1761), 16 Jan III Sobieski Sq., +48 601 176 351, +48 22 436 60 00, fodz@fodz.pl ¶ **Mikveh/bath house** (1908–1910), now St. Brother Albert's Aid Association, at the corner of Tadeusza Kościuszki St. and Ottona z Pilczy St. ¶ **Old Jewish cemetery** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.), Stanisława Moniuszki St. ¶ **New Jewish cemetery** (1860), Romualda Traugutta St. ¶ **Urban layout** dating back to two historical foundations: that of a medieval chartered town (circa mid-14<sup>th</sup> c.) with a market square, a network of streets, and a church, as well as that of the park and palace complex (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 17<sup>th</sup> c.) ¶ **Park and palace complex of the Lubomirski and Potocki families**, now a museum (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Zamkowa St. 1 Zamkowa St., tel. +48 17 225 20 08, muzeum@zamek-lancut.pl ¶ **Church of St. Stanislaus**, Farna St. ¶ **Old Dominican monastery complex** (14<sup>th</sup> c., rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c.), now a hotel run by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK), 1 Dominikańska St. ¶ **Town houses** (17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Christian cemetery** (circa 1800), Ignacego Mościckiego St.

**Markowa** (11 km): “Farm housemuseum”; The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II; monument and tomb of the Ulma family murdered in 1944 for harbouring Jews. ¶ **Żołynia** (16 km): Church of St. John Cantius (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the old granary of the Potocki family in Brzózka St.; a wooden mill on the bank of the Plytnica River; a Jewish cemetery near Mickiewicza St.; an old mikveh, currently a kindergarten. ¶ **Rzeszów** (18 km): Old Town Synagogue in Bóznicza St. (16<sup>th</sup> c.); New Town synagogue in Sobieskiego St. (early 18<sup>th</sup> c.), now Artistic Exhibitions Gallery (BWA); former Jewish houses in Matejki St.; former Bet Am community centre, now Voivodeship Cultural Centre; former Jewish hospital, now an oncology centre; former rabbi’s house, now State Archive; a Jewish cemetery; a memorial to Holocaust victims; 3 reconstructed ohels: of the Lewin rabbinical family, tsaddik Tzvi Elimelech Szapiro, and Abraham Horowitz; a castle (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); city hall (16<sup>th</sup> c.); burgher houses in the market square (16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Lubomirski Summer Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1624–1629); the fara church (1430); the Church of the Holy Cross (1645); District Museum; Bedtime Stories Museum; the History Museum of the City of Rzeszów. ¶ **Kańczuga** (18 km): Church of St. Michael the Archangel (1605), the old Greek Catholic Church of the Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a narrow-gauge railway station; the old synagogue building, now a health clinic; a network of underground tunnels used already during Tatar raids; the Jewish cemetery in nearby village of Siedlecza (tombstones and mass grave of victims from 1942). ¶ **Sokołów Małopolski** (24 km): Church of St. John the Baptist (1908–1916); the new Jewish cemetery (1880); the old Jewish cemetery in Kochanowskiego St., with ohels of Rabbi Meilech Weichselbaum and tsaddik Aba Hippler; the old synagogue building (19<sup>th</sup> c.), currently the Cultural Centre and the Regional Museum; the town hall (1907). ¶ **Tyczyn** (25 km): the only decoratively polychromed sukkah in Poland (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) in the house at 23 Rynek; the old Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the new Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Wodzicki palace and park complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Catherine and the Holy Trinity (1631–1638); former presbytery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Błażowa** (29 km): Church of St. Martin (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a cemetery chapel (1904), a synagogue converted to a regional hospital; a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Pruchnik** (30 km): about 40 wooden arcaded houses and cottages in the market square (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Nicholas (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the parish museum; a wooden observation tower; a memorial to 67 Jews killed in 1942–1943, situated by the road to Kańczuga. ¶ **Leżajsk** (30 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); tsaddik Elimelech’s tomb; the reconstructed ohel of Dov Ber’s disciple; a centre providing services for Jewish pilgrims visiting Leżajsk; the Leżajsk Land Museum in the Starościński Mansion; a basilica and a Bernardine monastery with Baroque organs (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the town hall (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the fara church complex: the Church of the Holy Trinity and of All Saints, a presbytery, curate’s house, and walls (early 17<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Greek Catholic Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now the Church of Merciful Lord Jesus (1828–1832); Mier’s Palace (1819); a sawmill (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the National House of Ruthenians’ Association “Proświta”; the Leżajsk Land Museum. ¶ **Jarosław** (34 km): the Orsetti House Museum (circa 1500); Rydzikowska House (16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> c.); Queen Consort Marysieńka’s House (late 16<sup>th</sup> c.); the town hall (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Prof. Feliks Zalewski underground city route; a convent of Benedictine nuns: the Church of St. Nicholas and St. Stanislaus the Bishop (1614–1624); Corpus Christi Collegiate Church

(16<sup>th</sup> c.); Transfiguration of the Lord Orthodox Church; the building of the Gymnastic Society “Sokół” (Falcon), currently the Municipal Cultural Centre; relics of Krakowska Gate and defensive walls (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the great synagogue in Opolska St. (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the little synagogue in Ordynacka St. (20<sup>th</sup> c.); the synagogue at 17 Mały Rynek St. (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), now BiaMed Medical Centre; the building of the Jewish Handicraftsmen Association Yad Charuzim in Tarnowskiego Square; the Jewish cemetery in Kruhel Pawłowski St. (1699). ♪

**Dynów** (34 km): The Centre of the History of Polish Jews, founded by Rabbi Pinchas Pamp, with its own synagogue, mikveh, kosher cuisine menu, archive, museum, and guest rooms; the old Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> c.) with the ohel of Yehoshua, son of Arie Leib, and the ohel of Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro; the new cemetery (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the folk school building (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the mansion of the Trzecieński family (1750); two bunkers of the “Molotov Line”; narrow-gauge railway. ♪ **Sieniawa** (37 km): the park and palace complex of the Sieniawski family (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a hotel; the town hall (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Orthodox Church of the Ascension (1753); the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1719–1749) with the Czartoryski family crypt; a Jewish cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 17<sup>th</sup> c.). ♪ **Czudec** (38 km): the park and palace complex of the Uznański family (17<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Martin (1602); Holy Trinity Church

(17<sup>th</sup> c.); underground remains of the castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden arcaded buildings in the market square; the old synagogue (1795) in Słoneczna St., currently a library, old mikveh at 8 Św. Marcina St. ♪ **Kolbuszowa** (47 km): the synagogue at 19 Piekarska St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the future Museum of the Two Nations; a Jewish cemetery (1830); All Saints’ Church (1750–1755); the remains of a manor farm – a granary, labourers’ living quarters, and a distillery (1910); the seat of the Gymnastic Association (1907); Ethnographic Park.





# Dukla

Ukr. Дукля, Yid. דוקלע

*All supply of wines for inns and taverns shall take no routes other than those bound for Jaśliska, Dukla, and Rymanów.*

The 1589 tax proclamation

**On the Hungarian Route** ¶ Established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the town of Dukla gained importance in mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, when a customs house on the route to Hungary was set up here. In 1588, King Sigismund III Vasa granted the town the right of wine storage, and from 1595 it was in Dukla that the duty on all the goods carried across the border were to be collected. The merchandise brought from the lands on the Danube was mainly wine, but also beer, horses, dried fruit, cheeses, and iron. The goods carried in the opposite direction included cloth, yarn, hide, herrings, and honey. The Hungarian wine trade was the main occupation of the first Jews who settled in Dukla at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1676,

23 Jewish families already lived here.

Dukla's Jewish community was organizationally subordinated to the kahal of the nearby town of Nowy Żmigród. Information about an independent Jewish religious community dates to 1742.

¶ A reference to Haim, a rabbinic official from Dukla, can be found in the memoirs of the wine merchant and Jewish community leader Dov Ber of Bolechów (now Bolekhiv). In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Haim was arrested in the Hungarian city of Miskolc after he had bought a large amount of wine paying fake coins.

After a one-year investigation, it turned out that the coins had come from the treasury of the Bernardine monastery in Dukla, where they had been contributed as alms from the nobility.

In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dukla became the residence of the noble family of Mniszech. The Mniszech palace in Dukla, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was rebuilt in 1764–1765 in late Baroque style by Jerzy August Mniszech and his wife Maria. The aristocratic residence was decorated with a collection of works by famous painters, including Rubens and Bacciarelli. The palace was rebuilt after its destruction in World War II, and today it houses the Historical Museum, one of the town's main tourist attractions. The Historical Museum – Dukla Palace – is located at 5 Trakt Węgierski St., tel. +48 13 433 00 85.



Jews going out of the synagogue in Dukla, 1916–1917. Photo taken by a German soldier during World War I, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv

**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ In 1758, the old wooden synagogue burnt down in a fire. An impressive new one of brick and stone was built in its place. The rectangular main hall measured 12 by 16 metres; on the western and northern sides it was adjoined by extensions housing a porch, a library, and a prayer room for women. The synagogue was devastated by the Germans during World War II. What survives today are the walls of the prayer room with a stone portal and the alcove for the aron ha-kodesh. In some places, it is still possible to discern traces of inscriptions with texts of Hebrew prayers. ¶ Near the synagogue, the bet midrash building has also survived (8 Cergowska St.); it was built in 1884, after another fire in the town, on Rabbi Tzvi Leitner's initiative. That fire, one of many that devastated

Dukla, destroyed not only the old bet midrash but also 104 houses of Jewish burghers and six houses of Christian burghers. A prayer house functioned in this building until 1940, when it was burnt down, and after the war it was converted and served as a storehouse for artificial fertilisers. At present, it houses a store. Across the street, in the former mikveh (12 Cergowska St.), there is an emergency ambulance service, a fire brigade, and the voluntary mountain rescue service (GOPR) station. Another interesting memento of Dukla's Jewish community is the municipal nursery school building (11 Kościuszki St.), founded by the financier and philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch in 1895 as a four-grade Jewish primary school for boys. In Dukla's market square it is also worth visiting the former rabbi's house,

which is currently a tourist hostel run by PTTK (Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society, 25 Rynek St.). It is possible to have dinner there or to find affordable accommodation.

**Under Habsburg rule ¶** In 1772, as part of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, Dukla was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. Ten years later, the town became the administrative centre of the district (cyrkuł) that was established as a result of Josephine reforms. This stimulated local development, but as early as 1790, the district centre was moved to Jasło and Dukla lost its importance. Wine trade continued, however, and the size and significance of the town Jewish community kept growing. In 1795, 574 Jews lived in Dukla. A century later – in 1900 – some 2,539 Jews lived here, constituting about 80 percent of the town's entire population, while the whole kahal of Dukla had 3,046 members and possessed



three religious schools, among other institutions.

Dukla was the birthplace of **Józef Samuel Bloch** (1850–1921), a famous rabbi, a member of the Austro-Hungarian parliament, and a journalist who fought against anti-Semitism and false accusations of ritual murder. Dukla was also the home town of Naftali and Gitel Rubinstein, the parents of Helena Rubinstein – the founder of Helena Rubinstein Inc., a global leader in the cosmetic industry.

**Turning mud into gold ¶** In 1854, in the village of Bóbrka, located 11 km from Dukla, the Polish pharmacist Ignacy Łukasiewicz, who invented the kerosene lamp, together with his associates established the first oil well in the world. Further oil mines and refineries began to emerge. Jewish entrepreneurs from Dukla, such as Isaac Reich or M.H. Ehrenreich, also became active in the oil extraction and processing

business. Eventually, the deposits were depleted and the oil industry began to move elsewhere, but the first oil mine in Bóbrka continues to operate to this day. The Ignacy Łukasiewicz Museum of the Oil and Gas Industry functions at the mine. It also lies on a tourist route called the Oil Trail, which links sites associated with the emergence of oil industry in southeast Poland and southwest Ukraine (see Drohobych, Ukraine).

Former rabbi's house in Dukla, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Town hall in Dukla, 1918–1936; collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

### The Battles of the Dukla Pass

¶ The Dukla Pass was a relatively easy passage for merchants travelling across the Carpathians, but it was also a trail through which the troops fought their way during the great wars of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century. During World War I, the Austrian-Russian troops passed through Dukla several times. Soldiers of both armies killed during the fighting for the pass are buried in the military cemetery in Dukla. Further bloody fighting took place here in 1944, leaving the town with another cemetery.

**The guild** ¶ In 1920–1939, a Communal Craft Guild functioned in Dukla; it associated 58 handicraft workshops, including 15 shoemakers and 15 bootmakers, 8 butchers and 8 ham and sausage makers, 7 bakers, 6 tailors, 3 carpenters, 3 hairdressers, and 3 clockmakers, as well as blacksmiths and locksmiths, metalsmiths, coopers, a glazier, a varnisher, a turner, a painter, and a photographer. More than half of the artisans in the guild, 38 people, were Jews. The occupations of Jewish artisans and shopkeepers included shoemaking, baking, butchery, hairdressing, clock and watch repair, and sheet-metal work. The only photographer in Dukla, Natan Laner, was a Jew as well. His studio was located at 4 Rynek St.

**Pinkhas Hirschprung** (1912–1998) was born into the family of Rabbi Haim Hirschprung of Dukla. From his early years he exhibited outstanding abilities as a scholar and thinker; as a result, he was sent to study at the famous Yeshivah of the Sages of Lublin (Yeshivat Hakhmei Lublin). He was in Lublin when the Germans attacked Poland in September 1939. Together with a group of Yeshivah students he escaped to the USSR, where he was arrested. On his release, he left for Lithuania, then to Kobe, Japan, and then on to Shanghai. Finally, shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into the war, he travelled by ship to Canada. He remained in Canada until the end of his life and served as Chief Rabbi of Montreal.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ From the beginning of the German

occupation in September 1939, Dukla inhabitants, especially the Jews, faced



severe persecution. On Yom Kippur (September 22, 1939), German soldiers dragged praying Jews out of the synagogue and beat them. A week later, during Sukkoth, the Jews of Dukla were rounded up in the yard in front of the palace and forced to pay a ransom; then they were ordered to leave the town and move across the San, to the Soviet occupation zone. Some of the Jewish inhabitants of Dukla did move to the USSR at the time, but a majority did not want to leave their homes and stayed in the town. In 1940, the local synagogue was set on fire. In June 1942, there were about 1,600 Jews in Dukla, of whom 300 had been displaced from Polish territories incorporated into the Third Reich. In July 1942, the Germans ordered the Jews living in the nearby villages to move to Dukla; as a result, a further 600 people appeared in the town. In August 1942, Dukla Jews were again rounded up in

the yard in front of the palace; they were surrounded by barbed wire, and the liquidation of the ghetto began. A group of about 100 members of the Jewish intelligentsia were taken away in the direction of Tylawa and shot there, on the slope of the Błudna Hill. About 200 strong, healthy men were sent to the forced labour camp set up near Dukla synagogue. The remaining group of about 2,000 Jews, mainly women, children, and elderly people, were transported to the Belzec death camp. Labour camp inmates were shot during work, and those who survived were transported in December 1942 to the ghetto in Rzeszów, where most of them were killed. About 150 of Dukla Jews survived the war.

¶ In 1944, the Dukla Pass became the scene of fierce fighting again, this time between the armies of the USSR and Nazi Germany. The war damaged 85 percent of the town's buildings.

In the village of Zyndramowa, 16 km from Dukla, the *Lemko Culture Museum* has since 1994 included the house of the Oliners – a Jewish family from that village – in its exhibition. This was made possible when, after many years, Holocaust survivor **Samuel Oliner**, currently a professor at Berkeley, came in contact with Fedor Gocz, a Lemko, the founder of the museum. As a little boy, Samuel Oliner was a pupil at the cheder in Dukla, and in the spring of 1941 he witnessed the mass execution of Jews from the local ghetto. After the war, he left for the USA and made his name as a sociologist studying altruistic behaviours. What inspired Oliner's choice of this particular subject matter for research was his experiences of World War II, and above all the selfless help he received from Balbina Piecuch from the village of Bystra. She saved Oliner, taking him in and finding him a job as a stable-boy on a remote farm.

**Cemeteries** ¶ Dukla Jewish cemeteries are located in the southern part of town, on Trakt Węgierski St. on the way to Barwinek. In the new cemetery, established in about 1870 and situated closer to the road and surrounded by a wall, about 200

matzevot from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century have survived. Near the entrance, there is a memorial to the victims of the mass execution that took place at the cemetery in 1942. Slightly higher there is the old cemetery, probably founded in the 18<sup>th</sup>



The new Jewish cemetery in Dukla, 2014. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

century, with a few dozen matzevot surviving. The owner of both cemeteries

is the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.

“A postcard with Hebrew writing led me to the Jewish community, which constituted over 70 percent of Dukla pre-war population.” Jacek Koszczan, <http://straznicypamieci.com/?dukla>

**Memory** J Present-day Dukla is a charming small town inhabited by about 2,000 people, situated on a busy road to Slovakia. It is an excellent base from which to explore the Low Beskids. Tourist Information Office is located on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the bus station at 26a Trakt Węgierski St., tel. +48 13 43 35 616, [tit@dukla.pl](mailto:tit@dukla.pl) J The “Shtetl of Dukla” Society for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in the Dukla Region (+48 691 050 902,

[sztetldukla@o2.pl](mailto:sztetldukla@o2.pl)), founded by a retired Border Guard officer Jacek Koszczan, looks after the town Jewish cemeteries, and each summer since 2012 it has organised the “To Save the Memory” Days of Jewish Culture in Dukla. Among other activities, this non-governmental organisation has also initiated the production of two amateur feature films about Dukla’s Jews – *Why?* (Pol.: *Dlaczego?*, 2012) and *Conscience* (Pol.: *Sumienie*, 2013).

#### Surrounding area

**Trzciana** (1.5 km): the hermitage of St. John of Dukla (18<sup>th</sup> c.). J **Tylawa** (11 km): former Greek Catholic and subsequently Orthodox Lemko church of the western type (1784), currently the Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God; obelisk at the mass grave of people murdered by the Nazis in the forest at the foot of Błudna Hill behind the manor house. J **Bóbrka** (11 km): the Ignacy Łukasiewicz Museum of the Oil and Gas Industry;



Judaica from Jacek Koszczan's collection in Dukla, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))

two functioning boreholes, "Franek" and "Janina," a few caved-in oil wells and 8 wooden buildings (19<sup>th</sup> c.), a machine shop, a forge, boiler houses, pump treadmills, storehouses, administration and residential spaces. ¶ **Nowy Żmigród** (14 km): the Jewish cemetery on Jasielska St. (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a World War I cemetery. ¶ **Barwinek** (15 km): about 2 km north of the village there is an obelisk commemorating about 500 murdered Jews from Dukla, Jaśliska, and Rymanów. ¶ **Zyndranowa** (16 km): the Lemko Culture Museum. ¶ **Jaśliska** (18 km): Umgebinde wooden houses (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.) in the market square; Church of St. Catherine (1724–1756). ¶ **Żarnowiec** (18 km): the Maria Konopnicka Museum; a folk school with a restored former classroom (1886). ¶ **Trzcínica** (36 km): open-air archaeological museum "Karpacka Troja" (Carpathian Troy); the wooden Church of St. Dorothy (late 15<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor complex with an orangery (20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Jasło** (39 km): the neo-Gothic Sroczyński Palace (1858); the Collegiate Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Stanislaus the Bishop (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the municipal park with a summer house with a figure of Aeolus; the Jewish cemetery in Floriańska St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.) with a section for World War I soldiers, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, and unmarked mass graves of about 200 victims killed in 1942. ¶ **Niebylec** (49 km): a synagogue, currently a library (19<sup>th</sup> c.), with unique polychromes; a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Machowski manor complex (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Invention of the Holy Cross and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Brzostek** (56 km): a Jewish cemetery (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); the former synagogue (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), currently used by the School Complex; a memorial plaque to the town's Jewish inhabitants on the town hall building; burghers' houses at the market square (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Wooden Architecture Trail: Route IV** (Sanok – Dukla), comprising 13 buildings.

Ruins of the synagogue in Dukla, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Worth seeing



The ruins of the synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Cergowska St. Jewish cemeteries, Trakt Węgierski St. ♪ The Mniszech Palace (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.) with a park, currently the Historical Museum, 5 Trakt Węgierski St., tel. +48 13 433 00 85. ♪ Bernardine monastery and church (1761–1764), 5 Pocztowa St. ♪ Church of St. Mary Magdalene (1765), 18 Trakt Węgierski St. ♪ Town hall (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Rynek St. Town houses (18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> c.). ♪ Military cemetery and memorial to the fallen in the Battle of the Dukla Pass (1915).



# Rymanów

Ukr. Риманів, Yid. רימאנעוו

*Had we stayed in Europe, most probably  
I would have become a tailor.*

Isidor Isaac Rabi

## At the crossroads of trails ¶

Rymanów is located in the Land of Sanok on the border of two geographical regions: the Jasło–Sanok Hollows and the Low Beskid. The area where the town was set up in the early Middle Ages was part of the Principality of Galicia–Volhynia. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, after the Rurikid dynasty died out, the Land of Sanok became a bone of contention between the Kingdoms of Poland and Hungary. In 1376, Duke Władysław of Opole, the Governor of Galicia–Volhynia appointed by King Lajos (Louis) I of Hungary and Poland, established here a town chartered under Magdeburg law, giving it a name derived from his own first name, Ladisslauia (which can be translated into Polish as Władysławowo). Mikołaj Reymann, a German, was appointed a borough leader (wójt), and his surname apparently suggested the town's current name, Rymanów, used in documents since 1415. ¶ The town was established at the crossroads of a trade route connecting Biecz, Krosno, Sanok with the trade route to Hungary running through Jaślicka and Carpathian mountain passes that was used for transporting goods such as wines, hides, and

honey. This location created favourable conditions for the settlement, despite the numerous disasters it suffered: fires, epidemics, Tatar, Hungarian, Swedish, and Russian incursions, as well as raids by Carpathian highland robbers.

## The Jewish community ¶

The first Jewish settlers appeared in Rymanów in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century at the latest. Initially, they came under the authority of the Lesko kahal. Tax records dated 1567 mention seven Jewish families in Rymanów and, ten years later, this number had increased to eight. The community in Rymanów became independent towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – it is known that there was an independent kahal there from as early as 1589. At that time, the community had a wooden synagogue and a cemetery. The evidence for the existence of a synagogue in this period includes a mention in the criminal records of the town of Sanok which contains testimony given by Paweł of Sobolew, who – together with Stanisław, a miner from Bochnia – broke into the Jewish shul in Rymanów [...], *stole moveable objects, that is: a silver cup, a silver tablet, three towels.*

**Hasidic dynasties** ¶ Hasidim settled in Rymanów at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The town became an important centre thanks to tsadik **Menakhem Mendel Rymanover** (d. 1815), who settled here; he was the disciple of Elimelech of Lizensk (Leżajsk) and Shmelke of Nikolsburg (Mikulov), the author of numerous homiletic works and a principal character in many parables written by his disciple Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz (Ropczyce). His other disciple, Tzvi Hirsch Rymanover (d. 1847), who, as the tradition has it, performed miracles and was nicknamed Hirsch the Helpful, became the next tsaddik in 1827. He was succeeded by his son, Józef ha-Kohen Rymanover (d. 1913), the author of rabbinic response and legal commentaries. In 1913, another tsaddik moved here: Isaac Friedman, a descendant of Dov Ber of Mezeritch. During

tsaddik Tzvi Hirsch's tenure, the tsaddik's court with a private prayer room and a room for Talmudic studies was built close to the synagogue. The building was partially destroyed during World War II and finally dismantled after the war. ¶ Rabbi Menakhem Mendel together with two other famous tsaddikim – the Seer of Lublin and the Maggid from Kozienice, all were convinced that the Napoleonic wars were a sign of the coming of Messiah. Together they prayed for his military victories, and the legend has it that during the battles in which Napoleon was successful, he always saw the vision of a red-haired Jew praying for him and allegedly it was Menakhem Mendel. In his last battle of Waterloo, he did not see this vision, hence was defeated. After Napoleon's fall, the three rabbis died the same year (1815).

” At court, when the rabbis of Apt [Opatow – eds.] and Rymanov were staying with the Seer of Lublin in the city of Lantzut where he lived before going to Lublin, his enemies denounced his guests to the authorities, who had them jailed. They decided that since Rabbi Mendel could speak the best German, and German was the language used in the court, he was to do the talking for all when they were examined. The judge asked: “What is your business?” The rabbi of Rymanov replied: “Serving the king.” “What king?” “The king over all kings.” “And why did you two strangers come to Lantzut?” “To learn greater zeal in serving, from this man here.” “And why do you wear white robes?” “It is the colour of our office.” The judge said: “I have no quarrel with this sort of people.” And he dismissed them. ¶ M. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. Olga Marx, New York 1991.

**The synagogue** ¶ A stone synagogue with a prayer room on a square plan was built near the market square, most probably in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In its northwest corner, there is a tower – a former kahal prison for disobedient Jews. The building was partly reconstructed during a general renovation towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it burnt down during World War

I and was rebuilt in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was then that the inside walls were covered with polychrome frescoes – only partially preserved today – by Baruch Fass. ¶ The synagogue was partly destroyed by Germans during World War II. Its women's gallery and narthex were dismantled. Dilapidated, the building was left to itself for many years. In 2005, it became the property of



the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage, which started its reconstruction in cooperation with Menachem Mendel's eighth-generation descendant, Rabbi Menachem Abraham Reich, and the Association of Rymanów Jews in New York. The building was covered with a roof, plastered on the outside, and floored; windows and doors were installed. Thanks to these works, the synagogue is again used (occasionally) for prayer purposes.

**Merchant wars** ¶ First and foremost, the Jews of Rymanów traded in commodities imported from Hungary – mainly wine and spices – and practiced low-scale money-lending. They constituted a major economic force in the town and its vicinity and also engaged in Rymanów's socio-political life. In 1698, Jan Samuel Czartoryski, the owner of the estate of which Rymanów formed part, obliged them to pay *corvée* – forced or unpaid labour – for two days during harvest time, suggesting thus that Jews should be downgraded to the level of serfs who also had to pay *corvée*. From 1569, Jews were prohibited from settling in the nearby town of Krosno; Jewish merchants from Rymanów stepped in to

fill the gap, trading at Krosno's markets and fairs. Christian merchants from Krosno did not like this and tried to get rid of the competition in various ways. When the conflict reached fever pitch, the town council of Krosno passed a resolution allowing merchants from Krosno to appropriate Jewish goods and even to kill Jews from Rymanów who traded there without facing any legal repercussions afterwards. ¶ In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, bishops of Przemyśl introduced numerous regulations pertaining to relations between Christian and Jewish communities. These, for instance, prohibited Jews from trading or even banned them from the streets on some days. Working as servants in Jewish houses was also forbidden for Christians. ¶ Tax records from 1765 reveal that the whole kahal of Rymanów was the third largest one in the Sanok lands in terms of the number of taxpayers (1,015 Jews in the city and the nearby towns and villages) – after Lesko and Dynów, and before Sanok, Baligród, and Dubiecko. Under Austrian rule, the Josephine reforms changed the organisation of kahals, forced Jews to adopt German surnames, introduced “German-Jewish” schools, and introduced new taxes. In

[A] Synagogue in Rymanów, 2015. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the „Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The aron ha-kodesh niche and partially preserved polychromy in the synagogue in Rymanów, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the „Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

1786, tax was paid in Rymanów by 708 Catholics and 330 Jews (47 percent).

**Physics ¶** Since 2005, a memorial plaque on the building of the General Secondary School in Rymanów has informed visitors that this is the town where **Isidor Isaac Rabi** (1898–1988) – a Nobel Prize Winner in physics – was born. His father, David Rabi, was a tailor from Rymanów, who emigrated to the USA a year after the birth of his son. It was in the USA that Isidor began his brilliant educational path, which was crowned in 1944 with the Nobel Prize for his research into the magnetic properties of the nuclei of atoms. After he saw an atomic explosion with his own eyes and realised the consequences of using this kind of weapon, he became an advocate of stopping the arms race and using atomic energy in peaceful ways. He was among those who initiated the establishment of CERN (Fr.: Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire) – the most important centre for research on elementary particles today, located in Geneva. In 1971, he came to visit the town where he was born and, as he said, found it as beautiful as his parents had described it.

### The Rymanów Medical Spa

¶ During the partition period of 1772–1795, Rymanów became part of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria. After the First Partition, the Rymanów estate was acquired by Józef Ossoliński, who chose Rymanów as his residence. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the estate was taken over by the Skórski family, who lived in Rymanów in a manor house they built, around which they established a park. A great fire broke out in the town

in 1839; it caused extensive damage. In 1872, the family of Potocki, Stanisław and his wife, Anna née Działyńska, bought the lands from the Skórskis. The Potocki family contributed significantly to the development of the town: they established a school of arts and crafts (1873), but first and foremost they established the Rymanów Zdrój medical spa (1881), where they constructed a pump room, baths, and buildings for patients and also set up the Spa Park. In 1884, a railway line was built near the town.

**Interwar period ¶** In the interwar period, Rymanów prospered in many respects, including in its socio-political life. All major parties such as the Agudas Yisroel, Poalei Zion, and the Bund, craftsmen's and merchants' unions, and cultural, educational, and sports associations operated within the Jewish community. A local curiosity was that the town Roman Catholic inhabitants engaged in activities more typical of Jewish craftsmen in other places: Christians here worked as tanners, furriers, butchers, shoemakers, coppersmiths, coopers, and blacksmiths. Jews were also tailors, bakers, carpenters, metalsmiths, and glaziers, but, first and foremost, they dealt in trade, wholesale and interurban. They had stores and trading stalls and also owned most inns and taverns. What may seem surprising is that Jews produced Christian devotional objects, which they sold in villages and towns. The local brickyard also belonged to Jews. In the interwar period, Hirsch Horowitz served as the Rabbi of Rymanów (until 1934), and just before the war this post was held by Moshe Eliezer Horowitz, who was killed during the occupation.





Jewish football team from Rymanów, 1933, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Dr. Zvi Rosen

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ The Germans seized Rymanów on September 9, 1939. Shortly after they entered the town, repressions against civilians began, especially against the Jews. The Nazis started confiscating goods, banning trade, forcing monetary ransom, expropriating the Jewish property. Jews were forced to move to the Soviet occupation zone but many after a short time returned to the town. Some of those who remained in the USSR were soon deported to Siberia. In the spring of 1942, the Jews from Rymanów and vicinity were concentrated in a ghetto established in the northern part of the town, around the synagogue. The Germans began to liquidate the ghetto in August 1942. Some Jews were transported to the labour camp in Płaszów, others were shot in the woods near Barwinek and at the Jewish cemetery; those remaining were transported to the Bełżec death camp. ¶ The Red Army entered the town on September 20, 1944. During German-Soviet clashes over Rymanów, part of the town burnt down. After the end of the war, to the south of Rymanów, there were clashes with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. In

the mid-1940s, the Operation Vistula took place, as a result of which the Ukrainian inhabitants of southeast Poland were displaced to the USSR and to the so-called Recovered Territories (territory of the former Free City of Danzig and the parts of pre-war Germany that became part of Poland after World War II). The Potocki family estate was taken over by the communist authorities and parcelled out at the beginning of 1945 under the Agrarian Reform decree.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The Jewish cemetery lies about 1 km from the town centre, on the eastern arm of the Kalwaria Hill – beyond the line of ramparts. It was established late in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and expanded in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two ohalim were erected over the graves of the two tsaddikim: the southern one over the grave of Menakhem Mendel and his wife and the northern one over the graves of Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer and Jozef Friedman. During World War I, a military section was set up in the southern part of the graveyard. In its space of 2.5 hectares, several hundred matzevot and their fragments have been preserved: one of them

probably dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and eight others to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ After it was destroyed during World War II, the ohel of Menakhem Mendel was rebuilt. In the 1980s, the cemetery was fenced, and the second ohel, Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer's and Jozef Friedman's, was also reconstructed. Today, the cemetery is administered by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage. Hasidim from all over the world come as pilgrims to the graves of the tsaddikim. The keys to the graveyard are available in the house at 11 Kalwaria St. (tel. +48 608 832 983).

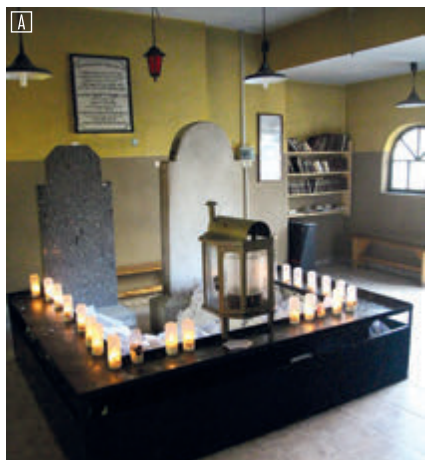
**“Meeting Rymanów” Association** ¶ Operating since 2008, the “Spotkanie Rymanów” (Meeting Rymanów) Association organises here “The Remembrance Days of the Jewish Community of Rymanów.” Every

year, former and present residents of Rymanów as well as their guests – Poles and Jews – march together along the same route which Jews from Rymanów had to walk in August 1942: from the Jewish cemetery of Rymanów to Wróblak Szlachecki. Lectures, concerts, performances, and exhibitions concerning the Jewish history of the town are also held. During the Remembrance Days in 2014, a mezuzah was ceremonially affixed to the house at 2 Sanocka St., which had been bought a few years earlier by **Malka Shakhm Doron**, a teacher from Mitzpe Ramon in Israel. The building had belonged to her grandfather before the war. She renovated it and often comes to Rymanów. One of the rooms on the ground floor was converted into a memorial chamber with photographs of old Rymanów (tel. +48 663 517 815).

**PAUL'S DIARY** ¶ Malka's mother, **Fryda Stary-Vogel**, was the granddaughter of a baker from Rymanów, Abram Stary, and his wife Haya née Szapiro. One of the things Malka received from her mother was the diary of a boy named Paul, who wrote it in the attic of the house on Sanocka Street during World War II. Paul was a cousin of the Szapiro family, and during the German occupation he came to Rymanów from Berlin together with his parents. Like the majority of Jews from Rymanów, Paul was killed at the Bełżec death camp. After the war, the diary was passed on to Fryda Stary-Vogel, who read it many times; but she had to bury it for safe-keeping when leaving Poland in the late 1940s. She later described its contents to Malka, who managed to convince her mother to write down what she remembered in Hebrew and publish it as a book of memories of the Holocaust. In 2014, the Austeria publishing house in Krakow published its Polish translation titled, *Zeszyt Paula* (Paul's Diary) which was launched during the Remembrance Days in Rymanów.

**Present day** ¶ Present-day Rymanów – and especially the nearby Rymanów Zdrój – are important centres of tourism. The town has around 2,000 residents. It has retained its medieval layout with a market square and a network

of streets leading away from it. The tourist information point is located in Rymanów Zdrój at 45 Zdrojowa St. (tel. +48 13 435 71 90).



**A** The interior of the ohel of tsaddik Menahem Mendel and his family at the Jewish graveyard in Rymanów, 2015. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Days of Remembrance of the Jewish Community in Rymanów, 2015. Photo by Bogdan Lisze

**Iwonicz-Zdrój** (6 km): a health resort with wooden architecture in the Polish-Swiss style, a former house of prayer located in “Leśna” villa, administered by rabbis from Rymanów and Dukla before the war. ¶ **Trześniów** (11 km): a manor complex: a larch wooden house (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.), a land steward’s mansion, a sheepfold, an outbuilding, and a park (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the church of St. Stanislaus the Bishop (1893–1898). ¶ **Haczów** (12 km): the wooden Church of the Assumption of Mary (14<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor with an orangery and a chapel (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Krosno** (16 km): a market square with Renaissance arcaded houses; the bishop’s palace (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.); the parish Church of the Holy Trinity (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Capuchin monastery and the Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Church of St. Adalbert



(15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Jesuit monastery (1660–1667); a Jewish cemetery at Ks. Sarny St. (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.) with a statue of Bernard Münz and the mass grave of people killed in 1942; Krosno Glassworks; the Subcarpathian Museum with a collection of kerosene lamps. ¶ **Nowotaniec** (19 km): manor house in Wola Sękowa (19<sup>th</sup> c.), fragments of earth ramparts and walls of a defensive manor (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Nicholas (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Bukowsko** (22 km): a Jewish cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, a presbytery, and wooden blacksmith's shop (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Brzozów** (24 km): The Church of the Transfiguration (1676–1686); the building of the former Gymnastic Society (1910), currently the Cultural Centre; a former missionary seminary (18<sup>th</sup> c.); tenement houses; a town hall (1896), currently the Adam Fastnacht Regional Museum; a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.) on Cegłowskiego St.; Mausoleum Memorial to Brzozów Jews murdered in 1942 in Podlesie-Zdrój; an obelisk in the forest of Brzozów-Zdrój (1990). ¶ **Odrzykoń** (24 km): ruins of the Kamieniec castle (14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Catherine (1887). ¶ **Jasienica Rosielna** (26 km): The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1770); a Jewish cemetery (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.) with a stone slab commemorating the Jews shot in Jasienica Rosielna, Domaradz, and Golcowa. ¶ **Korczyn** (26 km): a Jewish cemetery (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the grave of 9 soldiers killed in World War I, and graves of those murdered during the Holocaust. ¶ **Zasław** (28 km): a memorial grave to the murdered victims at the site of the concentration and extermination camp. ¶ **Frysztak** (40 km): The Church of the Nativity of Mary (1924–1927); a former pharmacy, post office, and library (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the old Jewish cemetery on Parkowa St. (17<sup>th</sup> c.) with the grave of Esther Ethel, daughter of Elimelech of Lizhensk; the new Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Nozdrzec** (40 km): the Skrzyński Palace (1843); “the grave of serfdom” – an obelisk commemorating the abolition of serfdom (1848); a turbine mill (1918); a ferry crossing the San River. ¶ **Strzyżów** (49 km): a synagogue on Przecławczyka St. (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.) – currently a library and the Society of the Enthusiasts of the Strzyżów Land, with partially preserved polychromy (19<sup>th</sup> c.) and original doors; a Jewish cemetery on Żarnowiecka Hill (1850) with the reconstructed ohel of Rabbi Horowitz; a railway tunnel from the time of World War II; the Collegiate Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> c.); the palace complex of the Wołkowicki family (circa 19<sup>th</sup> c.), currently the Janusz Korczak Children's Home; the manor house of the Dydyński family (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Jaślicka Landscape Park**: 5 nature reserves, with routes: the history and landscape path “On the Hungarian Route” and the nature path “In the Jasiołka River Gorge.”

Worth  
seeing

**Synagogue** (17<sup>th</sup> c.) at the corner of Bieleckiego St. and Rynek St. ¶ **The Malka's Jewish House**, 2 Sanocka St., tel. +48 663517815. ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.) with approx. 800 preserved matzevot, Kalwaria St. tel. +48 608 832 983. ¶ **Old urban layout** preserved in the town centre: the market square and a partially regular network of streets radiating from it. ¶ The parish **Church of St Lawrence** (16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> c.) with a two-storey Renaissance tombstone of Jan Sieniński and his wife Zofia, dated to circa 1580, by Lvovian sculptor Herman Hutten-Czapka, 5 Wola St. ¶ **Brick mansion** (19<sup>th</sup> c.) founded by the Skórski family, currently the seat of the Forest Inspectorate in Rymanów, 38 Dworska St. ¶ **Manor park** (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Brick tenement houses** (late 19<sup>th</sup> c. and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), with elements of earlier buildings (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Wooden and brick villas** (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.)



# Lesko

Ukr. Лисько, Yid. לינסק

*How full of awe is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.*

Inscription over the entrance  
into the synagogue in Lesko, Genesis 28:17

**The gate of the Bieszczady** ¶ Lesko is situated in the Bieszczady Foothills, on a gentle slope on the left bank of the San River. Towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Władysław Jagiełło granted estates to the kmita family that were located in the Land of Sanok, incorporated into the Crown. The village of Lesko is mentioned as part of the Kmita family estate in 1436. About 1470, Jan Kmita established a town with a market square in the centre, a network of streets around it, a church, and a manor house near the village of Lesko and within its lands. Thanks to its location at the intersection of roads the town experienced a developmental boom, particularly due to the route running south to Hungary and the local route running from west to east from Lesser Poland to Ruthenia up to, as far as Sambor and Lwów. Initially, Lesko was inhabited by Poles and Ruthenians, who were joined by Jews by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. According to local tradition, Lesko's first Jewish inhabitants were Sephardic Jews speaking Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), but this is not confirmed in documents.

## Medieval and Renaissance town

¶ The medieval town was established

at the tip of a hill, south of the village of Lesko, which lies on the San River plain. Its centre is a market square – square-shaped in this case – and several streets leading away from it, as well as a church situated northeast of the market square. West of the town, the kmitas erected a wooden manor house, in whose place the Stadnickis later built a stone castle. ¶ The town remained in the hands of the kmita family until the death of Piotr kmita, Grand Crown Marshal, in 1553. During his lifetime, the town was developed, and a new large market square was established south of the old centre, with a town hall and streets. Nearby, in the northeast, a Jewish quarter was established, with a synagogue and a cemetery located outside the town's walls, while in the southwest, in Zatylna St., a new Orthodox church was erected. The old one, probably dating back to the times before the town was chartered, had been located in the village of Lesko, which subsequently became a suburb known as Posada Leska. As was typically the case, the Orthodox church was surrounded by a graveyard, extended in Austrian times into a common Christian cemetery that functions to this day. In

**[A]** Moses' tablets set in the elevation of the western outer wall of the synagogue in Lesko, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**[B]** The castle in Lesko, after 1923, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

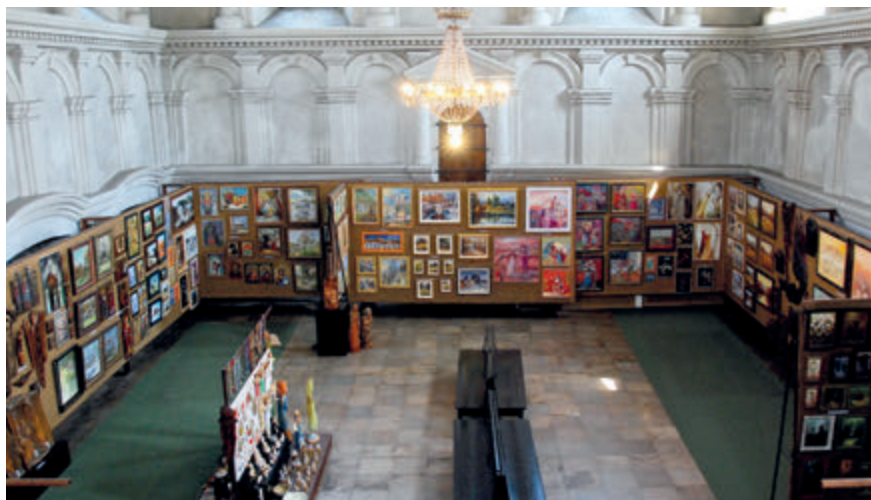


1916, a military cemetery for soldiers killed during World War I was established in front of it.

**Municipal citizens** ¶ In 1542, the register of Lesko's inhabitants mentions for the first time a burgher of the Jewish faith. In subsequent years, there was a dynamic influx of Jews, probably due to the favourable legal regulations introduced by Piotr kmita. By 1572, there were as many as 23 tax-paying heads of Jewish families in Lesko. ¶ A kahal was established here in the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, earlier than in the nearby older town of Sanok, which for centuries reported to the Jewish elders of Lesko. The Jews of both towns at the time belonged to the district (ziemstwo)

of Przemyśl. At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish taxpayers amounted to about 25 heads of families, or approximately 10 percent of the town's population. Unlike in many other towns of Poland-Lithuania, the Jewish citizens of Lesko were subject to the same laws as all other citizens and were allowed to do business without special restrictions, on a par with the Christian townsfolk. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, they already had their own cemetery and probably a synagogue, whose presence is mentioned in early 17<sup>th</sup>-century sources, and soon they also had a bath and a hospital (poorhouse). Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one of the community's elders and the principal of the local yeshivah was Aron, son of Isaac (d. 1591).

Taxpayers' registers from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries list kahal leaders: from 1611–1615, doctor Icyk (rabbi) and Jakub (a synagogue shames); from 1656–1660, the school's elders – Abusek and Aron Zachariaszowicz, fraternity elders – Abram Izaakowicz and Marek Moszkowicz, graveyard supervising elder



Former synagogue, currently art gallery in Lesko, 2015. Photo by Zenon Martinger, collection of the Bieszczady Cultural Centre

– Haim Samuelowicz, Jozef Łazurkowicz (an elder of the Land of Sanok), and Zelik – a *shkolnik* (a synagogue beadle). The 1769 register lists houses and the Jews living in them: *shkolniks* – Lewko Markowicz, Zabel, living next to the bath; as well as Helik, living together with the rabbi, Icek – a *wiernik* (Polish for the Hebrew *ne’eman*, a “trustworthy” – Jewish communal trustee), and Michel – a cantor. These registers reveal that Lesko’s Jews traded in a variety of goods, including Hungarian wine and cattle, and also engaged in leasing (mainly *propinacja* – production and sale of alcohol), low-key usury, and various crafts and services. They also owned houses. The Jews had two synagogues at the time, as well as a *beth midrash*, a bath, a hospital, and a cemetery.

**The wars and invasions** of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century spared the town. In the taxpayers’ register for 1655–1660, there were 182 Christians and 36 Jews (17 percent), and in 1676, the town’s 220 taxpayers already included as many as 83 Jews (38 percent). But the Swedes set fire to the town in 1704, causing many people to lose their homes and move away. Many of those who remained died during an epidemic the following year (including 303 Jews). In subsequent decades, the number of inhabitants increased again – in 1765, tax was reported to have been collected from 1,656 Jews in the entire *kahal*, including 587 in Lesko. According to data for 1769, the town’s

population amounted to about 1,440, which means that before the partitions, Jews constituted more than 40 percent of Lesko’s inhabitants. At that time, the *kahal* of Lesko was the largest of the Jewish communities in the nearby towns and boroughs, and the visible sign of its importance was its stone synagogue, established at a time when most buildings of this kind were made of wood.

**Synagogue ¶** The first synagogue in Lesko was wooden; it was probably built in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is mentioned in documents in 1580 as a Jewish school. The stone synagogue was built here most likely in the second



[A] Former synagogue in Lesko, 2015. Photo by Zenon Martinger, collection of the Bieszczady Cultural Centre

[B] Synagogue in Lesko, eastern view, 1918-1939. Photo by Jan Krzywowiążka, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

[C] Lesko, photomontage of the fire of the town, July 1930, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It appeared in the documents in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has survived to this day. Built on a rectangular plan, with a turret in the corner of the front elevation, it was rebuilt several times – for example, after the 1847 fire. ¶ Near the synagogue there were Hasidic prayer houses where the followers of tsaddikim from Nowy Sącz and Sadhora would pray, but these have not survived. ¶ During World War II, the Germans devastated the interior of the synagogue and used the building as a warehouse. After

the war, the derelict building gradually became dilapidated until it was rebuilt in the 1960s and 1970s. Since 1978, on the initiative of the then director of the Bieszczady Cultural Centre, Andrzej Potocki, it has housed an art gallery. The building is owned by the town of Lesko. In its vestibule, there is an exhibition of photographs about Jewish life. There are also memorial plaques here with names of Lesko's Jews. The art gallery is open from May till October, tel. +48 13 469 66 49, bdk\_lesko@poczta.onet.pl

” When reciting the psalms, a Jew from a small-town community is face to face with the Eternal God, may He be blessed, without complaining or pretending. Three such cantors, with particularly strong and clear voices, are engraved in my memory. These are: the water carrier reb Getzl Hagler, who was rumoured in town to be one of the lamedvovniks, the butcher Tzaddok Schwartz, and the coachman Ajzyk Bertentejl, son of Mordekhai [tsaddikim nistarim, lamed-vav tsaddikim or Lamedvovniks are 36 concealed righteous people at any time whose role in life is to justify the purpose of humankind in the





A Hashomer Hatzair troop, 1927, reproduction from *Sefer izkor; muke-dash li-Yehudei ha-aiarot she-misepu be-shoa be-shanim 1939-1944: Linsk, Istrik, Baligrod, Litavisk ve-ha-seviva*, ed. by Natan Mark and Shimon Friedlander, Tel Aviv 1964/1965

*eyes of God – eds.].* ¶ Shimon Friedlander, *The Town's Jewish Soul*, in: *Sefer izkor Linsk*, (The Memorial Book of Lesko), Tel Aviv 1964.

**War and peace** ¶ During World War I, the Jewish community, whose members owned most stores and craft workshops, suffered severely as passing soldiers looted the town. As elsewhere, Jews from Lesko served among the soldiers of the Austrian army. ¶ After Poland regained independence in 1918, Lesko remained a county town in the Lwów Voivodeship. The number of inhabitants decreased by about 1,000 as a result of warfare, a cholera epidemic and other diseases, and the departure of many inhabitants. In 1921, the town had a population of 3,870, including 1,080 Catholics (28 percent), 451 Greek Catholics (12 percent), and 2,338 Jews (60 percent). On the initiative of the Krasicki family, who owned the Lesko estate, the town name of Lisko, which had been in use since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was replaced with the earlier name of Lesko. ¶ In the interwar period, old parties, associations, and cultural and

youth organisations continued to function and new ones emerged; a loan fund was established. Three representatives of the Jewish community, Mendel Hager, Josef March, and Baruch Weiss, became members of the town council, and lawyer Alter Müller became deputy mayor. The health service at that time included Jewish doctors – Zelig Liebman and Lea Grossonger – as well as a dentist called Dampf. David Gottlieb owned the best hotel and restaurant in Lesko; Moshe Ber Gutwirth ran a company called “Importwin,” which also had a branch he opened in Lwów; and Rywka Schaff opened a print shop. ¶ The town had two functioning synagogues, a bet midrash, two baths, and an old cemetery. Hasidim – followers of the Ruzhiner dynasty of Rabbi Yisrael Friedman of Sadhora (Sadigura, Sadagora, near Czer-nowitz/Chernivtsi) and the Halberstam dynasty of Nowy Sącz – had their prayer houses here, too. The rabbi of Lesko was



[A] Dated 1548, the matzeva on the grave of Eliezer son of Meshulam is the oldest tombstone at the Jewish cemetery in Lesko, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[B] The ohel of tsaddik Menahem Mendel at the Jewish cemetery in Lesko, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Mendel Horowitz. Before the outbreak of World War II, the town Jewish community numbered about 2,500 people.

### The Jewish cemetery in Lesko

is one of the oldest and the richest in Europe. It was established before the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century on a hill east

of the town new centre. About 2,000 gravestones survive in it, of which 29 date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, more than 60 to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and 88 to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest identified matzevah is that of Eliezer, son of Meshulam, who died in 1548. Its Hebrew inscription reads:

” *Here lies a God-fearing man, Eliezer son of Meshulam (blessed be the memory of the righteous one). On Tuesday, the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Tishrei, year 309 (1548).*

The oldest matzevot can be found in the northern part of the cemetery, near the entrance gate. Further into the cemetery,

among other tombs, there is the ohel of tsaddik Menachem Mendel, who died here in 1803.

” *Here lies the Holy Rabbi Menakhem Mendel (may his merits be our protection), father of the Holy Rabbi Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz (may his merits be our protection), summoned to the heavenly yeshivah on the day of Simchat Torah, 23 Tishrei 5564. May his soul be bound in the bond of eternal life. Near his grave, his father R. Yaakow and his son R. Shmuel Shmelka lie buried, as well as his grandsons, R. Menakhem Mendel son of R. Shmuel Shmelka and R. Menachem Mendel son of R. Abraham Haim.*

The owner of the site is the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. The entrance fee to the cemetery is 7 PLN per person. The key to the

gate is available from the family living opposite the entrance (tel. +48 13 469 81 08 or +48 695 652 364).

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the town was first seized by German troops; the Germans withdrew across the San after a few days and the Soviets entered Lesko. The San River became the border between the occupation zones. This situation continued until the German attack on the USSR in June 1941. After the town was seized by the Nazis, repression began – mainly against the Jewish population. In June 1942, the Jews from the town and its vicinity were confined in a ghetto. It was liquidated three months later, in August 1942. About a hundred of the least physically fit people were shot at the Jewish cemetery, and the remaining ghetto dwellers were marched off to the labour camp in the nearby village of Zasław. Jews were also transported there from Sanok and its vicinity. That

camp was the scene of mass executions in which a large part of Lesko's Jews were killed. The others were transported to the Bełżec death camp, where they were gassed. Few of the Jews whom the Soviets deported to Siberia survived the war; between ten and twenty survived in Lesko, harboured by Poles and Ukrainians. ¶ After World War II, as a result of the extermination of the Jews and the displacement of Ukrainians, Lesko had only about 1,000 inhabitants left.

**Present day** ¶ Today, Lesko is a county town with a population of more than 6,000 people. It is regarded as a gateway to the tourist areas of the Bieszczady Mountains. The Bieszczady Tourist Information Centre is in the town square (tel.+48 13 471 11 30, e-mail: bcit@lesko.pl).

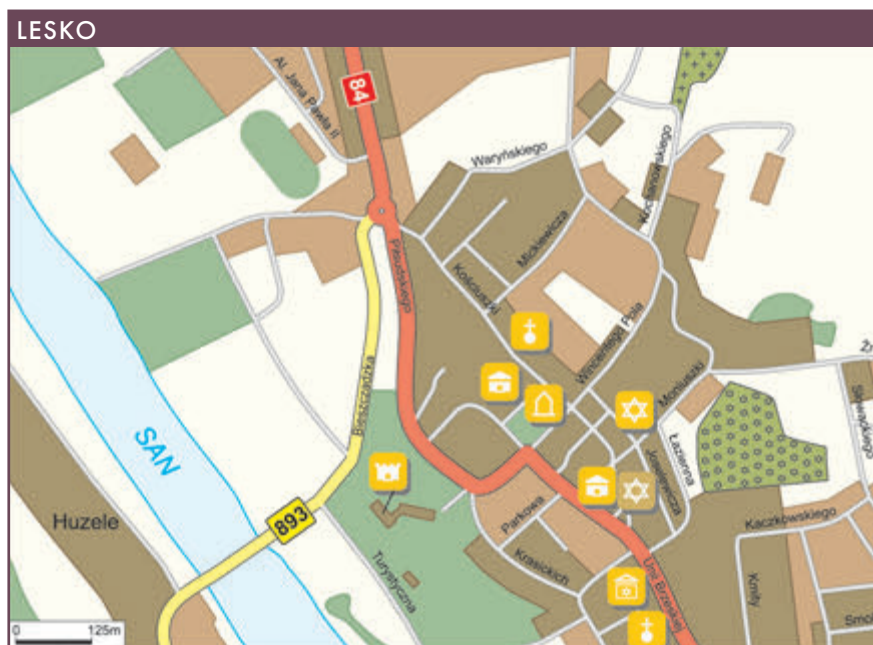
Former **synagogue**, now art gallery (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 16 Berka Joselewicza St., tel. +48 13 469 66 49, bdk\_lesko@poczta.onet.pl ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Słowackiego St. ¶ **Urban layout**, consisting of a medieval charter town (circa 1470) with the Renaissance town adjoining it to the south (circa 1550). ¶ **Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 10 Kosciuszki St. ¶ **Castle with a Romantic park** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 7 Piłsudskiego St. ¶ **Town hall** (1894–1896), 21 Rynek St. ¶ **Town houses** and suburban wooden houses (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Christian cemetery** (15<sup>th</sup> c.), Kochanowskiego St.. ¶ **Bunkers** of the so-called **Molotov Line**, erected on the San during the Soviet occupation in 1940.

Worth  
seeing

**Sanok** (15 km): former synagogue of Sadigura Hasidim (1924), currently State Archives; Yad Charuzim Synagogue in Franciszkańska St. (1897), currently the seat of the Architects Society; a town house in which there used to be a shtiebel (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), the mikveh building and townhouses of the Weiner and Ramer families; the new Jewish cemetery in the Kiczury district (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Folk Architecture Museum; the Royal Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.) housing the Historical Museum and Beksiński Gallery; a Franciscan church and monastery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); town hall at 1 Rynek St. (1875–1880); Mansionaries' house (18<sup>th</sup> c.) in Św. Michała Square; Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (1784–1789). ¶ **Baligród** (21 km): a Jewish cemetery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Greek Catholic Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (1835). ¶ **Ustrzyki Dolne** (24 km): the shrine of Our Lady of Bieszczady (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of Our Lady Queen of Poland (1909–1911); the Greek Catholic Church

Surrounding  
area

of the Dormition of the Mother of God (1847); the former synagogue building (circa 1870), currently a library; the old Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Museum of Milling and the Countryside; the Nature Museum of the Bieszczady National Park ¶ **Tyrawa Wołoska** (26 km): a Jewish cemetery, about 400 m southeast of the church, behind the Catholic cemetery; Church of St. Nicholas (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Mrzygłód** (31 km): original wooden buildings around the market square (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Latin church (1415–1424), currently the Sending of the Apostles Church; former wooden synagogue on the eastern side of the market square (1893), now a dwelling house; by the road there is a mass grave of Jews shot in 1942. ¶ **Bircza** (42 km): the Humnicki Palace (19<sup>th</sup> c.) with earth bastion fortifications of the old castle; Church of St. Stanislaus Kostka (1921–1930); the wooden house of the rabbi, a brick mikveh; Jewish cemetery in Cmentarna St. (19<sup>th</sup> c.); on Kamienna Górka there is an obelisk commemorating the extermination of Bircza's Jews. ¶ **Rybotycze** (52 km): a Jewish cemetery situated at the curve of the road to Makowa; the fortified Greek Catholic Church of St. Onuphrius in Posada Rybotycka (15<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a branch of the Museum in Przemyśl. ¶ **Krasiczyn** (61 km): a castle (late 16<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Martin (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery on a hillside near the forest. ¶ **Lutowiska** (65 km): “Three Cultures” Ecomuseum route including Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish heritage sites; a Jewish cemetery (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden building of the former Jewish school, ruins of the synagogue (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. Stanislaus the Bishop (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to the Jews murdered in 1943. ¶ **Ustrzyki Górne** (67 km): the seat of the Bieszczady National Park; Mountain Tourism Culture Centre of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK). ¶ **The Bieszczady National Park** in the Carpathian Mountains.





# Shtetl Routes Through Ukraine



# Zhovkva

Pol. Żółkiew, Ukr. Жовква, Yid. זשאָלקװע

*I was proud of my Zolkiev.*

*No other city has such monuments as ours,  
I thought to myself.*

Shimon Samet, *A Tour of Zolkiev*, in: *Sefer Zolkiev* (Hebr.: Memorial Book of Zolkiev), Jerusalem 1969

**A perfect city** ¶ Established towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a Renaissance “perfect city,” Zhovkva (then Żółkiew) was named in honour of Stanisław Żółkiewski, its founder. The earliest historical reference to the village of Vynnyky (Winniki), around which Zhovkva was subsequently established, dates back to 1368. In 1597, the Crown Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski began the construction of Zhovkva near Vynnyky, and in 1603, due to a privilege issued by King Sigismund III Vasa, the emerging urban center was granted municipal rights as a private Polish town. The crown privilege gave a powerful boost to the economic life of the town and its vicinity and promoted rapid development of diversified crafts and trade. In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Zhovkva was transformed into a fortified town circumscribed by pompous stone ramparts. The market square located in front of the castle was lined by trading houses on the northern and eastern sides that formed a gallery of stores, known as arcades. The entire town was designed by the famous Italian architect and theorist Pietro di Giacomo Cataneo. The town plan followed the successful experiment

of another “perfect” Renaissance town of Zamość, located 100 km north west of Zhovkva and established several years before. Since in the Renaissance art was somatic and anthropocentric, the general town plan and the plans of its environs, including the plots of neighboring lands and houses, reflected in its minute details the system of proportionally interrelated measurements of human anatomy. The famous Italian architects Paolo de Ducato Clemenci (also known as Paweł Szczęśliwy, Ukr. Pavlo Schaslyvyi) and Paolo Dominici (known as Paweł Rzymianin, Ukr. Pavlo Rymlianyan contributed to the creation of the town.

¶ In 1620, Zhovkva became the property of the Daniłowicz noble family, and later became the possession of John III Sobieski (1629–1696), King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who inherited it from his mother, Zofia Teofila. It was during John III Sobieski’s reign that Zhovkva (Żółkiew) saw its heyday. The king transformed the town into a major centre of political and economic life of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At his Żółkiew residence, he received diplomatic envoys of King Louis XIV of France and King Charles



II of Spain. After the victorious battle near Vienna on September 12, 1683, in which the troops of Habsburg Monarchy, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Holy Roman Empire under the command of King John III Sobieski destroyed the army of the Ottomans and their vassal and tributary states, the papal nuncio arrived in Zhovkva and granted the king with a sword blessed by the pope. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Zhovkva was home for young Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1595–1657), the future leader of the Cossack revolution, whose father served at Hetman Żółkiewski's court. The Cossack leader hetman Ivan Mazepa (1639–1709) visited Zhovkva too. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), from December, 1706, to April, 1707, the Zhovkva Castle served as the temporary headquarters of the Russian Tsar Peter I (the Great). ¶ Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the partition of Poland between Austria, Prussia, and Russia, Zhovkva, together with the entire new province of Galicia, became part of the Austrian domain. The Habsburg authorities began demolishing the town fortifications and reconstructing various

centrally-located buildings for administrative purposes. The entire sections of the defensive walls, including the Lwowska (L'viv) and Żydowska (Jewish) Gates were demolished; the castle palace was converted into a prison; plans were underway to rebuild the town hall too. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the authorities begin the renovation. For example, the Zwierzyniecka Gate was restored, and so were some of the castle walls. Yet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the castle as well as the entire town went into decline. ¶ In September, 1914, as World War I broke out, Zhovkva was captured by the Russian army. In June, 1915, the Austrians recaptured it. From November, 31, 1918, until May 16, 1919, the Lemberg (L'viv) county was under the administration of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), and then it was under temporary Polish administration until 1923, when the international community at the Conference of Ambassadors recognised Poland's sovereignty over Eastern Galicia.

**In Żydowska Street ¶** The first Jews settled in Zhovkva as early as the 1590s, immediately after the foundation of the

Panorama of Zhovkva. A general bird's eye view of the town, 1918–1933, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland



**A** A view of the market square with arcaded houses; the Basilian monastery is visible in the background, 1918–1939. Photo by Marek Munz, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland



**B** Synagogue in Zhovkva, 1918–1939, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

town. In 1600, Stanisław Żółkiewski, the Voivode of Ruthenia, allowed Jews to establish their first prayer house. At that time, the local Jewish community was subordinated to Lviv kahal, but in 1620, it became independent and established its own communal authority. The Jews were granted a privilege of building their residences in a street subsequently called Żydowska (Jewish) Street, which led to the Jewish Gate, one of the town four main gates. The king granted Zhovkva the autonomy according to the Magdeburg law and also exempted it from custom duties and other special taxes. These privileges enabled merchants and craftsmen from other towns to trade freely in Zhovkva. The town also received a privilege of hosting a major trade fair (*Jahrmark*) four times a year and to have two market days each week. 17<sup>th</sup>-century Zhovkva was home to more than a hundred Jewish craftsmen, including furriers, silver- and goldsmiths, jewellers, tanners, pharmacists, and tailors. Several dozen Jews received special privileges including the lease of the customs house, of tax collecting, and of *propinacja* (producing and selling alcoholic beverages). They were also running inns, managing fish ponds, running lumber mills, and freighting

timber. **¶** In 1624, a wooden synagogue was opened next to Aron Moshkovich's house, and in 1626, the kahal appointed first communal rabbi Ezekiel Issachar (d. 1637). In addition to the synagogue, the Jewish quarter enjoyed the operation of all other communal institutions, including a mikveh (ritual bath), a slaughterhouse, the rabbi's house, a beth midrash (study house for adult Jews), and a *hekdesch* (shelter for the poor and for the vagabond alms-seekers). In 1640, the town owners allowed the Jews to open a yeshivah. The town's Jewish community gradually grew and acquired importance. In 1628, 21 houses in Zhovkva were Jewish, and in 1680, 88 houses. When in 1648, the Cossack troops under Bohdan Khmelnytsky approached Zhovkva, thousands of Jewish refugees found safe haven in town and took part in defending the town against the Cossacks along the Polish garrison. In 1765, the Jewish community of Zhovkva boasted more than 1,500 members and possessed more than 270 buildings. Jews owned nearly all the buildings around the market square, which formed a lined-up gallery where most of trade took place. The street leading from the market square to the synagogue also had a commercial importance and was known as the Jewish Market.



” Built by Italians. [...] The old synagogue with its towering façade, buttresses, stone shells, cornices, attic acroteria [architectural ornaments], with its walls which turned golden as the time passed, with its vaults, ceiling coffers, and lunettes. ¶

Translated from: Z. Haupt, *Lutnia, albo przewodnik po Żółkwi i jej pamiątkach* (Lute, or a Guide to Zhovkva and its Memorials), in the same author's *Szpica: opowiadania, warianty, szkice* (The Picket: Short Stories, Variants, Sketches), Paris 1989

**Sobieski's synagogue** ¶ As early as 1635, the Jews of Zhovkva were granted the privilege to build a stone synagogue, but it was not built until towards the end of the century. Also known as the Sobieski Shul, it became one of Europe's most notable Jewish monuments.

There were many distinguished Jews among King John III Sobieski's close associates. One of them was the royal court purveyor (factor) **Jacob ben Nathan** (?–1696), the Steward of the Royal Chamber of Sambor, who was in the 1670s the leaseholder of all the custom houses of Red Ruthenia and Podolia. In 1685, he moved to Zhovkva, where he lived in the Sobieski's palace. In 1689, he was elected the head of the Zhovkva kahal. A few years later, at the Sejm of Grodno (regular decision-making meeting of the Polish nobility), the nobility accused him of corruption and blasphemy against the Christian religion. The accusation led to his removal from the steward's office. He was imprisoned for a short time and died shortly after his release. Another Jew closely associated with John III Sobieski was **Emanuel de Jona** from Lviv (?–1702), an outstanding court physician of Sephardic origin and a Marshal of the Council of Four Lands (Jewish parliament in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

The synagogue was called royal not only because of its pompous size and beautiful decorations and ornaments, but also because of 6,000 zlotys that the king lent the Jewish community toward its construction. Built of stone, the synagogue was erected in lieu of the old wooden one, next to the northern ramparts of the town, close to the Jewish Gate. By 1700, the construction was completed under the guidance of the crown architect Piotr Beber. The main nine-bay prayer hall measured 21 to 20 meters, and its height reached 14.5 meters at the highest point of the dome. The interior was lavishly decorated with stuccoes and frescoes. On the western and southern sides, the main

hall was adjoined by a vestibule and women's galleries. The synagogue roof was hidden behind an attic with special decorative visors, which made many believe that the building also allegedly served as part of the town fortifications. The Renaissance-style building (with some manierist elements) looked so elegant that the Catholic clergy forbade painting it in white so that it would not eclipse Zhovkva churches with its radiating beauty. ¶ In the first days of German occupation in 1941, the Nazis tried to demolish the synagogue. Attempts to blow it up totally destroyed the southern women's gallery; the western part of the building lost its roof and a gallery vault,

and in the main prayer hall the dynamite explosion destroyed three sections of the vault, the central columns, and parts of the roof. ¶ In 1963, the synagogue was partially renovated and catalogued in the National Register of Architectural Monuments of the Soviet Ukraine. Despite its state-protected status, the building was used as a warehouse. From the early 1990s, various plans were underway for conservation and restoration purposes, but the lack of adequate financial resources and the complete absence of the local Jewish community made any comprehensive renovation impossible. ¶ In the mid-1990s, the “fortress” synagogue of Zhovkva was listed by the New York-based World Monuments Fund as one of the “100 most endangered heritage sites in the world.” Thanks to this alert, renovation was begun in 2000. However, it was subsequently suspended as the supervising authorities discovered cases of embezzlement and inappropriate use of funds allocated for restoration of the monument. In 2007, the roof of the synagogue was covered with protective copper tiles yet the building has remained in perilous condition. ¶ In 2012, the National Bank of Ukraine introduced memorial coins worth 5 and 10 hryvnias with the images of the Zhovkva synagogue as part of the Architectural Monuments of Ukraine series.

**The printing press** ¶ In 1690, King John III Sobieski granted Uri Faivush ben Aaron ha-Levi (1625–1715) from Amsterdam with a crown privilege to establish a Jewish printing press in

Zhovkva. Uri Faivush had exported books to Poland-Lithuania for many years and was one of the three main Amsterdam book printers. He had also been known as the publisher of one of the first newspapers in Yiddish, *Dienstagshe un Freitogishe Kurant* (A Thursday and Friday Carillon). In 1692, Uri Faivush brought his unique Amsterdam type to Zhovkva and published his first Zhovkva printing-press book. In 1705, he returned to Amsterdam while the printing press was continued to be run by his grandsons, two outstanding printers Aharon and Gershon. Due to its excellent layouts and the clarity of its print and despite the restrictive decisions of the Council of Four Lands, Zhovkva printing press suppressed the two other printing presses operating in Poland at that time – Lublin and Krakow – and for almost 80 years remained a monopolist, the only Jewish printing centre in the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This exclusive position of Zhovkva in the printing market changed only after the 1764 dissolution of the Council of Four Lands. Zhovkva printing press published classical works of religious literature and also rabbinic treatises submitted for print by rabbinic scholars from various countries. The descendants of Uri Faivush (under various family names such as Madfes, Mann, Letteris, and Meirhoffer) owned the Zhovkva printing house until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The house of Uri Faivush, in which the printing house functioned, is located in the market square at 7 Vicheva Sq.

**THE HASKALAH** ¶ In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Zhovkva became an important centre of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) movement, particularly when **Nachman**

**Krochmal** (1785–1840), one of the leading *maskilim* (enlightened thinkers) in Eastern Europe lived in town. Krochmal was a religious thinker, historian, theologian, and writer. Born in the town of Brody, he spent a considerable part of his life in Zhovkva, making it one of the centres of the Haskalah. Other *maskilim*, members of the Haskalah movement such as Salomon Judah Leib Rappaport, Isaac Erter, Halevi Bloch, and others were closely connected to the circle of Krochmal in Zhovkva. After the death of his wife in 1836, Krochmal returned to Brody and two years later settled in Ternopil. Through consistent independent study, Krochmal mastered various fields, especially history and philosophy. He was one of the first thinkers to turn to the study of Jewish history “for a better knowledge of our essence and our nature.” He penned a renowned philosophical treatise entitled *More nevukey ha-zman* (Heb.: A Guide for the Perplexed of Our Times, 1839, published in Lviv in 1851). The title alluded to Maimonidean *More nevukeym* (Heb.: The Guide for the Perplexed), while the work used categories of rationalist philosophy and elements of German romantic thought with which Krochmal sought to construct paradigms of Jewish historical destiny. He wrote in a renovated Hebrew, enriching it with scientific and scholarly terminology of his own making thus considerably contributing to the development of contemporary Hebrew literature. He died in 1840 in Ternopil. His son Abraham Krochmal (b. 1820 in Zhovkva, d. 1888 in Frankfurt am Main) took after his father as a writer, thinker, and journalist in his own right. His hallmark was a rationalist approach to Judaism, which he treated mainly as an ethical system. As all *maskilim* of his generation with their aversion to pious trends in Judaism, including Kabbalistic thought, he vehemently rejected Hasidism.



The interior of the synagogue in Zhovkva, 2014. Photo by Agnieszka Karczewska, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**A Galician town** ¶ In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Zhovkva turned into a hub of the fur industry providing employment to hundreds of Jewish workers. Towards the end of the 1890s, 3,783 of the 7,143 residents of Zhovkva, or about 53 percent, were members of the Jewish community. After World War I, according to the 1921 census, the Jewish community numbered 3,718 people (47 percent of the town population). In the interwar

period, the population of Zhovkva grew, but by 1939, the percentage of Jews had decreased to about 40 percent (4,270 people) of the 11,100 town inhabitants. The town population also included Poles (approx. 35 percent) and Ukrainians (approx. 25 percent). ¶ The Great Synagogue was the centre of town religious life; the community of Zhovkva also maintained a Talmud Torah elementary religious school for poor children,

Castle in Zhovkva, 2014; at present, some of the castle's chambers house a museum. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



a Tarbut Hebrew-language school with its robust Zionist agenda, an orphanage, and other educational and charity institutions, including modern Polish-, German- and Hebrew-oriented cultural

societies and a football team “Hasmo-nea,” established according to the vision of the “Jew of muscle,” a new type of a modernized secular Jew.

” **A tour of Zhovkva with Shimon Samet** ¶ *The market square was the centre of the town: The square was broad and large, and in the middle of it there was a well with spring water, which the water carriers, and sometimes even the housewives, drew and carried around. It was the well around which the entire world revolved. On the one side of the square there was an old fortress building in the backyard, housing the John III Sobieski municipal gymnasium [secondary school] and the court; on the other side, there was a parking area for carts and wagons belonging to the peasants who arrived from the countryside with goods for sale. It was right here that the world of the Zhovkva trade flourished manifesting itself in a medley of Polish and Ukrainian languages. ¶ In the arcades of the buildings around the square there were stores and residential houses. The square was the heart of the town, with streets leading from it in all directions. There was also a church in the square, and inside it (they said) there were precious paintings and ancient works of art covered with gold and diamonds. The road led through a gate to Glińska Street, and then proceeded across the bridge over the Świna River and towards the park or returned to Piekarska Street, where there was Belzer Hoyz, the house of Hasi-dim from Belz. At the end of the street there was a bakery: the aromas of various baked products tickled the nostrils of local residents. In Piekarska (Baker) Street, we celebrated Simchat Torah (The holiday on which the annual cycle of Torah reading was completed – and restarted), Hasidic songs shook the walls. ¶ At the end of Piekarska Street there stood the enormous building of the Great Synagogue, a very special architectural artwork attracting observant Jews from the entire region. Anyone who wanted to cleave to God in deep silence amid a solemn and profoundly personal atmosphere, surrounded by beautiful*



architectural ornaments, should step in under the abode of the Great Synagogue: he or she would immediately leave the realm of the mundane and enter the realm of the sublime. ¶ Opposite the Great Synagogue there stood the bet midrash. Next to it, there was a small store selling soda water, sweets, and cigarettes. This was an important meeting place of the Zionist-minded young people, particularly of the members of the the local branch of Hashomer Hatzair (Heb.: *The Young Guard*, a boy scout Jewish youth organization). Next to the store there was also the house of the Zimmerman family, an important meeting place of the educated and young people who sought cultural and scientific knowledge. A little further up the same street there lived the Szpigel brothers, profoundly assimilated Jews. We used to spend hours playing in their large backyard. Still further, in Sobieski Street, there was our house which hosted a watchmaker's shop belonging to my father. We moved from there to Szpitalna



(Hospital) Street. ¶ A hostel with guest rooms, called “Ajnfarrowjz,” was located in Szpitalna Street, in which mainly visiting Hasidim stayed as they needed kosher cuisine. Even the tzadik of Belz stayed as a guest there. ¶ Sobieski Street takes us from the market square with its wagons, carriages, and a well-pump, toward the butcher store on one side and the river on the other, and from there – as far as Turyniecka Street. Down that street, which started from Hochner's timber storehouse, one could go as far as the villages of Turynka and Mosty Wielkie, and further up toward a beautiful quarter of small houses. A large church stood there. ¶ If one turned right and walked a short distance, one would find oneself in the busy, centrally located Lwowska Street. It had two side streets: one of them led from the Great Synagogue and the town hall to the prayer house called Kadeten-Shul. It was called that way because the so-called Progressive Jews [most likely associated with the patriotic-minded cadet corps] prayed in it. This shul served as the centre of the Zionist movement; politics was discussed there, as well as municipal council and Jewish communal election campaigns, and even the Zionist Congresses elections. The Jews who prayed here, including my father, were the opponents of the Belzer Hasidim. At the end of the street there was a mikveh and a bath. ¶ A location in the market square worth mentioning – a stationery shop run by the Ecker brothers. Jewish students would sometimes gather here. The main meeting place of those young people was the Wilder sisters' café. ¶ In the town hall building there was a cultural centre, the Kulturverein. Its leading figures enlisted the key members of local intelligentsia: Dr. Szloser, Dr. Sobel, Dr. Zimerman, and Dr. Sztern, and its administrator was Samson Lifszyc. This cultural center hosted lectures and talks, here one could

The place outside the town that was the scene of mass executions of Zhovkva's Jews, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

play chess and cards, and participate in Purim carnival. ¶ On the road from Zhovkva to Lviv, there was a garden known as The Old Wall, with a small store on the right hand-sight. Our mothers would stroll here on Saturdays and engage in gossip about everything and everyone: one could find out who had gone to see the tzadik of Belz to obtain blessing for one's commercial endeavors, who had sent his son to Lviv to look for a job, who was planning to leave for Palestine, who was getting married, and the like. After leaving the garden, you could go out to the opposite side, where the inn was located, in which Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews drank surrounded by clouds of cigarette smoke and a medley of conversations peppered with curses. ¶ Translated from: Shimon Samet, *Spacer po Żółkwi* (Pol.: *A Tour of Zolkiev*), ed. by Yaron Karol Becker, based on *Sefer zikaron Zolkiew* (Heb.: *Memorial Book of Zolkiew*), Jerusalem 1969

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the town was captured by the Red Army. Monuments to King John III Sobieski and Stanisław Żółkiewski were demolished. On June 29, 1941, German troops entered Zhovkva. Before they arrived, the retreating Soviet security police murdered at least 29 Ukrainian and Polish political prisoners in the local NKVD (Soviet secret police) prison located in the castle. The victims were the participants of various national resistance movements, some of them were just cultural figures with national-democratic proclivities. The persecution of the Jews started immediately after the Nazi invasion. The synagogues were leveled. On July, 22, the Germans established Jewish auxiliary police and a Judenrat, a Jewish communal council reporting to the Nazi authorities. Then, in November 1942, the Nazis established a ghetto, stretching from the square in front of the Dominican convent and through Turyniecka Street. Approximately 6,000 people were confined there. The liquidation of the ghetto took place a year later, on November, 25, 1943. More than 4,000 Jews were shot during mass executions in the Bór forest; others were transported to the Janowski

concentration camp near Lviv and to the labor camp in Rava-Ruska, where they were subsequently murdered. ¶ After the war, a memorial was erected at the site of the mass grave in the Bór forest. Another memorial was established at the municipal cemetery, at the gravesite where the exhumed remains of the victims of the Zhovkva ghetto were re-buried.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The Nazis destroyed the old Jewish cemetery, established at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest matzeva (tomb-stone), which was known to have been there before the war bore the name of certain Yitzhak, son of Abraham (d. 1610). The last burials took place in 1943. During the German occupation, tombstones were used to build roads. The Jewish cemetery was eventually destroyed in 1970, when the communist authorities demolished dozens of Jewish cemeteries across the USSR, particularly in Ukraine. The tombstones were removed and a large marketplace was established on the former site of the cemetery. The original Baroque cemetery wall survived partially, and in the south-eastern part, next to the entrance to the marketplace, there is an ohel over the grave of the local

righteous man called Yitzhak (d. 1737) and fragments of matzevot embedded in the wall.

**After the war** ¶ After the war, Zhovkva found itself on the territory of the independent Ukraine. The town's ethnic composition changed radically. During the war, the almost all Jews were murdered. In 1944, there were only 74 Holocaust survivors in town. In the late 1940s, Polish residents were transferred to the west and replaced by Ukrainians, transferred here from eastern Poland. In 1951, Zhovkva was temporarily renamed Nesterov to honor the Russian pilot Piotr Nesterov, who perished here in 1914 destroying an enemy plane in flight for the first time in the history of aviation. In 1992, the town regained its previous name, and in 1994, Zhovkva was granted the status of the National Reserve of History and Architecture, with 55 monuments of global, national,

and regional significance. ¶ A good place to start sightseeing in Zhovkva is the Tourist Information Centre located in the town hall at 1 Vicheva Sq. (tel. +38 032 522 24 98).

**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ Apart from the synagogue, the surviving traces of the Jewish community of Zhovkva include the former Hasidic prayer house (2 Vinnikovska St.), the former seat of the kahal's authorities (7 Zaporizka St.), and the building that housed one of the *heders* (10 B. Khmelnytskoho St.). The buildings that housed the Tarbut school (8–10 Lvivska St.) and the vocational school for women (76 Lvivska St.) also survived, and also the former 19<sup>th</sup>-century ritual slaughterhouse (1 Ludkevycha St.). And if one looks closely at the stone portals of the houses around the market square, one finds traces of *mezuzot* on the door posts.



## Surrounding area

**Krekhiv** (12 km): fortified St. Nicholas Monastery (1612), the Church of St. Paraskeva (17<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ L'viv** (25 km): the largest metropolis of Galicia. Numerous architectural monuments, including many surviving monuments of Jewish heritage, such as Jacob Glanzer's Hasidic synagogue at 3 Vuhilna St.; houses with traces of *mezuzot* and the place where the "Golden Rose" synagogue was situated in Staroyevreyska (Old Jewish) St. – now a memorial and educational site called the Space of Synagogues; the still-active synagogue in Brativ Michnovskich St.; the building at 12 Sholema Aylehema St. that housed the first Jewish museum in L'viv; Maurice Lazarus's hospital in Rappaport St.; memorials to Holocaust victims, a memorial plaque in Shevchenka Street, where the Janowski concentration camp was located; a memorial to Holocaust victims in Chornovola St. **✎ Velyki Mosty** (25 km): ruins of a synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ Mageriv** (25 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ Rava-Ruska** (35 km): a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), approx. 100 matzevot. **✎ Stradch** (38 km): a cave monastery (11<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ Sokal** (50 km): a ruined former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ Nemyriv** (50 km): a Jewish cemetery, with several hundred 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-c. matzevot. **✎ The Yavoriv National Park**

## Worth seeing

**Synagogue** (1692–1700), 14 Zaporizka St. **✎ Zhovkva Castle** (1594–1606) founded by Stanisław Żółkiewski, built by Paweł Szczęśliwy, housing the Zhovkva Castle Museum with an exhibition devoted to the history of Zhovkva from its foundation to the present day (2 Vicheva Sq., tel. +38 067 996 96 68). **✎ The Roman Catholic Church of St. Lazarus** (1606–1618), the Żółkiewski family mausoleum, 21 Lvivska St. **✎ The Basilian monastery complex** (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) (1612), the Basilian printing house as part of the monastery complex, still functioning today, at 4 Bazylyanska St. **✎ Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity** (1720), included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2003, 1 Sviatoi Triitsi St. **✎ Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos** (1705), Ivana Franka St. **✎ The former Dominican monastery complex** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a Greek Catholic church, 7 Lvivska St. **✎ Town hall** (1932), 1 Vicheva Sq. **✎ City gates and fortifications** (17<sup>th</sup> c.). **✎ Arcaded houses** (17<sup>th</sup> c.).



# Belz

Pol. Belż, Ukr. Белз, Yid. בעלז

*Belz, my little town of Belz  
The little house where  
I spent my childhood!*

*The song My Little Town of Belz  
(version sung by Adam Aston,  
written by Jacob Jacobs)*

**Princely town ¶** Belz is located near the border with Poland between two tributaries of the Bug River – the Solokiya and Richitsa. According to the most widespread hypothesis, the town's name comes from the Old Slavic *belz* or *bewz*, meaning a muddy, damp area. In the Boyko dialect, the same word means a muddy place difficult to get through. Another theory links the town's name with an Old Ruthenian word *бѣлизъ* (a “white place,” a lawn, or clearing, in the midst of a dark forest). ¶ Belz is one of the oldest towns not only in Ukraine, but also in Eastern Europe. Its first mention dates to the Old Rus chronicle *Tale of the Bygone Years* (also known as the primary Chronicle), which mentions that, in 1031, the Prince of Kiev (now Kyiv) Yaroslav the Wise defended the town against the Poles. At the time, Belz was a typical fortified town on the western frontiers of Kievan Rus. In 1170, the town became the capital of the independent Principality of Belz, which pleaded allegiance to the Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, after the Rurikid dynasty had come to an end, Belz – together with the whole Kingdom of Galicia-Volhynia – became

the focus of dispute between the rulers of Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania. In 1377–1387, the town came under Hungarian rule. In 1377, Duke Władysław of Opole – the governor of the Palatinate of Ruthenia appointed by King Lajos I of Hungary and Poland – granted the town with the Magdeburg law. In 1387, Queen Jadwiga (Hedwig) of Poland removed Hungarian palatine from Ruthenia and incorporated that territory into the Kingdom of Poland. A year later, her husband Władysław II Jagiełło handed that land over to Siemowit IV, Duke of Masovia. In 1462, the town became the capital of Belz Palatinate, created after the incorporation of the Land of Belz into the Polish Crown.

**The Jews of Belz ¶** Most probably a Jewish community existed here already in the times of the Principality of Halych (called Galicia after this town), which emerged as the Duchy of Volhynia-Galicia following the collapse of Kievan Rus' in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest reference to the Jews of Belz is dated to 1469 when a court case regarding debt recovery involving Jews took place. Initially, the Jewish community



A view of Belz, circa 1931, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

lived in the Przedmieście Lubelskie (Lublin Suburb) district, but due to the growth of Belz, in 1509, the Jewish quarter was included within the town walls and formed the northwestern part of the town centre. In 1570, about 20–25 Jewish families lived in Belz. In 1587, the Dominicans sold a plot of land to the Jews for the construction of a synagogue, which means that the town magistrate acknowledged the presence of the Jews and legalized Judaism as a tolerated religion. The first *shul* (prayer house) was built of wood, like most of buildings in the town. Later, another synagogue was erected next to it. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Joel Sirkes (1561–1640) served as the rabbi of Belz. Rabbi Sirkes was a renowned Talmudic scholar and rabbinic authority known as the BaH, an acronym of the title of his work, *Bayit Hadash* (Heb.: New House), a four-volume legal commentary that adapted many rulings by key Sephardic scholars to the Ashkenazic realities. Originally from Lublin, Joel Sirkes also served as a rabbi in Pruzhany, Lublin, Łuków, Luboml, Medzhybizh

(Mezhibizh), Belz, Szydlów, Brest, and Cracow. ¶ In 1648, during the Cossack Revolution, Belz was besieged by the Cossacks, who demanded a significant ransom from the town dwellers. The wars of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century destroyed Belz almost completely, a fact attested to by the 1667 document recording an inspection of the town. To accelerate rebuilding, the municipal council of Belz granted Jews the same rights that other burghers had enjoyed. In 1704, during the Great Northern War, Belz was destroyed by Swedish troops. With the First Partition of Poland in 1772, the town was incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy and became part of the Province of Galicia. The town lost its political and administrative significance and became a small craft and trade centre. On May 7, 1789, Emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Tolerance, under which most of the legal and residential differences between Christians and Jews were abolished and the existing restrictions on building synagogues and establishing Jewish cemeteries were lifted. The Jews of Belz settled throughout the

entire town centre, including the market square. After the great fire of 1806, when most of the wooden buildings, including the prayer houses, burnt down, a new synagogue sponsored by the influential Adler family was established.

**The Hasidism of Belz** ¶ In 1816, Belz became one of the centres of Hasidic movement in Galicia and home to the famous Hasidic dynasty of Rokeakh. The dynasty was founded by the tsaddik **Sholom Rokeakh** (1779–1855) from Brody, who was a disciple of Jacob Isaac Horowitz, known as the Seer of Lublin. After the death of his teacher in 1815, Rabbi Rokeakh was recognised as a tsaddik, the head of the Hasidic court, whom people called Sar Shalom (Heb.: Prince of Peace). He served as the rabbi of Belz from 1817 to 1855. On Sholom Rokeakh's initiative, in 1843, the Great Synagogue and a *beth midrash* (prayer house) were established. In 1874, the Rokeakh family sponsored the construction of a Talmud Torah school and a new building for the rabbinic families which were built to the southeast of the Great Synagogue. ¶ Due to the charisma of Sholom Rokeakh, Hasidic ideas spread wide through northern Galicia, Volhynia, and Hungary. As the legend has it, Rabbi Rokeakh was able to heal people, and his fame as a healer who helped Jews and Christians in difficult times reached far beyond the borders of Galicia, Volhynia, and Bukovina. Hundreds of Jews came to Belz for a personal blessing of a tsaddik. Sholom Rokeakh died in 1855 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Belz. Today his grave site has turned into a site of pilgrimage for people in dire straits. ¶



Sholom Rokeakh was succeeded by his fifth and youngest son, Rabbi Yehoshua Rokeakh (1825–1894), who – unlike his father – was active not only communally, but also politically. In 1878, the famous tsaddikim (Hasidic leaders) of Eastern Galicia led by Yehoshua Rokeakh established the first political organization of the Orthodox Jews called “Mahazikei ha-dat” (Heb.: “Upholders of the Faith”), which sought to combat the spread of the Haskalah in Galicia and to defend the Hasidic Orthodoxy. The members of Mahazikei ha-dat published one of the first journals of the rising Orthodox movement and participated in the elections to the Austrian Parliament. ¶ When the rabbi was taken ill with a mysterious disease, his followers, the Hasidim decided to take him to Vienna, where he was examined by specialists in

Jews in Belz, 1916–1917, a photograph taken by a German soldier during World War I, collection of *Beit Ha-Ifrut*, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv; courtesy of the Polish Academy of Sciences



one of the best hospitals in Europe. Doctors concluded that he needed an immediate surgery, but nobody could predict the result. The operation was performed without any complications but, on his way back from Vienna to Belz, the rabbi died. ¶ In 1894, Issachar Dov Rokeach (1854–1926), son of Yehoshua became the third Admor (acronym of Heb.: *adoneinu, moreinu, rabeinu* – our teacher and master) of Belzer Hasidim. Rabbi

Issachar continued to teach Hasidic traditions, promoted education, and enjoyed a widespread authority among Jewish leaders in Galicia and Hungary. He was also believed to be a miracle-worker. Thousands of pilgrims from various countries visited Belz to receive his blessing. ¶ Like his predecessors Shalom and Yehoshua, he too was buried at the Belz Jewish cemetery, where pilgrims come to pray at their graves.

” Dr. Arthur Ruppin, an outstanding German Jewish sociologist and economist and one of the leaders of Zionist movement – A Visit to Belz in the Year 1903.  
¶ *I came by train to Belz on the eve of the holiday of Shavuot. The train was completely packed with Jews who were traveling to the Rebbe. All of them had long earlocks and wore black velvet round shtreimels on their heads and some were wearing sandals. We arrived in Belz in the afternoon. The long line of Jews who were walking towards the town reminded me of a nation being in constant motion. Normally, Belz had 6,000 residents, of whom half were Jewish. On that day, it was like Belz was populated by Jews only, since thousands of Jews came to visit the Rebbe from out of town, even from Hungary and Russia. ¶ I went to synagogue for the evening prayer. There was no place to sit. There were thousands of Jews standing, crowding and swaying during prayer, like sheaves of grain in the wind. The Rebbe appeared and the congregation immediately started to pray. Everyone is pushing, attempting to get close to the Rebbe. The Rebbe walks to the podium and prays with a crying voice. It seems as though the voice awakens ardent admiration among the congregants. They are*



*closing their eyes and swaying their bodies from side to side in devotion. Their loud prayer reminds an uproar of a storm. Whoever sees these Jews in their prayer would have to admit that these people are still the most devout of all.* ¶ Based on: *Sefer zikaron Belz* (Belz Memorial Book), Tel Aviv 1974, trans. Gila Schecter, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

**The synagogue** ¶ In 1839–1849, a new stone synagogue and a beth midrash were built. The construction was most probably initiated by Rabbi Sholom Rokeakh. The following legend explains how the new synagogue emerged. Rabbi Sholom together with his two friends promised not to sleep for one thousand nights and devote his entire time to the Torah study. After a few hundred nights, the friends gave up while Rabbi Rokeakh persevered. On the last night, Prophet Elijah appeared before Rabbi Rokeakh – they studied the Torah together until the dawn. The prophet revealed to Rabbi Rokeakh all the details of a synagogue

and Rabbi Rokeakh promised to build the synagogue exactly according to the instructions of the prophet. For 15 years, the rabbi was personally involved in the building of the synagogue. It was a tall stone structure with one-meter-thick walls, resembling the fortified synagogue in the nearby Zhovkva. Established on a rectangular foundation, it comprised a square-shaped prayer room, a narthex, and a women's gallery. The building was topped with an attic decorated with gilded copper spheres. The synagogue had excellent acoustics and a capacity of 5,000 people.

After the Holocaust, the surviving Belzer Hasidim with their leader relocated to Jerusalem and elsewhere. In the 1980s, the fifth Belz Hasidic leader Rabbi Issachar Dov (II), grandson of Issachar Dov (I) and nephew of Aaron, proposed a plan for the establishment of the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem which would be an enlarged copy of the Belz Great Synagogue demolished by the Nazis. This new synagogue, one of the biggest in the world, was opened in 2000. It has a spacious prayer room with a capacity of 10,000 people, study rooms, a banquet hall, and various facilities. Located in Northern Jerusalem, it took 15 years to build – as long as it took to build the old synagogue in Belz.

**The early 20<sup>th</sup> century** ¶ In 1880, Belz had 2,135 Jewish residents (52 percent of the general population). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, another synagogue – founded by certain Feivel Taub – was erected near the Lwowski Przedmieście (Lviv Suburb) quarter. In 1909, Feivel's son – also Feivel – established a philanthropic society Yishrey Lev (People of Straight Will) that helped the sick and the poor. In 1910, this

charitable society built a shul to the south from the market. ¶ In 1914, Belz boasted 3,600 Jewish, 1,600 Ukrainian, and 900 Polish residents. World War I had a significant impact on the town: it disrupted the normal life of the Jewish community. In 1914–1915, Belz was occupied by Russian troops and became part of the Governorate-General of Galicia and Bukovina. During the first days of the occupation, Russian troops burnt

The synagogue of the Yishrey Lev Philanthropic Society in Belz, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre" (www.teatrnn.pl)



down nearly all the Jewish houses in the market and nearby streets. The burnt-down walls were the only reminder of the Yishrey Lev prayer house, of the *beth midrash* and of the Talmud Torah school. In 1916–1918, the Great Synagogue housed an Austrian military hospital. After the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918, Belz was for a short time a central county town in the West Ukrainian People's Republic, and then, in 1919, it was incorporated into the re-established Poland. ¶ During World War I, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeakh had to leave Belz and move to Mukachevo. He did not return home until after the end of the war. He died in 1926, and after his death, Aaron Rokeakh (1880–1957) became the leader of Belz Hasidim. While by the late 1930s, the Rokeakh family sponsored the reconstruction of all the destroyed Jewish buildings in town. Rabbi Aaron spent his childhood in his family house. He was known as a Torah genius already

in his young age. From his early years, he led an ascetic lifestyle, which affected his health, and became known as a reserved and mysterious person. Many of his disciples told stories of his mysterious behaviour and his miracle-working and compared him to the Baal Shem Tov, the legendary founder of Hasidism. ¶ At the beginning of the 1930s, Isaac Mautner, Shmul Spindel, and Isaac Teller established a Zionist organisation called Torah va-Avoda (Heb.: Learning and Working), first in Sokal and then in Belz. Later, a youth Zionist organization Bnei Akiva (Heb.: Son's of Rabbi Akiva) appeared in town. It consisted of two groups with a total of 20 members. Its leading activists were Moshe Hadari and Mirel Ziefert. The members of this youth Zionist group organised secular cultural events with nationalist flavor, taught Hebrew language, and cooperated with the Hit'akhdut (Heb.: Unity) and other Jewish political parties.

a prototype of the town in the song remains unclear. Aleksander Olszaniecki composed the music for the song, and Jacob Jacobs, a towering figure in American Yiddish Theatre life, penned the lyrics. The song appeared in 1932, commissioned for a New York stage production entitled *The Song from the Ghetto*. The song became a hit as a nostalgic reminiscence of the vanished world, it was translated into other languages, and with the destruction of Belz acquired elements of prophecy. ¶ There has long been an ongoing discussion which town that song immortalized: the old Polish Belz or the town of Bălți in Moldova. The former version is more widely held true in Poland, and one of the first translations of the song was made for the famous Warsaw cabaret singer Adam Aston. Still, it must be remembered that the singer Isa Kremer – for whom the song was written – came from the Moldovan town of Bălți (Yid.: Belts, Ukr.: Byeltsi, Pol.: Bielce). Be that as it may, both towns were doomed and the lyrics also depict the fate of hundreds of other towns, not only of these two with similar names.



Jewish cemetery in Belz, 2017. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Belz was occupied by the Red Army; then, after October 10, it was taken over by German forces and incorporated into the General Government (1939–1944). Together with the retreating Soviet troops, many Jews fled east, into the USSR mainland. The German occupation authorities, meanwhile, herded Jews from the nearby towns to Belz and created in town a forced labour camp. In May 1942, there were approx. 1,500 Jews in town. On June 2, 1942, about 1,000 of them were forced to walk some 60 km to Hrubieszów, from where they were transported to the death camp in Sobibór. In September, 1942, about 500 Jews who had remained in Belz shared their fate.

**The last rabbi** ¶ In an attempt to save himself from the Nazis, the last rabbi

of Belz, Aaron Rokeakh, moved in the fall of 1939 to Peremyshliany. In July 1941, the Nazis surrounded the Jewish quarter, herded all the Jews into the synagogue and set it on fire. They were rescued by a Greek Catholic clergyman Omelyan Kovch (the famous “parish priest of Majdanek,” who Pope John Paul II proclaimed a blessed martyr in 2001). He persuaded SS officers to let him into the burning *shul*. Taking advantage of the confusion, Kovch opened the doors of the synagogue and let the people out. He noticed a body near the entrance, which he picked up and carried from the fire. The person he rescued was Rabbi Aaron Rokeakh, who ended up surviving the Holocaust. Unfortunately, not everybody was able to flee the synagogue. Among the dead was Rokeakh’s only son, Moshe. ¶ In 1943, with the help of a Hungarian counterintelligence officer,

Rabbi Rokeakh and his stepbrother Rabbi Mordechai of Biłgoraj managed to escape to Hungary. The brothers shaved off their beards and side-locks: they were supposed to pretend to be two Soviet generals captured by the Hungarians and escorted to Budapest for interrogation. Later, the runaways recalled that miracles accompanied them at each and every step. During their 200-kilometre journey through Galicia and Slovakia to the Hungarian border, thick fog surrounded their car so that it was virtually invisible. When they finally reached the Hungarian border, they were pulled over at the border crossing. In a decisive moment, three high-ranking officials from Budapest appeared and ordered that the car be allowed to pass. The Hasidim of Belz sincerely believe that these were three Belzer tsadikim sent from the Heavens to secure Rabbi Aaron's escape. ¶ After the war, Rabbi Aaron Rokeakh recreated the Belzer Hasidic centre in Israel, where he lived until his death in 1957. Though he himself had survived the war under dramatic circumstances, the death of his son Moshe, in Belz, brought the direct dynastic line of the Rokeakh rabbis to an end (the current Admor of the Belzer dynasty is the son of Rabbi Aaron's cousin). In Israel, the court of the tsaddik of Belz was joined by other Hasidim whose tsaddikim (leaders of the Hasidic courts) were killed in Europe. Thus, the Belzer Hasidim became one of the largest present-day Hasidic communities.

**Post-war Belz** ¶ In 1944, the town again was incorporated into Poland and remained Polish for just a few years. During a forced "population exchange" (which historians nowadays consider

"ethnic cleansing" on both sides) between the communist Poland and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, as well as during the Operation "Vistula" (forced resettlement of Ukrainian ethnic minority in 1947 by the Polish government), all Ukrainians were moved from Belz and its surrounding areas further east. But then, under the 1951 Border Adjustment Treaty, Belz was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, while the neighbouring region of Ustrzyki became part of Poland. In a yet another forced population transfer, the Poles living in Belz were transported out of the town, which was in turn resettled by Ukrainians transferred here from the Ustrzyki region and by people displaced from other regions of Ukraine and USSR. Since 1991, Belz remained within the borders of independent Ukraine. ¶ In 1945, 220 Jewish survivors returned to Belz. Using their pre-war Polish status, some of them moved to Israel and other countries, but a small Jewish population remained in town. It was only towards the end of the 1990s that almost all Jews emigrated from Belz in the wake of the post-communist economic turmoil. ¶ The most precious landmarks of Jewish cultural heritage – including the Great Synagogue, a *beth midrash*, and the Talmud Torah school – the Nazis demolished in 1942. In 1951, the Soviets levelled and cleaned the ruins which still remained after World War II. The former *mikveh* building is the only element of the synagogue complex that has survived. The building of the Yishrey Lev Philanthropic Society and the remnants of the Jewish graveyard with partly preserved matzevot, particularly those of the Rokeakh family, have also survived.



**A pilgrimage destination** ¶ Belz remains an important pilgrimage destination for Hasidim from all over the world who want to visit the graves of the famous tsaddikim. To satisfy the needs of visitors, a new synagogue, a mikveh,

and a pilgrims' hostel have been built on the opposite side of the cemetery in the northern part of the town. The cemetery was circumscribed by a wall in 2007. Keys to its gate can be obtained at: +380325752417.

Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 106 Mitskevycha St. ¶ **Former prayer house of the Yishrey Lev Society** (1910), Torhowa St. ¶ **State Historical and Cultural Reserve in Belz**, 1 Savenka St., tel. +380325754157. ¶ **Arian Tower** (1606), the town's oldest surviving monument, Gogola St. ¶ **Ruins of the Dominican monastery** (mid-16<sup>th</sup> c.), Savenka St. ¶ **Town hall** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Savenka St. ¶ **Former church and convent of the Dominican Sisters** (second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., currently the Church of St. Nicholas – Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church), Savenka St. ¶ **Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (1906–1911) and St. Valentine's Chapel, Savenka St. ¶ **Wooden Greek Catholic Church of St. Paraskeva** (15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), Mitskevycha St.

Surrounding area

**Chervonohrad** (18 km): the Potocki Palace (1762), currently a branch of the L'viv Museum of Religious History; the Basilian Monastery of St. George (1673); the former Bernardine church (1692–1704), currently Orthodox Church of St. Vladimir. ¶ **Velyki Mosty** (20 km): ruins of the synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), inside: matzevot from the local Jewish cemetery; a church (1837); an Orthodox church (1893). ¶ **Uhniv** (21 km): the former synagogue building (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a church (1695); an Orthodox and Greek Catholic church (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Sokal** (28 km): The Orthodox Church of St Nicholas (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Bernardine monastery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), now a correction colony; ruins of the synagogue (1762); a devastated Jewish cemetery with the remains of matzevot. ¶ **Radekhiv** (52 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Greek Catholic Church of St. Nicholas (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.).



# Busk

Ukr. Буськ, Yid. ביסק

*Their hands pointed at a gently sloping rock: It is here!*

Georges Clemenceau, *Busk*, in: *Au pied du Sinai* (Fr.: At the Foot of Mount Sinai), Paris 1898

**The Venice of Galicia** ¶ Busk is located at the place where the Poltva, Solotvyn, and Rokitna rivers flow into the Bug, dividing the town into several parts. In the past, the town was surrounded by ponds and bogs, and the numerous rivers and brooks contributed to the creation of a unique landscape. That is why, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Busk was often called the “Venice of Galicia”. Today, the town looks completely different. The brooks have dried up and the division of the town into separate parts has disappeared. Only the bridges and wooden footbridges connecting the banks of former riverbeds stand as a reminder of this characteristic feature. ¶ The medieval *Primary Chronicle* mentions Busk (Buzhesk) as a fortified town reporting to the counts of the Duchy of Kiev (Kievan Rus) as early as 1097. From 1100, Busk was the capital of an independent palatinate included in the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia; the palatinate and the principality were incorporated into the Polish Crown in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1411, Busk was granted the Magdeburg rights, which significantly boosted the development of town trades and crafts and the creation

of urban infrastructure. This was also strategically important due to the town location at the so-called Black Trail, an ancient trade route used by merchants travelling from Crimea to Lviv as well as by the Tatars during their raids. From 1540, the position of the head of the palatinate belonged to one of the Górkas, Polish Calvinist family. Thanks to the Górkas, Busk became one of the first centres of Calvinism in Ruthenia (Galicia). The town expanded significantly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: in addition to the Old Market square, two more were established, the Central Market and the New Market. These new market places divided the town into three parts: old, new, and central. Paper mills were built in 1539–1541, they produced paper for printing presses in eastern Poland until 1788; the first printer of Slavic books, the famous Ivan Fedorov (Fedorowicz) printed his Ostrog Bible on Busk paper in 1581. This was the first complete edition of the Bible in Church Slavonic language. ¶ Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Józef Mier of Scottish origin became the town owner, and due to his mercantile interests and protectionist trade policies, the town began to develop dynamically



Market square in Busk, 1917, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

as the industrial centre. Mier ordered the establishment of sawmills and glass-works and invited Czech and German craftsmen to settle permanently in town. In 1810, his son Count Wojciech Mier built a palace which has survived till

this day. Busk remained in the hands of the Mier family until 1879, but the town experienced a devastating fire in 1849 and subsequently lost its economic significance. After the Mier family, Busk was ruled by the Badenis noblemen.

**Count Kasimir Felix Badeni (1846–1909)** became the Governor of Galicia in 1888, and in 1895–1897, he served as the Austro-Hungarian prime minister. After he retired, he settled in Busk, where he lived permanently until his sudden death on a train a few kilometres from Busk while returning from Karlsbad, the famous mineral waters spa west of Prague. He was buried in his family crypt in Busk, which was destroyed during the Soviet times. Ludwik Józef Badeni succeeded his father as the owner of the estate. The Badeni family was favourably disposed towards the Jews. Stories are told about Kasimir Badeni speaking to local Jews in Yiddish and supporting poor Jews by exempting them from taxes.

**The Jews of Busk** ¶ In 1454, Jews were first mentioned as living in Busk. In 1510, Jews were obliged to pay 20 gold florins to the Royal Treasury through the *kahal* of Lviv, which means that they were submitting to the authority of the Lviv Jewish community, as far as their financial relations with and obligations

before the Polish Crown were concerned. In 1518, the king exempted Jews from tax for one year due to a Tatar raid that devastated the town. Later, Jews had to pay their taxes in state-approved coins (30 *groszy* for one florin), not in gold. In 1564, King Sigismund Augustus confirmed the 1550 privilege granted to the Jews of Busk



[A] A view of Busk, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Jewish cemetery in Busk, 2013. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

and further expanded their privileges. He allowed Jews to purchase plots of land and construct houses anywhere in town, build new buildings, deal in real estate, and carry out business anywhere in Ruthenia (Galicia) and Podolia, including a privileged trade in meat. In short, Jews enjoyed all municipal and state privileges and exemptions on an equal footing with other Gentile residents. Nonetheless, in 1582, King Stefan Báthory declared Busk a free royal town which implied also that the town was granted *De non tolerandis Judaeis* privilege. The full consequences of this innovation are not exactly clear, since Jews continued to live within the town walls, in the New Town, as if the privilege stipulating the banishment of Jews was not enforced. ♪ From the legal standpoint, the Jewish community of Busk continued to be part of the *kahal* of

Lviv; still, it maintained its own independent communal institutions such as a cemetery and a synagogue. The rabbis serving in Busk included Rabbi Aaron (1540–1560) and Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham Hayes; the latter worked here in 1564–1568 and was then invited to become the Rabbi of Prague. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the rabbi of Busk was held by Tzvi Hirsch ben Moshe from Zhovkva (then Żółkiew). About 100 Jews died during the Cossack wars in 1648–1649, but by the late 1650s, the community revived afterwards and rebuilt itself.

**The Old Cemetery** ♪ The old Jewish cemetery in Busk is believed to be the oldest Ashkenazi cemetery in Ukraine and one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Central and East Europe. Located on several hills, it boasts the oldest surviving matzeva in the Shtetl Routes area, dated to 1520, with an epitaph reading: *A garland instead of ashes* (Isaiah 61:3). *Here lies an honest man, r. Yehuda son of r. Jacob, called Judah. He died on Tuesday, on the 5th day of Kislev in the year 5281 from the creation of the world (23.11.1520). May his soul be bound in the bond of life [together with the souls] of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all God-fearing people.*



## The Frankists and the Hasidim

¶ In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Busk turned into a centre of the Frankist movement that galvanized Podolia and Ruthenia and was led by the ambitious schismatic Jacob Frank. The leader of the movement considered himself a reincarnation of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century pseudo-Messiah Sabbetai Tsvi (who ended up converting into Islam) and preached salvation achieved through sexual orgies involving Jews and non-Jews and licentious behaviour that broke all the barriers of the Judaic commandments. This was the new avatar of the concept “redemption through sin” previously advanced by Sabbetai Tsvi. Frank based it on his perverse reading of the kabbalistic *Zohar* which he claimed allegedly supported the idea of Trinity. Several hundred Jews, even the then Rabbi Nachman Samuel ha-Levi of Busk joined the sectarians Jacob Frank. To ensure the sect has an upper hand in the larger Jewish community, Frank orchestrated a disputation between the traditional rabbinic Jews and himself, a new Jewish Messiah. The disputation took place in Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1757 under the supervision of Bishop Dembrowski and was attended by 19 Frankists, four of whom – led by Rabbi Nachman – came from Busk. Having rejected the reasons and traditions of rabbinic Judaism in public, Jacob Frank brought his Jewish followers to Catholicism. Among those baptised after the second disputation that took place in Lviv two years later, there were 103 people from Busk, including the former

Rabbi Nachman, who took the name of Piotr Jakubowski. Due to the strong support Frank received from the Jews of Busk, King Augustus III recognised Busk as one of the Polish main towns inhabited by Frankists and designated it as a place where the adherents of the sect should settle. The Jews of Busk sometimes were referred to as *bisker szabsecwijnikes*, from the twisted name of Sabbetai Zevi, Jacob Frank’s pseudo-Messianic predecessor. ¶ Rabbi David Pinkhas of Brothchin (Bohorodchany) actively opposed Frank, whom he considered a traitor of Judaism, a schismatic, a charlatan, who exploited the gullibility of his Jewish followers not able to make sense of the sophisticated kabbalistic texts. Rabbi David Pinkhas represented traditional Judaism, defended rabbinic Jewish authorities, and emphasized the key role of Talmudic education. He participated in the defense of Judaism at the second disputation with the Frankists in Lviv in 1759, while Frank facing a growing opposition to his messianic craze preferred to stay in Busk. ¶ The conversion of the Frankists and a subsequent imprisonment of the leader of the movement made the converted Frankists move into central Poland. The remaining void was soon filled by the new movement of religious enthusiasm, Hasidism, and its adherents, Hasidim. The Hasidic movement enjoyed mass following in Busk which coexisted with the traditional (Lithuanian) Jews associated with *mitnagdim* (anti-Hasidic minded Jews).

**THE ALESK HASIDIC DYNASTY** (named after the town of Olesko, located 23 km from Busk) represents a branch of Busk Hasidism. The founder of the dynasty, Rabbi Hanoch Henikh Dov Majer (1800–1884) was also known under



Synagogue in Busk, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

the title of his work *Lev sameach* (Heb.: A Happy Heart). He was a son-in-law of the tsaddik Rabbi Sholom Rokeakh, the founder of the Hasidic dynasty in Belz. As a child, Majer visited the Seer of Lublin and became a disciple of famous Hasidic rabbis such as Uri of Strelisk, Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz, and of his father-in-law Sholom Rokeakh. The leaders of the Hasidic dynasties such as Sassov, Kaliv, Stanislov, Trisk, Malin, and Radomishl were all related to the Alesk dynasty, which after 1945 relocated to Brooklyn, NY (USA).

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the town rabbi in Busk was held by members of the noted family of Babad: Rabbi Yaakov – son-in-law of Eliezer Ettinger of Zhovkva, his son Avrom (d. 1905), and his grandson Issachar Ber. These rabbinic authorities defended non-Hasidic traditions yet were much more tolerant toward the Hasidic-minded population, which enjoyed both charismatic Hasidic masters and the legal advice of the traditional rabbinic scholars.

**The synagogue** ¶ The stone synagogue, which has survived to this day, was built in 1842–1843 next to the market square, as most merchants were traditional Jews. Its construction was co-financed by Jacob Glazer, an influential merchant from Lviv. The synagogue rested on a rectangular foundation with a square-shaped prayer room. Built of hewn stone, the walls were plastered both inside and outside. The building was topped by a high attic decorated with brass spheres. The walls of the prayer room were decorated with a cornice, and the room received light through its two semi-circular

window-openings and one circular opening. The western podium was divided into two levels. In the part, in a small nave, the holy ark was placed, decorated with a two-level classicist portal topped with an archivolt. On both sides of the holy ark, there were two rows of columns with Corinthian capitals, imitating the entrance into the Holy of Holies of Jerusalem Temple. ¶ During World War II, parts of the interior of the synagogue's main room were used for building purposes. In Soviet times, the synagogue housed a gym, later a warehouse, and then one part of the synagogue was transformed into living quarters, and the other, into a garbage dump. The synagogue building was slowly but steadily falling into ruin. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to preserve this precious monument, a decision was made to transfer its uninhabited part to the community of Evangelical Christians, who partially renovated the building.

**Emigration** ¶ In 1884, some 5,297 people lived in Busk, including 2,001 Latin-rite Catholics (37.8 percent), 1,640



The Busk Branch of the Hatikva Society, 1931–1932, reproduction from *Sefer Busk*, ed. by Avraham Shairi, Haifa 1965

Greek Catholics (31 percent), 1,566 Jews (29.6 percent), and 86 Protestants (1.6 percent). In the early 1900s, the town experienced a big wave of emigration. Many Jewish craftsmen, traders, and

unemployed left for the USA. Most of them took to the road, making good use of the railway junction located in the nearby town of Krasne.

One of the famous people of Busk origin was the Austrian journalist and political activist **Morris Scheps** (1834–1902), the son of the physician Dr. Leo Scheps, the owner and publisher of the Viennese newspapers *Morgenpost* and *Wiener Tagblatt*. He was born in Busk in 1834, and attended a secondary school and the university in Lviv (then Lemberg). In 1854, he began his medical studies in Vienna but was captivated by journalism. Scheps was criticized by Vienna conservatives and xenophobes (who called themselves anti-Semites) for his pro-French liberal views. Scheps befriended many French writers and cultural figures including Georges Clemenceau, subsequently the French senator and prime minister, who even once accompanied Morris Scheps when he travelled back to Busk to visit his father's gravesite.

During World War I, from August 1914 until July 1915, Busk was occupied by Russian forces. Most Busk Jews fled to Vienna, Bohemia, or Hungary seeking to escape the Russian invasion, and most of them never returned to their hometown. In Boston, Massachusetts (USA), the Jews of Busk established a philanthropic diaspora *lansdsmanschaft* organisation (bringing together the émigrés from

their hometown) that helped new Jewish immigrants from and those Jews who remained in Busk; about 1,460 Jews lived in Busk in 1921. ¶ In November 1918, Busk was incorporated into the West Ukrainian People's Republic, which created an air force base there. In May 1919, Busk was captured by the Polish Army, and in August 1920, during Polish-Russian War, it was briefly occupied by the

Busk, a memorial to the Jews murdered in 1941–1944, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Cavalry Army under the command of Semion Budenny. Until 1939, Busk was part of the Republic of Poland.

### Education, culture, Zionism

¶ In the early 1900s, Busk had two elementary schools (Heb.: *hadarim*) for boys and girls, but there was no school for teenaged children. Wealthier parents sent their children to schools in Kamianka Strumilova, Brody, Zolochiv, or Lviv. Those who could not afford bed-and-board for their children taught them at home. Busk had no yeshiva, but any teenager eager to continue religious studies after finishing *cheder* could study in *hevruta* (peer-learning) at the local *beth midrash*. In 1908, a Hebrew school of the Zionist Tarbut school type for adult learners was established. Its first teacher was Israel Baruch, who later, when living in Haifa, wrote a memoir about the first Hebrew school in Busk. Many young people continued to learn Hebrew in Lviv (Lemberg) at the teacher training institutions and at other Jewish schools. ¶ In 1911, the Toynbee-Halle club appeared in Busk. It functioned as

a cultural and educational centre reaching out to the poorest members of the Jewish community. The club was named after Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), English economist and philanthropist, an ardent proponent of social reforms. The Zionist Hatikvah society, also established in Busk, ran cultural programs for the Jews of Busk, sponsoring a library, reading rooms, and a lecture room. A Jewish sports club “Bar-Kochba” enjoyed popularity among young people. Busk had a Jewish orphanage for 40 children, which was financially supported by the Boston-based *landsman-schaft* which also sponsored free meals for those in need during winter time. In 1921, there appeared in Busk a Hebrew school of the educational network “Safa Berura” (Heb.: Clear Language), indicating politization, secularization, and nationalist proclivities among local Jews. ¶ The Jews of Busk actively participated in various Zionist organisations. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a voluntary association Ahavat Zion (Heb.: Love of Zion) was established. There emerged branches of Zionist youth organisations such as Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, Betar, and some others. Political parties and groupings ranging from the Popular Zionists to Hitachdut to Poale Zion to Yad Harutsim were fighting for votes and followers with one another. Several *chalutzim* (agricultural pioneers-settlers in Palestine) from Busk joined the Third Aliyah to Palestine. One of them was Majer Dror (Schor), the founder of the Busk branch of Hashomer Hatzair, boy-scout Zionist youth organization.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, some 8,000 people lived in



Busk, including 4,000 Poles, 2,500 Jews, and 1,500 Ukrainians. In September 1939, the town was captured by the Soviet army, which established a POW concentration camp in the stables of the Badeni Estate. About 1,000 Polish prisoners of war worked in Busk on the construction of the Lviv–Kyiv road. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the local NKVD unit killed 35 prisoners. ¶ In late June 1941, German troops entered the town. At that time, 1,900 Jews resided in Busk. On August 21, 1942, local Jews together with Jews from Kamianka Strumilova were transported to the Bełżec death camp. Then, on September 21, 1942, the Nazis killed 2,500 Jews from Busk and Kamianka in a single extermination action in a forest near Kamianka Strumilova. In late 1942, the Nazis established a ghetto and a forced labor camp for surviving Jews from Busk and nearby towns. In Spring, 1943, some 3,000 people – including people transported from liquidated ghettos – were confined there. In the first half of 1943, ghetto inmate Jacob Eisenberg organised the ghetto underground resistance movement. Its activists were able to amass firearms, but they were betrayed, caught and executed by the Nazis. Most of Jews remaining in Busk were killed on May 21, 1943. Only a small group of survivors were sent to the Janowska

concentration camp in Lviv. That summer, the Nazis discovered six large underground bunkers in town with 140 Jews hiding in them. The armed escapees tried to resist but without success.

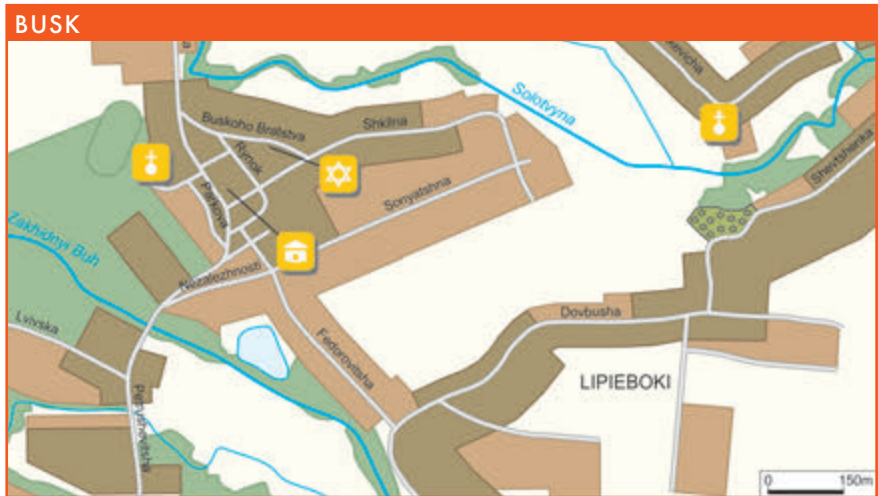
**Memorial sites** ¶ During the German occupation, Busk was devastated. The occupying forces destroyed a mill and factories, the telegraph and the telephone office; they disrupted the operation of almost all industrial enterprises and demolished dozens of residential buildings. After the war, newly resettled people and the surviving Busk dwellers began gradually to rebuild the town. Busk became the district administrative centre. Today about 8,000 people live in town but there is no Jewish community. ¶ Near the old Jewish cemetery (between the cemetery and the floodplain of the Solotvyn River), there is a place where, according to residents' testimonies, mass executions of the Jewish population took place. The site and the cemetery are used today as a pasture. In 2004, representatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sokhnut) erected a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, and in the summer of 2006, excavation works were conducted near the cemetery, at the site of executions, where the remains of 1,750 victims with traces of violent murder were uncovered.

**Father Patrick Desbois**, the president of the “**Yahad-in Unum**” organization, initiated the search for the places of mass executions of the Jews who had been murdered during the Holocaust in East Europe. Father Desbois dedicated his life to fighting anti-Semitism and establishing religious reconciliation between Jews and Catholics. By today, his organization identified about 600 mass graves and recorded more than 1,900 testimonies of the witnesses of mass murders. Father Desbois crossed the breadth and width of Ukraine looking for the places of mass murders of the Holocaust victims. Before

*filling back the pits, – he explained in his book *The Guardian of Memories: the Blood Traces of the Holocaust* – I leased a helicopter so that we would be able to make photos demonstrating the magnitude of the murder.*

**Worth  
seeing**

**Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Shevchenka St. 🕍 **Former synagogue** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Shkilna St. 🕍 **Wooden Church of St. Paraskeva** (1708), 56a M. Shashkevycha St. 🕍 **Wooden Orthodox Church of St. Onuphrius** (1758) and a chapel carved in the trunk of a millennial oak tree (1864), Khmelnytskoho St. 🕍 **Palace of Count Badeni** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 12 J. Petrushevycha St. (not open to public). 🕍 **Church of St. Stanislaus** (1780), Parkova St.



**Surrounding  
area**

**Olesko** (22 km): Olesko Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a branch of the Lviv National Art Gallery; ruins of the synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Church of the Holy Trinity (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Capuchin monastery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (with an ohel and several matzevot). 🕍 **Zolochiv** (33 km): a former synagogue (1724); a Jewish cemetery; a defense castle (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a museum. 🕍 **Pidhirtsi** (36 km): Pidhirtsi Castle (1635–1640); a Basilian monastery.

# Rohatyn

Ukr. Рогатин, Yid. ראָהאַטין

*Finally, having received a request from the faithful Jews of Rohatyn to resume the trading fair that had long been held in Rohatyn on Tuesdays, for which they are ready to produce valid documentation, [we are ready] to designate Tuesday as the trading fair day.*

Privilege granted by King John II Casimir Vasa to the Jews of Rohatyn, Lviv, May 21, 1663

## Roksolana and the antlers ¶

In the Middle Ages, the Opole region, where Rohatyn is located, was part of Kievan Rus (Duchy of Kiev). The village of Filipowice, on the site of which the town was established, is mentioned in primary sources as early as 1184. At that time, the ruler of this area was Yaroslav Osmomysl, Prince of Halych. As the legend has it, Yaroslav's wife once got lost while hunting, noticed a red stag with huge antlers, and followed it until she found the Prince and his party. The place where the woman encountered the extraordinary animal became a princely hunting ground, and subsequently a town emerged around it. In honour of this animal the town boasts deer's antlers in its coat-of-arms – and the name Rohatyn seems to come from this,

too: the Polish for antlers is *rog*, the Ukrainian is *pozu*, pronounced *rohy*, and the Russian is *poza*, pronounced *roga*. The town name Rohatyn first appears in documents dating back to the 1390s, but it was not until 1415 that the town was granted the Magdeburg right. It was then that the founder of the town, Wólczko Przesłużyc, took on the family name Rohatyński. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Rohatyn was surrounded by a moat, ramparts, and a wooden palisade, later replaced with a stone wall. One could enter the town through the gates and drawbridges: the Halych Gate, the Lviv Gate, and the Cracow Gate. In 1523, Otto Chodecki, the chief of Rohatyn palatinate and the Voivode of Sandomierz, granted the town the privilege of a weekly trading fair.

In the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Tatars from the Crimean Khanate who sought to take captives often raided Rohatyn lands. During one of these raids, they kidnapped the daughter of a local Orthodox priest, Nastia (Anastasia) Lisowska (as the 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholars agreed to call her, since her true name has never been established). The girl was sold into the sultan's harem in Istanbul. Thanks to her exceptional beauty and intelligence, she soon became the wife of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. Tradition has it that, at her request, the sultan promised never to invade her native lands. Her Persian name was Hürrem, but she entered the legend under the name **Roksolana**. In



**A** The market square in Rohatyn, destroyed by warfare, ca. 1915, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



**B** Greetings from Rohatyn, a postcard, before 1918, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

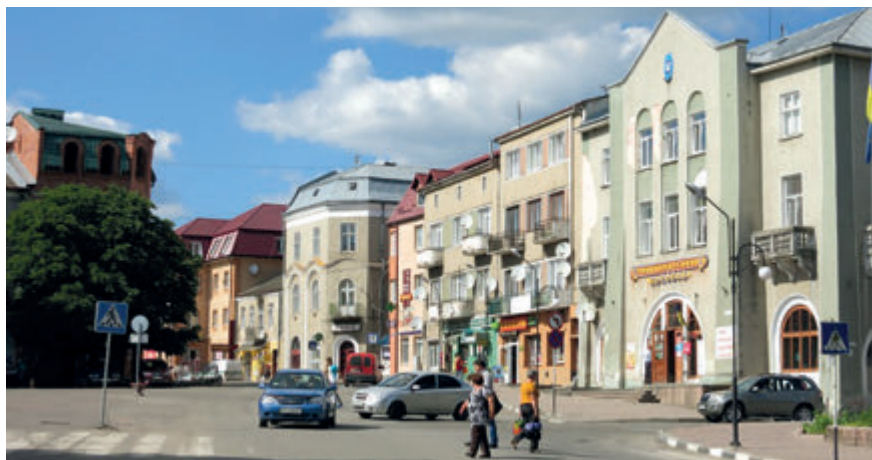
**1566, Selim II, one of her sons, succeeded Suleiman on the Ottoman throne. Roksolana died in 1558 and was buried in Istanbul. In 1999, a monument to this famous daughter of Rohatyn was unveiled in the town's central square.**

**The Jews of Rohatyn ¶** The earliest reference to Rohatyn Jews dates to a 1463 document, written by nobleman Jan Skarbek. The document mentions the Rohatyn richest Jewish merchant, the cattle trader Shimshon of Zhydachiv (Shimshon mi-Zhidachov). The document implies there was a small and stratified Jewish community in town as early as the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Nearly two centuries later, in 1633, King Władysław IV Vasa granted the Jews of Rohatyn with a wide-range privilege to settle in the town, trade in the market square, own inns, produce and sell liquor, trade in beer and mead, build a synagogue, and establish their own cemetery. Jewish privileges matched those of the town Christian inhabitants. The privileges were confirmed and reinforced by the subsequent kings, John II Casimir Vasa and Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki. ¶ The town Jewish population, along other

inhabitants of Rohatyn, suffered greatly from the warfare and mass violence during the Tatar, Turkish, and Cossack raids in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the economic situation of the town – and of the Jews – significantly deteriorated. In 1648, during the Cossack revolution and the peasant war against Polish urbanized and fortified areas, Rohatyn was captured by the Cossacks of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. It took the Jewish refugees a long time to come back and rebuild their community. On December 23, 1675, the *sejmik* (regional diet) of Halych discussed the necessity temporarily to exempt the Jews of Red Ruthenia from poll tax, which they were not able to pay because of the post-war devastation and economic downfall. In his decree of July 27, 1694, King John III Sobieski stated that *the Jews in Red Ruthenia had suffered more than other Jews did*.

**Moshe ben Daniel** was one of the Rohatyn rabbinic scholars in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1693, he published *Sugiyot ha-Talmud* (Heb.: Talmudic debates), a solid discussion of polemical issues in the Talmud. His work was





The centre of Rohatyn – Roksolany Square, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

considered so important that the Dutch Calvinist and philosopher Bashuysen reissued it in Germany in 1707 in the original Hebrew with Latin translation.

**False messiahs** ¶ Early modern Rohatyn Jews, like other early modern Jews in the Diaspora, experienced significant impact of the Jewish millenarian (messianic) movements, the adherents and leaders of which prophesized the immediacy of redemption, the end of the *golus* (Yid.: exile), the return to the Holy Land, antinomian approach to rituals and commandments of Judaism, and a revolutionary change of authority, switched from the rabbinic leaders to the messianic figures such as Sabbetai Zevi (1626–1676). Sabbateanism, the movement initiated by Sabbetai and his prophet, Natan of Gaza (Haazti), was particularly popular in Ruthenia and Podolia. When the Sabbatean prophets and believers were excommunicated elsewhere in Central Europe, for example, in Amsterdam, the Jewish communities in Zovkva and Rohatyn greeted them. The adherents of the movement were representatives of distinguished families, not necessarily the gullible folk. For example, the first Sabbatean

in Rohatyn was Elisha Shor, a descendant of the prominent rabbinic scholar Zalman Naftali Shor. ¶ With the conversion of Sabbetai Tsvi to Islam and the excommunication of the leaders of the movement, Sabbateanism went underground, where the antinomian religious ideas generated the rise of Frankism, a new pseudo-messianic movement of religious enthusiasm, which antinomian kabbalistic-based ideas galvanized Jews in Ruthenia, Volhynia, and Podolia. In the 1750s, adherents of Frankism were quite influential in Rohatyn. Jacob Frank, the founder of the movement who presented himself as a new Jewish messiah visited Rohatyn in 1755 during his trip to Galicia. He was received there by Elisha Shor’s family. Frank’s visits were reportedly accompanied by a number of scandals involving ritual sex orgies, which, according to Frank, should have released the sparks of divine light captured by the shards of human sexuality. The open conflict with traditional Jews caused the number of Frankists in Rohatyn to



Rohatyn, former Jewish shops in Halytska St, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

undertake radical steps. In 1759, several dozen Rohatyn followers of Jacob Frank converted to Catholicism, among them Shlomo Shor, Elisha Shor's son, who was given the baptismal name of Franciszek Łukasz Wołowski, and his three brothers: Natan who became Michał, Yehuda who became Jan, and Yitshak who became Henryk Wołowski. Eventually, Łukasz Wołowski pursued a career at the Polish king's court as a secretary to Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732–1798). Many descendants of the Wołowski family became significant cultural figures; suffice it to mention the pianist and composer Maria Szymanowska (1789–1831). One of the staunch opponents of the

Frankists in Rohatyn was Rabbi David Moshe Abraham, the author of *Mirk- evet ha-Mishneh* (Chariot of Mishnah), a book in which, among other things, he described a devastating activity of Frankist schismatics in his town. Initially, the Jews of Rohatyn did not have their own representative in the Council of Four Lands, Vaad Arba Aratsot – a supra-communal organization which some call the Polish Jewish *sejm* (parliament), – because their community (*kehillah*) was too small; Rohatyn was represented by certain Zelig from Lviv, most likely, an influential purveyor and international merchant. However, in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, sub-*kahals* such as Rohatyn began to gain independence from the central *kahal* in Lviv. Late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rohatyn regularly sent its two representatives to the Vaad, and at the beginning of the 1700s, the Jewish community of Rohatyn became completely independent from the Lviv *kahal*, legally and financially. In 1765, 797 Jews lived in the town. The entire *kehillah* of Rohatyn numbered 1,347 people at that time and had its own sub-*kahals* – in Pidkamin and Stratyn with minor Jewish communities reporting to Rohatyn.

“Here it is: Rohatyn. It starts with mud huts, clay houses with thatched roofs that seem to weigh the buildings down to the ground; however, as we move closer to the market square, houses become more and more slender, the thatched roofs become increasingly delicate, and eventually it gives way to wooden shingles on houses of unburnt clay brick. There is also an old parish church, a Dominican monastery, Saint Barbara's Church in the market square, as well as two synagogues and five Orthodox and Uniate churches further on. Around the market square there are small houses, like mushrooms, with some sort of business in each one. A tailor, a rope-maker, a furrier – all of them Jewish, and next to them a baker by the name of Bochenek, meaning Loaf, which invariably pleases the dean as attesting to some hidden order that could be more visible and consistent, in which case people would live more virtuous lives. Next, there is the workshop of a sword-maker called Luba; though the storefront does not stand out as particularly prosperous, its

walls are freshly painted blue, and a large rusty sword hangs over the entrance – apparently, Luba is a good craftsman and his customers have deep pockets. Further on there is a saddler, who has placed a wooden trestle in front of his door with an exquisite saddle on it – the stirrups are probably silvered, judging by the way they shine. There is a faint smell of malt in the air, permeating every commodity on sale. It fills you up like bread.

In Babintsy, the outskirts of Rohatyn, there are several small breweries, and it is from there that the aroma spreads over the whole vicinity. Numerous stalls sell beer here, and the better shops also offer vodka and mead. The shop of the Jewish merchant Wakszul offers genuine Hungarian and Rhenish wine as well as the slightly tart kind that is brought all the way from Wallachia. ¶ Olga Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, or a Great Journey across seven borders, five languages, and three major religions, not counting the minor ones: told by the dead and complemented by the author through conjecture, taken from a wide variety of books and enhanced by imagination, which is the greatest natural human faculty (Translated from: *Księgi Jakubowe*, Cracow 2014).

## Synagogues and traces of memory ¶

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a functional Jewish cemetery in Rohatyn, and at least from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a synagogue. Primary documents of 1792 confirm the existence of a wooden synagogue, and it is also known that in 1826 the town had a stone synagogue. The 1846 plan of the town indicates at least six buildings used by the Jewish community for religious purposes. ¶ Most of them were situating the north-eastern part of the town, in what now is Valova Street. It was there that the main synagogue was located, together with the adjoining prayer houses for tailors and shoemakers, the main *beth midrash*, and most of the *kahal* buildings. Only one of these buildings has partly survived to the present day: the former *beth midrash*, which after 1945 was converted into a bakery and then a mechanical



A klezmer band from Rohatyn; most of the musicians were from the Faust family, 1912, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

workshop after that. The Rohatyn memorial book mentions that there were also several Hasidic synagogues in town. ¶ One of Rohatyn's synagogues was located in what is now the school in Kotsiubynsky Street; the school complex also includes the former buildings of a *mikveh* (currently a laundry), the headquarters of the Jewish communal authorities, and the former World War II Judenrat. During renovation of the school in 2011, the constructors uncovered many scraps of various kinds of documents related to the Rohatyn Jewish community. They were in various languages (Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, Russian, and German). Subsequently, they were transferred to a Jewish museum operated by the Hesed-Arieh Jewish Centre in Lviv.

## Hasidism, Haskalah, Zionism

¶ In 1788, seeking to implement the recommendation of Joseph II's Edict



In the 1930s, the “Macabee” sports club was established in Rohatyn. Its seat was located in the still surviving library building in Ivana Franka St., 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

of Tolerance, the Austrian authorities established in Rohatyn a secular German-language school for Jewish children (functioning until 1806). Its director was the enlightened-minded Shlomo Kornfeld. The Austrian authorities sought to reform Rohatyn Jews making them useful subjects of the Austrian emperor: they restricted the *kahal* privileges allowing it to function exclusively as a religious umbrella organization; required to keep all documentation in German; and attempted to convert the Jews from tradesmen into farmers, encouraging and sponsoring the resettlement of 12 families in the agricultural colony of Novy Babilon near Bolekhiv.

Adherents of the Hasidic movement appeared in Rohatyn at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Rabbi Yitzhak Meir of Peremyshliany, Rabbi Yehuda Hirsch Brandwein of Stratyn (Yid.: Stretin), and Rabbi Yitzhak Yehuda of Baranivka settled here. The Stratyn dynasty became the most influential Hasidic dynasty in Rohatyn. When in 1844, Rabbi Yehuda Hirsch Brandwein passed away, he was succeeded by his elder son Abraham Brandwein, and then, in 1865, by his grandson Nachum Brandwein. Initially, the Haskalah, or

the Jewish Enlightenment movement, had few adherents in Rohatyn, but the movement became more popular in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1868, when the town council was reelected, seven out of 32 new magistrates were Jewish, most of them – *maskilim*, representatives of the Haskalah movement, proponents of the educational and religious reform of the Jewish people.

When the Zionist movement established itself firmly in Galicia, the town first avowed Zionist, Shalom Melzer (1871–1909), established in Rohatyn the B’nai Zion (Heb.: Sons of Zion) organization, which by 1898 boasted 100 members. In 1907, Rohatyn Jewish women established a local women’s Zionist organisation “Ruth.” A newly established Zionist club headed by Rabbi Nathan Levin became a forum for political and social debates on issues such as the role of secular Jewish education and the need of a Jewish higher educational establishment in town. Rohatyn sent its representatives to a number of Palestinianophile (proto-Zionist) congresses and conferences, for example, to the Congress of Hevrat Yishuv Eretz Yisrael (Association of Relocating Jews to Palestine) and of Ahavat Zion (Heb.: Love of Zion) in Tarnów in 1894. Shalom Melzer and Avrum Zlatkis represented Rohatyn at the 1898 Zionist congress in Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk), while Melzer also took part in the 1904 conference of Ha-Mizrachi in Austria, held in Pressburg (now Bratislava) in 1904, the first meeting of the followers the new religious movement bridging Zionism and traditional Judaism, later associated with Rabbis Shmuel Mohilever and Avraam Kook and known today



as the Israeli national-religious camp.

¶ Due to the efforts of Rabbi Nathan Levin, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a modern Talmud Torah school was established. In 1904, the Zionist-minded Raphael Soferman established a new secular Jewish school in which he served as a teacher and headmaster. In 1912, Soferman left for Palestine, where he continued as an educator. Rohatyn Jewish children also attended Ukrainian and Polish gymnasias (secondary schools) that were established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Time for trains** ¶ Due to the industrial growth in Galicia, the economic situation of Rohatyn Jews began to improve in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This happened predominantly due to the construction of the Halych–Ternopil railway line in 1852. The line connected Rohatyn to the national railway system. Train-related services became an important source of employment for local Jews. In addition, the railroad gave boost to Rohatyn wineries, breweries, small factories, several mills, a brickyard, and two print shops, most of them run by Jews. Rohatyn Jews also earned their living through the traditional trade and crafts. In 1913, the Jewish community

of Rohatyn included 590 merchants, 42 craftsmen, 19 farmers, and 44 representatives of liberal professions (lawyers, accountants, etc.). Economic growth also fostered the establishment of the Jewish charities and credit societies. In 1906, the Credit Society was set up to provide free-loan or low-interest loans for the start-up businessmen; by 1908, it had 385 members and granted 346 loans amounting to 71,425 crowns.

**Between the wars** ¶ After the outbreak of World War I, many Jews from Rohatyn fled to Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia, where they stayed in refugee camps. The occupation of Galicia by Russian troops in September 1914, triggered the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence, Rohatyn was no exception. The Russian soldiers set the Jewish quarter on fire, and the Russian authorities arrested 570 Jews, accused them of espionage (since they were speaking Yiddish which the Russians took for German) and deported them to the interior Russia, as far from the battlefield as it was possible. The deportees included the Fausts, a Jewish family famous for its family orchestra that performed at various ceremonies in Rohatyn.

“ There was not a single person in our city who did not know the musicians of our orchestra. And none of the surrounding towns had such a unique group as the father and his four sons – the well-known members of the Faust family. The father died leaving his four sons. David Faust, the eldest, was the fiddler; he also used to call the tune at weddings. The second son, Itsik-Hersh, a small and delicate man, played the flute, and his lips seemed to have been molded to fit his instrument. The third, Yaakov Faust, stout and powerful, was the trumpeter, his cheeks were always puffed up from trumpeting; he was a [quiet] man with an endearing smile. The fourth, Mordechai-Shmuel, a young, bearded, bespectacled man with a cultivated demeanor, could read music and conducted and led the orchestra on his instrument – the clarinet. ¶ Kehilat Rohatin ve-ha-sevivah; ir



Jewish cemetery in Rohatyn, 2013. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

After the defeat of the Russian troops, the Austrian authorities re-established themselves in Rohatyn in 1915, and many Jewish refugees returned to their homes. During the Polish-Ukrainian War (1918–1919), Rohatyn's Jewish community

*be-hayeyha u-ve-kilaiona* (Hebr.: *The Community of Rohatyn and Environs; The Life and Death of the Town*, trans. Binyamin Weiner), Tel Aviv 1962, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

appointed the Jewish National Committee, a secular and autonomous version of the *kahal*, to protect its interests before the authorities. In the interwar period, the relations between the three ethnic groups in town – Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews – became particularly tense and hostile. In addition, economically Jews also suffered from the growing competition of the newly urbanized Christian population, whose cooperative institutions provided aid to Poles or Ukrainians of the Christian population only.

**Norbert (Nathan) Glanzberg** (1910–2001) was a French composer and pianist born in Rohatyn to a Jewish family. Soon after his birth, his parents moved to Würzburg, Germany. From his early age, he showed an amazing musical talent, which he later developed by taking piano and composition lessons at the music university in Würzburg. Glanzberg composed music for German films. When Hitler came to power, Glanzberg was forced to emigrate to France. In 1940, he found himself in Marseille, where he met the singer Édith Piaf, then a rising star aged 25. Glanzberg, for a time Piaf's lover, wrote some of Piaf's most famous songs (including the acclaimed *Padam, padam...*). Piaf helped Glanzberg escape persecution by the Nazis by arranging for him to stay hidden for a time at the chateau of Countess Lily Pastré. After World War II, Glanzberg composed film music as well as songs, and his scores were used in two dozen films starring actors such as Brigitte Bardot (*Please, Not Now!*) and Marina Vlady (*The Blonde Witch*), among others.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the Soviet army occupied Rohatyn. The Soviet authorities banned all political parties and religious organisations except the communist and began screening of all the “suspicious” individuals. The Soviets arrested and deported to the Ural, Kazakhstan and

Siberia dozens of Poles and Ukrainians who did not fit in the class-based vision of the socialist society imposed by the new regime. The Jews, mostly impoverished, were co-opted by the Soviets as the representatives of the oppressed classes. Then in less than two years, on July 2, 1941, the German troops entered

Rohatyn. In late July, the Nazis ordered the establishment of a Judenrat, and in late August, they established a ghetto, in which they kept Jews from Rohatyn, Burshtyn, Bukachivtsi, and nearby villages until the summer of 1943. The Rohatyn ghetto took up about one-fourth of the town area (from the town centre to its western outskirts). It was circumscribed by barbed wire and guarded by policemen. Every day, 40 to 50 people died in the ghetto of malnutrition, typhus, and dysentery. ¶ It is estimated that that number of Rohatyn Holocaust victims amounted to some 12–15,000 Jews: 9,800 were killed in town, 2,100 were transported to the Belżec death camp. March 20, 1942, remained in the Jewish memory as the “black Friday”: on that day about 1,800 Jews from Rohatyn, mainly young people and children, were shot dead at the local railway station.

**The cemetery** ¶ The old Jewish cemetery in Rohatyn is located in the south-eastern part of the town, at the intersection of Stepana Bandery St. and Bohdana Lepkoho St., opposite Saint Nicholas’ Church. The exact date of its establishment is unknown, but the privilege granted in 1633 by King Władysław IV Vasa to the Jews of Rohatyn alludes to the existence of an operating cemetery in first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ The boundaries of the cemetery remain unchanged since 1939, but fewer than 20 matzevot (tombstones) have survived to the present day, none of them in their original place. The oldest ones date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cemetery was destroyed during World War II, when 75 percent of the *matzevot* were uprooted, removed, and used for construction and

paving. Today, there are two monuments at the old Jewish cemetery in Rohatyn. One of them, of black granite, bears an inscription in Hebrew; the other, which has the form of a square-shaped tablet, has inscriptions in English, Ukrainian, and Hebrew that state that this was the site of the Jewish cemetery destroyed by the Nazis during World War II. In recent years, a memorial plaque has been placed there and an *ohel* has been erected. ¶ The new cemetery was established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last known burial took place in 1940. Currently, works are in progress to gather the fragments of Jewish tombstones found in town and to place them back at the old Jewish cemetery. Special survey (with scanning) has also been underway to determine the site of the Holocaust-era mass graves.

**Memorials** ¶ Nowadays, in the northern part of the town, opposite the municipal park, there are two memorials. One of them, established by the communist authorities, bears an inscription “To the victims of fascism.” The other, established in the post-communist Ukraine and unveiled in 1998, bears an epitaph in Ukrainian, English, and Hebrew. Its English inscription reads: “Here lie thousands of Jews, citizens of Rohatyn and its surrounding areas, who were brutally killed by the German Nazis during the years of 1942–1944. God rest their souls.”

**Heritage** ¶ For many years, Mykhailo Vorobets’, a local retired teacher, worked tirelessly to preserve the memory about Rohatyn Jews. In 2011, Marla Raucher Osborn, whose ancestors came from Rohatyn, with the help of the

Association of Rohatyn Jews and their descendants, launched the “**Rohatyn Jewish Heritage**” project ([www.rohatyn-jewishheritage.org](http://www.rohatyn-jewishheritage.org)). The project on preservation of Rohatyn Jewish heritage has been carried out in close cooperation with local authorities and activists. Thanks to the project, more matzevot

were discovered in town and returned to the cemetery. Plans are underway to establish a new memorial. The organisation of the descendants of Rohatyn Jews has been in cooperation with the town’s authorities on several educational projects to preserve the town Jewish heritage.

### Worth seeing

**Jewish cemeteries** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Bandery St., (19<sup>th</sup> c)Turianskoho St. 🕍 **Holy Spirit Orthodox Church** (16<sup>th</sup> c., wooden), included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, 10 Roksolany St. 🕍 **Church of St. Nicholas** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Shevchenka St. 🕍 **Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Mother of God Nativity** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 18 Halytska St. 🕍 **Rohatyn Museum of Art and Local History** in the renovated building of Mykola Uhryn-Bezhrishnyi’s manor house, 11 Uhryna-Bezhrishnoho St. 🕍 **“Opilla” Museum** in the building of the Volodymyr the Great Middle School, 1 Shevchenka St.

### Surrounding area

**Chortova Hora (Devil’s Mount)** (3 km): a natural reserve park. 🕍 **Burshtyn** (18 km): a Jewish cemetery (several thousand 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-c. matzevot); Holy Trinity Church (18<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox church (1802); a former manorial estate park. 🕍 **Berezhany** (32 km): the Sieniawski Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Armenian church (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Catholic church (17<sup>th</sup> c.); former Bernardine Monastery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the town hall (1803); ruins of the synagogue (1718); a Jewish cemetery (approx. 200 matzevot). 🕍 **Bibrka** (40 km): ruins of the synagogue (1821); a Jewish cemetery with approx. 20 matzevot.





# Halych

Pol. Halicz, Ukr. Галич, Yid. העליטש

*When the Karaite pitched a tent there,  
That guest from a distant homeland*

Aleksander Mardkowicz,  
*Halic* [Kar.: Halych], Lutsk 1937

**The Capital on the Dniester** ¶ Halych is the town that gave its name to the entire region – Galicia (Ukr. Halychyna). In the Middle Ages, it was the capital of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia. It is here that works depicting the earliest 12<sup>th</sup>-century times of the Principality such as the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle* and the *Galician Gospel* were composed in late 13<sup>th</sup>–early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Written references to Halych appear in Hungarian sources as early as 898, and in Old Rus chronicles they date to 1138. In 1141, Prince Volodymyr united Galician lands into one principality submitted to his Kievan rule. The town reached its heyday in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, during the reigns of Yaroslav Osmomysl, Roman Mstislavich, and Daniel of Galicia. ¶ Archaeological excavations confirmed that as early as the

10<sup>th</sup> century there was a fortified town in Halych, situated on a hill. At the foot of the hill there was a settlement settled by craftsmen and traders. Within the fortified town, archaeologists found the remnants of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin built under Prince Yaroslav Osmomysl (1130–1187). Under its ornamented mosaic floor, they discovered a sarcophagus with remains of the prince. In Halych and the nearby villages, the archaeologists discovered the ruins of ten other medieval churches.

¶ In 1241, the Mongols from the Asian steppes destroyed the Duchy of Kiev and burnt Halych down. The capital of the principality was moved to Chełm (Kholm). In 1367, the restored Halych was granted the Magdeburg rights, but it never recovered its former glory.

Halych had two Hungarian rulers: Princes András and Kálmán of the Arpad family. Kálmán's reign had a major impact on the future of Galicia as a whole. The prince bore the title of *Gallitiae Lodomeriaque Rex* (Lat.: King of Halych and Volodymyr [Volynskyi]). Because Hungary had been incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy as its intrinsic part, Empress Maria Theresia, as the Queen of Hungary, made claims to the lands annexed into the Austrian Empire after the First Partition of Poland (1772), considering **Galicia and Lodomeria**, former Halych and Volodymyr Palatinates, as the historical patrimony of the Empire.



Karaite kenasa in Halych, circa 1905, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

## Jews and Karaites in Halych ¶

Primary sources confirm that Jews lived

in Halych in the 1400s. Documents from this period mention certain Izaczko Sokołowicz, a merchant of Halych. The 1488 municipal records also mention the judges Yehoshua and Moshko and a tax collector Josek. The Halicz brothers, who set up in Cracow the first Hebrew printing house in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, probably came from Halych too. ¶ Halych remained a border-line town and had been often attacked, particularly by the Tatars from the south. In 1506, King Alexander I Jagiellon exempted the Jews of Halych from taxes due to the losses they had suffered as a result of recent Tatar raids. The 1565 tax census lists 44 Jewish householders in Halych; the surnames of most of them suggest that they were of Karaite descent.

As an anti-rabbinic Jewish sect, **Karaites** originated in the 8<sup>th</sup>-century Babylonia, when Anan ben David rebelled against the power of the Jewish exilarch, proclaimed himself a messiah, rejected the authority of the Talmud and rabbinic scholarship based on the Talmud, accused Jews of falsifying the Bible, and headed the sectarians who called themselves true Sons of the Bible, Bnei Mikra (from here – Karaites). He and his followers, who became quite influential in the Middle East in the 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries, maintained that the liturgy should be replaced by Psalms recitation, calendar defined according to the observed natural phenomena, new rituals based on the literal interpretation of the Torah, and the entire corpus of rabbinic scholarship rejected as baseless and heretical. Karaites eventually made their way to the Crimean Peninsula, from where they most likely moved to Galicia, Volhynia and the region of Troki (Trakai) in Lithuania. ¶ There are several explanations stipulating why Karaites settled in Halych. According to one of those, Karaites migrated from the Ottoman Empire or relocated from Lviv. According to another, they were resettled by Duke Vytautas of Lithuania around the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A third theory says that 80 Karaite families settled in the town in 1246, following an agreement between Prince Daniel of Galicia and Batu Khan of the Crimea.

The first document confirming the presence of Karaites in Halych was a 1678 privilege granted by King Stefan Báthory to the local Karaite community, who

were referred to in the document as *Judaeis carimis, civitatis nostrae incolii*. This was the first time that Karaites were distinguished from the traditional



Halych, a general view, circa 1910, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

(rabbinic) Jews in the official documents. Most likely, the Karaite community had already lived in Halych for quite some time before the privilege was issued. ¶ The 1627 census reported 24 Karaite householders in Halych and only two traditional Jewish householders. One of the main occupations of local Karaites was fishery. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were eight Karaite fishermen in

town, who delivered some of their catch to the castle in lieu of tax. Karaites also dealt in cattle: in 1621, two Karaites from Halych – Mordechai and Moshko – were attacked by the brigands from Kosiv, who robbed them, according to a contemporary document, of “87 oxen, 30 sheep, 1,000 salmons, as well as sabres and other goods.”

The Polish-Cossack wars of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century devastated the community of Halych. In remembrance of the 1648 Cossack assaults, local Jewish Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) prayers included a reference to the “merciless Tatars and Khmel’s [Khmelnytsky’s] cursed troops.” The 1661 census listed only eight Karaite families living in Halych. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the religious leader of the Karaite community (*hazzan*) was Aaron ben Samuel, who maintained correspondence with Karaite leaders from Constantinople. He also had friends among the traditional Jews of Lviv. His successor as the *hazzan* of Halych in 1685–1700 was **Josef ben Samuel**, also known under the nickname of **ha-Mashbir** (Heb.: food provider). Ha-Mashbir was a poet, translator, and author of important religious treatises. He considerably influenced the quality of cultural, religious, and intellectual life of his community. The services he rendered and his exceptional qualities entered a Karaite saying: “There was only one Mashbir.” His descendants held the position of *hazzan* in Halych for more than 100 years.

According to the 1765 census, 258 Jews and 99 Karaites lived in town. After the 1772 First Partition of Poland, Halych

was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire. Joseph II’s radical enlightened reforms were less painful for the

Karaite than they were for the traditional (rabbinic) Jews: As “Jews who earn their living as agricultural farmers,” they were granted a number of exemptions and privileges, different from those issued for rabbinic Jews. From 1787, the Halych Karaites adopted the

Polonised versions of traditional Jewish names as their family names. The most popular family names included such as Nowachowicz, Jeszwowicz, Leonowicz, Zarachowicz, Icchowicz, Mordkowicz, Sulimowicz, Szulimowicz, or Abrahamowicz.

**Zecharia Yitzchak Abrahamowicz** (1878–1903), one of the major Karaite poets, for most of his life maintained connections with Halych. Zecharia was born into a large family in the village of Łany, where his father Samuel leased cultivated fields from a Polish landowner. His parents sent him to the *midrash* (a Karaite religious school) in Halych, where he learned from Rabbi Simcha Leonowycz. When Zecharia mastered Hebrew prayers, he was transferred to a secular municipal school. The talented boy continued his education at a gymnasium (secondary school) in Stanisławów, but was expelled for belonging to what his supervisors considered an “illegal association.” He started working as a shoemaker, but soon resumed his secondary education in Stanisławów, at the same time actively participating in the meetings of Karaite young people. As a teenager, he began writing poetry in the Karaite language. The authors of the book on Ukrainians and Jews described the Karaite language in the following manner: “a fusion language based on standard Ottoman Turkish grammar but with a significant influence of the Nogay Turkish steppe dialect.” Furthermore, in Galicia and Volhynia, the Karaites “used a Golden Horde or Kipchak Tatar dialect until the mid-nineteenth century, although subsequently, as a result of the influx of Karaites from Lithuania (Troki/Trakai), they absorbed the Ottoman Turkish spoken language of the Crimean and Lithuanian Karaites.” Of course, as many other Jewish fusion languages, including Yiddish and Ladino, the Karaite language was transcribed in Hebrew letters. Zecharia Yitzchak Abrahamowicz was soon drafted into the Austrian army, where he continued to write poetry in Karaite, Polish, and Ukrainian. Zecharia returned from the army suffering from tuberculosis and died on May 5, 1903.

According to the 1896 census, there were 192 Karaites and 1,568 Jews among Halych’s 4,850 inhabitants. Jewish synagogues and Karaite *kenasas* (from Hebrew root *k.n.s.* – to enter or to gather) functioned separately, and both communities had their own cemeteries. ¶ The Jews and Karaites of Halych suffered a similar lot during World War I; many houses were robbed and a cholera epidemic swept through the

town. Still, all the Karaites who had been called up returned in 1919, although at that time only 150 Karaites lived in Halych, Lviv, Bibrka, and the villages of Zalukva and Zhyravka. According to the 1921 census, there were 582 Jews in Halych (which constituted approx. 16 percent of the town’s population). ¶ In the interwar years, the Karaite community in Halych managed to rebuild itself. The main occupation of local Karaites





Karaite cemetery in Halych, 2017. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

was agriculture, yet they also worked as civil servants, lawyers, or railwaymen, enjoying many more privileges than the traditional (in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Orthodox) Polish Jews. In 1925, the religious school resumed its educational activities. The head of the Karaite community in Halych, Zachariah Nowachowicz, a lawyer, participated in the drafting of the 1936 law on the Karaite Religious Union, which legally regulated the life of Polish Karaite community.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, when the town was seized by Soviet troops, about 1,000 Jews and 112 Karaites lived in Halych. The Nazi Germans arrived two years later, on July 2, 1941. The Nazis did not consider the Karaites on a par with ethnic Jews. Due to this misunderstanding the Karaites fared much better in World War II and escaped the fate of Jews who died in the Holocaust. In mid-April 1942, about 100 Jews were shot dead in Halych, while others were transported to the labour

camp in Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk) and to the death camp in Bełżec. ¶ Once Western Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union following World War II and the Yalta agreements, the Karaite community dwindled sharply. In the 1940s and 1950s, 24 Karaites left for Poland and 11 others moved to Lithuania, leaving only some 40–50 Karaites in town. The atheistic-minded Soviet authorities banned them from using *kenasa* for religious services. Subsequently, the *kenasa* was demolished, the Karaites had to gather privately for services. In 1996, the tiny remaining half-a-dozen members of the profoundly secularized Karaites celebrated the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Karaite settlement in Halych.

**The Kenasa** ¶ Unlike the east-west oriented synagogue, a *kenasa*, a Karaite prayer house, is south-north oriented. The first wooden *kenasa* in Halych was established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but after it burnt down in the first half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, it was replaced with a new stone building. The *kenasa* in Halych functioned as a communal prayer house until the mid-1950s, then it was shut down and in 1985, it was demolished to accommodate the construction of a residential building next to it. The community managed to save the carved wooden altar, which was later transferred to a Karaite *kenasa* in Yevpatoria, Crimea. At present, some objects from the Halych *kenasa* can be seen in the local municipal museum in Halych.

**The Karaite Museum ¶** Towards the end of the 1990s, with the Karaite population (only 8 people at that time) ageing quickly, the idea of establishing a museum preserving the cultural heritage of the Karaites of Halych emerged. The museum acquired a house that had belonged to a Karaite family, located on Maidan Rizda St. in the town centre. The museum collection, which currently comprises about 3,000 exhibits, tells a story about a religious, cultural, and social life of the Karaite community in Galicia. This is the only Karaite museum in Ukraine.

**The Museum of Karaite History and Culture** is part of the “**Old Halych**” National Reserve ([www.davniyhalych.com.ua](http://www.davniyhalych.com.ua)). The reserve administers the remains of the castle and operates the Old Halych History Museum and the Ethnographic Museum, which are both located in the nearby village of Krylos, the site of the medieval capital of the principality. The heritage sites there include the Halychyna Grave Mound and the foundations of several Orthodox churches dating back to the times of the principality.

**Synagogues ¶** Two 19<sup>th</sup>-century stone buildings that hosted traditional synagogues have survived, they currently host two stores and are located in Konovaltsia Street.

**Cemeteries ¶** The only surviving Karaite cemetery (*zeret*) in Western Ukraine, with approx. 200 tombstones, is located west of the town center, on a high bank overlooking the Dniester River. In 1997–2000, ethnographers

conducted field studies there; they copied the epitaphs, translated them, and published a catalogue of the cemetery tombstones (*The Karaite Cemetery near Halych. Catalog of Tombstones*, Ivan Yurchenko, Abraham Kefeli, Natalia Yurchenko, Alexander Beregovsky, in Ukrainian, the epitaph in Hebrew, 252 pages). ¶ The Jewish cemetery is situated to the south from the town. It occupies quite a large area, but few *matzevot* have survived.

Surrounding  
area

Krylos (6 km): the old princely town of Halych – a museum; an archaeological and ethnographic park; Halychyna Grave Mound (reconstruction). ¶ Bilshivtsi (18 km): a former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery with the remnants of *matzevot*. ¶ Burshtyn (20 km): ruins of a synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Ivano-Frankivsk (formerly Stanisławów) (26 km): Reform synagogue (*tempel*) in Moorish style (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the partly preserved new Jewish cemetery on the south-western outskirts of the town; the Collegiate

## HALYCH



Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1672–1703); the Jesuit College (1744); the Armenian church (1762); the Cathedral of the Holy Resurrection (1753–1763); brewery (1767).

👉 **Monastyryska** (43 km): a synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (1751); the wooden Church of the Consecration of the Holy Mother of God (1873); the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1892).

**Karaite Museum**, 33 Maidan Rizdva St.

👉 **Karaite cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.) 👉 **Castle** (mid-14<sup>th</sup> c.), Konovaltsia St. 👉 **“Old Halych” National Reserve**,

Worth seeing

1 Franko St, tel. +380343121663. 👉 **Church of the Dormition of the Virgin** (16<sup>th</sup> c.) 👉 **Church of St. Panteleimon** – the oldest surviving church of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia; the village of Shevchenkove (late 12<sup>th</sup> c.).

# Drohobych

Pol. Drohobycz, Ukr. Дрогобич, Yid. דראָהאָביטש

*One and a half towns – half-Polish,  
half-Jewish, half-Ukrainian.*

Marian Hemar

**One and a half towns** ¶ As the legend has it, around 900 years ago, Khan Boniak of the nomadic tribe of Polovt-sian burnt down Bych, a settlement of a prince. From the ashes of the burnt town, a new town rised which was given the name of Drohobych, derived from the words “Drugi Bych” (Pol.: Second Bych). ¶ The first mention of Drohobych is found in the municipal records of Lviv and dates to 1387. As early as 1392, the town was referred to as the centre of salt production. Salt from Drohobych was exported to various countries. In the Middle Ages, the so-called Great Salt Trail connecting major trade centers in Eastern Europe ran through Drohobych fostering the prosperity of the town. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were 45 salt mines here, which produced approx. 26,000 barrels of salt a year. In 1422, Drohobych obtained Magdeburg rights. The town coat of arms has nine salt cones (Pol.: *topka*), early modern measurement for salt. From 1498–1634, Drohobych experiences economic downfall because of the multiple Tatar raids. The first mention of the Drohobych guilds of traders and craftsmen dates to 1530. Later in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the town had nine

guilds, their craftsmen representing 36 occupations. After the First Partition of Poland (1772), Drohobych came under the Habsburg Monarchy, and in 1788 the town was proclaimed a “free royal town,” which signified it was not in any magnate possession and its magistrate members reported directly to the Austrian provincial administration.

**The Jews of Drohobych** ¶ Jews lived within Drohobych town walls as early as 1404. The only Jews allowed permanent residence in town were the leaseholders of salt mines who could live close to the mines. The authorities, however, were not ready to tolerate the public display of Judaism as a religion (called “perfidious” in the early Polish documents) and did not allow the Jews to establish a Jewish cemetery. ¶ In 1404, a Jew named Wołoczko became a royal treasurer for King Władysław II Jagiełło, who leased to him the supervision of salt mines. In 1425, certain Decko obtained the king’s privilege allowing him to deliver salt to the royal court as well as to trade with Turkey and Kyiv. In 1500, a newly introduced tax system in Drohobych regulated Jewish entrepreneurship





Drohobych, a general view, circa 1910, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

by heavily taxing salt excavation and alcohol production. ¶ In 1578, King Stefan Báthory issued a decree *De non tolerandi Judeos* that prohibited Jews from settling in Drohobych and its vicinity and banned them from trading during fairs. Four decades later, in 1618, after the town suffered from Tatar raids, two Jews from Lviv – Isaac Nachmanowicz and Isaac ben Mordechai, who leased royal estates near Drohobych – tried to restore the Jewish privileges allowing Jews to live and trade in the town, but with little success. ¶ In 1635, Jan Daniłowicz, the chief of the Palatinate of Ruthenia, allotted an area on the royal estates called Łan (today within Drohobych boundaries), where Jews could legally reside. He also allowed Jews to establish a separate Jewish cemetery near the salt mines. Only after that time the Jewish community started to re-emerge. Around the 1670s, the Jews of Drohobych hired a communal rabbi, Yekutiel Zalman Siegel, the son of the rabbi of Przemyśl. His successor, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch, resettled from Kolo-myia ten years later.

**The Great Synagogue** ¶ The 1680 document mentions a wooden synagogue in Drohobych. In 1711, the bishop of Przemyśl allowed local Jews to renovate it, but a fire demolished it two years later. In 1726, the bishop granted permission to build a new synagogue on the

condition that it would be neither bigger nor taller than the previous one. The first stone synagogue was erected in 1743. In 1865, a pompous Choral Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Eastern Galicia, was established. At that time, there were two synagogues in Drohobych, 24 prayer and study houses, and a Jewish hospital.

**The oil extraction region** ¶ In 1810–1817, the Czech geologist Józef Hecker managed to extract and distil oil in the Drohobych area, but it was not until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the process of extracting and distilling acquired industrial proportions, particularly with the invention of naphtha, distilled oil that burned safely and without emitting bad odour. At that time, oil was used mainly for lighting – and hundreds of Drohobych dwellers realized they can draw crude oil just in their backyards. By 1835, there were about 20 oil pits in the nearby town of Boryslav, and by the 1860s, Drohobych dwellers followed the lead and drilled oil wells. In 1866, the first oil refinery in Europe was opened in Drohobych. A decade later, there were thousands of mines and shafts and more than ten oil refineries in town. Late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Drohobych area produced four percent of the entire crude oil extracted in the world. At the turn of the century, European companies entered the market. They were pouring



new resources modernizing extraction and production of oil and purchasing smaller oil-producing industries not able to compete internationally. With the expansion of the international capital, small- and medium-size Jewish entrepreneurs disappeared from the market. Still, most of mines and some refineries remained in Jewish hands.

**Painters** ♪ **Maurycy Gottlieb** (1856–1879), whose father, Isaac, owned refineries in Drohobych, died at a very young age yet he left more than 300 paintings and is considered today one

of the great Jewish artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Born in Drohobych, he studied at Vienna and Cracow Art Academies. In Cracow he joined the studio of Jan Matejko. A number of Maurycy Gottlieb's works are historical paintings that deal with Jewish themes, including biblical. ♪ His three brothers, Marcin, Filip, and Leopold, were also professional artists. Leopold Gottlieb (1879–1934) achieved considerable fame as a modernist painter and graphic artist. During World War I, he served in Piłsudski's legions and portrayed scenes of military life acquiring fame "the painter of the First Brigade."

***Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur***, which Maurycy Gottlieb painted at the age of 22, is one of the most famous Tel Aviv Museum of Art exhibits. The painting depicts a group of Jews praying in the Choral Synagogue in Drohobych (sometimes misrepresented as the Amsterdam synagogue). Gottlieb included three self-portraits in his composition: in the centre, he is shown as a young man wearing a colourful *tallit* (prayer shawl) with a medallion bearing the Star of David and the initials, M.G.; to the left, he is shown as a child; and to the right, he is portrayed as a young man next to his father, who is looking into a book. The painter's fiancée, Laura, is also portrayed twice in the painting: to the left, she is standing in the women's gallery with a book pressed to her chest, and to the right, bending down, she is whispering something to her mother. In the centre of the painting there is a Torah scroll that bears an inscription in Hebrew: "for the soul of Maurycy Gottlieb, may his memory be a blessing." Maurycy knew he was deadly ill with tuberculosis. His father is reported to have asked for the inscription to be removed from the painting, but the artist restored it after a few months. A year later, Maurycy Gottlieb passed away.



Maurycy Gottlieb,  
Jews Praying in the  
Synagogue on Yom Kip-  
pur, oil on canvas, 1878,  
collection of the Tel Aviv  
Museum of Art. Source:  
commons.wikimedia.org

also produced a famous photographic portrait of the founding-father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl. In 1906, on one of his visits to Palestine (then under the Ottoman Empire), Lilien helped establish the famous Bezalel art school in Jerusalem, which became the first Jewish art educational institution.

Drohobych was also the hometown of another exceptionally influential Jewish artist who studied under Jan Matejko, namely – **Ephraim Moses (Maurycy) Lilien** (1874–1925). His father, an ordinary woodturner, could not finance his son's education, so, as a novice painter, Lilien had to work for one Shapiro, a sign-painter in Lviv. However, despite apparently unsurmountable financial problems, Lilien managed to study painting in Cracow, Vienna, and Munich. He became known as an Art Nouveau graphic artist and illustrator, who enthusiastically supported the Galician Zionist movement. He created illustrations for magazines and books, including the Bible and poetry by Morris Rosenfeld, designed popular postcards, and

**Prosperity** ¶ In 1892, some 92,500 people lived in Drohobych, half of them Jews, who spoke two, sometimes three languages – Polish, Yiddish, and German. In 1883, Aaron Hirsch Żupnik began publishing the *Drohobyczer Zeitung*, a newspaper that came out both in German and Yiddish. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the town became a prosperous economic hub with several refineries and two banks, primary and secondary schools, cultural societies, and the Jewish People's House, a secular cultural center established with the encouragement of the Austrian authorities. ¶ The Russian Army seized Drohobych at the beginning of World War I, and in 1918, the town came under the rule of the West Ukrainian People's Republic. Shortly afterwards, it was taken over by Polish forces and remained part of the independent Poland until World War II. According to the 1931 census, there were 20,484 Jews in Drohobych and its vicinity.

“Market Square was empty and white-hot, swept by hot winds like a biblical desert. The thorny acacias, growing in this emptiness, looked with their bright leaves like the trees on old tapestries. Although there was no breath of wind, they rustled their foliage in a theatrical gesture, as if wanting to display the elegance of the silver lining of their leaves, that resembled the fox-fur lining of a nobleman's coat. The old houses, worn smooth by the winds of innumerable days, played tricks with the reflections of the atmosphere, with echoes and memories of colours scattered in the depth of the cloudless

sky. It seemed as if whole generations of summer days, like patient stonemasons cleaning the mildewed plaster from old facades, had removed the deceptive varnish, revealing more and more clearly the true face of the houses, the features that fate had given them and life had shaped for them from the inside. Now the windows, blinded by the glare of the empty square, had fallen asleep; the balconies declared their emptiness to heaven; the open doorways smelt of coolness and wine. ¶ Bruno Schulz, *August*, in: *Cinnamon Shops*, London 1963, Trans. Celina Wieniewska

## The writer from the Street of Crocodiles ¶

The artist and writer Bruno Schulz was born in 1892, in Drohobych to the family of the silk merchant Jacob Schulz and his wife, Henrietta Kuhmärker. Schulz attended the local Emperor Franz-Joseph Gymnasium and later studied at Lviv Polytechnic Institute and the University of Vienna. After his studies, he returned to Drohobych where, in 1924–1941, he taught painting at the King Władysław Jagiełło Gymnasium. Actively participated in various artistic events in Lviv, Cracow, and Vilnius. In 1933, Schulz made his debut as a writer publishing in the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*, a short story entitled *Birds* and a book entitled *Cinnamon Shops*. In 1936, he published a collection of short stories *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* which received the Golden Academic Laurel of the Polish Academy of Literature. His wonderfully vivid language and imagination captivated the readers. ¶ During the German occupation, the school at which Schultz worked was shut down. Schulz became the resident of the Drohobych ghetto. He found personal protection by the ambitious Gestapo officer Felix Landau, who commissioned Schulz to decorate the children's room in his villa (called Villa Landau) with fresco murals illustrating the fairy tales of Brothers Grimm.

On November 19, 1942, Schulz went out to buy milk and bread and was shot dead in the street by a Nazi officer, who disliked the fact that his colleague had taken a Jew under his aegis. Most likely, the following day, Schulz was buried in a mass grave at the Jewish graveyard. Commemorative plaques have been placed on the pavement where Schulz was shot and on the building where he lived. ¶ In 2001, a group of enthusiasts from Germany and Poland discovered Schulz's murals under layers of stucco at what had been Villa Landau. Then, the representatives of Yad Vashem Israeli Museum removed five fragments of the frescos and transferred them to Jerusalem. This controversial way of rescuing the heritage of Bruno Schulz triggered an international scandal. In 2007, Ukrainian and Israeli representatives signed an agreement according to which Ukraine officially allowed Yad Vashem to keep those five fragments and Israel acknowledged that they were Ukrainian heritage. Since 2009, they have been displayed at Yad Vashem as part of its permanent exhibition. Fragments of the fresco murals remaining in Drohobych were put on display at the local museum "Drohobychchyna" at the Palace of Arts in Villa Bianca (38 Shevchenka St.). ¶ Many of Schulz's literary works have been lost, but those that survived have been translated into 45 languages. In



2003, an exhibition room representing a preliminary version of the would-be Bruno Schulz Museum was opened at the Drohobych Pedagogical University. ¶ Since 2004, the Ihor Meniok Centre for Polish Studies, with headquarters at the local Pedagogical University, has been organizing the Bruno Schulz Festival that provided framework for conferences, exhibitions, and literary events connected with Schulz's legacy.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, some 17,000 Jews resided in Drohobych. The Soviets seized the town in September of that year and then the Germans occupied the city on July 1, 1941. During the German occupation, the Nazis confined the Jews to a ghetto. Because of the horrible sanitary conditions and the spread of contagious diseases, many Jews died in the ghetto in the winter of 1941–1942. In late March 1942, the Nazis transported around 2,000 Jews to the death camp in Belżec. In early August, 1942, the Nazis transported another group of about 3,000 people. In cooperation with local collaborators, the Nazis caught and killed about 600 Jews trying to hide. From October to November, 1942, further transports sent thousands more Jews to Belżec. From May 21 to June 10, 1943, the ghetto was finally liquidated. Its remaining dwellers were shot dead outside the city. Only several craftsmen and blue-collar workers found useful for the occupying forces managed to survive, but in April 1944, they too were killed when the German troops retreated. In August 1944, 250–300 Jewish survivors left their hiding places and returned to Drohobych.



**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ During World War II, the Choral Synagogue served for the Nazis as a warehouse and later, for the Soviets, as a furniture store. In the early 1990s, the building was handed over to the local Jewish community, but only in 2013 the community found an oligarch who invested into its renovation. In 2016, the renovation works were in full sway. ¶ In Drohobych, several Jewish communal buildings survived the Holocaust and post-World War II destruction of Jewish institutions. Next to the Choral Synagogue, there was a Jewish hospital, currently used as a municipal kindergarten. At the corner of Sholem Aleichem St. and Ivana Mazepy St., there stood the progressive synagogue “Or Chaim,” established in 1909. After the war, it was used as a gym. In 32 Rynok St. and 3 Pidvale St., several Jewish 19<sup>th</sup>-century prayer houses remained intact, although refurbished. The Faculty of the Humanities of the Ivan Franko University occupies the former Jewish orphanage (46 Lesia Ukrainka St.), and the municipal library moved into the former Jewish nursing home (27 Taras Shevchenko St.). Drohobych has numerous old, beautiful houses, that had Jewish owners. For example, the photo studio of Bertold

Synagogue in Drohobych, 2017. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

Poster of the Three Nations Coalition issued during the local election in Drohobych, 1931, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



Schenkelbach, whose son Erwin – born in Drohobych in 1929 – became a well-known Israeli photographer and writer, and Villa Bianca, formerly the house of Dr. Leon Himmel, famous radiologist, which currently serves as the Palace of Arts and the main building of the Drohobych local history museum (38 Shevchenko St.).

**Cemeteries** ¶ The earliest Jewish cemetery was established in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century across the main synagogue. The Soviets levelled it in the 1950s and it was replaced by residential buildings. There is a memorial plaque at the site. The new cemetery was established in 1926. No more than 200 graves have survived there.

The Israeli economist **David Horowitz** (1899–1979) was born in Drohobych and in 1920 emigrated to the land of Israel. In 1948–1952, he served as the Israeli first minister of finance and in 1954, became the head of the Central Bank of Israel. In his memoirs, titled *Ha-etmol sheli* (Heb.: *My Yesterday*, Jerusalem 1970), he described his youth in Drohobych.

**Present day** ¶ Contemporary Drohobych has a small Jewish community, officially registered in 1990. Its members have included Alfred Shreyer (1922–2015), a violinist, singer, and music teacher, who was among the last students of Bruno Schulz, and Mark Golberg (1922–2007), a distinguished Ukrainian literary scholar, literature theorist, and professor at the Ivan

Franko National Pedagogical University. ¶ Leonid Golberg, a Drohobych resident, one of the editors of the Internet news site *Maidan* ([maydan.drohobych.net](http://maydan.drohobych.net)) and the spokesperson at the Bruno Schulz Festival, is a skilled guide with expertise in the historical, artistic, and culinary heritage of Drohobych. Another Internet news site about past and present of Drohobych is *Drohobyczer*

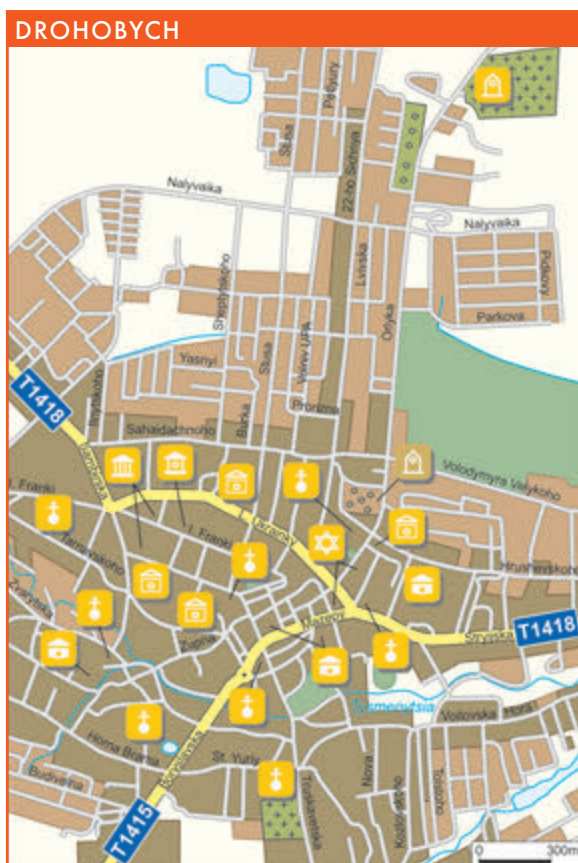
*Zeitung* (drohobyczer-zeitung.com), which draws inspiration from the

first newspaper published in the town between 1883 and 1914.

**Choral Synagogue** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Pylyp Orlyk St. **Bruno Schulz Museum:** established in 2003 at the building of the Pedagogical University, in Schulz's former staffroom. Exhibits include the first edition of *The Cinnamon Shops*, 24 Ivan Franko St., tel. +380324451122; e-mail: polcentrum@wp.pl **"Drohobychchyna" Local History Museum**, 32 Ivan Franko St. **Villa Bianca** (Palace of Arts), 38 Taras Shevchenko St. **Church of St. George:** wooden (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), 23 Solonyi Stavok St. **Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 7 Zvarytska St. **Church of St. Bartholomew** (17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.); the bell tower dates back to the late 13<sup>th</sup> c. is believed to be the oldest building in the town; Zamkova Hill. **Monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Stryiska St. **Church of the Holy Trinity** (17<sup>th</sup> c.) 2 Truskavetska St. **Town hall** (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Rynok Sq. **Saltworks complex in Drohobych** (13<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.), Solonyi Stavok St. **Municipal granary**, 17 Hrushevskoho St.

Worth seeing

**Boryslav** (16 km): the town is located over industrial deposits of oil and gas as well as ozokerite, with numerous springs of mineral and curative waters; private prayer and study houses; a Jewish cemetery. **Stryi** (30 km): a ruined synagogue (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1425, with later reconstructions). **Sambir** (33 km): town hall (17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.); town houses at the market square (17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.); Bernardine monastery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Stanislaus. **Staryi Sambir** (50 km): a Jewish cemetery (mid-16<sup>th</sup> c., one of the oldest in Ukraine); a synagogue (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.). **Turka** (70 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); wooden 18<sup>th</sup>-c. Orthodox and Catholic churches).



Surrounding area

# Bolekhiv

Pol. Bolechów, Ukr. Болехів, Yid. באָלעכעוו

*Szewska Street ran south from the market square to the so-called Hebrew quarter, which resembled a maze of wooden huts, workshops, and homes.*

Anatol Regnier, *Damals in Bolechów: Eine jüdische Odysee*, Munich 1997

**Salt from Solomon Hill** ♣ Bolekhiv is a small town located south of Lviv in the Skole Beskids on the Sukil River at the foot of the picturesque Ukrainian Carpathians. On the Solomon Hill near Bolekhiv, archaeologists discovered the remains of an Old Rus fortified settlement of the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century, yet whether the later town of Bolechiv was somehow geographically or administratively related to this medieval fortress, remains unclear. Bolekhiv was first mentioned in the 1371 act of Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, who granted the lands of and around the village of Bolekhiv to Daniel Dažbohovicz for his services to the crown. Later, the emerging town absorbed two neighbouring villages, Ruthenian Bolekhiv (Bolechów Ruski) and Wallachian Bolekhiv (Bolechów Wołoski). Bolekhiv was established as a Polish private town near a salt refinery in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century by Mikołaj Giedziński, a Polish nobleman. This salt refinery had been established in 1546 by Amalia Grosowska, a Polish landlady, although salt had been mined there much earlier. Salt became one of the major raw materials exported from Bolekhiv: in the late 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries,

Bolekhiv became part of what was known as the “salt route” running from Dolina, through Bolekhiv and Stryj (now Stryi), Przemyśl, Toruń, and Gdańsk. In 1603, King Sigismund III Vasa granted the town Magdeburg rights. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Giedziński family built in Bolekhiv a wooden fortress that withstood numerous Tatar raids. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the fortress became a heavily fortified castle on the Sukil River. Today, only remnants of its foundations can be found at the local military base. In 1710, the Giedziński family sold Bolekhiv to the Lubomirskis, after 1750, the town changed hands again – first to the Poniatowskis, later to the Potockis. In 1772, together with the rest of Galicia, Bolekhiv became part of the Habsburg monarchy. ♣ Bolekhiv often fell victim to attacks by Carpathian raiders; one of these attacking groups was led by Ivan Dovbush, brother of the famous Oleksa Dovbush, the leader of the rebellious rural *opryshky* (outcasts), the Ukrainian Robin Hood. The town suffered the most in 1759, at the hands of Ivan Boichuk’s gang, which set the town on fire, an event so devastating that Count Potocki exempted Bolekhiv from all





taxes for three years to enable its dwellers to rebuild the economy. ¶ In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the salt refinery in Bolekhiv was one of the most profitable businesses in Galicia, employing 49 workers and 10 clerks and producing from 50,000 to 70,000 cwt of salt per year. Three leather factories and a textile factory were established in town in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet salt remained the most important

trading commodity. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bolekhiv also became a medical spa due to its therapeutic water, rich in minerals and iodine. ¶ Between November 1918 and May 1919, Bolekhiv administration reported to the short-lived government of the West Ukrainian People's Republic, while in the interwar period, to the sejm of the Independent Poland.

The Sukil River in Bolekhiv, before 1930, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

” On Friday afternoon, a siren wailed. People finished their work, went to the steam bath, put on clean underwear, and refreshed themselves. During the Sabbath, the street was dominated by Jews rushing to the synagogue with prayer shawls on their shoulders. Whoever met the rabbi stepped aside and let him pass, and when a rabbi's son was getting married, the whole town joined in the celebration. During Yom Kippur, the faithful fasted, all trade came to a standstill, and even non-Jewish residents respected the importance of this holiday. ¶ Anatol Regnier, *Damals in Bolechów: Eine jüdische Odyssee*, Munich 1997

**The Jews of Bolekhiv** ¶ In the last quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mikołaj Giedziński, who supported the development of the salt trade and industry in town, invited Jews settled in Bolekhiv. Jewish merchants were encouraged to settle around the market square. They

obtained privileges to establish trade and open stores. To boost the Jewish economic impact on town, the town's owner exempted all Jewish communal buildings from *czynsz* (real estate) taxes. In 1612, Mikołaj Giedziński granted the Jewish community a special *privilege* to

The market square in Bolekhiv, before 1906, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



establish a cemetery, a *yeshiva* (Talmudic academy), and a synagogue. He also exempted Jews from the jurisdiction of the municipal court, allowing them to file complaints directly to him, the owner of the town, who acted as a local supreme judge – exactly as it happened in dozens of other Polish private towns.

¶ The Jewish district was located in the southeastern part of Bolekhiv, where the first wooden synagogue was built. After the synagogue and the nearby houses were burnt down as a result of the 1670 fire, Bishop Jerzy of Lwów (now Lviv) lent funds to the Jewish communal leaders Lejba Ickowicz and Lipman Łazarewicz for the reconstruction of the Jewish quarter. ¶ At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community

in Bolekhiv boasted about 1,000 people, outnumbering Polish Catholics and Ukrainian Eastern Orthodox and Greek Catholics. Due to its significance and the presence of several outstanding communal leaders, Bolekhiv *kahal* sent its representatives in the Council of the Four Lands, the central body of Jewish self-government to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most Jews in Bolekhiv worked in the salt and wine trade. They were also active in money exchange services and lending. These details appear in the contemporary memoir of Dov Ber Birkenthal (1723–1805), a wine merchant, Jewish communal leader and a trustworthy chronicler of the Jewish life in Bolekhiv and Galicia.

**Dov Ber Birkenthal Bolechover (1723–1805)** – a Jewish wine merchant who was also a writer, chronicler, and community leader. His father was born in Międzyrzec but moved to Bolekhiv during the Cossack wars in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Dov Ber, a reliable connoisseur of high-quality wines, purchased wine wholesale in Hungary and sold it to distinguished noblemen and clergy in Galicia. He also ran a shop in the centre of Bolekhiv and had a comparatively significant private library at home. In 1772, when Galicia was incorporated into Austria, he assumed the family name Birkenthal. He received a traditional Jewish education, but his father, who also traded in wine and had many acquaintances among Polish and Hungarian noblemen, hired a non-Jewish teacher to teach his son



Orthodox Church and the town hall in Bolekhiv, 1910. Photo by "Zofia" photographic studio, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

Polish, German, French, and Latin. In 1759, the multi-lingual Dov Ber served as an interpreter during the Lviv disputation between the rabbinic Jewish authorities such as Rabbi Haim Rapaport and Jewish anti-Talmudic sectarians led by Jacob Frank. Dov Ber authored a religious treatise *Divre Binah* (Heb.: Words of Reason), in the preface to which he portrayed religious aspects of Jewish life in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including the rising Hasidic movement. In his memoirs written as a mixture of a spiritual will, a merchant's ledger and autobiography, he described social, cultural, religious, and political life of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Galician Jewish communities with an amazing sense of economic details. Dov Ber had a passion for history: he translated several historical works from German and Polish into Hebrew. His grave at the Jewish cemetery in Bolekhiv is adorned by a matzevah which has the image of a bear (alluding to the meaning of Dov's name, "bear" in Hebrew) and a bunch of grapes, alluding to his role as a wine merchant.

In the 1760s, approx. 1,300 Jews lived in Bolekhiv. One of the most famous local 18<sup>th</sup>-century rabbis was Rabbi Ya'akov ha-Levi Horowitz (1679–1754), who later moved to Brody and was replaced in Bolekhiv by his son, Rabbi Mordke Horowitz.

**Synagogues** ¶ The stone building of the synagogue was established in 1789 on the site of the old wooden one and has survived to this day. It is located

across from the town hall building, and next to a Greek Catholic Church. The synagogue was completely rebuilt in 1808. In Soviet times, it served as a cultural centre and a club of local Jewish tanners. Another former synagogue (at 9 Sichovykh Striltsiv St.) was used in the Soviet times as a school; today it houses a museum dedicated to Natalya Kobrynska, a prominent Ukrainian writer, social activist, and one of the first Ukrainian feminists. A progressive

(Reform) synagogue and a Hasidic *kloyz* that also existed in Bolekhiv before World War II have not survived.

**NEW BABYLON** ¶ In 1772, New Babylon, a Jewish agricultural colony was established near Bolekhiv on the initiative of the enlightened Austrian empress Maria Theresia. Ten Jewish families settled there, each receiving five hectares of land. The Austrian government provided farmers with building materials, but the farmers had to pay for the land and agricultural tools. Living conditions in the colony were hard, and the soil was not fertile. At first, the initiative was supported by the local Jewish community seeking to meet half-way the enlightened reforms of the government, but the whole undertaking turned out to be a failure and the new undertaking proved to be unsustainable. As it happened, half-a-century later in the tsarist Russia, many Jews could not cope with the difficulties and returned to their traditional occupations, trade and crafts.

### **Hasidim, Maskilim, and Zionists**

¶ In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first groups of Hasidim, pietists and religious enthusiasts, appeared in Bolekhiv. Among the most important Hasidic masters of the later period were Yehoshua Heschel Padua and his son-in-law Shlomo Chaim Perlow. Another Hasidic group active here was represented by Yaakov Joel Horowitz (1824–1832), his son Menachem Mendel (1832–1864), and Menachem Mendel's son, Levi (1879–1902). The presence of several generations of Hasidic masters transformed Bolekhiv in one of the Galician centres of Hasidism. ¶ With the spread of the Haskalah movement in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the new reformist policies of the enlightened Austrian government, Bolekhiv became one of the first in East Galicia to establish a secular Jewish school for boys (1781). The enlightened Rabbi Hirsch Goldenberg was among the first *maskilim* in Bolekhiv, his sons, Shmuel Leib, Yaakov, and Zelig Tzvi Mandschein also continued their father's tradition and became enlightened rabbinic leaders. In 1830,

Shmuel Leib published a book about Haskalah and *maskilim*. From 1833 to 1843, the journal *Kerem Hemed* (Heb.: Vineyard of Delight), a platform for the debates about the Haskalah movement, was issued locally, while Zelig Tzvi Mandschein published the magazine *Ha-Shahar* (Heb.: The Dawn), in which he attacked Hasidic Jews and advanced the reform of Jewish education. ¶ In 1845, a Jewish hospital, managed by the *kahal*, was established in Bolekhiv, and in 1856, a secular Jewish school was opened. In it, children received education in three languages, Hebrew, Polish, and German. In 1902, a Zionist-oriented school for girls was opened, with Hebrew as the main language of instruction, and a similar school for boys opened its doors six years later. ¶ Once the Tikvat Israel (Heb.: The Hope of Israel) organisation was established in 1894 and the weekly Zionist magazine *Die Welt* (Ger.: The World) was launched, the Zionist movement gained popularity in Bolekhiv. From 1911 to 1913, a Zionist-oriented women's organisation Banot Zion (Heb.: Daughters of Zion) launched



a Hebrew language program. Zionist youth organisations were active in Bolekhiv, too, for example, Tseirei Zion (Youth of Zion) and He-Halutz ([Agricultural] Pioneers). In the 1920s, Jewish agricultural settlers from Bolekhiv established in Palestine two *kibbutzim*, Heftsi-Bah and Bet Alfa . ¶ In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community in Bolekhiv experienced a rapid population growth, with Jews making up 78 percent of the 4,000 residents, one of the highest Jewish/Gentile ratios in Galicia. At the beginning of World War I, many buildings in Bolekhiv were destroyed and the town's Jewish population dwindled. According to the 1921 census, Bolekhiv had only 2,433 residents, Jews and non-Jews. In the early 1920s, the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped establish the first Jewish bank in Bolekhiv.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the Red Army took control over the town. The Soviet authorities began suppressing and persecuting the members of various socio-political organisations and parties, including the socialist ones and the Jewish ones. Less than two years later, in July–August 1941, Bolekhiv was occupied by the Hungarian and German troops. On July 4, 1941, many Bolekhiv Jews died during a pogrom. In August 1941, the Nazi Germans introduced their racial laws in Bolekhiv. A forced labour camp for Jews and a *Judenrat* were established. The first large-scale operation to create a *Judenrein* (free of Jews) zone took place on October 28 and 29, 1941. The Nazis first gathered the Jews in the old Red Army barracks and



then transported them to the execution site near the village of Taniawa (which became a memorial site after the war); 750 people were shot there, and those who remained in the town were confined in the ghetto. During the second *Aktion* in April 1942, another 450 Jews were shot at the Jewish cemetery in the nearby village of Dovzhky. ¶ In June 1942, some 4,281 Jews were still staying in Bolekhiv and surrounding villages; 1,588 were engaged in forced labour. In August 1942, Jews from the surrounding villages were resettled to Bolekhiv. The third *Aktion* took place on September 3–5, 1942. After that, only about 2,500 Jews remained in the town. In October and November 1942, some Jews were transported to the ghetto in Stryj, while

[A] Former Jewish houses in Bolekhiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The façade of the synagogue in Bolekhiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



1,748 Jews able to do work remained in Bolekhiv. In December 1942, the Jews working in Bolekhiv were transferred to the barracks, later shot and buried at the Jewish cemetery in Bolekhiv. All the Bolekhiv Jews transported to Stryj were also shot. On August 23, 1943, the ghetto in Bolekhiv was liquidated. ¶

During the Nazi rule in Bolekhiv, 3,800 Jews were killed in the pits around the town and 450 were transported to Bełżec extermination camp. Only 48 Jewish people who managed to hide in the surrounding forests survived the Holocaust. After the war, in 1945 and 1946, most of them left for Poland.

In September 2006, Professor of Classics Daniel Mendelsohn published his much-acclaimed book *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, portraying his personal quest for his Jewish relatives on his mother's side: Samuel Jager, his wife Esther, and their four daughters, who all lived in Bolekhiv before World War II and died at the hands of the Nazis.

”To me in particular he [my grandfather] loved to tell his stories about the town in which he was born, and where his family had lived “since,” he would say, clearing his throat wetly in the way that he did, his eyes huge and staring, like a baby’s, behind the lenses of his old-fashioned, black-plastic glasses, “there was a Bolechow.” BUH-leh-khuhv, he would pronounce it, keeping the “l” low in his throat, in the same place where he caressed the “kh,” the way that people will do who are from that place, BUHlehkhuhv, the pronunciation that, as I found out much later, is the old, the Yiddish pronunciation. ¶ Daniel Mendelsohn, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, New York 2006

**The cemetery** ¶ The Jewish cemetery in Bolekhiv is located on a hill near the

town; with the entrance from Mandryka St., through a private yard. The cemetery

has about 2,000–3,000 matzevot, the oldest one dating back to 1648. Many have beautiful, sophisticated, and elaborate carved ornaments. About 50 metres from the entrance is the grave of one of the most famous dwellers of Bolekhiv,

Dov Ber Birkenthal. His matzevah contains an epitaph, which reads: “Here lies a famous, generous elder, Dov Ber, son of Yehuda Birkenthal. May his soul be bound in the bond of life.” Next to it, there is the grave of his wife Leah.

Worth seeing

Former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Ivana Franka Sq. ¶ Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Mandryka St. ¶ Museum of Bolekhiv History, 9 Sichovykh Striltsiv St. ¶ Natalya Kobrynska Museum, 7 Sichovykh Striltsiv St. ¶ Town hall (1863), Ivana Franka Sq. ¶ Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1838). ¶ Orthodox Church of the Holy Women Carrying Fragrant Oils (wooden, 17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva (1939). ¶ Greek Catholic Church of St. Anne (1870). ¶ “Brükenstein” Hotel (1900–1905), now the department of obstetrics of the Central Municipal Hospital, Yevhena Konovaltsa St.



Surrounding area

Morshyn (10 km): a health resort famous all over Eastern Europe. ¶ Bubnyshche (13 km): the scenic Dovbush Rocks Reserve. ¶ Dolyna (15 km): an old salt refinery; a former synagogue (1897); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c., with no surviving matzevot); numerous Catholic and Orthodox churches; “Boykivshchyna” Ethnographic Museum. ¶ Kalush (49 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the neo-Gothic Catholic Church of St. Valentine (1844); Orthodox Church of St. Michael (1910–1913); the Folk House (1907).

# Khust

Pol. Chust, Ukr. Хуст, Hung. Huszt, Yid. חוסט

*Here live Ruthenian [Ukrainian – ed.] shepherds and woodcutters, Jewish craftsmen and merchants. Poor Jews and rich Jews. Poor Ruthenians and even poorer Ruthenians.*

Ivan Olbracht, *Nikola Šuhaj*  
*loupežník* (Czech: *Nikola Šuhaj, Robber*), 1933

**Salt trail fortress** ¶ Located on the picturesque Tisza River Valley at the foot of the Carpathians, Khust is the third largest city in Transcarpathia. Probably its name comes from the Hustets, the river flowing through the town centre.

¶ The historical origins of Khust date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when a fortress was established in order to protect the salt trail leading from the Solotvyno salt mines. The fortress was completed around 1190 by Béla III, King of Hungary. In 1329, the Hungarian king Károly Róbert (Charles I) gave the castle as a gift to his faithful knight Drago, and Khust became a royal town. After the 1526 defeat of the Hungarian army in the Battle of Mohács, the Kingdom of Hungary fell apart and Khust Castle found itself in the Principality of Transylvania. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Khust Castle was one of the centres of struggle between the Princes of Transylvania and the Austrian Habsburgs. In 1577, the fortress was reinforced and a royal garrison was stationed there. Tatars besieged the castle many times, and in 1594 set the surrounding area on fire but they failed to conquer the town. Khust also withstood

the Turkish siege in 1660–1661. But in 1687, the Austrian army managed to seize the castle. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rebels and outcasts of peasant origin – among them the band led by Hryhor Pynts and Fedir Boyko – pillaged the area around Khust, and their attempts to batter the castle with a wooden cannon became a theme of popular folksongs and part of local musical folklore. In 1703, the troops of Prince Francis II Rákóczi captured the Khust Castle, and it was there that the independence of the Principality of Transylvania was declared. In 1709, Prince Rákóczi summoned the so-called Transylvanian Diet, and in 1711, Khust was incorporated into the Austrian Empire as part of its Hungarian lands. ¶ Over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Khust developed as a town of crafts and trades. In 1885, andesite started to be mined here industrially, and an andesite quarry has remained in the town to this day. Because of the surrounding forests and hills rich in clay, the town dwellers developed furniture production, established a brickyard and other manufactories and depots of construction materials. ¶ In the fall of 1918, in the aftermath of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire



collapsed, and on January 21, 1919, the Ukrainians from Transcarpathia called a Nationwide Transcarpathian Congress in Khust, where 420 delegates from all over the Transcarpathian region decided to join the united Ukraine. Despite the will of the local population and due to the political ambitions of the surrounding countries, this part of Transcarpathia found itself in the interwar Republic of Czechoslovakia as Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

**The Jews of Khust** ¶ Attracted by its favourable location, Jewish merchants started to settle in Khust in the early modern times. However, since Khust had been a royal town of Hungary and followed the *De non tolerandi Judeos* policy, Jews could trade locally but could not permanently settle in the town. An intense influx of Jews began in 1772, coinciding with the First Partition of Poland and the incorporation of these lands into the Habsburg Empire. In 1792, the Jewish community consisted of 14 families. In 1839, 132 Jews lived here, along with 1,953 Greek Catholics, 640 Roman Catholics, 370 Reformed Evangelicals, and 8 Lutherans. The first rabbi in Khust was Abram Yakov of Zhydachiv, appointed in 1812, which implies that the community was sufficiently well-to-do to afford a rabbinic leader. The most



The synagogue in Khust, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

respected among the 19<sup>th</sup>-century rabbinic scholars was Rabbi Moshe Schick (1807–1879), who in 1861 established a yeshiva in Khust – the largest one in Eastern Europe at that time. This yeshiva attracted rabbinic scholars of the highest calibre who at different times served the local community, among them Moshe Grinwald (1853–1910), Israel Yakov Leifer, Shmuel Shmelke Leifer II of Khust, Meshulam Grinsberg of Khust, and Josef Tzvi Dushinsky. In 1921, Rabbi Josef Tzvi Dushinsky became the head of the Khust Jewish community. He moved to Jerusalem in 1930, and became the leader of the rising ultra-Orthodox Judaism that embraced the so-called *haredi* community – various groups of Hasidim, yeshivah-centered Lithuanian Jews, and the Orthodoxy-oriented Sefardic Jews.

**Moshe Schick** (Maharam Schick, 1807–1879), born in Birkenhain (now, Brezová in Slovakia), was one of the most prominent 19<sup>th</sup>-century European rabbis and one of the leaders of the rising Orthodox Judaism. Moshe studied under the famous rabbinic scholar Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Schreiber, 1762–1839) in Pressburg (Bratislava, Pozsony), perhaps the most authoritative rabbinic leader in East Central Europe of that time and the head of the biggest European Talmudic academies enrolling up to 400 students. Hatam Sofer called his outstanding student a "treasure chest full of holy books." Schick was appointed to serve as a rabbi in



Interior of the synagogue in Khust, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

the town of Svätý Jur (Slovakia) in 1838, where he opened a yeshiva, which he thought would create a stronghold of traditional Judaism against the encroaching Reform movement. In 1861, he became rabbi of Khust, and helped to establish a yeshiva there that over the years was attended by more than 800 students. ¶ In his rabbinic commentaries, Schick was commonly referred to as Maharam Schick, an acronym for "More(y)nu ha-Rav Rabbi Moshe" (Heb.: Our Teacher, Our

Master, Rabbi Moshe). He is the author of a number of legal (*halakhic*) responsa, works as well as the treatises *Hidushey ha-Maharam Schick* containing legal novelties and *Derashot Maharam Schick* with his commentaries on the Torah weekly portion. He died in Khust on January 25, 1879.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community of Khust became one of the largest and most influential in Transcarpathia. In 1880, it numbered 1,062 Jews, and by 1910, it grew to 2,371 (15 percent of the town's population). In the interwar period, Khust became a district center in Czechoslovakia. By 1921, its Jewish population had increased to 3,391 people. Jews were involved in all aspects

of civic, cultural, and economic activities. They established cinemas, managed taverns in wine cellars, ran factories and craft workshops, three banks, four mills, the "Korona" and "Centralny" Hotels, and other businesses. Many of them worked in liberal professions as doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, and clerks. In 1923, there were five Jews serving in the town council.

**Josef Tzvi Dushinsky** (1867–1948), of Hungarian-Jewish origin, was a disciple of one of the grandsons of Rabbi Hatam Sofer of Pressburg. Initially, Dushinsky served as a chief rabbi of Galanta in Slovakia, and in 1921 became the chief rabbi of Khust, where he spent most of his time teaching yeshiva students. In 1930, together with his family, he moved to Palestine and settled in Jerusalem. In 1932, shortly after the death of Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (1848–1932), the leader of the Haredi community (ultra-Orthodox Jews) in Jerusalem and the founder of the "Ha-Edah ha-Haredit" community (Heb.: The Community of The God-Fearing), Josef Tzvi Dushinsky was appointed as his successor – a sign of enormous prestige and respect toward this Transylvania rabbi. He also founded the Society of Hungarian Jews in Jerusalem. Rabbi Dushinsky was known for his strong opposition to secular Zionism; he protested to the UNO against the creation of the State of Israel, claiming – as some leaders of the *haredi* community would do in Israel – that the real messianic process is religious, not political in essence and that the

messianic pretensions of the Zionists are baseless. He died on the eve of the Sukkot holiday, on October 17, 1948, shortly after the State of Israel was established.

By 1930, the Jewish population of Khust grew to 4,821. Around the same time, however, a large majority of Jews in Transcarpathia, then part of Czechoslovakia (as many as 65 percent, according to the 1930 records), was not urbanized and continued to live in the mountainous rural areas: the highest percentage of Jews engaged in farming in Europe. This reflected on local realms – friendly relations between Jews and Christians in the Transcarpathia rural areas – and also the reformist intentions of the Austrian government that in 1867 allowed Jews to own land. ¶ Various Jewish political parties were active in Khust, including the “Agudat Israel” (also known as the Agudah) which represented newly formed political-religious Orthodoxy, as well as several Zionist organisations, Orthodox youth groups, and the Jewish National Party (*ation partei*, a Zionist



group promoting full emancipation and national autonomy), which represented the Jewish community in the municipal council. ¶ Khust boasted its own Hasidic dynasty, an offshoot of the Nadvorna dynasty, established by a first-generation Hasidim Rabbi Meir of Premishlan (1703–1773), a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov. The dynasty was founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its first *admor* (tsaddik) was Rabbi Yakov Israel Leifer (d. 1929). Today, descendants of the Khust dynasty reside mainly in the USA.

Former synagogue in Khust, currently library, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**CAPITAL** ¶ In October 1938, following the Munich Agreement, the Ukrainian autonomous Subcarpathian Ruthenia was established as part of Czechoslovakia. A month later, it was renamed into Carpatho-Ukraine, with the capital in Khust and Avgustyn Voloshyn, a famous political leader and mathematician, as president. Carpatho-Ukraine proclaimed independence at the Diet in Khust on 15 March 1939, but as an independent polity it existed just one day: the following day Khust was seized by Hungarian troops, Voloshyn had to flee to Prague.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ Following the outbreak of World War II, anti-Semitism in Hungary grew stronger, and became a palpable phenomenon in Transcarpathia, which previously had not registered anti-Semitic incidents. The Transcarpathian Jews,

like all Hungarian Jews, were persecuted in 1939–1944, although Hungarian authorities with all their staunch anti-Semitism did not support the Final Solution. Starting from 1940, all healthy Jews were directed to forced labour sites. Several hundreds of Khust Jews were

transported in freight cars to Kőrösmező (the village of Yasinia) near the pre-war Polish border, and then across the border, where they were handed over to the Germans, who in turn sent them to concentration camps. Khust Jewish families without Hungarian citizenship were expelled to the Nazi-occupied territory of Ukraine. Many of them were executed in Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1941. ¶ In April 1944, immediately after a fascist coup in Hungary, three ghettos were set up in the area: one in Khust and two in the villages of Iza and Sokyrnytsia. More than 10,000 Jews had been confined there before they were deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Several dozen Jews managed to escape from Khust and join the Ukrainian partisan units. ¶ Before deportation, the Jews were rounded up at what is now a brickyard, as well as in other assembly points in today's Dobryanskoho St.,

Duhnovycha St., and Khmyelnytskoho Square, which served as *Umschlagplatz*. Starting from May 14, 1944, trains to Auschwitz set off directly from eight railway stations in the region – Mukacheve, Berehove, Uzhhorod, Volove, Solotvyno, Sevlush (Vynohradiv), Khust, and Tiachiv. Each train transported between 2,000 and 4,000 Jews. Some Jews from Khust were forced to march west on foot – to the concentration camps of Buchenwald and Ravensbrück (Germany) and Mauthausen (Austria), 1,300 km and 800 km, respectively. Hundreds of prisoners were held in the Kryvka concentration camp, near Khust. From there, forty transports with the Jewish inmates were taken to the bank of the Tisza River close to the Welatynsky Bridge, where the prisoners were shot and their bodies thrown into the river. By late spring 1944, the Nazis declared Khust *Judenrein*, “free of Jews”.

**Ernő Szép (1884–1953)** was born in Khust as one of the nine children of a local Jewish teacher. As a young boy, he moved to Budapest, where he made his name as a poet, playwright, and journalist. He debuted with a collection of poems and short stories *Első csokor* (Hung.: The First Bouquet, 1902). Alongside Sándor Bródy and Ferenc Molnár, he ranks as one of the most outstanding writers of Jewish origin who wrote in Hungarian. His plays such as *Pátika* (Hung.: Pharmacy, 1918), *Lila ákác* (Hung.: Lily Acacia, 1921), *A Vőlegény* (Hung.: The Bride, 1922), are still staged in Hungarian theatres. In 1944, together with other Jews from Budapest, Ernő Szép was made to do forced labour for many weeks, an ordeal that he described in his memoir *Emberszag* (Hung.: The Smell of Humans, 1945). His profound child-esque naiveté in the midst of the Holocaust horrors and his physical ability to dig trenches in extenuating and life-threatening conditions saved his life.

On October 24, 1944, Soviet troops entered the town making it part of Soviet Ukraine (USSR). In February 1945, the first Jewish survivors returned to the city. By mid-1946, the Jewish population of Khust had grown to 400

people. Most of the returning Jewish families, however, could not come back to their old houses, which were taken by the Gentiles whose take-over was legitimized by the new Soviet authorities.





Jewish cemetery in Khust, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

### In defence of the synagogue ¶

According to some sources, there were eight synagogues and prayer houses in Khust at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Old Synagogue survived the war, but it was converted under the Soviets into a movie theater. ¶ Only one synagogue, built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has retained its original appearance and function to this day. The internal original wall paintings have survived, and the building has never been destroyed. It is the only synagogue in Transcarpathia which has operated continuously as a Jewish prayer house since its construction. ¶ During World War II, the Nazis stored Jewish confiscated property in the synagogue. After the war, the Soviet authorities repeatedly tried to confiscate or demolish the building, but the Khust Jewish women came to the synagogue and took shifts at its walls, preventing the realisation of these plans. Besides, the synagogue

served a comparatively sizeable religious community of the Holocaust survivors: when they came to pray there was hardly enough room for everybody. This community secured the survival of the synagogue as an actively operating Jewish house of worship in the difficult times of the communist regime. To this day, about 165 Jews live in Khust – and they still pray in that synagogue.

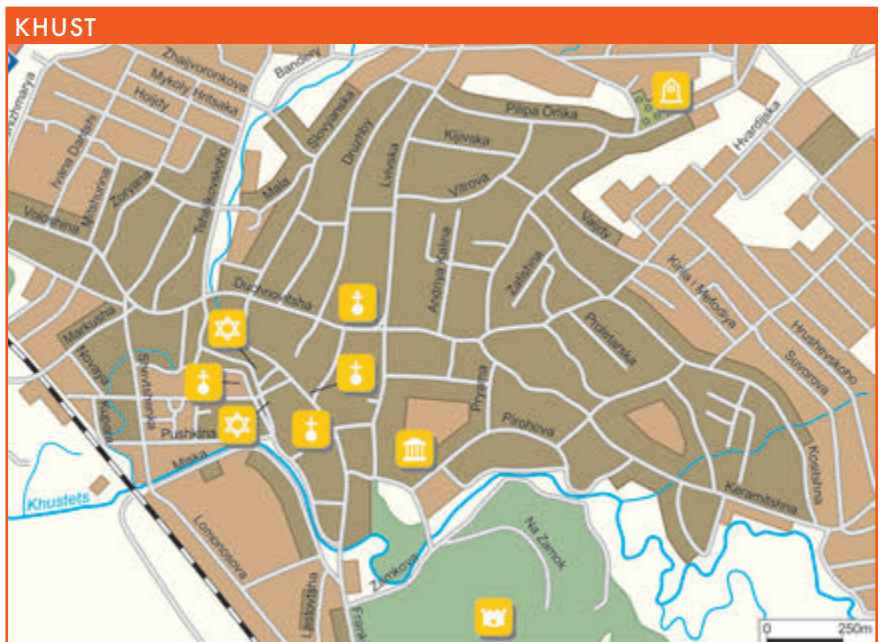
**The cemetery ¶** An old Jewish cemetery, established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is situated on a hill on Ostrovskoho St. It has more than 1,500 matzevot. Those buried there include Rabbi Moshe Schick and Rabbi Moshe Grinwald, prominent rabbinic scholars and communal leaders. The cemetery was closed for burials in 1960. A new Jewish cemetery was established on the slope of Castle Hill, near the Christian cemeteries, and it is still used by the Jewish community.

**Worth  
seeing**

**Synagogue** (1872 – 1875), 11 Nezalezhnosti Square, tel. +380667785786. **Jewish cemetery**, Ostrovskeho St. **Ruins of the castle** (11<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamkova St. **St. Elizabeth Calvinist Church** (13<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.), a Gothic fortified church, 45 Konstitutsyi St. **St. Anne Roman Catholic Church** (late 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.), 40 Karpatskoi Sichy St. **Orthodox Church of the Annunciation of the Mother of God** (1928–1929), Duhnovycha St. **Khust Regional History Museum**, 1 Pyrohova St., tel. +380686167370.

**Surrounding  
area**

**Kireshi** (5 km): Carpathian Biosphere Reserve “The Valley of Narcissi”: Narcissi flowers bloom in May, at an altitude of 200 m above sea level on an area of 170 hectares (420 acres); the entire reserve covers an area of 257 hectares (635 acres). **Vynohradiv** (24 km): a synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; a Franciscan monastery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Ascension (15<sup>th</sup> c.). **Irshava** (36 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery. **Solotvyno** (50 km): salt mines; a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.; rebuilt); Jewish cemeteries (19<sup>th</sup> c.). **Kolochava** (60 km): “a village of a hundred museums,” including an exceptionally rich ethnographic *skansen* (open-air museum) with Hutsul, Czech, Rusyn, Soviet, Hungarian buildings and a Jewish tavern exhibition; Ivan Olbracht Museum; a wooden Orthodox church (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery on the hill at the entrance to the village with the Holocaust memorial matzevot commemorating the Kolochava Jews; the Synevyr National Park and the legendary Synevyr lake. **Berehove** (60 km): a functioning synagogue (1920); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). **Mukacheve** (83 km): unique Palanok Castle (11<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.); Gothic Chapel of St. Joseph (11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Schönborn Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Martin’s Cathedral (20<sup>th</sup> c.); a new synagogue (21<sup>st</sup> c.); a restored Jewish cemetery (20<sup>th</sup> c.). **Uzhhorod** (100 km): a former synagogue now used as a concert hall (1903); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.).



# Delatyn

Ukr. Делятин, Yid. דעלאטין

*If we agree with the statement that the Carpathians are a fortress, then the Ivano-Frankivsk–Rakhiv route is the main gate to this fortress, its ceremonial entrance. And the most important word that opens up another perspective is Delatyn.*

Taras Prokhasko, *Delyatynski paroli*  
(Ukr.: Delatyn Entries), 2004

**Ten cones of salt ¶** Delatyn is situated deep in the mountains, in the valley of the Prut River crossing the mountain region; the highest mountain in the area is Vavtorov (1,059 m). The first written mention of the town dates back to 1370, and the crown privilege of 1578 placed Delatyn under the Magdeburg law. Salt, first mined near the town in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, became the basis of the town's development. Hence, there are a symbolic 10 cones of salt on Delatyn's current coat of arms. Delatyn salt refineries began operating on an industrial scale in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with salt production gradually becoming a mechanised process. In 1870, a steam engine was

established in the refinery and two pumps were installed in the mines, extracting 155 quintals of salt a day. The salt deposits allowed for the establishment of spa facilities. Mineral springs were used to treat rheumatism (with salt baths) and respiratory diseases (with salt inhalations): the well-known health resort in Yaremche was just about 10 km away. About 8,000 people live in Delatyn today, and the town has become one of the traditional Hutsul folk craft centres in Ukraine, which the autochthonous dwellers of the Carpathians, the ethnic Hutsuls, mountain cattle-breeders supply with their wooden, glass, clay, and textile crafts.

” *Near the train station, there is a hill with a large park on top of it. There are Drimmer's and Dicker's Hotels. There are Rummel's and Stefaniuk's restaurants. In the eastern part of the town, there is a very powerful salt spring with mineral baths; the guests are almost exclusively Jews. The cliff above the baths allows a beautiful vista of the town. A trip to the Mount of Malava (844 m, 1.5 hrs), which offers a wide view of the Prut River valley, the Hutsul Beskid Mountains, and the Gorgany Mountains. A beautiful Orthodox church built by the Hutsuls can be seen in Luh (5 km). Delatyn is a gateway to the territory inhabited by the Hutsuls. ¶* Translated from: M. Orłowicz, *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Galicji* (An Illustrated Guide to Galicia), Lwów 1919

**The Jews of Delatyn ¶** The first mention of Jews in Delatyn dates back

to 1767. There were 87 Jews living in the town at that time, employed



A view of Delatyn, the 1930s, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

as traders and craftsmen. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many local Jews inspired by the rumours of the upcoming redemption, joined the sect of the false messiah Sabbetai Zevi (1626–1676); there is even a legend that the Shabbetai personally visited the nearby town of Kolomyia, which of course never happened. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Delatyn became the property of Count Potocki, who fostered the economic development of the Jewish community by extending to them various lease-holding privileges, including those for wood-cutting and lumber freight, alcohol production, and purveying of the troops and the count's court. ¶ In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Delatyn was a typical Galician shtetl. A sawmill and a mill on the Peremyska River were leased by Jewish entrepreneurs for more than a century. Delatyn also boasted Jewish farm-owners such as Dr. Janina Bloch and Kopel Seinfeld, who were engaged in producing and selling grain. Lumber industry particularly flourished in Delatyn. In 1929, there were four

sawmills in town that belonged to Jewish families: the Blochs, the Fogels, the Jagers, the Friedfertigs, and the Kleins. Jews such as Shlomo Bernstein owned the Delatyn power plant and many other manufacturing facilities, while such as K. Belstein worked as doctors at the local spa. ¶ There were two wooden synagogues in town, both destroyed by the Nazis. ¶ The rabbis serving the community of Delatyn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century included several outstanding scholars such as Naftali Hersh Teomim, Naftali Ehrlich, and Azriel Landau, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Yakov Hurwitz. In 1895–1910, there was a Jewish school in Delatyn, headed by Chaim Bardach. ¶ During World War I, many soldiers from Delatyn fought for the Austro-Hungarians. The Russian troops first captured Delatyn in October 1914, yet the town changed hands several times during the military campaign. After the Russian offensive in 1916 (known as the Brusilov Offensive), the front line ran along the Prut River.





Delatyn suffered a great deal: during the war, 80 percent of the town's (mostly wooden) buildings were destroyed.

**A** Salt refinery in Delatyn, 1917, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

**Chaim Bloch** (1881–1973) was a rabbi, military chaplain, journalist, and a writer who came from a well-known family of Jewish rabbis and scholars of Delatyn and Nadvirna and was a descendant of the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov. He studied at a local yeshivah for a rabbinic degree, but when the town was seized by the Russians, he moved to Vienna together with his wife and children. From 1915, he served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a chaplain serving the Jewish prisoners of war. During the war, he wrote *Erinnerungen aus einem Kriegsgefangenenlager* (Ger.: *Memories from a POW Camp*), a unique document shedding light on the plight of the Jewish soldiers during the war. In 1939, he emigrated to New York City. His book *Der Prager Golem: Von seiner "Geburt" bis zu seinem "Tod"* (Ger.: *The Golem of Prague: From "Birth" to "Death,"* 1920) was heavily based on Jewish folklore and retold the legend of the Golem, an artificial being allegedly created by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rabbi Loew (Maharal of Prague) in order to defend the medieval Jewish ghetto.

**B** Market square in Delatyn, about 1915, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

**Notable residents** ¶ In the interwar period, Delatyn maintained its status as a medical spa and water resort. Its Jewish inhabitants served as prominent lawyers, notaries, state officials, teachers, merchants, and also bank, restaurant café, and hardware store owners. Most local Jews engaged in various crafts: they were tailors, carpenters, furriers, and butchers, but people of liberal professions. ¶ At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Jews in Delatyn were traditional, who eventually formed the core of the rising Orthodox movement.

Among the local Hasidim, most followed the tsaddikim (Hasidic masters) from Zhydachiv, Sadhora, and Vyzhnytsia. Many Jews of the younger generation supported various forms of Zionism and joined a number of Jewish organizations and political parties, such as Poale Zion and the Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. ¶ In present-day Delatyn, it is worthwhile to visit a brick house established by the Jewish financier and philanthropist, Baron Maurice de Hirsch and designed by architect Leon Borge-nischt. In 1932, it was renovated thanks



The centre of Delatyn, about 1930, collection of the Local History Museum of Delatyn

to the efforts of the Jewish cultural and educational organisation Tarbut. The house hosted a library, a reading room, a club, and an apartment where the director of the institution lived.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Polish government officials fleeing from the Germans to Romania fled through Delatyn. At the end of September, the Red Army captured the town. The Soviets began deportations of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians engaged in national-democratic movements or belonging to a wrong class (bourgeoisie) to Siberia and Kazakhstan. The arrival of the Hungarian and German troops in June and July 1941, marked the most tragic period in the history of the town's Jewish community. In 1941–1943, more than 3,000 Jews were murdered in the Delatyn area. In July 1941, a *Judenrat* was set up. During an *Aktion* on October 16, 1941, the Gestapo troops surrounded

the town and began to inspect the documents. The German authorities, under the pretence that Jews would be given land, announced that Jews would have to be registered. When all the Jews had assembled to do this, they were brought to a timber processing factory for selection. From there, the elderly were taken to the Olkhovets wilderness and shot dead, while young people were kept for forced labor. Altogether 1,900 Jews were executed during this first *Aktion*. Some Jews were rounded up and shot in Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk) during the second *Aktion*. During the third *Aktion*, 200 Jews from the nearby Tatariv were murdered at the cemetery in Delatyn. The fourth *Aktion* took place in March 1942, when 456 Jewish people were shot: first, almost 200 local Jews were arrested and then those from the neighbouring villages and towns were brought in. They were all taken to the Jewish cemetery and executed. At the

end of 1942, 200 Jews from Delatyn and the surrounding area were deported to the Belżec death camp. ¶ The fifth and final mass execution operation was carried out in November and December 1943. The Gestapo and soldiers of the Vlasov army surrounded Delatyn at night and started shelling. People who ran into the street in panic were murdered. The Nazis rounded up all the Jews in the town centre, shot them randomly, loaded living and dead into trucks and transported them to the Olkhovets forest. Altogether, 712 Jews and 95 Ukrainians were murdered in this fifth *Aktion*. At the end of 1943, the town was proclaimed *Judenrein*, “free of Jews.” The Nazis confiscated and ravaged Jewish property. ¶ In March 1944, the Soviet army took control of Delatyn, but in April the Nazis reclaimed the town. Eventually, the Soviet rule was reinstated on July 26, 1944. ¶ The mass grave of local people shot in 1941–1943, most of them of Jewish origin, is situated in the Olkhovets forest, north of the town. A monument commemorating the victims, with an inscription in three languages, marks the site.

**The cemetery** ¶ The only place where traces of the Delatyn Jewish community have been preserved is the Jewish cemetery with several hundred matzevot. During Soviet times, it was not fenced and some gravestones were pillaged and used to build roads. Today, the cemetery is fenced, some matzevot have been set up in their original places, and a commemorative plaque has been placed on the gate.

**Memory** ¶ Today, there are two associations of Delatyn Jews and their



descendants, one in New York and the other in Israel. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch film director Willi Lindwer visited the town together with his father, Berl Nuchim, whose family perished in Delatyn during the Holocaust. Lindwer's documentary *Return to My Shtetl Delatyn* tells the story of a Jewish family and its community. One of the protagonists is Anna Yosypchuk, a Jewish woman who had married a Ukrainian and became a Christian before the war, which saved her life during the Nazi occupation. After the war, she became the Mayor of Delatyn.

[A] Olkhiivtsi Colony – the site of executions of Jews in 1941–1943, 2015. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Matzevot at the Jewish cemetery in Delatyn, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

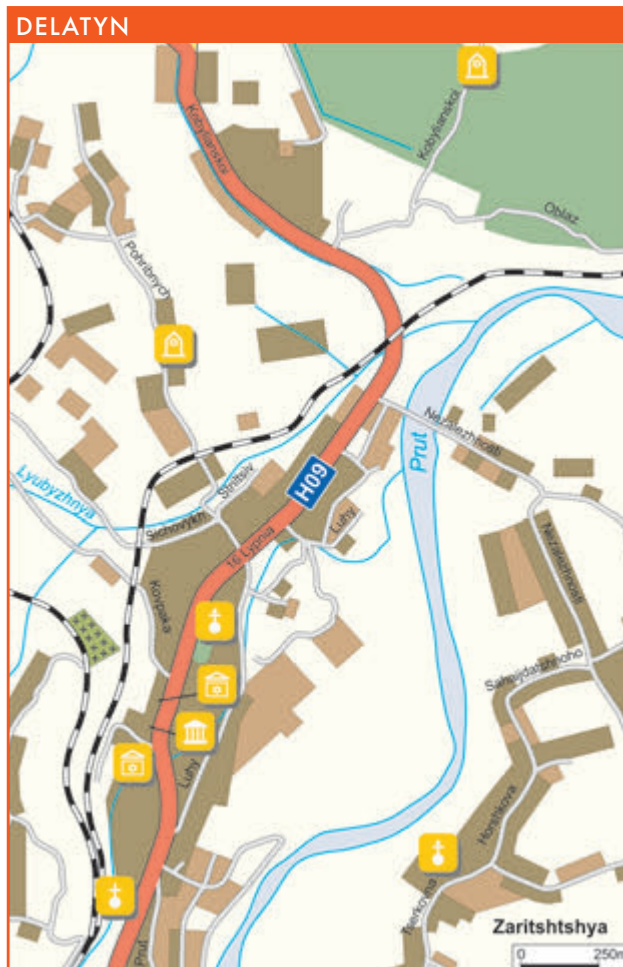


**Worth  
seeing**

Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Nezalezhnosti St. 🏛️ Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God (1620), 29 Kovpaka St. 🏛️ St. Francis Church (1865), 16 Lypnia St. 🏛️ Town hall. 🏛️ The Marko Cheremshyna Literary Memorial Museum, located in a villa built in the so-called “Zakopane style,” where the writer lived in 1908–1912. 🏛️ The Local History Museum of Delatyn, 247 16 Lypnia St, tel. +380672500365.

**Surrounding  
area**

Yaremche (8 km): the “Probiy,” ”Zhonka” (“Wifey”), and “Girls’ Tears” waterfalls; souvenir markets; the Museum of Metropolitan Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky; the Museum of Ethnography and Ecology of the Carpathian Region; mineral water springs and health resort. 🏛️ Nadvirna (12 km): Pniv Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Vladimir Orthodox Church; ruins of the citadel in the municipal park (19<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏛️ Sotolvyn (35 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏛️ Kolomyia (37 km): a functioning synagogue (1848); the town hall (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Orthodox Church of the Annunciation of the Mother of God (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the National Museum of Hutsulshchyna and Pokuttia Folk Art.





# Kosiv

Pol. Kosów, Ukr. Kociv, Yid. קאָסעו

*Between Kosiv and Kutry  
There is a bridge  
Where Baal Shem  
Used to stroll...*

A Hasidic song

**Among the Hutsuls** ¶ Kosiv is the centre of the Galician Hutsulshchyna region, named after the Hutsuls, an autochthonous people of the Carpathian mountains, cattle breeders and craftsmen, whose folklore has been nurturing and is still nurturing Hungarian music, Romanian folklore, Polish art, and Ukrainian literature. Kosiv is a mountain town, situated on the edge of the Ukrainian Carpathians in the valley of the Rybnytsia River, a tributary of the Prut. To the north, rising above it, is the Town Hill (432 m). ¶ The first mention of Kosiv dates back to 1318, when it was part of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia. A century later, Lithuanian Duke Švitrigaila *Algirdaitis* (son of Algirdas) granted the ownership of the villages of Kosiv, Berezhovo, and Żabie (Zhabie, now Verkhovyna) to his “faithful servant,” a Moldavian boyar named Vlad Dragosynovych. This event is reflected in a document of August 31, 1424, composed in the Ruthenian (one of the official languages of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), a form of High Medieval Ukrainian. ¶ In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a wooden fortification was built at the top of Town Mountain. It was a

fortalice, fortified noblemen’s residence smaller and less imposing than the real fortress. The Kosiv fortalice dominated the town and served defensive purposes during the invasions of the Tatars and Turks as well as during the attacks of other noblemen who sought to conquer Kosiv and include its lands under their rule. ¶ When Kosiv and its surrounding lands became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the town acquired a status of the “crown lands” (*królewszczyzna*) possessions. In the 1579 tax register, the name “Koshov, oppidum” (Koshov, a town) was used for the first time, along with the name “Koshov, villa” (Koshov, a village). That document lists Kosiv as a private town owned by one Michał, whose last name and rank in the feudal hierarchy remain unknown. This private town near Stary (that is, Old) Kosiv together with four nearby villages formed a distinct Kosiv district. ¶ Kosiv prospered thanks to the salt trade, which made it a tempting target for raiders. In 1740, it was attacked by a gang of Oleksa Dovbush, a rebellious outcast who lived from 1700–1745 and who entered Ukrainian folklore as a champion of poor people’s



rights. In 1759, the nobleman Tadeusz Dzieduszycki, the then owner of the

town, called up a private army to defend Kosiv against such raids.

“Once, the Baal Shem Tov – the Besht – asked Dovbush a question: ¶ – How much longer do you plan to be a robber? Look, you have so much goodness and love for all creation in you; can’t you settle down somewhere, work the land, build a house, take a wife, have children, raise them and just live, as God commanded? Why do you sin so? [...] ¶ And Dovbush began to excuse himself: ¶ – What else can I do, holy man? I grew too big and too healthy, and I was the only pride and joy of my mother, a widow. In our mountains, no one knew how much evil there was out there. In our mountains, as you know, there are no masters, we do not know what an overseer’s knout or whip is, our backs are proudly erect, and we are free like eagles. The forest is ours, we cheerfully hunt bears and deer; the meadows are ours, our sheep graze on them; you can hear the pipes, flutes, and bagpipes that the shepherds play to while away the time on long sunny days. ¶ Then recruiters and commissioners came to conscript us, cut off our long curly hair, put us in tight uniforms, and took us far from home, to Vienna, beyond the deep Danube, where even ravens would not find our bones. They brought us to Kolomyia, where we were guarded by soldiers. We talked long into the night, girded our loins, and then we attacked the guards, tied them up, and ran away back to our mountains with their weapons. From then on, we have been fighting them and their laws. Fighting to the death. The fight is hard, and our life is bitter. ¶ Translated from: Dov Ber Horowitz, *Dobosz* (Dovbush) in: *Wunderleche mayases*, Warsaw 1923

According to a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century census, Kosiv comprised nearly 250 Greek Catholic families, more than 110 Jewish

families, and seven Roman Catholic families. ¶ With the First Partition of Poland (1772), Kosiv was incorporated

into the Habsburg Empire. Under Austrian rule, in addition to the salt industry, other crafts developed: carpet weaving, wood-crafts, and ceramics. From 1850, Kosiv became a weaving centre, with its own Weaving Society and a School of Weaving established in 1882. ¶ After the outbreak of World War I, Kosiv found itself under Russian occupation (1914–1915 and 1916–1917) and was subject to pogroms and pillaging. In November 1918, it fell under the rule of the West Ukrainian People's Republic, and after May 26, 1919, came under Romanian occupation. In August, 1919, along with the surrounding towns, Kosiv was incorporated into the Republic of Poland. ¶ In the interwar period, a number of Ukrainian associations and political groupings were established in Kosiv – both legal (e.g. the Society of Stone Cutters, the boy-scout “Plast,” and the Ukrainian Women's Alliance) and illegal (the OUN, Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists; and the CPWU, the Communist Party of Western Ukraine). Other organisations were also active, including the Polish Society of Friends of Hutsulshchyna, the Jewish “Merkaz Ruchani” (Spiritual Center) and the Maccabee Sports Club. Kosiv had guest houses that could accommodate as many as 3,000 people a year, and eventually it became a mountain health resort. It was precisely this transformation that, in 1938, led to the failure of the salt refinery, which had earlier been the driving force behind the economic development of Kosiv.

**The Jews of Kosiv** ¶ Most likely, Jews settled in Kosiv as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but they did not

form an independent community. Only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish cemetery was established, indicating the growing independence and prosperity of the local community able to negotiate its own privileges with the town owner – and pay for them. Hoping to increase their revenues, the Jazłowiecki and Dzieduszycki families, the town owners, issued trade and residential privileges encouraging Jewish merchants and craftsmen to settle in Kosiv. Gradually, the town centre became home to Jewish merchants and Jewish leaseholders of salt refineries, mills, landed estates, and inns. ¶ In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Hasidim, Jewish pietists and mystically-oriented religious enthusiasts, settled in Kosiv. They joined the old-generation pietists, called today the “small-case hassidim” – ascetic Kabbalists who had here their own *koyz*, an exclusive prayer and study house for members of the pietistic elite. Among the town's residents there were old and new religious enthusiasts, such as Rabbi Nachman (d. 1746), Rabbi Baruch ben Abraham (d. 1782), and Rabbi Menachem Mendel (d. 1825). Between 1790 and 1942, the town rabbis were mostly of Hasidic descent and relatives of Rabbi Yaakov Kopl Hosid (Yaakov Kopl ben Nechemia Feivel, known as “Hasid from Kolomyia,” d. 1787), a disciple of the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov, (known as the Besht), who had a beautiful voice and also served as a *hazzan* (synagogue cantor). ¶ As the legend has it, in the 1720s, the founder of Hasidism, Baal Shem Tov, lived in solitude in a cave by the lake near Kosiv. For seven years, he prayed and meditated there, but also carried out hard physical work – he cut

wood, prepared charcoal which his wife was selling in nearby villages to make

*Fun Kosew biz Kitew  
Iz a brikele faranen  
Awu der Bal-Szem, awu der Bal-Szem  
Szpacirn iz geganen...*

*Fun Kosew biz Kitew  
Iz a tajchele faranen  
Awu der Bal-Szem, awu der Bal-Szem  
Zich tojwlen iz geganen...*

*Fun Kosew biz Kitew  
Iz a weldele faranen  
Awu der Bal-Szem, awu der Bal-Szem  
Af hisbojdedes iz geganen...*

*Fun Kosew biz Kitew  
Zajnen fejgelech faranen  
Awu der Bal-Szem, awu der Bal-Szem  
Lernen szire iz geganen...*

One of the Hasidic legends in *Sefer Shivchei haBesht* (Hebr.: Book in Praise of Baal Shem Tov, 1814) tells of a meeting in the mountains near Kosiv between the Besht and the infamous bandit Oleksa Dovbush: one day, the great tzadik helped Dovbush escape from Hajduk soldiers by showing him a path through a mountain gorge. The grateful outlaw presented him with a pipe, which the Baal Shem Tov is said to have used until the end of his days, walking among people “always with a pipe in his mouth.”

**Synagogues and kloyzn** ¶ The first Kabbalistic groups of pietists emerged in Kosiv and in the neighbouring town of Kutu in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. These pre-Beshtian (before the

a living. This episode is reflected in an old Hasidic Yiddish song:

*Between Kosiv and Kutu  
There is a bridge  
Where Baal Shem  
Used to stroll...*

*Between Kosiv and Kutu  
There is a river  
In which Baal Shem  
Would perform ritual ablutions...*

*Between Kosiv and Kutu  
There is a forest  
Where Baal Shem  
Went to be alone and pray*

*Between Kosiv and Kutu  
There are birds  
That Baal Shem  
Visited to learn songs...*

baal Shem Tov) hassidim established their own prayer houses (*kloyzn*), where they used a kabbalistic prayer book of the Safed Kabbalist Isaak Luria (known as Arizal). There were three such *kloyzn* in Kosiv. Later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Beshtian Hasidim settled in Kosiv and established a dynasty of tsaddikim which also gave rise to an important Vyzhnytsia Hasidic dynasty (which emerged in the nearby Vyzhnytsia). After the Holocaust, the leaders of these two dynasties moved to Israel (Safed) and to the USA (New York), where they established sizeable ultra-Orthodox communities. ¶ In fact, all the prayer houses in Kosiv belonged to the Hasidic community. A wooden *kloyz* was built there at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, around the same time that the Jewish





The market square in Kosiv, 1904–1906, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

cemetery was established. Today, it is difficult to determine exactly where the first synagogue was located. It is certain, however, that a *kloyz* of the tsaddik the Hager family was built near the road to Kolomyia. The construction of this edifice, which could seat 200 people, was financed by Nathan Bender, a merchant and commercial agent from Zabolotiv.

¶ The central Hasidic *kloyz* in Kosiv was situated somewhere near the today's 126 Nezalezhnosti St. It was a one-floor building with thick brick walls. The prayer hall was decorated with floral wood-carved gilded ornamentation.

¶ On the evening of October 17, 1941, the *kloyz* was set on fire by the Nazis as part of the first large anti-Jewish *Aktion*; seven days earlier they had shot dead seven Jews seeking refuge in the building. The building burnt down but the walls remained. Another synagogue, which also served as a *cheder* (elementary school), has survived to this day and is now the seat of a municipal office. Near the synagogue, there is a building

that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century served as a residence of the Hager Dynasty. Today, it is the building at 55 Nezalezhnosti St., and it houses the ethnographic Museum of Hutsul Folk Art.

**At the turn of the century ¶** In 1880, the Jewish community in Kosiv numbered more than 2,000 people and made up 78 percent of the town's population. In 1898, a local branch of the Agudat Zion was established, and the same year also saw the opening of a vocational training school – it taught various crafts and was funded by the Jewish financier and philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch. In 1909, the Agudat Zion set up the “Safa Brura” school, with Hebrew as the main language of instruction. In 1938, a Jewish secondary school was opened. ¶ Zionists became active in Kosiv after World War I, setting up their own organisations and encouraging the local Jewish population to emigrate to Palestine. ¶ In 1921, the Jewish community of Kosiv numbered more than



[A] Pre-war Jewish houses in Kosiv, Nezalezhnosti St., 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Former rabbi's house in Kosiv, currently housing an ethnographic museum, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

2,166 people out of a total of 4,234. Dr. Jacob Gertner (1892–1941), of Jewish descent, served as the Mayor of Kosiv in 1929–1934, and Jews constituted half of the members of the municipal council. ¶ In the interwar period, Kosiv flourished economically. In 1928, some 40 weavers established a carpet-weaving cooperative. A year later, a Jewish Cooperative Bank was opened. Jews also owned the "Hutsul workshop" (belonging Gilman) and knitwear establishments (belonging to Schneiberg and Gund). ¶ The Zionists became increasingly influential in the 1920s and '30s, with various Zionist parties and branches of youth movements such as Hashomer Hatzair (Heb.: The Young Guard) and Hanoar Hatzioni (Heb.: The Zionist Youth) established in town. The Maccabee Sports Club was

actively promoting a healthy way of life and even had its own football team. Between 1934 and 1936, the *Kosover Shtyme* newspaper (Yid.: The Voice of Kosiv) was published.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ On September 22, 1939, the Red Army occupied Kosiv. The Soviet authorities opened the Industrial School of Hutsul Art, based on the former School of Weaving. But at the same time, harsh measures were taken against the local population. Jewish social institutions and political organisations were disbanded, but at the same time, the number of Jews in Kosiv increased due to an influx of refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland: in 1941, there were about 4,000 Jews in the town. At the beginning of the Soviet-German war in the summer of 1941, Hungarian forces allied with the Third Reich were the first to enter Kosiv; on July 1, 1941, they took over the town. The Hungarians had a relatively tolerant attitude towards the Jewish population, they submitted to the German racial laws but did not support mass executions of the Jews. However, in August 1941, Kosiv fell under the rule of the Germans, who instituted a regime of mass terror. On August 16–17, 1941, the first *Aktion* took place, in which half of the Jewish population of Kosiv was executed point-blank as part of what today is known as the Holocaust by bullets. In April 1942, 600 Jews were transported to Kolomyia, while others were murdered in the Sheparovski Forest. In the fall 1941, more than 10,000 Jews from Kosiv and neighbouring towns and villages were killed. In May 1942, a ghetto was established in Kosiv, and in September 1942,

all the prisoners, except skilled craftsmen and men able to do construction work, were either killed or transferred to the Bełżec death camp. In November 1942, Kosiv was proclaimed *Judenrein*, “free of Jews.” Today, on Town Hill, there is a memorial to the victims of the Nazi regime. The mass graves of those killed in the Nazi *Aktions* of 1941–1942 can be found some 150–200 metres from the Jewish cemetery, on the site of the former castle. In 1992, a memorial plaque was established there, marking the place as a burial ground for Kosiv’s Jews. ¶ During the war, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was active in the mountains around Kosiv. Soviet forces returned to Kosiv on March 31, 1944. For several months, the town was on the front line and suffered heavy destruction.

**Post-war period ¶** The end of World War II saw Ukraine incorporated into the USSR and marked the beginning of a new Soviet era in Kosiv’s history, the so-called “second Soviets,” which lasted until 1991 when Kosiv became part of the independent Ukraine. Under the Soviets, the town’s spa facilities fell into decline; instead, much folk crafts experienced a revival. New Shevchenko and Franko *kylym* (Ukr.: for tapestry and carpet) workshops were established and the “Hutsulshchyna” sculpture studio was opened. In 2001, Kosiv was listed as one of the Historical Towns of Ukraine. Today, it has a population of more than 8,000, but there is no Jewish community.



**The cemetery ¶** The first Jewish cemetery in Kosiv was set up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the side of Town Hill (behind the building at 42 Nezalezhnosti St.). Covering an area of approx. one hectare (2.5 acres), it contains several hundred matzevot and the tombs of the important Hasidic rabbis of the Hager dynasty. Among the oldest legible gravestones are those of Baruch, son of Abram (d. 1779); Sarah, daughter of Abram (d. 1783); and Menachem Mendel, son of Yaakov Kopl (d. 1825).

[A] Jewish cemetery in Kosiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Graves of Hasidic rabbis at the Jewish cemetery in Kosiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

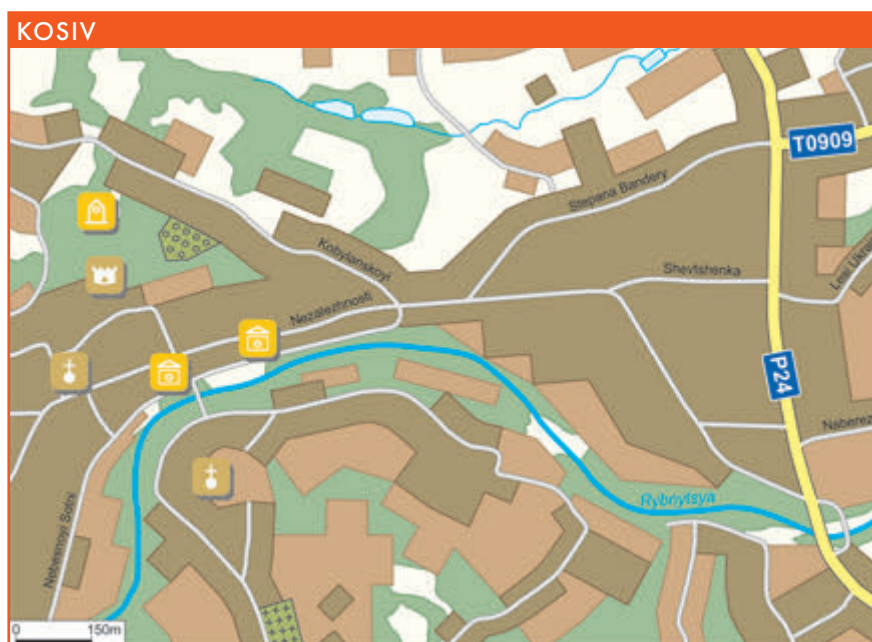


## Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), O. Kobylanskoi St. **Museum of Hutsul Folk Art and Life** (located in the former rabbi's house), 51 Nezalezhnosti St. **Town Mountain**, ruins of a reinforced fortalice from the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c. **Burial mound** from the Roman period (3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> c. AD) in the suburban village of Vezhbovets. **Orthodox Church of the Nativity St. John the Baptist** (1912), built of wood in the Hutsul style. **Chapel** (1866) located at the Polish cemetery; it had served as the main Catholic church before a new one was built.

## Surrounding area

**Horod**: a rock fortress from the times of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia. **Huk**: a waterfall on the Rybnitsa River near Kosiv (2.5 metres high). **Kuty** (12 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.) with over 2,000 matzevot. **Vyzhnytsia** (12 km): 3 buildings of former synagogues (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.); the 19<sup>th</sup>-c. house of the Vizhnitzer tsaddik; a Jewish cemetery with over 1,000 matzevot; the legendary natural *mikve* of the Baal Shem Tov on the River Vizhenka. **Yabluniv** (17 km): a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.). **Sniatyn** (43 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a church (1721); a town hall (1861). **Chernivtsi** (78 km): the capital of Bukovina; the Museum of the History and Culture of Bukovinian Jews; the Tempel (Progressive Synagogue, 19<sup>th</sup> c.); numerous monuments, Catholic and Orthodox churches, and museums; the palace of the tsaddik of Ruzhin in Sadhora (now district of Chernivtsi); the Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.) with the gravesites of the tsaddik of Ruzhin (Israel Friedman) and key literary and political Jewish figures of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., including the fable-writing poet Eliezer Shteynabrg (1880–1932).





# Chortkiv

Pol. Czortków, Ukr. Чортків, Yid. טשאָרטקעוו

*The writer – Karl Emil*

*From Chortkiv, at the Bristol directly from Berlin  
Dropped by just like that – to no one in particular  
On the Seret – milk-and-honey-coloured  
yellow clay of white bread*

Vasyl Makhno, *For Chortkiv*

## On the banks of the Seret ¶

The first written mention of Chortkiv (Czortków) dates back to 1427, when the nobility of Ruthenia gathered for a *sejmik* (diminutive of Sejm, regional diet) that was attended by the nobleman Jan Prandota. King Władysław Jagiełło awarded him with lands at the Seret River as a reward for his heroism in the Battle of Grunwald (1410), in which Polish and Lithuanian troops defeated the Teutonic Knights. Prandota came from the village of Czartki in Sieradz Voivodeship (Palatinate), and he named the centre of his new estate Czartków in memory of his far-off home village. With time, Jan's descendants changed their family name to Czartkowski. ¶ In 1522, King Sigismund I granted the large village of Czortków municipal rights, and in the same year, Jerzy Czartkowski built a wooden castle here. In 1610, Stanisław Golski, Voivode of Ruthenia and Castellan of Halych began to build a stone castle here. After the death of Stanisław Golski and his brother Jan, the castle and the town became the property of Count Stefan Potocki. Three times – in 1648, 1649, and 1655 – Chortkiv and its castle were captured by

Bohdan Khmelnytsky's Cossacks during the bloody and devastating Cossack revolution. As a result of the Ottoman Porta invasion, in 1672–1683, the town was part of Podolia Eyalet (palatinate) reporting to Istanbul. It was not until 1683 that royal forces drove the Turks away from Chortkiv. ¶ The castle as a fortification lost its military significance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and from then on served only as a residential palace. In 1809, the mercantilist-oriented town owners transformed the castle into a tobacco drying facility; soon after, the Austrian government, which leased the castle, used it as a warehouse and from 1815, as a prison. The last owner of the castle was Hieronim Sadowski, who left it to charity when he died in 1895. It was eventually purchased by the founder of the Chortkover Hasidic dynasty, Rabbi Moshe Dovid Friedman, the son of the tsaddik of Ruzhin, who had established his headquarters in Sadhora near Czernewitz (today Chernivtsi).

**The Jews of Chortkiv ¶** The first Jews settled in Chortkiv soon after the town was established. Rabbi Beniamin Selnik (1555–1620) of Podhorce (now



Pidhirtsi) mentioned in his book *Masa'at Beniamin* – the Travel of Binyamin – that the Jews of Chortkiv had come here as wine traders and that the wine trade was one of their main occupations. The memorial book of Chortkiv mentions a *matzevah* dating back to 1616. ¶ By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, about 50 Jewish families lived in Chortkiv. A collection of short stories and ethnographic materials gathered by A. Litwin (real name: Shmuel Horowitz, 1862–1943), titled *Yiddishe neshomes* (Yid.: Jewish Souls, vol. 5, 1917), reports that in 1645, Jews were accused of collaboration with the Cossacks and expelled from the town to a suburb known since then as Vygnanka (from the Ukrainian “exile,” one of the Jewish quarters was established there later). ¶ In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community in Chortkiv experienced a revival and it came to be associated with the names of two eminent experts on Jewish law: Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Halevi Horowitz (known as Rabbi Hirsheli) and Rabbi Segal of Lviv. Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch’s son Shmuel Horowitz became famous as Shmelke of Nikolsburg (currently

Mikulov in the Czech Republic) – one of the most eminent Hasidic leaders, the disciple of Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezherich, and the Chief Rabbi of Moravia. Tzvi Hirsch’s other son, Rabbi Pinkas, became Chief Rabbi of Frankfurt am Main. ¶ In 1722, Count Stefan Potocki officially granted the Jews a privilege allowing them to settle in town without restrictions, to build houses, and to work in trade and crafts. At the same time, the Jews were also obliged to renovate the castle and repair the roads as well as to defend them if necessary. That year the Chortkiv Jewish families owned 110 houses, while Christians had 142. ¶ In 1789, the Austrian authorities enforced the implementation of the 1782 Joseph II’s Edicts of Tolerance and eliminated the autonomous Jewish communal self-government (*kahal*) in Galicia. The imperial authorities conducted a census and ordered that the Jews should adopt German surnames. In 1797, Chortkiv’s Jews owned 121 houses, compared to 232 owned by Christians. In 1848, in the wake of the Spring of Nations, the authorities allowed Jews to work as

clerks at the local government offices and courts of law, and also to study and practise law and medicine. Thus, the Jews of Chortkiv could enter liberal professions.

**Cemeteries** ¶ There were three Jewish cemeteries in Chortkiv, and all of them have partially survived to the present day. The best preserved is located on the Vynnanka Hill, off Kopychynetskoï Provulok St., near the bridge over the Seret River and the bus station. That cemetery was probably founded in the early 1920s. There still remain a few dozen *matzevot* from the 1930s; a small memorial lapidarium has been built near its edge. At the rear of the Christian cemetery on Bandery St. there is a Jewish cemetery, which functioned in 1914–1926, and where many Jewish victims of influenza and other epidemics were buried. A part of the wall and fragments of *matzevot* have survived there too. A municipal hospital now stands on the site of the old Jewish cemetery (near Nezalezhnosti St.), established in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Only one gravesite marker can be found there – a modern one, erected several years ago, commemorating the Tsaddik Moshe Dovid Friedman.

**Synagogues and kloyzn** ¶ The oldest surviving synagogue in Chortkiv was built in 1680. It still stands in the central part of the town, on the premises of the Medical College (Petrushevycha St.), but it is used as a warehouse. The New Synagogue, erected in 1905–1909, incorporated the Hasidic *kloyz* that had been built in 1870 and was later converted into a tsaddik's palace with a large prayer hall. The Viennese architect Hans



Goldkremer, who designed the building, modelled it on the Sadhora residence of Rabbi Israel Friedman, the tsaddik of Ruzhin, adding to the *kloyz* annexes with oriental-style turrets. In Soviet times, and until 2013, the building housed a Young Mechanics' Club.

[A] The municipal marketplace in Chortkiv, 1918, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

[B] The market square in Chortkiv, after 1918, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

**Chortkover Rebbe** ¶ In 1870, Rabbi Dovid Moshe Friedman (1827–1904), the son of Israel Friedman of Ruzhyn, the tsadik of Sadhora (Sadagura or Sadigura), near Chernivtsi, settled in Chortkiv. The town eventually became the residence of the Chortkiv branch of the Ruzhin–Sadigura Hasidic dynasty.

¶ The tsaddik Dovid Moshe Friedman was by all accounts a humble and kind-hearted man and soon gathered around

The soap works belonging to the family of Berl Dov Sharfstein. Standing second from the left is his son, Zvi Sharfstein, who left for Israel in the 1930s. Chortkiv, circa 1928, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, Zvi Sharfstein's legacy



himself one of the largest Hasidic groups in Galicia. The Czortkover Rebbe, as he came to be known, lived an ascetic life, devoting himself entirely to prayer and learning, day and night. The Hasidim told wonder-stories about him, portraying him as a person able to live without sleeping, eating, and drinking for several days showing no signs of weakness. He avoided worldly matters and distanced himself from the problems of the community, yet he had considerable standing among its members. His elder brother Avraam Yaakov (1820–1883) described him thus: “I have never seen such a pious Jew before.” During prayer, Rabbi Dovid Moshe would experience ecstatic moments; he would say: “[...] inside a tsaddik there is a burning fire, which sometimes escapes outside. Just like water flows out of an overfilled vessel, the righteous one expresses himself through that excess of holiness, so that people can see that holiness and believe in him.” His son Israel (1854–1934) continued Dovid Moshe Friedman’s tradition of Hasidic

leadership, simultaneously fighting the staunch opponents of Hasidism such as Rabbi Meir Shapira (1887–1933), the founder of the Chachmei Lublin Yeshivah (Heb.: The Wise Men of Lublin Yeshiva). The representatives of the Czortkover dynasty moved to Israel and re-established themselves there. The third tsaddik of Chortkiv – Nachum Mordechai – died in Israel in 1946.

### From France to Chortkiv and from Chortkiv to France ¶

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an international merchant Lefert arrived in Galicia from France. An adherent of the rising Haskalah, he came from a family of Sephardic Jews but considered himself a German. The Austrian authorities, however, gave him the surname of Franzos, because of his country of origin. His son Heinrich worked in Chortkiv as a physician and took part in the revolutionary events of 1848. Heinrich’s son **Karl Emil Franzos** (1848–1904) was born in Chortkiv; eventually, he became an eminent writer and translator of German literature. Karl



Emil attended the Dominican school in Chortkiv, but he took private Hebrew lessons and also mastered Polish and Ukrainian. After his father's death in 1858, he moved with his mother to Chernivtsi (then Czernowitz) and then studied law at the University of Vienna and the University of Graz. He wrote substantially about the life of Ukrainian peasants and Ukrainian-Jewish relations, and he won renown after publishing travel notes from Russia, Central Europe, and Turkey. Franzos coined the term “Halb-Asien” (Ger.: Semi-Asia), which he used to portray Galicia, which he saw immersed in poverty, backwardness, and “squalid provincialism.” In his collection of short stories *Die Juden von Barnow* (Ger.: The Jews of Baranov), one of the first attempts to create a model Jewish shtetl, the fictional provincial town of Baranov resembles the Jewish Chortkiv – the town of the author's childhood. 📌 **Sasha Blonder** (1909–1949), an acclaimed artist, was born into a merchant's family of modest means in Chortkiv, and left for France as a young man. It was in Chortkiv that he began painting and became the leader of a local group of artists. His works frequently include references to his home town: he oftentimes depicted local synagogues or the quiet yards and streets of old Chortkiv. In 1930, Blonder's parents managed to send the talented young man to Paris to study architecture. There, his artistic taste was strongly influenced by the works of Chagall, Soutine, Modigliani, Bonnard, and other masters of avant-garde and Paris School painting. Blonder gave up architecture to study painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. In Cracow, he became one of the founders



of artistic groups named “Żywi” (Pol.: Alive) and “Grupa Krakowska” (Pol.: the Cracovian Group). He probably visited his father and brother in Chortkiv for the last time in 1935, two years before he moved definitively to Paris. During the Nazi occupation in France, Blonder was active in the resistance movement and in 1942 began to sign his paintings with the pseudonym “André Blondel.”

## World War II and the Holocaust

📌 In 1939, there were about 5,000 Jews among the 12,000 residents of Chortkiv (then Czortków). In September 1939, Jewish and Polish refugees began

[A] Former New Synagogue in Chortkiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

[B] The tomb of Tzadik David Moshe Friedman at the Jewish cemetery in Chortkiv, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

Wonder-working Rabbi Israel Friedman of Chortkiv (with a long grey beard, in the train car window) returning from Karlsbad, May 1931, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland



arriving in thousands from western Poland. The town was soon captured by the Red Army; then, on July 6, 1941, the Nazis occupied the town and, as in many other places, established their New Order by orchestrating a pogrom. The Nazis established a *Judenrat*, but a month later, they shot the *Judenrat* members in the Black Forest, near the town, along with several hundred other representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia. From July to October 1941, more than 650 Jews were murdered in Chortkiv. In April 1942, the Germans established a ghetto that encompassed Rzeźnicka, Składowa, Łazienna, Szkolna, and Podolska Streets. On August 26–27, 1942, the first deportation operation took place: 2,120 people were sent to the Belżec death camp, including Jews from Chortkiv, Yagilnitsa (Jagielnica) and Tovste (Tluste); 350 people were killed on the spot. On 5 October, another deportation was carried out – 500 Jews from Chortkiv were added to a transport of people from Ternopil, Tovste, Yagilnitsa, Monastyryska,

and Buchach. Jewish policemen were also deported from Chortkiv at that time. This transport was sent to Belżec, but it stopped first in Lviv, where the Germans carried out a selection: about 1,000 people (out of the 6,000 Jews in the entire transport) were taken off and moved to the labour camp in Janowska Street; they were replaced on the train with the same number of Jews classified by SS as unfit to work. In December 1942, the Germans set up a labour camp for over 500 local artisans in Chortkiv's Talmud Torah building. The workers faced hunger and other privations there but were safe from the round-ups. When the ghetto was liquidated on June 17, 1943, about 2,000 people were executed. At the same time, there was an attempt at resistance. A group of Jews hidden in bomb shelters used weapons against the Germans. Their attempt failed, however, and all of them were killed. On June 23, 1943, the labour camp in the Talmud Torah building was also liquidated. The Nazis carried out selection, sending one group, classified as unfit to work, to be

shot dead in the Black Forest. The others were sent to the nearby labour camps. A few dozen survived there until the arrival of the Red Army in June 1944. Other Jews in the area were hidden by

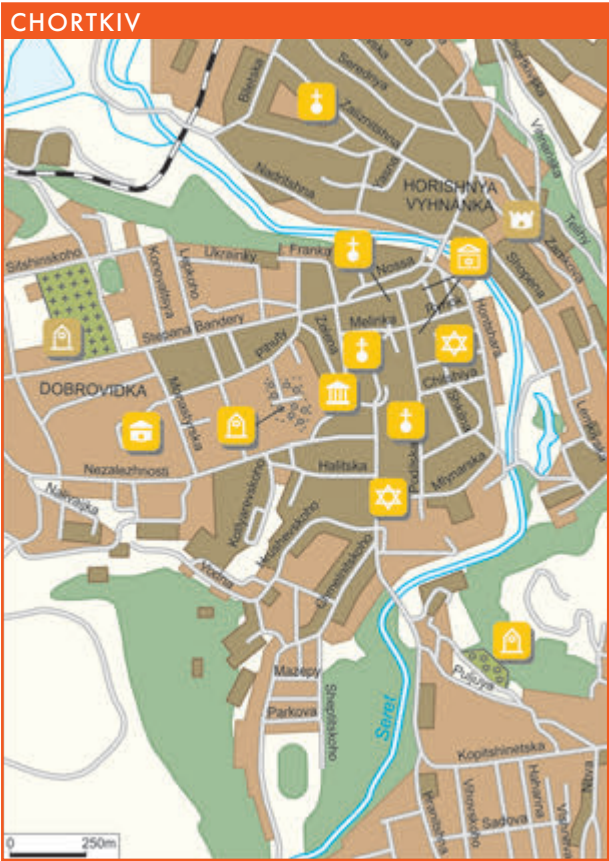
Christians and therefore survived the war. ¶ In 2005, a memorial was established at the mass grave site in the Black Forest (near the road to Kopychyntsi).

Worth seeing

Former old synagogue (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Petrushevycha St. ¶ Former new synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Shevchenka St. ¶ Jewish cemeteries (17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.), Nezalezhnosti St., Kopychynetskoj Provulok St., Bandery St. ¶ Chortkiv Castle (1522–1610), Zamkova St. ¶ Dominican Church of St. Stanislaus (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 2 Shevchenka St. ¶ Greek Catholic Church of the Ascension (wooden, 1717), Zaliznychna St. ¶ Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1635), Tserkovna St. ¶ “Old Town Hall” (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.), *fachwerk*-style cloth hall (*sukiennice*) in the market square. ¶ “New Town Hall” (1926–1930). ¶ Local History Museum, 3 Zelena St.

Surrounding area

Kopychyntsi (17 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.), a wooden Greek Catholic church (1630), a church (1802), Folk House (1910). ¶ Probizhna (18 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Husiatyn (38 km): former fortified synagogue (17<sup>th</sup> c.), tombs of tsaddikim of the Friedman family (renovated in 2007), the Greek Catholic Church of St. Onuphrius (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Church of St. Anthony (1610). ¶ Skala-Podilska (38 km): a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.), ruins of the castle (14<sup>th</sup> c.), the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1719), the Greek Catholic Church of St. Nicholas (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Zalizhchyky (48 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Church of St. Stanislaus (18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Poniatowski Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Horodenka (56 km): a former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Theatine church and monastery (18<sup>th</sup> c.).



# Buchach

Pol. Buczacz, Ukr. Бучач,  
Yid. בעטשאצ

*When they left the House of Study, the whole town was already deep in slumber. [...]*

*Buczacz lies on a mountain, and it seemed as though the stars were bound to her rooftops. Suddenly the moon came out and lit up all the town. The river Stripa, which had previously been covered by darkness, suddenly gleamed silver...*

Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *In the Heart of the Seas*  
(Hebr.: *Bi-levav yamim*), 1948, trans. by I.M. Lask

**The relentless** ¶ Buchach is situated in the valley of the Strypa River, surrounded by three hills: Zamkova, Targovitsa, and Fedor. The town's name probably derives from the Old Ruthenian word *bucha*, which meant a swiftly flowing river or depth, or from a different Old Ruthenian word, *buch*, meaning "haughty" or "tenacious." ¶ In 1393, Buchach was granted Magdeburg rights by King Władysław Jagiełło. Initially, the town was the property of the Buczacki family, but in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Potocki magnates became the new owners. The town was intensively developed during the rule of Count Stefan Potocki, the Voivode of Bratslav (1624–1648). Situated on a borderland constantly threatened by the gangs of nomads, then by Tatars and later by the Ottomans, Buchach needed substantial fortifications to defend itself. The early modern border between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Crown ran between Buchach and Lwów (Lviv), putting Buchach exactly on the frontline of several Ottoman military campaigns against Poland and Austria. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Buchach became a powerful city-fortress with walls, fortified ramparts, ditches, and a castle on a hill.

The fortress had four corner towers and three gates: the Halych Gate, Lviv Gate, and Yazlovets Gate. The reinforced, constantly renovated fortifications, however, could not protect the town from total destruction. In 1676, during the Turkish siege commanded by Ibrahim Pasha, a skilled Ottoman military leader, the town was almost completely destroyed. In 1672, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was forced to sign a treaty with the Ottoman Empire that later came to be known as the Treaty of Buchach: under this treaty the city was divided between the two countries, Poland and the Ottoman Porta, along the Strypa River. In 1684, the owner of Buchach, Jan Potocki, once again restored the fortress and thoroughly rebuilt the town. Later, his successor Mikołaj Bazyli Potocki (1712–1782) invited the architect Bernard Meretyn and sculptor Jan Jerzy Pinzel to Buchach, where they created a number of unique late Baroque buildings: the town hall (1751), the Basilian monastery (1751–1753), the parish church (1761), adorned with exquisite Pinzel sculptures. With the First Partition of Poland (1772), Buchach became part of the Habsburg Empire. In 1874, the first municipal



election was held: among the 30 councilors elected to serve at the magistrate, there were 12 Jews, 9 Ukrainians, and 9 Poles. ¶ The construction of a railway line running through Buchach in 1884 (Stanisławów–Jarmolińce, now Ivano-Frankivsk–Yarmolyntsi) helped make the town one of the largest commercial centres in Galicia. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Buchach boasted four mills, a textile factory, a factory manufacturing candles and soap, an alcohol

brewery and winery, and a factory manufacturing wooden toys. ¶ During World War I, the Tsar's troops stayed in Buchach from August 15, 1914, to July 1917, and during this period, set fire to the town. From November 2, 1918, until July 1919, Buchach was part of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR). From August 15 to September 18, 1920, the town was occupied by the Bolsheviks, and in 1920–1939, it was part of the Second Polish Republic.

“One of the company said, I never in all my life knew that this town was so pleasant. It seems to me that there is nowhere in the world a town as pleasant as ours. That, responded his companion, is just what occurred to me this very moment. Every city, remarked Rabbi Alter the slaughterer, in which decent and pleasant people live is decent and pleasant. ¶ Shmuel Yosef Agnon, *In the Heart of the Seas* (Hebr.: *Bi-levav Yamim*), 1948, trans. by I.M. Lask

**The Jews of Buchach** ¶ The first written mention of Jews in Buchach dates back to 1572, when 14 Jewish families lived in the town. Until 1664, the Jewish community formed a sub-*kahal* of the Lwów *kahal*, as it was not numerous and powerful enough to afford an autonomous Jewish self-governing institution. Only after the establishment of Turkish rule in 1672 did the Jews of Buchach manage to establish an independent *kahal*. ¶ The new Polish owners of Buchach – the Potockis family of magnates – supported the development of trade and protected Jewish merchants, but not without selfish commercial interest. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town had a synagogue, a *beth midrash*, and a Jewish hospital, and by the end of the century, was home to 150 Jewish families. ¶ After Buchach returned to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, on May 20, 1699, Stefan Aleksander Potocki confirmed the

Jews' residential privilege as well as their other rights and duties, issued by the previous Polish town owners. The Jewish community was also allowed to establish its own rabbinical court. ¶ By 1870, some 6,077 Jewish residents made up 78 per cent of the total population. They worked in various trades (as tailors, shoemakers, furriers, etc.) and in commerce – in 1864, there were 158 Jewish stores.

**Synagogues** ¶ In 1728, a stone synagogue was erected in the centre of the town. It had massive fortification-type walls. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 12 Jewish religious institutions were active in Buchach: a synagogue, two *batei midrash*, two Hasidic *kloyzn*, and several *shtiblakh* (small prayer houses). The synagogue, like other buildings in Buchach, sustained heavy damage during World War II yet was destroyed by the Soviet authorities along with other



damaged buildings in the late 1940s. The *beth midrash* building that had been located next to the synagogue's entrance was dismantled in 2001.

**Religion and politics** ¶ In 1813, the position of the town rabbi of Buchach was offered to the famous Galician Talmudist and Kabbalist Avrom David Warman (1770–1840), the author of religious works such as *Birkat David*, *Da'at Kodeshim*, and *Divrei Abot* that included Talmudic novella, Torah exegesis, and responsa. Rabbi Warman started a dynasty, which was continued by his son – Rabbi Eliezer, and his nephew – Rabbi Avrom Dovid. ¶ With Jews making up around two-thirds of the population, local Jews took active part in various aspects of the town's life. For example, Bernard Stern (1848–1920), a son of the head of the *kahal*, served as the Buchach mayor for more than 40 years (1879–1920). Stern owned a brewery, and from 1911, he was also a member of the Austrian parliament, where he belonged to the Polish Circle,

supporting Polish political interests and Jewish assimilation into Polish culture and society. In 1919, he was elected to the Sejm (parliament) of the Second Polish Republic as a candidate of the Constitutional Labour Club, but his parliamentary career was cut short by his death. ¶ Several other Jewish members of the Austrian parliament had Buchach roots or came from the Kolomyia–Buchach–Sniatyn electoral district; they included the Cracovian Rabbi Shimon Schreiber (son of Rabbi Hatam Sofer, the leader of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Central Europe); the rabbi, politician, and journalist Josef Samuel Bloch, and the lawyer Heinrich Gabel from Lviv (then Lemberg), who was born in Buchach. ¶ Buchach had both Jewish secular schools and traditional *hadarim* (elementary schools). From 1892, there was a vocational school, opened by the foundation of financier and philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831–1896), which had 262 students in 1893, and 180 in 1907. A modern Jewish hospital was established in Buchach in 1891. In 1890,



Buchach, general view of the town, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))

encouraged by the Austrian administration, the Jewish community established the Jewish National House, a secular cultural club, and eventually, a Jewish public library. In 1905, the first Jewish newspaper in the town was launched,

entitled *Ha-Jarden* (Heb.: The Jordan), and in 1907, the "Toynbee" educational club began to function. It was here that the Nobel Prize Laureate Shmuel Yosef Agnon, born in Buchach, read his poems for the first time.

**S.Y. Agnon** (real name: Shmuel Yosef Czaczkes; 1888–1970) was one of the central figures of modern Hebrew fiction and shared the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966 with the German Jewish poet Nelly Sachs. He was granted the prize "for his profoundly characteristic narrative art with motifs from the life of the Jewish people." Agnon was born in Buchach, into the family of a Hasidic rabbi from Chortkiv (Czortków), well-versed in classical Judaic sources. Agnon received excellent Jewish education, became fluent in literary Hebrew, but, growing up in the multicultural environment of the town, he also mastered several other languages: Polish, Ukrainian, and German. Agnon began to write as a boy under a profound influence of German Romanticism. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he worked for a newspaper in Lviv but then, under the influence of secular Zionist movement, moved to the Ottoman Palestine. There he published his first novel, *Agunot* (Heb.: Abandoned Wives), taking the pen name "Agnon," meaning an "abandoned husband." He later adopted this pen name as his surname. Agnon first wrote in Yiddish, the spoken language of most Galician Jews, but later moved to Hebrew. He left Palestine in 1913 and moved back to Europe, to Germany, where he lived for the next 10 years. He spent his time studying European literature and also the religion, history, and culture of the Jews; he also collected old Jewish books. In his German period, he published three collections of short stories about the Jews of East Europe, combining

Mickiewicz Street in Buchach, 1909-1914. Photo by Ignacy Niemand collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



modernistic literary devices and the traditional folk style of the Hasidic stories. He returned to Palestine in 1924, where he continued his literary activity. In 1931, he published *Hakhnasat kala* (Heb.: The Bridal Canopy), a novel presenting the adventures of a poor Hasid in Galicia. After a visit to Buchach in 1930, similar themes appeared in his works: in *Sipur pashut* (Heb.: A Simple Story, 1935) and *Oreach nata lalun* (Heb.: A Guest for the Night, 1939), Agnon described his impressions from his visit to his home town complicating them with expressionistic and symbolic elements. He also drew on Jewish folklore, legends, and fairy tales, as well as the Jewish experience in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His novel *Tmol shilshom* (Heb.: Only Yesterday) tells the story of life in Palestine in the times of the Holocaust. Several of his works appeared posthumously. Agnon's unique literary style combines nearly all forms of the tradition of Jewish literature produced in Hebrew over many centuries.

The first Zionist organisation in Buchach, "Zion," was founded in 1894, and in 1906, a branch of the Zionist Marxist party Poale Zion was established. In 1906, Jews arriving from Russia founded a yeshiva, with Rabbi Kitaigorodskiy as its head. A year later, a secular Zionist-oriented school with Hebrew as the main language of instruction was opened. In 1908, 216 out of the

696 students in the Buchach secondary school were Jewish. 🕒 During World War I, the Jews of Buchach suffered persecutions and pogroms. Under the West Ukrainian People's Republic (1918–1919), the Jewish National Committee was formed in Buchach, consisting mainly of Zionist activists. From mid-July 1919 until September 1939, Buchach was part of independent Poland.

” *Buczacz had a vibrant cultural life. The young people never missed an opportunity to see the theatre, comedians, musicians and the cinema. Troupes would*





come from Vilna and beyond, and while most people were poor, they always seemed to have money for the performances. Theatre was performed at the Sokol, next to our school on Gymnasialna Street. [...] There was also the excitement of going to see the latest movies at the one kino in town. ♣ Mina Rosner, *I am a Witness*, Winnipeg 1990, retrieved from: <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Suchostav/Buchach/Witness.html>

The town hall in Buchach, 2014. Photo by Yurii Ostapa

## World War II and the Holocaust

♣ After Soviet troops entered Buchach in September 1939, all Zionist parties were abolished, and their members arrested as subversive elements and deported to Siberia. In Jewish schools, instruction was allowed only in Yiddish: the Hebrew language was forbidden as nationalist, religious, and bourgeois class enemy.

♣ The Germans occupied Buchach on July 5, 1941. After just a few weeks, the Nazis murdered more than 300 Jews; in February 1942, about 2,000 Jews were shot and buried in mass graves. ♣ On October 17, 1942, the Nazis established a Jewish ghetto and carried out the first main ghetto liquidation: about 1,600

Jews were transported to the Belzec death camp, and on November 27, 1942, another group of 2,500 people was deported there. Around the same time, about 8,000 Jews from Monastyriska, Zoloty Potik, and Yazlovets were resettled to Buchach. ♣ On February 2, 1943, 2,000 Jews from Buchach were executed; 500 others were murdered on June 11, and a further 1,000, on June 26. After the withdrawal of the German army in March 1944, 800 Jews left their town hideouts and forests hiding places, but soon afterwards the German army returned and murdered most of those who remained. On July 21, 1944, Soviet troops entered Buchach. ♣ A memorial



[A] The Art-Dvir in the former house of Shmuel Agnon, 2015. Photo by Viktor Grebenyovskiy

[B] Former former house of Shmuel Agnon, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

stone now stands on the slope of Fedor Hill, where more than 5,000 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. There is also a Catholic cemetery on Fedor Hill, where a group of Jews managed to hide for several months in late 1943 and early 1944 with the help of the local gravedigger. The group included Shmuel Rosen, who reported the story.

Buchach was the birthplace of **Emanuel Ringelblum** (1900–1944), a renowned Polish Jewish historian, teacher, and social activist who organised the Oneg Shabbat underground group in the Warsaw Ghetto and was driving force behind the creation of the Warsaw Ghetto archive. The archive, comprised of thousands of items that documented everyday life in the ghetto, partially survived the destruction, hidden in milk cans. Ringelblum attended a Buchach cheder and a state secondary school. During World War I, he and his family

moved to Nowy Sącz. Ringelblum studied at the Faculty of the Humanities of the University of Warsaw. In his university years, he joined the left wing of the Marxist-Zionist Poale Zion party. During the Holocaust, he and his family were confined in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he led the secret Oneg Shabbat group. Shortly before the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, he and his family managed to escape the ghetto and were hidden, with about two dozen other Jews, by Poles on the "Aryan side." But in March 1944, the neighbours denounced them to the Gestapo, and the entire Ringelblum family and the other Jews hiding with them – as well as the Poles who hid them – were murdered. Much of the hidden Oneg Shabbat archive was discovered after the war. It is kept presently in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, which in 2009 was named after Ringelblum.

**The cemetery** ¶ The Jewish cemetery in Buchach was founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was located on the town outskirts near the Strypa River. The oldest surviving tombstone is dated to 1587, and the last known burial in the

cemetery took place before 1940. About 500 matzevot remain. In addition, many matzevot that were used for construction and found under the town roads and buildings have been brought back to the cemetery. This cemetery was the

burial place of the relatives of the writer S.Y. Agnon and the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, whose parents came from Buchach.

**Traces of Jewish presence ¶**

A few Jews remained in Buchach in the Soviet times. In 1990, the Holocaust survivor Mina Rosner visited Buchach for the first time since the war, and her visit was chronicled in a documentary entitled *Return to Buchach* (1990). It received an international award at the

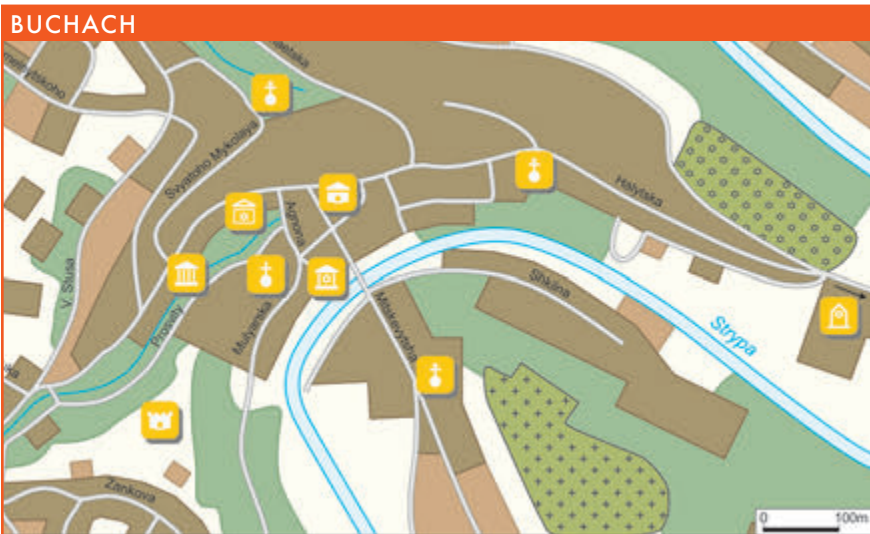
New York Film Festival. ¶ The houses where several notable Buchach natives were born still exist: the birthplace of Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal (1908–2005) is at Halytska Street. Since 2012, the house in which Shmuel Agnon was born (5 Agnona St.) has been home to the cultural organisation Art-Dvir (Ukr.: The Art Yard). In 2014, the S.Y. Agnon Literature Centre began to function here (tel. +380664687958, e-mail: agnon-center@gmail.com).

**Jewish cemetery**, Tarhova St. ¶ **S.Y. Agnon's family house**, currently Art-Dvir, 5 Agnona St. ¶ **Buchach Castle** (1379) established in place of the former 12<sup>th</sup>-century fortified town, Prosvity St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas** (1610), fortified. ¶ **Town hall** (1751), designed by Bernard Meretyn. ¶ **Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary**, designed by Bernard Meretyn. ¶ **Basilian Greek Catholic church and monastery** (1753) ¶ **Local History Museum in Buchach**, 52 Halytska St, tel. +380352221360.

Worth seeing

**Yazlovets** (17 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a castle (15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Koniecpolski Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Greek Catholic Church of St. Nicholas (16<sup>th</sup> c.); ruins of the Dominican church (16<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Monastyrska** (17 km): a former synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); an Orthodox church, formerly a Roman Catholic church (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Budaniv** (44 km): castle (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Terebovlia** (49 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the town hall (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (1635), formerly the *fara* church.

Surrounding area



# Pidhaitsi

Pol. Podhajce, Ukr. Підгайці, Yid. פּידהײַטץ

*Pidhaitsi grows like big cities do,  
following the direction of progress  
and the way of the Haskalah.*

David Polisiuk, *Ha-Maggid*, 1876

**By the grove** ¶ Most likely, the town's name comes from the expression *pod gajem* in Polish, *pid hayem* (*nið zaem*) in Ukrainian (meaning "by the grove"). The village of Stare Misto, a suburb of Pidhaitsi, has grown around the place of the earliest local settlement. The first written mention of the town is dated to 1397, and its first known owner was the Kniehinicki magnate family; they were followed by the Buczacki family, who in the 15<sup>th</sup> century built a castle and founded the first Catholic parish here. In 1539, Pidhaitsi (then Podhajce) was granted Magdeburg rights. The castle was also rebuilt at that time. In 1544, the town was mentioned as an *oppidum-castrum* (Lat.: town-castle). In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, a Catholic church, a synagogue, and Orthodox churches were erected. The first mention of a rabbi who was the leader of the Jewish community in Pidhaitsi dates back to 1552. ¶ In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town grew in the direction of the nearby hill, at the top of which the new market square was set up; new houses appeared around the marketplace, and a complex network of underground tunnels and passages was created. The castle was fortified with

mighty towers. A triangular marketplace was unusual for the towns under Magdeburg laws but quite common for the Ruthenian towns. ¶ The first coat of arms of Pidhaitsi has been known since 1554. Approximately at that time several trade and craft guilds were established, among them the furriers' guild, the first statute of which dates back to 1590. Blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, and others had their guilds as well. In 1590, the town received a privilege allowing weekly Saturday fairs. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town had the only musicians' guild in Galicia. ¶ In 1641, Pidhaitsi became the property of the Potocki family. Their rule marked the town heyday. The new owners rebuilt the castle and established the town hall and other administrative buildings. Apart from the church and the synagogue, there were six (and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – seven) Ruthenian/Ukrainian Orthodox churches. There was also a 1664 reference to an Armenian (Armenian-Gregorian) church, most likely wooden. In 1650–1653, the Ruthenian community built the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God Orthodox Church, which has survived to this day. ¶ In 1667, in the wake of the bloody Cossack revolution





Town hall in Pidhaitsi, 1905–1906, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

and peasant war, King John III Sobieski defeated the Tatar and Cossack forces under Petro Doroshenko, the Hetman of Right-Bank Ukraine. A peace treaty was signed in the church in Pidhaitsi, under which Right-Bank Ruthenia (that is, Ukraine to the west from the Dnieper river) was to remain under the control of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. ¶ On 9–11 September 1675, Cossack forces completely destroyed Pidhaitsi. In order to rebuild the town, Feliks Kazimierz Potocki ordered that all residents be tax-exempt for the next 12 years. ¶ As a result of the First Partition of Poland (1772), the town became part of the Habsburg monarchy. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Austrian authorities had the castle in Pidhaitsi and the municipal fortifications pulled down; some parishes were closed, and hospitals and Orthodox graveyards were liquidated. A large part of the Jewish population left the town. In order to stimulate local economy, permission was granted in 1820 to have 11 annual fairs. ¶ During World War I, about 200 buildings

were destroyed and about 10 percent of the town's residents were killed. Pidhaitsi became a frontline town, where the sick and wounded were taken care for at the local hospitals. In November 1918, the revolutionary masses and troops proclaimed at the local marketplace the authority of the West Ukrainian People's Republic. Subsequently, the Ukrainian administration was established here. During the Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918–1919, the town changed hands several times. In August 1920, Pidhaitsi was occupied by the Bolsheviks, and on 21 September 1920, it was finally captured by Polish troops and became part of the independent Poland. ¶ In 1924, the County Association of Cooperatives was founded here, and in 1925, the organisation called "Płast" was established. In the 1930s, several football clubs appeared, among them the Jewish "Maccabee" and the Polish "Klub Sportowy." Four youth organisations functioned in the town: "Sicz," "Sokol," "Betar," and "Strzelcy" ("Shooters"). In 1928–1934, the



[A] Pidhaitsi, town hall and houses in the market square, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Pidhaitsi, 1920s, a 3D model prepared by Polygon Studio as part of the Shtetl Routes project, 2015, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Ukrainian community established the Ukrainian Folk Community Centre.

**The Jews of Pidhaitsi** ¶ The earliest mention of the Pidhaitsi Jews dates back to 1552 and refers to a 20-zloty poll tax imposed on the members of the Jewish community. At that time, the Jews lived in the area south of the marketplace. Local Jews worked mainly in trade; some of them were leaseholders or craftsmen. In 1648, the Jews suffered severely during the Khmelnytsky Revolution and massive raids of the Cossack cavalry against Polish towns across Ukraine and in Galicia. In 1677, the Turks, who came to occupied Podolia at that time, considered Jews as a tolerated yet marginalized minority obligated to keep low profile and pay double taxes.

**The synagogue** ¶ The first mention of a synagogue in Pidhaitsi is dated to 1552. The currently existing building was erected in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and is believed to be the oldest local building. The synagogue was located next to the town gates; it served as an additional defence edifice. ¶ The synagogue construction follows a rectangular plan of the Renaissance buildings (fashionable in Poland long after they became outmoded elsewhere in Europe), with narrow windows cut through the thick fortress-type walls; the eastern façade has been reinforced with buttresses. The upper section of the Renaissance-style main portal has partly survived. The base of the building is adjoined by single-storey women's galleries. Inside, it was adorned with still preserved stone-carved floral ornaments and elaborate stucco work. Remnants of the stone carvings of the *aron ha-kodesh* (holy ark) also survived. Over the main entrance, there is still a visible Hebrew inscription "This is the Gate of the Lord, the righteous will enter it." ¶ About 100 metres from the synagogue stands the building of the old *mikvah* (ritual bath). Opposite the Great Synagogue there was also an old *bet midrash* and two neighbouring buildings that functioned as prayer houses for the Chortkov and Belz Hasidim.

**The rabbis** ¶ Rabbi Moshe and his son Yehuda Leib served as the first rabbis of the town. They were referred to with the honourable title of *gaon*, granted to the most illustrious rabbis of the time. At the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Benjamin Aaron ben Abraham and his son Jacob served as the rabbis. They were succeeded by Rabbi David, who authored the famous

homiletic tractate *Tiferet Israel*. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rabbi of Pidhaitsi was Rabbi Katzenelenbogen, who subsequently moved to Ansbach, Bavaria. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Rabbi Meshulam Zalman, son of Rabbi Jacob Emden, the famous leader of the anti-sabbatean and anti-Kabbalistic trend in rabbinic Judaism, lived and worked in Pidhaitsi. The last rabbi before 1772 was Simcha Rapaport, son of Rabbi Chaim ha-Kohen Rapaport of Lwów (Lviv). Pidhaitsi was the birthplace of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rabbi David ha-Kohen Lilienfeld, who in the last decades of his life served as a rabbi and preacher in Frankfurt an der Oder. It was there that he published his books: treatises on the Sabbath, sermons for Saturdays and holidays, novellas on the principles of philosophy and Kabbalah, and commentaries on the Talmud.

One of the best-known rabbis of Pidhaitsi was **Binyamin Aaron** known as **“Solnik”** (1530–1620), one of the greatest authorities on Jewish law in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. His father, Rabbi Abraham, came from Thessaloniki (hence the nickname “Solnik”); he descended from Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), Minister of Finance to the Spanish King Ferdinand, and one of the most famous Sephardic (post-expulsion) commentators of the major Jewish books including the Passover Haggadah. Binyamin Solnik was a disciple of Moshe Isserles (known as Rem’a, 1520–1572) of Cracow and Solomon Luria (1510–1573) of Lublin, the two highest Polish rabbinic leaders of that time. He briefly worked as a rabbi in Silesia and later held the post of a town rabbi (*rosh yeshiva*) and the head of the rabbinic court (*av bet din*) in Pidhaitsi. Binyamin Aaron Solnik was an active participant at the meetings of Vaad Arba Aratzot (Council of Four Lands). His son Jacob inherited the rabbinic position in Pidhaitsi; he also represented local communities in the Vaad Arba Aratzot. He wrote a book titled *Nakhlat Yaakov* (Heb.: Jacob’s Heritage). His other son, Abraham, became a rabbi in Ternopil (Tarnopol) and later the principal of the yeshiva in Brest. Solnik’s son-in-law, Menachem Mann, became a town rabbi and the head of the Talmudic academy in Vienna. ¶ Binyamin Aaron Solnik wrote an array of books, including the Yiddish halakhic digest *Mitzvot Nashim*, which became very popular in Europe and



[A] Synagogue in Pidhaitsi, circa 1920, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Inscription over the entrance in the synagogue in Pidhaitsi, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

was translated into Italian, English, and Hebrew. His most famous work was the collection of responsa *Masat Beniamin* (Heb.: Beniamin's Gift; Cracow 1633).

**Sabbateanism** ¶ In the 1680s, Haim Malakh, one of the leaders of Sabbateanism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, came to live in Pidhaitsi. Thanks to his influence, the town became an important centre of the pseudo-messianic and schismatic movement that had a major disruptive impact on many Jewish communities in the diaspora. Followers of Sabbetai Zvi were also active in Pidhaitsi, among them Shmuel Yakow Falk (known as “Sokół” – Pol. “falcon” – or “der Falk,” 1708–1782) and Moshe David (born in Pidhaitsi in 1696). Those two adherents of Sabbateanism were eminent Kabbalists. After the bans of excommunication against Sabbateans were announced elsewhere in Europe, both of them were forced to leave Pidhaitsi. Subsequently, several of the local rabbinic leaders, particularly Meshulem Zalman Emden, son of the noted Rabbi Jacob Emden, were at the center of resistance to the activities of the local crypto-sabbateans and Frankists.

### **Hasidism and the Haskalah** ¶

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Jews in Pidhaitsi in this or that manner supported the revivalist religious movement known as Hasidism. They followed the rabbis (tsaddikim) of Stratyn, Belz, Ruzhin, Husiatyn, and Chortkiv. Some descendants of the Hasidim of Pidhaitsi still live in New York and Jerusalem. As elsewhere, there was also a group of *mitnagdim* in Pidhaitsi, who vehemently opposed Hasidim, and who were centered in the *bet midrash*; many adherents of the Haskalah came from

this group. In 1876, a Jewish club was founded, which ran a library and a reading room.

**Ups and downs** ¶ In the early 1800s, the Jews constituted a majority of the town population. In 1788, they owned 21 of the 33 houses in the market square. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable proportion of the Jewish population left Pidhaitsi and moved to new bigger trade centres. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the life of the town and the Jewish community experienced a revival. By 1910, about 6,000 Jews lived in the town. In the first elections of the municipal council, held in 1874, Jewish representatives won 18 out of 30 seats. In 1889, Izydor Lilienfeld became a deputy mayor. Also in 1889, Baron de Hirsch visited the town and donated 50,000 francs for the needs of its poor inhabitants. Modern institutions emerged in Pidhaitsi such as a Jewish reading room, schools, and a nursery school. ¶ In 1898, the local Palestinophile movement which had launched a new secular emigration to the land of Israel and the revival of modernized Hebrew gave rise to the town's first Zionist organisation, Syjon (Zion), with about 150 members; one of its leaders was the wealthy Benjamin Kutner, the head of the Jewish community. A branch of the Marxist-Zionist Po'alei Zion was established in 1906, and in 1918, a branch of the youth Zionist Hashomer Hatzair began operation. ¶ In 1905, Rabbi Shalom Lilienfeld (1857–1909), who served as a rabbi in



Pidhaisi in 1887–1909, founded a Talmud Torah school, where all the town's *melamdim* – elementary school teachers – taught whose salaries came from the Jewish community council funds.

A well-known local activist promoting Jewish culture was **Michał Weichert** (1890–1967). Born in Pidhaisi, he was the director of a Yiddish Jewish theatre, a theatre critic and historian, and the founder of one of the first Jewish performing arts schools. Toward the end of the 1920s, he organised and became the manager of the Jewish Experimental Studio “Jung Teater” in Warsaw, which was the first to use the experience of a “simultaneous” performance, a type of stage design that consists in placing all the scenery elements necessary for the performance simultaneously on the stage. He published a Yiddish-language modernist expressionist periodical in Warsaw, titled *Ringen*, which gave rise to the noted Jewish modernist poetic group of the same name, later renamed “Chaliastre” (Yid.: “Rabble,” 1921–1925). Its members included such prominent figures as poets Uri Zvi Grinberg (1896–1981), Peretz Markish (1895–1952), and Melekh Ravitch (1893–1976). The group was also joined by prose writer Israel Joshua Singer (1893–1944), the elder brother of the future Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevis Singer, as well as by the poet, playwright, director, and painter Moshe Broderzon (1890–1956).



Pidhaisi, Jewish socio-cultural society “Ahva,” 1933, collection of Stepan Kolodnitski

Before World War II, the Jewish community made up about 53 percent of the town population. The last rabbi was Yitzhak Menachem Eichenstein (1879–1943) of the Zidichov Hasidic dynasty, who established a Hasidic court in Pidhaisi in 1909. He died in the Pidhaisi ghetto during the Holocaust in the spring of 1943.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the town came

under Soviet rule. The day of 11 May 1941 was the so-called “bloody Sunday”, when the NKVD units performed a mass execution of young people of the conscription age. ¶ Pidhaisi was the birthplace and hometown of Baruch Milkh, the author of the memoirs written in 1943 in a hiding place in Tovste (Tłuste), Galicia. Among other things, he described Pidhaisi under Soviet occupation.

“The fate of nearly all of my family became critical immediately: their social standing was leveled. Their stores were closed, but taxes were still collected anyway. They loitered aimlessly, seeking work in vain, with a stain in their passports: social origins – merchant. ¶ Translated from: Baruch Milkh, *Testament*, Warsaw 2001



Jewish cemetery in Pidhaisi, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

On 4 July 1941, the German Wehrmacht occupied Pidhaisi. The Nazi Germans established a *Judenrat* and a ghetto in which more than 5,000 Jews were segregated. The first anti-Jewish *Aktion* took place on September 21, 1942, on Yom Kippur, when about 1,000 Jews were transported to the Belżec death camp and murdered there. On October 31, 1942, about 1,200 people were also transported there. Around the time of the deportations, a group of 100 people led by Israel Zilber managed to escape from the Pidhaisi ghetto. In December 1942, after deportations and *Aktions*, only about 2,000 Jews remained in the ghetto. Altogether three mass executions of Jews – in the summer of 1942, on 1 October 1942, and on 6 June 1943 – were conducted. During the last operation, the German occupation authorities sent some of the ghetto Jews to Belżec and others to the forced labour camp in Ternopil. In June 1943, the ghetto was liquidated. In 1942–1943, about 300 Jews were killed at the Jewish cemetery in Pidhaisi. During World War II, some 70 percent of the houses were demolished. After the liberation of Pidhaisi in July 1944, more than 50 Jews returned to the town, but most of them left soon afterwards.

cemetery, located 200 m west of the synagogue, is one of the oldest and best-preserved in Ukraine. Some 150 m long, it has more than 1,350 preserved matzevot. The last burial took place in 1952. On its northern side, fragments of the former entrance gate have survived. ¶ One of the Pihaisi last Jewish inhabitants was Moshe Khaber (1897–1989), whose entire family, including his wife and their five children, were killed during the Holocaust. It was thanks to his efforts that the Jewish cemetery was not destroyed in Soviet times, when there were thoughts to build a supermarket, a nursery school, and a road on its site. ¶ The oldest preserved matzevah dates back to 1599. It was discovered and described in 2011 during a research expedition led by Dr. Boris Khaimovich from Jerusalem. Most of the inscriptions on it had been effaced, but judging by the image of hands raised in a gesture of blessing, carved on the stone, the matzevah most likely marked the grave of a person from a priestly (Katz, Kahn or Cohen) family. Interestingly, this matzevah – the only one from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the cemetery – is located in the lower, northeastern part of the cemetery, among much more recent, 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century gravestones. ¶ A larger group of older matzevot can be found closer to the entrance, in the western part of the cemetery; these include a matzevah from 1629 and more than 50 dating back to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the section of the cemetery where 18<sup>th</sup>-century tombstones stood has not survived. The upper, northeastern section includes about 1,000 matzevot from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Also in this part of the cemetery stands an obelisk, erected in 1919 to

commemorate the Jewish soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army killed during World War I. There are mass graves, too, in which the Jews killed here during the Holocaust were buried.

**Memory** 🕯️ Stefan Kołodnytsky, a local history enthusiast, was elected the town's first mayor after Ukraine gained

independence. He lived near the Jewish cemetery and for many years worked relentlessly for the preservation of the town historical legacy. On his initiative, in 2012, a monograph was published presenting the history of Pidhaitsi and its surrounding area. It was also his efforts that made it possible to save the synagogue and the church from collapsing.

Former **synagogue** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Lesyi Ukrainki St. 🕯️ **Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Lesyi Ukrainki St. 🕯️ **Museum of Local History and Culture**, 13 Berezhanska St. 🕯️ **Former inn** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 7 Zamkova St. 🕯️ **Market square**, triangular in shape. 🕯️ **Town hall** (1931). 🕯️ **Holy Trinity Church** (1634), Mitskevicha St. 🕯️ **Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (1650–1653), Berezhanska St. 🕯️ **Orthodox Church of Sts. Boris and Gleb** (1711–1772). 🕯️ **Greek Catholic Church of the Transfiguration** (1772).

Worth seeing

**Strusiv** (40 km): a former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.), ruins of a castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.), the Lanckoroński Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.). 🕯️ **Ternopil** (64 km): the main city of the region, with a functioning modern synagogue, a former Jewish hospital (1894–1895), a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.), a castle (1540), a cathedral (18<sup>th</sup> c.), and numerous monuments. 🕯️ **Hrymailiv** (68 km): ruins of a fortified synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (1806). 🕯️ **Sataniv** (94 km): fortified and recently restored synagogue (16<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); ruins of a castle (15<sup>th</sup> c.), town gates (15<sup>th</sup> c.), a fortified monastery (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.).

Surrounding area



# Brody

Ukr. Броди, Yid. בראַד

*A town that brings together wisdom and wealth,  
the Torah and understanding, trade and faith.*  
Nachman Krochmal

**Near the border** ¶ Brody is found in the borderland of Galicia and Volhynia, where the frontier between Austria-Hungary and Russia ran in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This borderland location was an asset to the town and promoted its development. ¶ The first mention of Brody is dated to 1084. In 1441, Władysław III of Varna, King of Poland, gave the nobleman Sienieński the castle in Olesko together with the surrounding area as a reward for his services in defence of Ruthenian territories. Brody became part of Sienieński's estate. In 1580, his descendants sold their estate to Stanisław Żółkiewski, and this marked the beginning of the town's rapid socio-economic development. On August 22, 1584, Brody was granted Magdeburg rights and royal privileges. Thanks to this, every Tuesday and Friday the town enjoyed the market days. In addition, three annual fairs were established. In 1629, the town passed into the ownership of Hetman Koniecpolski, who invited to Brody various artisans, including Jewish, Armenian, Greek, Turkish, and Flemish weavers in order to stimulate the economy. These newcomers developed the production of

oriental-style carpets and tents, which was the staple of the local economy until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ In 1630, the construction of a large fortress began. The work supervised and guided by the Venetian architect Andrea dell'Acqua and French engineer Guillaume le Vesseur de Beauplan took five years. During the outbreak of the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Cossack Revolution, Brody was totally burnt down. The fortress, however, survived thanks to its powerful fortifications and its location in a marshy area. Aleksander Koniecpolski transferred the town to King John III Sobieski, and Sobieski, in turn, transferred it to his son James, who sold Brody to the Potocki family in 1704. ¶ In 1772, the town found itself under Austrian rule and became a border town: first, at the border with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and after 1795, at the border with the Russian Empire. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Rzeszów–Lviv–Brody railway line was built making Brody into an important international trade and migration centre. Emperor Joseph II of Austria granted it the title of a “free town” which enjoyed all sorts of duty-free privileges.





Market square in Brody, 1912, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

**The Jews of Brody** ¶ The first Jews settled in Brody in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Hetman Koniecpolski owned the town. By 1648, around 400 Jewish families lived here. In 1664, the local sub-*kahal* split from the *kahal* of Lwów (Lviv), secured its independence, and from that time, Brody Jewish leadership played a significant role in the Council of Four Lands. In 1696, the Jewish quarter burnt down but was quickly rebuilt. In 1699, the owner of the town, Jakub Ludwik Sobieski (son of King John III Sobieski) allowed Jews to settle in all quarters of the town and to work in all crafts as well as in trade, despite the presence of the Christian guilds active in the same trade. ¶ Early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Brody was pillaged by the Russian army, and a great fire destroyed the central part of the town in 1749. Brody was soon rebuilt, however, thanks to the support of the Jewish international merchants who brought merchandise from Paris, Leipzig, and Neustadt. When the Armenians, who also had been active in trade, left the town after the fire, the Jews remained without their long-lasting

competitors and Brody became one of the main Jewish centres in Galicia.

**Synagogues** ¶ The wooden synagogue known from the 16<sup>th</sup> century burnt down in a fire in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1742, because of the frequent fires, the Jewish community decided to build a formidable stone synagogue. Under the pressure of the bishop of Lutsk, local authorities refused to grant permission for its construction. They also demanded a payment of 350 zlotys a year for the maintenance of every Jewish student of the Lutsk yeshiva (Talmudic academy). Therefore, the construction of what would become the Great Synagogue did not start until the *kahal* agreed to pay this fee, which was attested to by an inscription on the eastern attic of the building. ¶ One of the largest synagogues in Galicia, the fortress-like building was designed according to Renaissance-style square-plan blueprint. Its main prayer room was adjoined on the southern, northern, and western sides by lower annexes used as women's sections. ¶ In May 1859,

[A]



[A] Synagogue in Brody, 1930s, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, legacy of Joseph Parvari

[B] Interior of the synagogue in Brody, a general view in the direction of aron kodesh. Photo by Szymon Zajczyk, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



the synagogue burnt down in a fire that destroyed most of the town. Renovation was carried out at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ The synagogue suffered severe damage during World War II – the northern and southern annexes were completely destroyed. In the mid-1960s, the building was renovated and its interior was adapted to serve as a warehouse. Yet the roof was constantly leaking, and the building soon ceased to be used and quickly fell into ruin. In the summer of 1988, a massive collapse of the western wall and annexe occurred, and in February 2006, the western part of the vaults collapsed. At present, the

condition of the synagogue is disastrous.

¶ The 10 Honcharska Street building stands on the site where there used to be a so-called Little Synagogue. After a great fire at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this synagogue was restored (circa 1804) and thus earned the name of the “New” synagogue. It was pulled down after World War II. ¶ According to a register of synagogues in the Zolochiv district made in 1826, there were six other synagogues in Brody, two of them wooden. ¶ In 1756, in the wake of the Frankist pseudo-messianic schism against the traditional Judaism and Jewish communities, local Jewish authorities condemned the leaders of the schism at the Brody synagogue in Brody. Likewise, in 1772, the *kahal* elders condemned the rising Hasidim, a movement of religious enthusiasm, whose representatives were put under the ban of excommunication. Despite this, Hasidim remained in the town, gained respect of the communal members for their piety and spiritual drive, and Brody eventually became an important Hasidic centre at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. ¶ In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Brody became one of the key Jewish centres of the studies of Kabbalah and Judaic mysticism due to the functioning of the “Broder *kloyz*.” This was an elitist study and prayer house maintained by the family of Rabbi Jacob Babad. The pietists who studied here practiced various pietistic and ascetic rituals flowed by the study of classical esoteric texts such as the Zohar (The Book of Splendor). Initially they opposed new-style Hasidim, who rejected ascetic regulations and preached the divine service through corporeality, but later some of them became adherents of this new



movement. It suffices to mention that the founder of the movement Israel ben Eliezer (who revealed himself in 1740 as the Baal Shem Tov, or the Besht) married the daughter of the Brody merchant and pietist Moshe Kutover who was also the sister of a prominent Brody kabbalist Gershon Kutover. Before World War I, the local Hasidim followed the rites and regulations of the Hasidic dynasty of

Belz, whose founder Shalom Rokeach was born in Brody in 1781. ¶ For some 50 years, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1785–1869) served as the head of the rabbinic court of Brody and was also known as the Maggid of Brody. Rabbi Kluger was an arduous opponent of the Haskalah movement of Jewish Enlightenment and educational reform. He died in Brody and was buried there.

[A] Ruins of the synagogue in Brody, 2017. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog)

[B] A part of the original decoration of the frieze in the Great Synagogue, 2013. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Shlomo Kluger** (1785–1869) was a noted rabbi, Talmudist, preacher, commentator, and teacher, one of the most distinguished Torah scholars in 19<sup>th</sup>-century East Europe. A person of distinguished pedigree, he was born into a rabbinic family in the town of Komarów, in the Lublin Province, then part of the Russian Empire. From his early years, he exhibited extraordinary talents; he wrote his first commentary on the Torah at the age of six. He studied in Zamość under the guidance of the illustrious preacher and commentator Yaakov Kranz, known as the Maggid of Dubno. In 1809, he took the position of the town rabbi in Kulików (now Kulikiv); in 1817, he became the rabbi of Józefów (Lublin Province); and in 1820, he assumed the position of the Brody town rabbi. In 1845, he was offered the position of the Berezhany rabbi. Despite the pleas of the local community, he accepted the offer. Soon after his arrival in, however, he fell ill with typhus, and doctors did not give any chance of recovery. He promised to return to Brody if he did recover. He kept his promise and returned to Brody, where there was already a different rabbi. Kluger continued to live in Brody until his death nearly a quarter of a century later. ¶ Shlomo Kluger occupied a special place in the rabbinic literature of East Europe and Russia of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An eminent Talmudic authority and moralist, he became one of the most respected rabbis in the Russian Empire. Both Hasidim and their opponents Misnagdim valued his opinion on legal and moral matters.



Students of the Jewish gymnasium (secondary school) in Brody, 24 July 1921, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, legacy of Joseph Parvari

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews of Brody, who maintained close commercial relations with the Germanic market towns, promoted the spread of Enlightenment (Haskalah) in Galicia and then to the nearby territories of the Russian Empire. Because adherents of the Haskalah were often associated with German culture, Brody was considered to be the most Germanised town in Galicia. ¶ With the support of Herz Homberg, a leading Haskalah scholar in Galicia, the local Jewish authorities endorsed the establishment of a modern Jewish secondary school (*Hauptschule*), two elementary schools (*Grundschule*), and a school for girls. All these institutions, however, were closed in 1806 by the suspicious Austrian government. Still, in 1815, the *kahal* opened a three-year modernized school. The headmaster of that school was not a Jew, and the teaching of religion was replaced with the teaching of ethics according to Homberg's moral and religious storybook for children, entitled *Bnei Zion* (Heb.: Sons of Zion). The school had many opponents among traditional Jews, who opened a *yeshivah* and invited the noted Talmudist Grisha Heller to

come and teach there. However, Heller soon had to leave Brody because he was accused of teaching "forbidden books" – this is how the local Jews called the Haskalah publications. The institute was soon closed as well. In 1851, the maintenance of the reopened "real school" (*Realschule*) was taken over by the state and transformed into a state secondary school. Initially there were no classes on Saturdays, yet 3.5-hour Saturday classes were introduced later. In 1847, a Jewish school for adults was opened, headed for many years by the noted educator Leopold Herzel. In 1907–1908, he also taught religion at the state secondary school. At that time, the secondary school enlisted 688 students, including 273 Jewish children. ¶ In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews made up 88 percent of the town population. Brody became the biggest county town in Europe with a high percentage of Jewish residents. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Brody was regarded as the second most important city of Galicia after Lviv (then Lemberg), often referred to as "the Jerusalem of Austria-Hungary" or the "mainland Trieste." In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, due to its unique position as the major cross-border railway station, the town became the largest trade centre in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The importance of Brody as a trade centre began to decrease after 1879, when it lost the status of a duty-free trade town. Its location right at the border remained important, though.

**The singers of Brody** ¶ The "singers of Brody" (Yid.: *broder-zinger*) was an expression used in the mid-1850s to refer to itinerant troupes of folk singers,



performing at inns and taverns, initially in Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia and later elsewhere in East Europe. The first of such groups was organised by D.B. Margulies of Pidkamin near Brody, and another one, equally well known, was organized by B.Z. Ehrenkranz of Zbarazh, a noted poet and bard who began his singing career by writing songs. With time, these singers founded the Jewish-German Theatre of Art and Singing, appointing Chaim Bendl as its manager. They performed in Lviv, at the popular Bombach's inn. They sang folk and Hasidic songs, danced, staged Yiddish one-act plays, whose authors preferred to remain anonymous (though some plays are attributed to Israel Grodner). Many new songs were written by Alik Tsunajer, others by Velvl Zbarazher (pen-name of Ehrenkranz) and by the famous Ukrainian Yiddish theatre director Avrum Goldfaden, often regarded as the father of the Yiddish theatre. Leading actors included Khune Sztrudler and Jona Rejzman. These performances were exceptionally popular among the



Jews. In 1866–1868, the Brody singers performed in Warsaw, in the summer theatre on Nalewki Street. Artists from Vienna and Zhytomyr were guest stars in the plays. These were the first Jewish secular theatrical performances, apart from the occasionally staged Purimspiels – Purim plays, performed on the February/March religious holiday built around the events of the Book of Esther, in which the singing actors were also engaged. ¶ Based on: [www.jhi.pl/psj/brodzcy\\_spiewacy](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/brodzcy_spiewacy)

Złota Street in the former Jewish quarter in Brody, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Brody was the birthplace of the famous Austrian writer and journalist **Joseph Roth** (1894–1939). He finished high school in Brody at the age of 19 and moved to Lviv (Lemberg), where he studied philosophy at the University of Lviv. He soon found himself in the epicentre of the Polish-Ukrainian rivalry. As neither Polish nor Ukrainian nationalism attracted him, and he remained unimpressed by the Zionist movement, he decided to integrate the imperial Austrian culture and write in German. After a year of studies, Roth transferred to the University of Vienna. Jewish themes are present, to a greater or lesser degree in most of his works, among which *The Radetzky March* is by far the most popular novel which portrays representatives of various ethnic minorities in their relation to the Dual Austro-Hungarian Empire and its symbols at the time of the collapse of the empire. The famous short novel *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (Ger.: *The Wandering Jews*) is a kind of elegy for the "Ostjude," East European Jews who found themselves caught in between the fighting powers during World War I. One of Roth's best works, *Job*, contains a description of a shtetl in Soviet Ukraine, which the writer visited as



**The Spring of Nations** ¶ In 1848, the series of revolutions and political upheavals known as the “Spring of Nations” began. These events ushered in a new era of the European nationalism and nationalist revivals across the continent and triggered new courses of action for the Jewish community. Jews were gradually recognized as an ethnic and national (not only religious) minority and granted political rights on a par with other minorities in the Habsburg empire – but not in the Russian Empire. ¶ In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two politically-oriented newspapers were published in Brody: *Hekhalutz*

a correspondent for a German newspaper in the early 1920s. The novel has been adapted for the screen. Marlene Dietrich, who knew Roth personally, regarded him as her favourite writer and *Job* as her favourite book.

(Heb.: Pioneer), issued between 1852 and 1889 in Hebrew and edited by Joshua Heschel Schorr, and *Ivri Anokhi* (Heb.: I am a Hebrew), a weekly issued from 1865 until 1890 by Baruch and Jacob Weber. Both newspapers adapted Hebrew for modern journalism and promoted secular study of Hebrew among east European Jews. ¶ After Galicia gained autonomy in 1867, economic life in Brody began to decline due to the weakening of trade relations with other trade centers of the Empire and new railway routes that deflected trade from Brody. Local Jewish secular intelligentsia and economic elite tried to defend Austrian centralism, and their position led to economic isolation and weakened Brody’s position in the region. ¶ Various Jewish religious associations functioned in Brody such as Burial Society, the Society for providing Passover matzo to the poor, and the Society of helping the needy with the clothes.

**Nathan Michael Gelber** (1891–1966) was a Jewish historian, social activist, and researcher of Galician Jews. He graduated from the high school in Brody and continued his studies at the Universities of Berlin and Vienna. During World War I, he served as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army. At the beginning of 1919, he was one of the advisers of the Jewish National Council of Galicia in Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine), the organ of Jewish national autonomy under the West Ukrainian People’s Republic. In 1933, Gelber moved from Vienna to Palestine. A Zionist activist, Gelber authored the following works: *Die Juden und der polnische Aufstand 1863* (Ger.: Jews and the 1863 Polish Uprising), *A History of the Jews of Stanisławów, Brody 1584–1943*, *Geschichte des Zionismus in*

*Galizien 1875–1918* (Ger.: *A History of the Zionist Movement in Galicia*), a collection of articles devoted to the history of the Jewish community of Lviv, historical articles in various encyclopedias and co-authored publications devoted to the history of Jews in Galician towns – Stryi, Busk, Ternopil, Zovkva and others.

**Dov Sadan** (1902, Brody – 1989, Afula, Israel) – an Israeli academic and politician, ethnographer, and literary scholar. In 1952–1970, he was head of the Department of Yiddish Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In 1965–1968, he was a member of the Knesset. Sadan was awarded the Israel Prize in Jewish Studies for 1968.

After World War I, Brody became a part of Poland (1919), and in the interwar period, it was a county town in the Tarnopol Palatinate.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, Brody had a population of 6,000, of whom more than 3,000 were Jews. In September 1939, after the partition of Poland between the Nazi Germany and the USSR, the town became part of the USSR. In July 1941, the German occupation began, and on 12 July 1941, the Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators in Brody shot 250 Jews. In the middle of July, the occupation authorities established a *Judenrat*. The Germans set up a ghetto in the autumn of 1941, encompassing Browarna and Słomiana Streets. The inmates included 12,000 Jews from Brody and the nearby villages of Sokolivka, Lopatin, and Olesko. ¶ The first transport operation took place on September 19, 1942. According to different sources, between 2,000 and 4,500 people were brought to the market place,



Jewish cemetery in Brody, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

from which they were forcibly transported to the Belżec death camp. During that operation, many people, who knew about the Belżec camp, took their own lives. Many Jews were murdered in their own homes or in the streets. The second transport operation was carried out on November 2, 1942, when a group of 2,500–3,000 Jews, including members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police, were transported to Belżec. ¶ From December 1, 1942, the ghetto was enclosed with barbed wire. In two streets, there still lived 4,000 Jews from Brody and 3,000 Jews from the nearby towns and villages. The local residents were strictly prohibited from maintaining any contacts with the Jews in the ghetto. The daily ration of bread was 80 g. A typhus epidemic soon broke out; and in winter 1942/1943, hunger and disease took lives of about 1,500 people. ¶ A resistance group led by Samuel Weiler was formed at the beginning of 1943, but attempts to organise an uprising in the ghetto failed. ¶ The operation aimed at the final



liquidation of the ghetto began on May 21, 1943. It was then that the members of the underground resistance opened fire on the camp guards. In response, the guards started shelling the entire ghetto. Many Jews were burnt alive, others were shot in the street or in the forest near the town. In the ensuing chaos, some Jews managed to escape; they joined the group of Jewish partisans led by Weiler and survived the war. During the liquidation of the ghetto, the remaining 3,000 Jews were transported to the Sobibór extermination camp. Of the entire population of 10,000 Jews in Brody, only 88 people survived the Holocaust.

**The cemetery** ¶ The new Jewish cemetery in Brody is the largest Jewish cemetery in Galicia, and despite damage caused to it it is one of the best-preserved Jewish cemeteries in present-day Ukraine. About 5,500 tombstones have survived there, many of them elaborately carved. The oldest one is that of Judah, son of Meir (d. 1833). Just behind

the fence, in the western part of the cemetery, there is the mass grave of about 6,000 people shot here during the Holocaust. ¶ As an economic and trade center, Brody suffered severely during both world wars. The Roman Catholic church was shut down for 50 years, and the faithful attended services in the parishes of Zolochiv and Kremenets. Two Baroque-style Orthodox churches have survived near the town walls. What remains of the once famous synagogue is a massive ruin. Before the outbreak of World War II, there were 86 Jewish houses of worship in the town, of which the only surviving ones are the partly destroyed Great Synagogue and the former 19<sup>th</sup>-century synagogue building at 9 Shchurata St. The latter lost all distinguishing features when it was converted into a shop in the summer of 2006. A recent project attempts to identify historic houses, buildings, and other sites in the town, providing detailed information via QR codes (more: [www.brodyhistory.org.ua](http://www.brodyhistory.org.ua)).





Worth  
seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Chuprynki St.  
 ¶ **Former synagogue** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Goncharska St.  
 ¶ **Castle ruins** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), with the Potocki Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamkova St.  
 ¶ **Fortified Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God** (1600), 12 Ivana Franka St. ¶ **Holy Trinity Orthodox Church** (1726), 23 Velyki Filvarky St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of St. George** (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), Yuriyivska St. ¶ **Catholic church** (1596), 9 W. Stusa St. ¶ **Chamber of Industry and Commerce** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 8 Kotsiubynskoho St. ¶ **The building of the former Imperial-Royal County Elder** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), the seat of the **Brody Museum**

**of History and Ethnography**, 5 Maidan Svobody, tel. +380326642113. ¶ **“Zastavki” forest wilderness**, the site of an old Ruthenian town mentioned in a chronicle.

**Olesko** (28 km): the ruins of a synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a museum; Holy Trinity Church (1545). ¶ **Berestechko** (35 km): a former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the stone post on Prince Aleksander Proński's grave site (16<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Church (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the **Museum of the Battle of Berestechko** (1651).

Surrounding  
area

# Kremenets

Pol. Krzemieniec,

Ukr. Крeм'янець,

Yid. קרעמעניץ

*Once Rabbi Abraham visited his father-in-law in Kremnitz. The most distinguished members of the congregation assembled to welcome the holy man. But he turned his back on them and looked out of the window at the mountain at whose foot the city lay. Among those waiting for him was a man very aware of his own learning and intent on his own importance. He said impatiently: "Why do you keep staring at the mountain? Have you never seen anything like it before?" The rabbi answered: "I look and am amazed to see how such a lump of earth made much of itself until it grew into a tall mountain."*

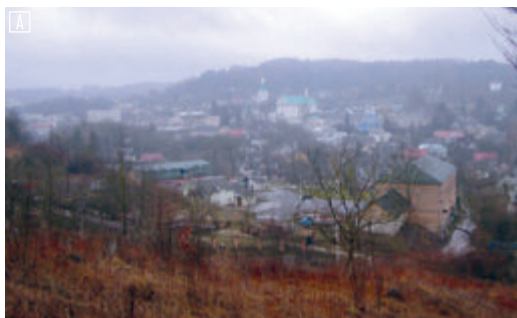
Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. O. Marx, New York 1991

**At the foot of the Hill** ♪ Situated amid picturesque hills, Kremenets has long been a secure place for people to settle. The Castle Hill (also called Bona Hill, in honour of Queen Bona Sforza)

provided an excellent defensive position, and it is hardly surprising that, according to some sources, fortifications were built on it already in pre-Christian times.

“On one of those hikes, we went all the way to Dubno, 30 kilometers from us, where a soccer game was being held between a local Maccabee team and one from the Polish army stationed there. For most of us, it was the first time in our lives that we had seen this game. What is more, the ball itself was a completely new thing for us. True, as children, we had played a few games with balls, but in those games, we used balls we made from rags.

♪ It was a great feeling for us to see these festive goings-on: on a wide green field, players from the two teams ran quickly, an assembly of onlookers shouted, and an army band played throughout the game. The result: we watched and got hooked. We decided on the spot to organize a soccer team. We envisioned something similar happening in our town, and what seemed at the time to be a nice dream very quickly became a reality, as you will see here. ♪ Without any help or encouragement from anyone, we got to work. There were many obstacles in our way: we had no financial means; in Kremenets, a town built on the slopes of hills, there was no flat area to be found for a soccer field; none of us had short pants for sports, and they were not available in our stores; and worst of all, there was no soccer ball to be found in the whole town. ♪ We overcame most of the obstacles soon enough. About an hour's walk from the center of town, up on Mount Vidomka, we found a fallow field hidden among thick shrubbery on Kalinovski's farm. We improvised short pants, folding our heavy wool pants up to our knees. Avrasha Rozenfeld, who had lived in central Russia during the war, found an instruction booklet for soccer among his things. The most important obstacle yet to overcome was that we were missing the ball. ♪ And here help came to us from high above; from there came our ball – a ball from Israel. From such a source, how could it be otherwise? ♪ This is how the story goes: one day Avraham Krivin – son of Shalom Krivin, the leather merchant – came from Israel, where he had lived for many years, to visit his parents. We heard that he had brought a big ball as a gift for his sister's little children. Without



*delay, a delegation was dispatched to him to present our problem. Our happiness was endless when he responded favorably to our request, and we left his house with the ball in our hands. Now we could get to work.* 🕯 from: Manus Goldberg – *Jewish Sports in Kremenets*, [www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kremenets1/kre1\\_0701.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kremenets1/kre1_0701.html)

Kremenets is one of Ukraine's oldest towns. According to the archaeological data, it has been uninterruptedly inhabited since the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but the earliest written reference associates the town with the 1227 battle fought by Prince Daniel Romanovich of Volhynia against the army of King Ándrás II of Hungary. In 1240, Kremenets Castle withstood an attack by Batu Khan's Tatar forces. In 1366, the town was captured by the forces of Casimir the Great. After a brief period of Hungarian rule, Kremenets fell under the dominion of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania. In 1438, Grand Duke Švitrigaila of Lithuania granted the town Magdeburg rights. The charter stated that the rights extended to: "Ruthenians, as well as to Poles, Germans, Vlachs, Armenians, Jews, and Tatars." Švitrigaila knew Kremenets well, though what he knew was not its best side: the future ruler had spent nine years in prison at the local castle.

**The Jews of Kremenets** 🕯 A Jewish presence in Kremenets dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, aside from a brief interval

in 1495, when Grand Duke Alexander Jagiellon decided to expel all Jews from Lithuania (and thus also from Kremenets). The same duke allowed the Jews to return in 1503. According to documents, their former property, including the cemeteries and synagogues, was returned to them. 🕯 The town's Jewish community became so influential that at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Jews of Kremenets, along with the Jews of Ostroh, represented all the Jews of Volhynia at the Council of Four Lands, this Jewish communal umbrella institution was analogous to the Polish Sejm. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were more than 50 Jewish houses in the town; there was the Żydowska (Jewish) Street (currently Shevchenka St.), a functioning synagogue, a *kahal* house, and a *hekdesz* (a poorhouse and a hospital for the needy). The eminent Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, future town rabbi in Lublin, Prague, and Poznań, represented Kremenets at the Council of Four Lands around that time. 🕯 In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kremenets remained

[A] A panorama of Kremenets, 2014. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] A view of Kremenets and Castle Hill, circa 1920, collection of the Archive of the National Reserve of History and Architecture in Kremenets and Pochaiv



Two joined houses from the 17th and 18th c., so-called Kremenets Twins, 2014. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

one of the largest towns in Volhynia. In 1629, it had 1,224 houses, which means, in terms of population size, it was

**Notable personalities born in Kremenets include a key representative of the Jewish Enlightenment, Isaac Ber Levinson; the eminent Polish Romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki, the Orthodox Saint Alexander Hotovitzky, the Ukrainian composer Mykhailo Verykivsky, and the famous Jewish American violinist Isaac Stern. Wilibald Besser, a botanist of Austrian descent, worked in this town for a long time.**

**Near the border ¶** In 1793, in the wake of the second partition of Poland, Kremenets found itself under Russian rule. Initially, Russia preserved the *status quo* of the Jews in the territories it annexed from Poland. However, the appearance of the border disrupted traditional trade routes, prompting many Jews to engage in smuggling and establishing contraband routes circumventing the customs. In 1812, the Russian authorities began issuing regular orders aimed at limiting or reducing to a minimum the number of Jews in the frontier zone, which was usually understood as the 50-verst wide belt along the border. These orders were never fully executed, however. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews made up 37 percent of the Kremenets population, which was the lowest percentage among all the towns

second only to Ostroh (1,655 houses) and double the size of Lutsk, the main city of the province (546 houses). ¶ The subsequent centuries were not easy for the local Jews, however. The entire town suffered during the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Cossack Revolution – even Kremenets Castle was captured and destroyed; influential anti-Judaic pamphlets were published by a printing-press in the nearby town of Pochaiv (Poczajów); and in Kremenets, several blood libel trials were held against Jews accused of allegedly using the blood of Christian children to bake Passover *matzah*.

of the Volhynian Guberniya. Kremenets Jews lived in the centre of the city as well as in two suburban districts: the Dubno suburb and the Vyshnivets suburb. The town's main street was called Żydowska (Jewish) St. until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when its name was changed to Szeroka St. At that time, the town lived off trade with neighbouring Austria. Jewish merchants traded in grain and tobacco. ¶ The year 1805 marked the beginning of a period when Kremenets was called the "Athens of Volhynia." It was then that Tadeusz Czacki, an influential enlightened thinker and a magnate in his own right opened the Volhynian modern school here, transformed into the Volhynian Lyceum (secondary and high school) in 1819. For a quarter of a century, this school remained the major centre of learning and education





in the Right-Bank Ukraine (that is, the pre-partition Polish territories on the right bank of the Dnieper River), leading to a revival of social and cultural life and perceptibly changing the face of the town. After the 1830 November Uprising of Poles against the Russian dominion, the Lyceum was closed and its book collections were taken away to Kyiv, where they became the basis of a newly-established library and the University of Kyiv. Some of the teachers moved there as well. Meanwhile, in 1817, a Jewish publisher from Warsaw, Nathan Gluksberg, opened a bookshop in Kremenets, and two years later, he established a printing house that published some 61 titles in less than two decades: secondary school curricula, textbooks for schools of the Vilnius school district, popular science books, and literary works. ♪ In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, smuggled goods were not the only things that arrived in Kremenets from across the Austrian



border. Smuggled ideas, related both to Judaic mysticism and European rationalism also made their way here, particularly from the nearby town of Brody, which was then part of Austria. Brody was a strong centre of the Haskalah and Hasidism. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kremenets had its own Hasidic community leader – tsaddik Mordekhai, son of the legendary Maggid (preacher) Yekhiel Mikhel of Zolochiv. Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Kremenets also became one of the main centres of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) in Volhynia. ♪ Kremenets was the hometown of Isaac Ber Levinson (1788–1860), an influential maskilic (enlightened) writer, thinker, linguist, and satirist, also called “the spiritual leader of the *maskilim*.” Although his father-in-law, Nakhum Tversky, was a tsadik of the Chernobyl dynasty and one of the most respected Hasidic leaders in Volhynia, Levinson left his Hasidic family and eventually radically departed from the pietistic Judaism, although he remained an observant Jew for the rest of his life. He tried to introduce the ideas of the Haskalah among Jews in Volhynia. He argued that Yiddish should

[A] Old buildings in Kremenets, 1918–1939. Photo by Feliks Nowicki, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

[B] S. An-ski and Zusman Kiselhof during an ethnographic expedition in Kremenets, 1914, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



Yet his financial situation and his poor health (he could hardly walk) made him return to Kremenets in the early 1820s, where he lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of town writing his most remarkable works. He was visited there by his contemporaries that included such prominent figures as Count Dmitry Tolstoy, Russian statesman. Levinson sought to convince the Jews to introduce secular subject matters into the educational curriculum. At the same time, as a genuine enlightened thinker, he argued for Jewish move to farming. He spent much time using his leverage with the Russian government trying to dispel popular anti-Jewish stereotypes and bias among the Russian statesmen. He published his works with the help of Russian governmental grants. After his death, many of his works were reprinted and translated into many languages. Levinson died in Kremenets in 1860 and was buried there.

**An-ski in Kremenets** ¶ The ethnographic expedition led by S. An-ski (Shlomo Zanvel Rapoport, 1863–1920) visited Kremenets during its first two seasons (1912 and 1913). The visit of July 1912 is fairly well recorded and was later included in the *Memorial Book of Kremenets*. ¶ The author of this record, Hanokh Gilernt recollects that An-ski arrived in Kremenets accompanied by the ethnographer and musicologist Zusman (Zalman) Kisselgoff and the painter and photographer Solomon (Shlomo) Yudovin. They arrived on Friday, stayed at Moshe Melamed’s hotel, and the owner was surprised to see the Yiddish-speaking guests from St. Petersburg. Gilernt added: “Some strange Jews checked in and said they were from St. Petersburg.”

be banished from the Jewish educational curriculum and Hebrew introduced in its stead – while he propagated Hebrew as a full-fledged language capable of conveying most sophisticated philosophical and scientific concepts. Levinson moved to Brody for a while because of the resistance to his innovations in Kremenets.



**A** Roadhouse in Kremenets, 1928, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

**B** Synagogue in Kremenets, 1925. Photo by Henryk Podębski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

**C** Former synagogue in Kremenets, currently a bus station, 2014. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**D** Wooden buildings of Kremenets, 1918–1939, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

“On Friday night, the streets were usually filled with young people; this time, they all gathered around the hotel and envied the group that was privileged to be inside. Meanwhile, Sender Rozental and Yashe Roytman, and Shlome the baker’s son, joined the group and were told by the hotel owner that An-ski wanted to visit a Hasidic kloyz on Sabbath morning. The hotel owner went to the caretaker, Peysi the blind, to let him know. An-ski asked for information about Hasidic liturgical rites and details about the Hasidim in town. He was quite astonished to hear that Hasidim in town lived in piece and that representatives of various Hasidic trends – Trisk, Stolin, Ruzhin, Husiatyn, Chernobyl – all prayed in the same synagogue and in the same style. He was not surprised, however, to hear the maskilim prayed with them. After a while, the young men took Kisselgoff and Yudovin for a short walk to the “mountain.” An-ski [did not] forget to greet them with “good Sabbath” and [reminded] them to behave properly, meaning that they should not smoke or speak Russian ... in other words, they should behave in a Jewish manner.”<sup>¶</sup> Based on Hanokh Gilernt’s account in: *Pinkas Kremenits* (Hebr.: *The Record Book of Kremenets*), Tel Aviv 1954, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

During their stay in Kremenets, An-ski’s team managed to record some unique Hasidic *nigunim* (tunes), to write down local tales, and to obtain two copper lanterns from the synagogue for the museum in St. Petersburg.

**Synagogues** ¶ *The Memorial Book of Kremenets* mentions 18 synagogues and prayer houses that existed in the

town. The main synagogue of Kremenets was located in Żydowska St. (now Shevchenka St.). According to the 1563 inventory, at the end of Żydowska Street there was “doctor Smuyl’s plot” (more than two hectares); on Średnia Street, running parallel to it, there were two school plots (three and two hectares accordingly), a “Jewish doctor’s plot” (about seven hectares), a Jewish hospital

plot (three hectares), and “*shkolnik* Józek’s plot” (two hectares). A synagogue was probably located on one of these plots. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a new stone synagogue was erected. It was designed according to a rectangular plan, and had a nine-section prayer hall, and a gable roof. On the eastern wall, there was an impressive cartouche with the Star of David and the crown of the Torah, supported by two lions. In the backyard, there was the smaller Synagogue of the Maggid, named in honour of Yakov Israel ben Tzvi ha-Levi, a maggid who worked in Kremenets in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was the author of several exegetical works that appeared in Zhovkva (1772, 1782). ¶ In Żydowska Street, there were also the *kahal* house and two *batei midrash* – the old one and the new one, known as the “Cossack” *bet midrash*, the town’s second largest synagogue. The tailors’ synagogue (Yid.: *shneider shul*) stood in Krawiecka (Tailor) St., and the butchers’ synagogue (Yid.: *katzavim shul*) in Jatkowa St. There were also several Hasidic synagogues and prayer rooms in private houses. Synagogues existed in the Dubno and Vyshnivets suburbs, too. ¶ The only synagogue building that has survived is the one at the end of Dubienska St. Thoroughly rebuilt after the war, it now serves as a bus station.

**The time of change** ¶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the young generation of Kremenets Jews studied at the traditional educational institutions (such as the elementary *heydorim*, a Talmud Torah school, and a small *yeshivah*), but there were also secular institutions: in 1907, a “progressive *cheder*” for children

of both sexes with instruction in Hebrew was established. A year later, a vocational training school was opened, with Russian as the language of instruction: its statute stipulated that 40 percent of its students were to be Jewish, and 60 percent – Christians. In order to keep up with this regulation, a Jewish family wishing to send a child to the vocational training school was required to find a Christian child and cover the cost of his or her education too; this included buying school supplies. ¶ During World War I, the front line ran near the city, but Kremenets suffered no damage, thanks to its location surrounded by hills. There was perceptible tension between Jews and Christians, but Kremenets Jews experienced no mass violence. ¶ Between 1917 and 1920, Kremenets changed hands seven times. From the moment the Central Rada declared the independence of Ukraine on January 22, 1918, until the entry of Bolshevik forces on June 2, 1919, the town was controlled by the government of the Ukrainian People’s Republic which, however, changed its political profile and cadre three times during the 18 months of its existence. ¶ During the election of the town councillors in the fall of 1917, Jews representing various political parties won more than half of the seats, and for some time in 1919 a Jew, Azril Kremenetski, held the post of Chairman of the Municipal Council. After the Bolshevik coup d’état in Petrograd, a faction of the Bund advocated closer cooperation with the Central Rada of Ukraine. In April, 1918, it fought for the introduction of an 8-hour working day. ¶ After the war, Kremenets found itself within the borders of Poland. According to the 1921 census, the Jewish community had 6,397



people and constituted nearly 40 percent of the local population. Subsequently, after the change of the town's administrative borders, the percentage of Jews decreased a little. The Jewish population had their own Society for the Care of the Elderly, the Jewish Sports Club "Has-monea," and the Jewish Workers' Sports Club "Jutrznia." The Zionist organisation and Jewish trade unions had their own libraries and Yiddish-language newspapers. ¶ In 1931, a report on the difficult situation of the local Jewish community appeared in the newspaper *Kremenitzer*



*Shtime* (Yid.: Voice of Kremenets).

Jewish cemetery in Kremenets, 2017. Photo by Andrey Malyskiy

“The economic situation of the Jewish community is difficult and is getting worse year by year. A considerable number of people are ruined and forced to look for new ways to earn a living, since the old ones are no longer sufficient. Many respected merchants have gone bankrupt, and the situation of small shopkeepers and craftsmen is even worse. Unemployment and low income lead to hunger and poverty. ¶ Based on *Kremenitzer Shtime*, December 19, 1931.

In the 1920s, the Jews of Kremenets began to leave for Palestine in an organised way. First preparations took place in the village of Verba (currently in Rivne Oblast), where a *kibbutz* was set up – a settlement whose inhabitants were trained to live in harsh conditions of an agricultural settlement. They learnt Hebrew and the kinds of work that could be useful in Israel; they were also learning Hebrew songs.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Kremenets was captured by the Red Army. Waves of Jewish refugees from the German-occupied part of Poland arrived. In the spring of 1940, the authorities required that the refugees either register and declare their intention to remain in the Soviet Union or to return to Poland.

Those who decided to return were unexpectedly visited by the NKVD at night. Whole families were loaded on trains and deported to Siberia. Meanwhile, all Jewish parties and movements were banned, including even a theatre troupe. Only the cinema continued to function and only Soviet films were shown. The NKVD murdered 100–150 Ukrainian and Polish inmates in the local prison. Then the Germans entered the town on July 2, 1941; more than 8,500 Jews lived in Kremenets at that time. On the following day, a pogrom against the Jewish population took place, organised with the help of local Ukrainian collaborators, in which at least 130 Jews were killed. On July 23, 1941, the Germans carried out a mass execution of the Jewish intelligentsia; members of the Polish and Ukrainian intelligentsia were arrested on

28 July. On 1 March 1942, a ghetto was established in the centre of the town. Many people died of hunger there. On August 10, 1942, the Germans began the liquidation of the ghetto: 5,000 people were shot that day. According to various accounts, a group of armed Jewish young people put up resistance. The ghetto was put on fire; the people were marched out and shot near the tobacco factory. To this day, it is not known who set fire to the ghetto: the Jews in self-defence, or the Germans in order to force the Jews out of their hiding places. The old part of the town burnt down.

Only 14 people from the entire ghetto survived.

**Memory** ¶ Today, there is no Jewish community in Kremenets. The Kremenets Jews who managed to survive the Holocaust or who emigrated earlier, as well as their descendants, established active compatriots' associations in Israel, Argentina, and the USA. They published two memorial books: in 1954, in Israel and in 1965, in Argentina, and also the Hebrew periodical titled *Kol Kremenitz* (Hebr.: Voice of Kremenets).

The violinist **Isaac Stern** (1920–2001), left Kremenets with his family as a child, emigrating to the USA. It is his violin that can be heard in the *Fiddler on the Roof*, the 1971 Hollywood musical that won three Oscars and two Golden Globes.

Another figure who emigrated to the USA was **Mark Katz** (also Kac; 1914–1984), who left one year before the outbreak of war, already with a PhD in math and a representative of the renowned Lwów school of mathematics. He became a famous expert in the field of spectral theory and the winner of several prestigious scholarly awards.

There are two monuments at the site of the mass grave at the former tobacco factory where thousands of Kremenets Jews were murdered. The first one dates back to Soviet times. The other was erected in 1992 on the initiative of the Israeli association of the former residents of Kremenets. In the vicinity, there is also a mass grave of the members of Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish intelligentsia, murdered by the Nazis at the foot of Krzyżowa Hill. ¶ Present-day Kremenets is a district center with a population of about 20,000. It is the seat of the Kremenets–Pochaiv Reserve of History and Architecture and an important centre of local tourism, based

on its scenic landscape, a past shrouded in legend, numerous monuments, and deep traditions of spiritual life.

**Cemeteries** ¶ Cemeteries of various religions are located on the hills around Kremenets. The oldest surviving tombstones can be found at the recently fenced and restored Jewish cemetery on a slope of Mount Chercha. Among the approximately 7,000 surviving *matzevot*, about 50 date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On a different slope of the same hill there is the Cossack Pyatnitsky Cemetery, the burial place of Maxim Kryvonos' Cossacks killed during the siege of the town in 1648. At the Tunicki

Cemetery, founded towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Christians of the

Orthodox, Uniate, and Roman Catholic rites are buried together.

Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Dzhernelna St. **Former synagogue** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Dubienska St. (now a bus station). **Castle ruins** (13<sup>th</sup> c.), on Bona Hill. **Cossack cemetery** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Kozatska St. **St. Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral**, former Franciscan monastery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 57 Shevchenka St. **Buildings of the former Kremenets College** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Litseyna St. **Orthodox Monastery of the Epiphany** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Dubienska St. **Twin houses** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Medova St. **Church of St. Stanislaus** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 30 Shevchenka St. **Local History Museum**, 90 Shevchenka St., tel. +38 035 462 27 38. **Juliusz Słowacki Museum** in the poet's family home, 16 Slovatskoho St.

Surrounding area

**Pochaiv** (23 km): Orthodox monastery – Pochaivska Lavra (16<sup>th</sup> c.). **Vyshnivets** (25 km): a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c., several hundred matzevot, the oldest one dating back to 1583); the palace and park of the Wiśniowiecki (Vyshnevetskyi) family (1720); the Orthodox Church of the Ascension (1530). **Shumsk** (38 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c., more

than 100 matzevot); the Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1852). **Yampil** (46 km): a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the *ohel* of the Maggid of Zolochiv, a pilgrimage destination of Hasidim. **Zbarazh** (52 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a former synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Zbaraski castle (1626); Bernardine monastery and church (17<sup>th</sup> c.); Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God (18<sup>th</sup> c.). **“Kremenets Hills” National Park**



# Dubno

Ukr. Дубно, Yid. דובנע

*This is one of our most lively towns, bustling with trade, in some seasons of the year.*

J.I. Kraszewski, *Vollhynian Evenings*, 1859

**Contracts** ¶ Dubno is one of the oldest towns in Rivne Oblast. The first written mention of it dates back to 1100. Since the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the rural settlement of Dubno belonged to the Ostrogski princely family. In 1498, at the request of Prince Konstanty Ostrogski, the owner of Dubno, Grand Duke Aleksander of Lithuania granted the town free settlement privileges. At that time, the castle was modernised and its wooden structure was replaced by a masonry one. According to the 1616 register, the castle had the largest treasury in the entire estate of the Ostrogski princes – an irresistible lure for enemy armies. In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Dubno was circumscribed by walls and ramparts and thus transformed into a fortress-town. Thanks to

these fortifications, it has gone down in history as a town that was never seized during Tatar or Cossacks raids. Even Jews of Dubno called the town *Dubna rabbati* – the great and mighty Dubno. ¶ In 1774, Dubno became an important trade centre thanks to the establishment of wholesale contract fairs, which were held until 1795. After this date, it had the biggest Jewish community in Volhynia. Profits generated by contracts allowed the owners of the town – Princes Lubomirski – to develop the municipal infrastructure. The town streets were paved, and many stone buildings were erected. The increasing significance of Dubno as a trade and cultural centre made it the largest city in Volhynia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

” We, who need fixed times during the year to remind us that we need to think of ourselves, come here to the so-called contract fairs. The Dubno fairs used to compete with those of Lviv, and now they are threatened by the more and more frequently attended fairs of Kyiv [...]. In addition to the entrance gate from the direction of Murawica, known as the Lutsk gate, where a Masonic lodge met in the early years of our century, a nearby church and a former Bernardine monastery, a newer parish church, one convent, the so-called town hall in the middle of the market square and housing a contract hall and shops, Dubno has only a few brick houses, and no sign of new buildings emerging are to be seen for some years now. ¶ J.I. Kraszewski, *The Vollhynian Evenings*, 1859



When the wholesale contract fairs were moved to other towns, the economic life of Dubno went into decline. From the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it gradually acquired features of a military town due to the 41<sup>st</sup> Selenginsk Infantry Regiment and the 11<sup>th</sup> Chuguev Uhlan Regiment that were quartered there. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fort was built near Dubno, which became a strategically important Russian military facility on the border with Austria-Hungary.

**The Jews of Dubno** ¶ The first mention of Jews in Dubno is dated to 1532 and states that local Jews possessed 300 oxen. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Jews from Spain and Orleans, France, came to Dubno, but the large-scale Jewish settlement in the town did not begin until after the 1569 Union of Lublin which brought Poland and

**A unique find connected with the Jewish community of Dubno is a mysterious object made of marl. It has a distinctive, flattened, roughly square-shaped base. Its upper part is elongated, with a widened shield bearing carved symbols, divided by a horizontal line. The escutcheon bears vivid images of two hands and, above them, three letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Dimensions: height – 2.3 cm, length – 2 cm; dimensions of the escutcheon: 1.6 × 1.8 cm. The inscription on the artefact can be translated as follows: “For the priestly (kohens’) blessing.” It is possible that the object was used as a stamp or a matrix for casting a stamp. Perhaps it was also used as a lid or a decorative element of some tool or vessel. Discovered near the synagogue in Dubno, the object is dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At present, it is the oldest object connected with the history of Dubno’s Jewish community and is kept at the Historical and Cultural Reserve in Dubno.**

Dubno Castle was not captured by the Cossacks during the Cossack wars in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. When Cossack troops approached the town, the town elder voivode, along with 80 Polish soldiers, locked himself in the castle, but Jews were barred from entering the fortress.



Lithuania into a single Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

[A] Gate building of Dubno Castle, 2014. Photo by Robert Miedziocha, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Lutska Gate in Dubno, 2014. Photo by Yuriy Pshenichnyi

As a result, between 1,100 and 1,500 Jews were murdered by the Cossacks just in front of the castle. The Jewish community was reborn after this tragedy. Already, a map of the town drawn in 1671 shows a synagogue and a Jewish quarter.



[A] Dubno, a view of the town, 1925. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



[B] Residents of Dubno near the synagogue, circa 1914, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

“One valuable ritual object in the great synagogue was a golden menorah (110 cm high and 100 cm wide). It is [said]: this menorah was stolen by a non-Jew who used to put out the candles on Friday nights. After he broke it he put its shafts and its parts in a sack and brought it to one of his associates to sell. One man saw it, and alerted the people of the community. The thief was sent to prison and the menorah was returned to the synagogue. ¶ *Dubno: A Memorial Book of the Jewish Community of Dubno, Wolyn (Dubno: Sefer zikkaron)*, trans. by Sara Mages, Tel Aviv 1966, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

In 1716, a girl who had converted from Christianity to Judaism so that she could marry a Jew was brought before the local court. The court decided to burn the bride alive for her crime against the Sacraments. The *kahal* that had allowed this wedding to take place was punished with a hefty fine. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked with a belated Polish reaction to Counter-Reformation. It was the period when Jews were prohibited from employing Christian servants and when conflicts between the Jewish community and monasteries were not infrequent. Documents from the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries attest to regular arguments over ponds, breweries, and an inn, but later 18<sup>th</sup>-century conflicts include disputations on matters of theology and direct anti-Judaic invectives. ¶

In 1794, a Jewish printing house opened in the town, which functioned for 40 years. In 1857, there were 15 synagogues and prayer houses and 22 *heydorim* (elementary schools) in Dubno. In 1861, Dubno had a population of 7,922, including 6,258 Jews. In 1897, 7,018 out of the town's 14,257 residents was Jewish.

### The Maggid of Dubno and others

¶ One of the most famous 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish preachers, Jacob ben Wolf Kranz (known as the Maggid of Dubno), resided in Dubno. The town was also the birthplace of the translator of the Pentateuch, Salomon ben Joel, and the writer Haim Zvi Lerner. ¶ **Jacob ben Wolf Kranz** (1740–1804) lived in Dubno for 18 years and was also a preacher in Międzyrzec

Podlaski (Mezrichh), Żółkiew (Zhovkva), Włodawa, Kalisz, and Zamość. He enjoyed immense popularity and also visited various German lands, where he delivered sermons in major Jewish communities. In Berlin, he met the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, the founder and spiritual leader of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment). Mendelssohn called Kranz “the Jewish Aesop” because of his brilliance and love of parables: Kranz wrote a multi-volume Hebrew commentary on the Torah adding to his meticulous exegesis various parables, folk legends, and real life examples making his commentary into a Musar (ethical) text. His jokes about Hasidim (of whom Kranz was quite critical) were rich in folk humour. His disciples published his commentaries together with the text of the Pentateuch and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the parables from the commentaries were extrapolated from the text, translated



Aron Kodesh in the synagogue in Dubno, 1930s, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

back into Yiddish (the language in which Jacob Krantz preached), and published in two volumes entitled *Ale masholim fun Dubiner Maggid* (All Parables of the Maggid of Dubno).

“Once the Gaon of Vilna, undoubtedly the most influential legal authority among eighteenth-century Jews, asked [Yakov Kranz]: why was he so keen on parables and fables? Would it not be better to make a direct statement in a sermon? Tell Jews the truth – directly, to their face! Well, said the Maggid of Dubno, let me answer this question with a parable. ¶ Once the naked Truth was walking through the streets of the shtetl, seeking alms. Nobody wanted to greet her, nobody let her in, and nobody wanted to recognize her. She was desperate and depressed, and her life was miserable. Once a Parable met her and asked: why, what’s going on with you, sister? The Truth complained and cried bitterly. Well, said the Parable, let’s do this: I will lend you my clothes and you will walk around in them seeking support and exposure – deal? The Truth agreed. Once she put on the Parable’s clothes, everybody began turning to her, everybody was seeking her; they welcomed her and rejoiced in and were uplifted by her presence. ¶ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *A Tale of Two Towns*, 2015, [www.shtetlroutes.eu](http://www.shtetlroutes.eu)

**Solomon (Shlomo) ben Joel Dubno** (1738–1813) was a translator of the Pentateuch, a philologist, and a poet. From 1767, he lived in Amsterdam and Berlin. He taught the son of Moses

Mendelssohn, who – holding Dubno’s knowledge in high esteem – became his patron and friend. It was Dubno who insisted on publishing the German translation of the Pentateuch that



Entrance to the synagogue in Dubno. An inscription in Hebrew is visible over the entrance, reading: "In the house of God we walked with the crowd," meaning the Jewish year 5553 (1792–93), before 1914, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

Mendelssohn had made for his son; he also wrote a commentary on the text. He died in Amsterdam. 🕯 **Haim Zvi Lerner** (1815–1889) was a Jewish scholar, writer, and columnist, born in Dubno. Thanks to the support of Jewish educational activists, he attended the Bezalel Stern Jewish school in Odessa, one of the first modern-type enlightened Jewish schools in the Russian Empire with German as the language of instruction. He taught at a Jewish school in Berdychiv and, from 1851, at the rabbinic seminary in Zhytomyr. He published a Hebrew-language grammar textbook *More ha-lashon* (The Language Mentor), that was reissued six times during his lifetime and several times after his death. The textbook owed its popularity to the way it explained grammar, which resembled the system used for teaching European languages. It enabled learners to study individual

topics more effectively compared to former textbooks. 🕯 **Avrom Ber Gottlob** (1810–1899) was a Jewish poet, historian, writer, and journalist, and a Haskalah activist. He was born in Starokostiantyniv. In his youth, he studied the Bible and the Talmud and was fascinated by Kabbalah. In 1828, when he met the Jewish educational activist and *maskil* Josef Perl in Ternopil, he devoted himself zealously to studying secular sciences. Gottlob's acquaintance with the Jewish Haskalah activists Menahem Mendel Lefin and Isaac Ber Levinsohn had a major impact on his worldview. Gottlob became one of the most active and prolific *maskilim* (enlightened Jews) in the Russian Empire. In his poems and prose narrative, he fought for reforms in Jewish education, welcomed the reform of the school system undertaken by the government, and criticised Orthodox Jews for bigotry, backwardness, and obscurantism. He worked at public schools for Jewish boys in Kamianets-Podilskyi and Starokostiantyniv. From 1866, he taught Talmudic texts at the rabbinic seminary in Zhytomyr. After the school was closed down in 1873, he settled in Dubno and, in 1876, started publishing a magazine *Ha-boker Or* (Heb.: Morning Light). Gottlob's memoirs and autobiography are a precious source of knowledge about the history of European Jews in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The poet, by then blind, spent the last years of his life in Białystok. 🕯 **Salomon Mandelkern** (1846–1902) was a Jewish writer, lexicographer, and translator. He was born into a Hasidic family in Mlyniv, in Dubno County. After moving to Dubno at the age of 16, he continued his religious education studying



with local rabbis but also mastered European languages. He graduated from the Department of Oriental Languages at the St Petersburg University from the Department of Law at Odessa University. In 1873–1880, he worked as a rabbi's assistant in Odessa. He wrote a 3-volume history of Russia and Poland in Hebrew and published the first translation into Russian of Nathan Hannover's chronicle *Yeven Metsulah* (The Abyss of Despair) on Jews in the midst of the Cossack Revolution of 1648–1649. ¶ In 1880, he moved to Leipzig, where he became fascinated with Zionism. He published two volumes of his own poems and was one of the first Hebrew poets who composed ballads. He translated the works of Goethe, Heine, Byron, Pushkin, and Lermontov into Hebrew as well as Vladimir Korolenko's stories into German. Mandelkern's *magnum opus*, which brought him fame around the world, was the Jewish-Aramaic Concordance, published in 1896 (the last edition – 1967).

**The Jewish quarter** ¶ When Jews settled in Dubno, the southern part of the town, on the swampy banks of the Ikva River, was allocated to them, and this is where the Jewish quarter developed. The increasing Jewish population



Jewish gymnasium (secondary school), 1928, collection of the Dubno Historical and Cultural Reserve

led to high-density urban housing with many small streets and lanes. Parts of this urban layout have survived until today. In 1782–1795, a wooden *shul* was replaced with a grand stone synagogue, which still stands. The construction was founded by the *kahal* with the financial support of Prince Michał Lubomirski. That is why there is a plaque above the entrance with the coat of arms of the Lubomirski family with the prince's initials and an inscription below the coat of arms, reading: “We shall go to the House of God, heedless of the lightning, thunder, rain, and snow,” as well as the date according to the Jewish calendar: 5554 (1794/1795). The synagogues in this region mentioned the name of the generous prince in their prayers.

“The synagogue in the city of Dubno is a very beautiful stone building, its height is about 30 cubits (21 meters), and its dome rests on sixteen pillars that were built in four rows. Its construction lasted approximately twelve years, from 5543 to 5554, when – as it [was] written in the community ledger – they started to pray there. [...] Twenty-five years have passed since a reliable man, an old man of about seventy years, told me that he had heard in his youth from his father, who was eighty years old at that time that he was there when the cornerstone was laid for the synagogue's building. He saw with his own eyes how the townspeople, their chiefs and notable persons sat around the tables, which were made of wooden planks that were placed on top of empty wine and brandy barrels, and [a] glass of brandy and honey cakes before them, and in their company was also this prince,

*a great respected minister of the Polish Kingdom and one of the military leaders, who drank a glass with them after he [had] told them a few things and after he blessed them: That they'll finish successfully what they have started to build, and they'll pray in this synagogue to God who created the heavens and the earth, and all living things upon the earth.*

¶ Based on: *Dubno Rabbati* (Hebr.: *Dubno the Great*) by Rabbi Haim Zeev Margaliyot, Warsaw 1910, as cited in: *Dubno. A Memorial to the Jewish Community of Dubno*, Wolyn (Hebr.: *Dubno: Sefer zikkaron*), trans. by Sara Mages, Tel Aviv 1966, [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)

### World War I and its aftermath ¶

During World War I, the town's economic situation deteriorated sharply. Dubno was essentially destroyed and abandoned. In addition, it was struck by epidemics of pox and typhoid. The troops stationed here began to take advantage of every opportunity to rob the local population. They did so by imposing

numerous "forced contributions" as well as by outright robbery and holding people for ransom. In July 1919, the Jews of Dubno had to face another challenge – Soviet authorities ordered the liquidation of the *kahal*, the so-far officially recognized Jewish communal umbrella organization.

**Isaac Babel (1894–1940), a Russian Jewish writer of international renown and formidable artistic influence. In 1920, as a war correspondent with the Commander Budyonny's First Cavalry Army, he stayed in various towns of the Rivne Oblast; his observations were reflected in the pages of his later works, first and foremost, *The Red Cavalry*. Using the events in Dubno as an example, he gave a detailed description of the "liberation mission" of the Bolsheviks. Russian military authorities including Commander Budyonny considered his description of the Red Army an anti-patriotic lampoon.**

“Dubno synagogues. Everything destroyed. Two little vestibules left, centuries, two tiny rooms, everything full of memories, four synagogues, close together, then pasture, plowed fields, the setting sun. The synagogues are ancient buildings, squat, green and blue, the Hasidic synagogue, inside, nondescript architecture. I go into the Hasidic synagogue. It's Friday. Such misshapen little figures, such worn faces, it all came alive for me, what it was like three hundred years ago, the old men running about the synagogue, now wailing, for some reason they keep moving from corner to corner, their worship could not be less formal. [...] A quiet evening in the synagogue, that always has an irresistible effect on me, four synagogues in a row. [...] Can it be that ours is the century in which they perish? ¶ Isaac Babel, *Dnevnik 1920* (1920 Diary), trans. by H.T. Willetts, 1990.

In 1921–1922, the Jewish community began to gradually rebuild its institutions, including the social relief organizations. The funds were limited, so they appealed to Jews from abroad for help.

First, a hospital was established. But in the first few years it had no surgeon, which meant that patients requiring an operation had to go to Lwów – and they did not always make it. It was not until

1925 that the Rojtmans – a surgeon couple – came to live in Dubno. They had at their disposal a spacious operating theatre and X-ray equipment.

**Jewish education ¶** As in other shtetls, Jewish education in Dubno was based exclusively on religious upbringing. The situation changed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The first Jewish private school was established in 1876, and another one was opened in 1890, both with elements of German-oriented and Enlightenment-inspired education. When Countess Shuvalova founded a modern secondary school for women in the town in 1907, Jewish girls were among its students, and two Jews became members of the School Welfare Committee. The same year, a boys' secondary school was opened, in which 230 out of 310 students were Jewish. The curriculum of the School of Trade in Dubno – apart from mathematics, economics, and science of commodities – included such cutting-edge matters as advertising and Esperanto. There was also a local Tarbut Hebrew school. Jews who planned *aliyah* to the land of Israel (Ottoman, later British Palestine) gained practical skills in workshops and learnt agriculture by working at a *hakhsarah* (training farm) located in a nature reserve called "Palestine." Some Jewish young people belonged to Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth organization. There was also a local sports club, "Maccabee," named after the leaders of the Anti-Hellenizers movement of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century b.c.e.

**World War II and the Holocaust ¶** In September 1939, Dubno was incorporated into the USSR. On



June 25, 1941, German troops entered the town. They began persecuting and murdering local Jews, who at that time constituted a 12,000-wise community. In April 1942, a ghetto was established (in addition to Jews, Roma Gypsies also were confined there). On May 27, 1942, the *Einsatzgruppen* executed approx. 3,800 Jews at the old airport outside the town. The last residents of the ghetto were murdered in October 1942. Only a few dozen Jews from Dubno survived the Holocaust.

**Traces of Jewish presence ¶** Today, Dubno has around 38,000 residents. There is no registered Jewish community here, but the architecture of the former Jewish quarter has been preserved. South of the market place there stands the abandoned building of the former synagogue, and behind the bus station, there is a destroyed 16<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish graveyard. Only fragments of matzevot have survived, but there is also a monument and plaque reminding all who visit about the history of this place. The museum in Dubno Castle is one of the region's major tourist attractions – a part of the exhibition is devoted to the history of the Jewish community in the town.

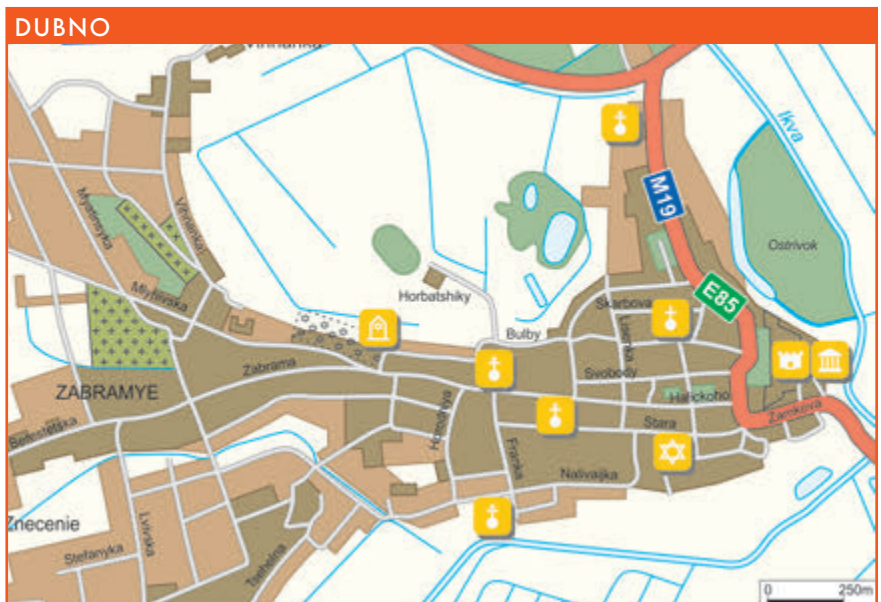
Dubno, Kyryla i Mefodya Street, with the synagogue building visible in the background, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

## Worth seeing

Former **synagogue** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 23 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **† Ostrogski Castle**: the complex comprises the buildings of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century castle of Princes Ostrogski, plus the castle wing over the gate from the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c. and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Lubomirski Castle, 7a Zamkova St, tel. +380365643568. **† Bernardine Monastery** (1629), 28 Danyla Halytskoho St. **† Lutsk Gate** (1623), 32 Danyla Halytskoho St. **† Orthodox Church of St. George and bell tower** (1700), 10 Sadova St. **† Carmelite Church and Convent** (1630–1742), 51 Tarasa Shevchenka St. **† Dąbrowski's house** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 156 Mykhaila Hrushevskoho St. **† St. Elias Orthodox Cathedral** (1908), 13 Danyla Halytskoho St. **† Merchant houses** (19<sup>th</sup> c.) 6, 10 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **† Elbert's house** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Tarasa Bulby St. **† Grynberg's House** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Svobody St. **† Parish church** (1830), 18 Ostrozko St. **† Commercial and residential houses** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 8–18 Svobody St.; 1 Mykhaila Drahomanova St.; 12 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **† Hop manufacture** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 48 Svobody St. **† Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration** (Spaso-Preobrazhenska) (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 30 Ivana Franka St. **† Countess Shuvalova's Manor** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 104 Mykhaila Hrushevskoho St.

## Surrounding area

**Tarakaniv** (6 km): defensive fort (19<sup>th</sup> c.). **† Mlyniv** (20 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a palace (1791), currently a museum; the Orthodox Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God (1840). **† Mizoch** (30 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. John of Nepomuk (1795). **† Zdolbuniv** (42 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); more than 100 matzevot; the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1908). **† Rivne** (45 km): the main city of the region; a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.); two synagogues (19<sup>th</sup> c., Shkilna St.); the Local History Museum; Catholic and Orthodox churches; parks, theatres. **† Klevan** (64 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Czartoryski Castle (15<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1630); the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God (1777); the green railway “tunnel of love.”





# Ostroh

Pol. Ostróg, Ukr. Острів,  
Yid. אָסטראָ

*It happened in Ostroh. I was young at that time and spent my days and nights at the bet midrash, studying the Torah. During the day, when the Jews went home, I sometimes locked the bet midrash and stayed inside, alone with the books...*

*Tailor of Lublin, in: Yevreyskie narodnyie skazki, predania, bylichki, rasskazy, anekdoty, sobrannyye E.S. Rajze (Rus.: Jewish Folk Tales...), ed. Valery Dimshitz. St Petersburg 2000*

**The letter of the Torah** ¶ The town's name was pronounced "Ostre" in Yiddish, which can be understood as "Os To[y]re", the Yiddish for "the letter of the Torah". With a name like this, the town was well suited to become an important place of the Jewish culture.

¶ A mention of this old settlement can be found in the Old Ruthenian *Primary Chronicle* (around 1110). In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the town became the seat of the Princes Ostrogski, who built a fortified castle here. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was called "the Athens of Volhynia" because of the famous Ostrogski Academy, a university founded in 1576 by Prince Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski. This academy became a leading educational center for Orthodox Christian clergy in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Ostroh is also known for its famous Ostroh Bible, printed by Ivan Fyodorov in 1581; it was the first complete printed edition of the Bible in the Church Slavonic language.

**The Jews of Ostroh** ¶ No detailed data on the ethnic make-up of the town population can be found in medieval documents. However, an act issued

in 1603 by Prince Konstanty Wasyl Ostrogski in which he divided his estate between his sons, Janusz and Alexander, noted that Christians (Eastern Orthodox and Catholics) as well as Jews and Tatars all lived in the town. Jews were the second largest religious group in Ostroh. Since the town was divided between two owners to whom the Old Town and the New Town respectively were submitted after 1603, it had two separate but cooperating Jewish communities. ¶ Scattered references to Jews living in Ostroh appear as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century; however, the dynamic growth of the Jewish community in the town began only in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Jewish quarter developed southeast of the marketplace. In 1603, there were 73 Jews registered in Ostroh, and their number increased to 229 by 1629. At the end of the 1640s, the Jewish community of Ostroh boasted about 1,500 people. The Ostroh *kahal*, governing over the most important and the largest Jewish community in Volhynia, represented the Jews of Volhynia at the Council of Four Lands, along with Lutsk, Volodymyr-Volynskyi, Kovel, and Dubno.



Ostroh, a general view of the town before 1897, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

**Maharsha and other prominent rabbis** ¶ As the centre of a sizeable and influential Jewish community, Ostroh attracted eminent learned rabbis. From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the town had its own *yeshiva*. The first

known Rabbi of Ostroh and the head of the *yeshiva* was **Kalman ben Yaakov Haberkasten**, succeeded by **Solomon ben Ezekiel Luria** (1510–1573), known as **Maharshal**. The *yeshiva* teachers included a famous Kabbalist, **Isaiah Horowitz** (1565–1630), the author of *Shela'h* (*Shney lukhot ha-Brit*, Heb.: Two Tablets of the Covenant). Another prominent rabbinic leader was **Samuel Edels**, dubbed **Maharsha** (an acronym for: More(y)nu ha-rav rabi Samuel Edels, Heb.: Our Teacher Rabbi Shmuel Edels). In his honour, the main synagogue in Ostroh was named the Great Maharsha Synagogue.

**Rabbi Samuel Eliezer Edels** (1555–1631), was a Talmud commentator and expert in Jewish law, one of the most prominent rabbis of his time. He was married to Dvora Halperin, the daughter of the influential Rabbi of Poznań, Moshe Halperin. He headed a *yeshiva* in Poznań, which his mother-in-law, Edel, supported for 20 years (1585–1605), in recognition of which he adopted the nickname “Edels.” In 1605, he became Rabbi of Chełm, then of Lublin, and from 1624, served as Rabbi of Ostroh. He opposed the then universal practice of studying mainly the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Halakhic law code *Shulkhan Arukh* (Heb.: Set Table) and insisted on the need to study earlier Halakhic sources comparing them to later ones to be able to understand how the Judaic law comes to being and how the mind of a posek (top religious authority) works. Edels was known for his radiating kindness and selfless help to others. On the door frame of his house (which burnt down in 1889), a verse from the Book of Job was carved: “no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveller” (Job 31:32) – this was the motto he observed all his life. ¶ Between 1600 and 1602, Edels published commentaries on most treatises of the Talmud: *Hiddushey Halakhot* (Heb.: Novellae in Jewish Law) and *Hiddushei Haggadah* (Heb.: Novellae on the Haggadah), in which he explained the Talmudic text with its legal debates, its historical tales and legends, parables, aphorisms, and ethical maxims of sages. In the classic editions of the Talmud, his commentaries are necessarily attached in appendices, along with commentaries by Solomon Luria (Maharshal) and Meir Halperin (Maharam) of Lublin. ¶ Rabbi Shmuel Edels died in Ostroh on November 30, 1631 and was buried at the local Jewish cemetery.

Another eminent scholar connected with Ostroh was **David ben Samuel ha-Levi**

(1586–1667) – a rabbi and expert in Jewish law, better known by the acronym

ר"צ, Ta"z, from the first letters of his work *Turei zahav* (Heb.: Pillars of Gold). In 1641, he settled in Ostroh, where he served as rabbi and head of the *yeshiva*. *Turei zahav* (published in parts between 1646 and 1766) is an influential commentary on *Shulkhan Arukh*. Fearing the Cossack mass violence against the Jews, Samuel ha-Levi moved to Moravia. A year after returning to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1653, he became Chief Rabbi of the Golden Rose Synagogue in Lwów. He participated in the meetings of the Council of Four Lands, his signature appearing on many of the Council's resolutions.

**Crafts and trade** ¶ As Ostroh was situated on an east-west oxen trade route, the cattle trade became one of the main occupations of the local Jews, though some of them worked as merchants and craftsmen as well. In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ostroh received the privilege of holding weekly two-day fairs (on Fridays and Sundays) and annual three-day fairs on St. Onuphrius' Day, on Our Lady of Protection Day, and on St. Nicholas Day. This privilege significantly boosted the trade and helped local merchants attract and support most significant rabbinic scholars in Poland. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the most widespread crafts in Ostroh were alcohol distillation, brewing, and malting, the importance of which is evidenced by numerous vineyards, breweries, and malt houses. In 1687, these were owned only by Jews, who had a total of 144 process tanks in the Old and New Town. At that time, there were 17 vineyards, 5 breweries, and 5 malt houses in the part of the town belonging to the Ostrogski entailed



estate. The inventories of 1708 and 1724 testify to the presence of Jews among tailors, barber-paramedics, smiths, furriers, butchers, bakers, tin-plate and copper artisans, glass-makers, bookbinders, doctors, and pharmacists.

**Cossacks and Tatars** ¶ Ostroh was the birthplace of Nathan Hannover (c. 1610–1683), the author of the influential *Yeven Mezulah* (Heb.: Abyss of Dispair) chronicle published in 1653 in Venice. Although it is written as an early modern chronicle, not as an accurate historical report, its details in many cases (but not the ethical stories and statistics) are accurate. Hannover reports that in August 1648, during the Khmelnytsky Uprising, about 600 Jews were killed in Ostrog within just a few days. No less tragic was another Cossack raid, in 1649, which brought death to about 300 people. Their bodies were dumped into a well near the synagogue, which was turned into a stable. Nathan Hannover, whose father was one of the victims of the massacre, noted that only three Jews and five Jewish houses had been left in Ostroh. The community quickly recovered, however. The act of 1654 stated that, out of the 93 houses and palaces in the Old Town of

Leyvi Soyfer, the scribe (right), with his two "unequal" students, one old, one young, at the end of a table by a window (photographer's note), photo published in 1925. Photo by Alter Kacyzne, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



**[A]** Mausoleum of Rabbi Samuel Edels at the Jewish cemetery in Ostroh, 2014. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**[B]** Market square in Ostroh, 1900, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Ostroh, 44 belonged to Jews. In 1666, the Jews of Ostroh sent their own delegate to the Council of Four Lands again, which means their community re-established its significance and reputation.

Massacres during the Khmelnytsky Uprising were a great tragedy for the Jews living in Ukraine, but the number of victims reported by 17<sup>th</sup>-century chroniclers tends to be overstated and should be treated with caution. According to Prof. Shaul Stampfer from the Hebrew University, around 40,000 Jews lived in the Ukrainian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 1640s. During the Khmelnytsky Uprising, about 14,000–18,000 were killed, about 1,000–2,000 – converted under duress to Christianity, and about 1,000 – taken captives and sold at the slave markets in Istanbul.

In 1687, there were 390 houses in Ostroh, of which at least 135 belonged to Jews. The town was destroyed again during the Great Northern War in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to the 1708 partial inventory, there were 58 Christian and 40 Jewish houses, nine unoccupied houses, and 14 mansions; 188 houses were vacant. ¶ According to a legend circulating among Ostroh Jews, in 1734 during the Cossack and peasant uprising remembered as the Haidamachyna, the local Tatars defended the Jewish community. For many years, this event was commemorated annually in the Great Synagogue in Ostroh.

**The synagogue** ¶ The preserved building of the former main synagogue can be found in the northern part of Ostroh. It was erected on the site of an

older prayer house, probably after 1627.

¶ Reportedly, the foundation stone for the synagogue in Ostroh was laid by Rabbi Maharsha himself. Its similarity to the Great Suburb Synagogue in Lwów, erected at the same period, suggests that it may have been designed by the same architect, Giacomo Medleni from Lwów. Its main hall (11 metres high at its highest point) is a rectangle with thick walls of stone and brick. Each of the four walls has three large windows, together symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel. The vault is supported by four octagonal pillars with Doric capitals. In the past, vestibules and women's galleries adjoined the main hall from the west and south. Nothing has been left of the rich synagogue interior; its original appearance can be recreated only from old photos and descriptions. The





synagogue fell victim to many raids and fires, but it served as a prayer house until World War II. Turned into a chemicals warehouse in the Soviet times, it was left abandoned and in ruin until recently, when a group of Ostroh residents under

the guidance of the enthusiastic Gregory Arshinov, made extraordinary efforts to preserve and reconstruct this unique monument.

Among the traditional elements typical for synagogue interior, there was also one unique item: a cannonball suspended on a long rope from the ceiling. According to a legend, the Russian troops tried to storm the Ostroh synagogue in 1792, believing that it was a hiding place for Poles. Luckily, the cannonballs that fell into the building did no harm to the Jews gathered inside. After a three-day siege, a Jew by the name of Eliezer left the synagogue and swam across the river to the invaders' camp. He convinced them that there were no more Polish troops in the town and showed them a ford they could use to cross the river. The Russians lifted the siege and left Ostroh. To commemorate this extraordinary event, the Jews decided to have one of the cannonballs suspended from the ceiling. Several other cannonballs from that time are exhibited in the Ostroh Museum of Local History. Additionally, to mark the day on which the Jewish community was saved from the Russian attack, the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Tamuz (June–July) was celebrated in Ostroh as a Purim-like holiday, and a text written specially for this occasion called *Megilat Ester Tamuz* (Heb.: *The Scroll of ester for the Month of Tamuz*) was recited in the synagogue.

**Printing houses** ¶ At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ostroh became one of the most important centres of Jewish printing in the Russian Empire. Between 1794 and 1832, seven printing presses were

established there, the first one around 1792, by Avraham ben Yitzhak Ayzyk of Korets. Avraham ben Yitzhak Ayzyk's partner was Aaron ben Yona, who opened another Hebrew printing house,

[A] Ostroh Castle – the round tower, 2015. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Synagogue in Ostroh, 1933. Photo by Jerzy Łuczyński, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

which competed not only with the publishing establishment in Ostroh, but also with a highly influential Krüger's printing house in Novyi Dvir. To confuse customers and make them believe that they were buying Krüger's books, Aaron ben Yona used a printing signet that resembled the one used by Krüger. Soon, in 1795 or 1798, a third printing house was set up. It was run by Shmuel ben Issakhar Ber Segal (the owner of Hebrew printing houses in Korets, Shklov, and Polonne). Segal's establishment in Ostroh, however, was eventually shut down because it published materials for the Polish insurgents during the November Uprising in 1831.

**History scholar** ¶ Menachem Mendel Bieber (1848–1923) was a historian, writer, and teacher who researched and chronicled the heritage of the Ostroh Jews. From his early age, he was fascinated by the history of his town and collected materials to create a literary monument to the Ostroh Jewish community. In 1866, he married and moved to Cracow, where he received higher education in history and became a teacher at the Jewish secondary in Cracow. In his spare time, he worked at the libraries in Cracow, Warsaw, and Vilnius. Bieber is the author of historical novels such as *Di nacht in goles* (Yid.: A Night in Exile, 1874) and *Ven dos leben ot geblit* (Yid.: When Life Bloomed, 1877). At the end of 1889, he returned to Ostroh only to find out that several historical monuments he was researching and the collection of his documents had been lost in a fire. It was then that he decided to carefully examine the inscriptions on *matzevot*, gravestones, the material that hardly burns. His painstaking work resulted

in a collection of many important and interesting documents about the life of Ostroh Jews from the town establishment until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bieber presented the results of his research in 17 articles published in academic journals in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Warsaw, as well as in many notes and press releases. His first historical monograph *Di alte Ostroger yiddishe velt* (Yid.: A History of the Jews of Ostroh) was published in Warsaw in 1902 and the second one (written in Hebrew), *Mazkeret li-gdolei Ostroha* (Heb.: In the Memory of the Great Rabbis of Ostroh) in Berdychiv, in 1907. The latter describes the life and work of more than 400 rabbis and leaders of the Ostroh Jewish community and remains an invaluable historical encyclopaedic source to this day. Bieber also enthusiastically promoted the knowledge about Ostroh and its inhabitants. He wrote more than 100 articles for newspapers and magazines all over the world, while still teaching history at the Ostroh high school and at the Talmud Torah school. He died in 1923 at the age of 75.

**The cemetery** ¶ Menachem Mendel Bieber found eternal rest at the local cemetery, which is as old as the Jewish community of Ostroh. The following inscription was engraved on his *matzevah*: “Born in Ostroh, our teacher and mentor, Menachem Mendel Bieber, son of Ari Leib Bieber. May he rest in peace. A history scholar, attentive to people. A teacher and school headmaster. The author of two books. He is our pride and glory!” Unfortunately, his gravestone has not survived. ¶ In his book *Mazkeret li-gedole Ostroha* (Hebr.: In the Memory of the Great Rabbis of Ostroh), Bieber



Synagogue in Ostroh,  
2017. Photo by Andrey  
Malyuskiy

wrote that the oldest part of the cemetery included many old *matzevot* but only two of them bore legible inscriptions, which he cited and dated to 1445 and 1449. A photo of one such *matzevah* has survived, but in his detailed analysis, Prof. Andrzej Trzciński indicates that the date was misread and the *matzevah* should be dated to 1520, which still makes it one of the oldest known gravestones with Hebrew inscriptions in Poland-Lithuania. It reads: “Here lies a good man, Mr. Menakhem, son of Mr. Eliezer, buried on Thursday, the 15th day of the month of Shevat, in the year 280 according to the short reckoning. May his soul be bound up in the bond of life.” ¶ Other prominent residents of Ostroh buried at the Jewish cemetery include such illustrious individuals as Shlomo ben Eliezer, Yoel Halperin, David Shmulevich, and Haim Horowitz. However, the most famous person buried there is Samuel Edels (Maharsha). ¶ Having withstood the tests of time and wars, the cemetery fell

victim to the Soviet regime. In 1968, it was closed and then converted into a leisure park with a dancing hall, an indoor shooting range, and an amusement park; the tombstones were used to make pavements at the military base and in the psychiatric hospital. In recent years, thanks to the efforts of Hryhoriy Arshinov, the leader of the local Jewish community, the park has been closed, some *matzevot* removed from the squares and streets, carefully identified and cleaned, brought back to the cemetery and reestablished. Also, the *ohel* (stone burial canopy) over Rabbi Edels’ grave has been rebuilt and is again a pilgrimage place for Jews from all over the world.

**The Book of Desire** ¶ Ostroh was twice visited by the ethnographic expedition led by S. An-ski, who discovered during the tour an enigmatic manuscript entitled *Sefer ha-Heshek* (Heb.: The Book of Desire). The manuscript is written by a Kabbalist and popular healer (a *baal*



Interior of the synagogue in Ostroh — a view of the aron kodesh, circa 1930. Photo by Szymon Zajczyk, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

*shem*) who called himself Hillel, and who made his living selling amulets and herbs and exorcising evil spirits in the towns of Volhynia and Podolia between 1732 and 1740. *Sefer ha-Heshek* is a collection of *refuot* and *segulot* (folk medicine recipes and healing remedies), and exorcism stories and instructions. Interestingly, it not only contains examples of successful rituals, but also describes situations when attempts to banish the dybbuk ended in failure. Such a situation took place in Ostroh, and Hillel describes it as follows:

“Once with the help of God I came across a dreadful incident in the country of Volhynia in the town of Ostroh where the demon of idol-worshippers appropriated the soul of a woman from the same town. I was not able to perform [against the dybbuk] for several days. I resorted to great oaths in the synagogue with the Torah scroll and the people and

holy witnesses. And the spirit answered me from the body of that woman (may God protect us): “You are the Rabbi who has been working for six days already, you pronounced oaths over me and tried to exorcise me using the holy names. However, you could not do anything [shum pe’ulah] to me at all, although you have somewhat weakened the evil powers that surround my soul, and damaged my members, sinews, and bones. This is not the place that permits you to utilize the holy names, because there is a place of filth next to this holy synagogue. So if you would like to complete this work, you should go together with me and try in a different place. Only with seven Torah scrolls and with seven boys who have not sinned up till now or with seven – or more – proper men [will you be able to perform]. The same day when they pronounce oaths, let them go with you to the ritual bath, pray [daven] together with you, and after that, with the help of God, you will succeed and I will go out of the body of this woman. The only thing I do not know is whether I will leave her body without her soul or with it.” ¶ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, ‘We Are Too Late:’ *Shloyme Ansky and His Paradigm of No Return*, Stanford 2006

**The Kultur-Lige in Ostroh** ¶ The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of new political and cultural life. In 1918, the Yiddish “Kultur-Lige” organization

was established. Its branch in Ostroh appeared due to Jacob Tolpin, an activist of Poale Zion, who describes the organization in the Memorial Book of Ostroh:



“Ostrog’s Cultural League grew. It combined different streams of thoughts, but Jewish culture played the most important part. People who would otherwise not have shown interest in Jewish culture became interested. Despite the fact that the League’s program dealt only with culture and not with politics, most of its supporters were from Poalei Zion and the Bund. ¶ When the Soviet government was formed, it took over various institutions. Plans for expansion were made, but in effect just the opposite occurred. The governor of Zhytomyr County ordered all Hebrew schools and evening courses to close. The Cultural League continued, however, and its salaries were paid by the government. Once when they brought the salaries for our town, I distributed the money among the Jewish teachers, leaving my father, my sister, and myself for last. But by that stage there was nothing left for us! We did not mind, the institutions functioned regularly, we had a kindergarten, the I.L. Peretz School and the Ber Borochov evening courses. We also organized cultural gatherings, concerts, plays, etc. [...] ¶ When the borders between Russian and Poland were altered after the First World War, Ostrog became part of Poland. This brought about a change in the school system. At first the Inspector of Schools nominated me as the superintendent of the Borochov courses and the technical school. But when I arrived in Warsaw at the beginning of 1921 there was already a new law which stated that only teachers who passed a special exam would qualify to teach together with Polish teachers. ¶ The work of the Cultural League to spread Jewish literature, etc., continued as before. However, with time, the Jewish school and other institutions gradually diminished and then disappeared completely. ¶ Prof. Jacob Tolpin, Ostrog’s Cultural League, in: *Pinkas Ostroha; sefer zikaron li-kehila Ostroha* (Ostrog Book: A Memorial to the Ostroh Holy Community), Tel Aviv 1987, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

In the interwar period, Ostroh became a sleepy provincial town, although its location on the border with the Soviet Union meant that both border-guard soldiers and smugglers could be encountered there. The Jewish community was actively involved in cultural and

socio-political life. There were branches of Jewish political parties, cultural organisations, a Jewish library, and a Tarbut school. In 1933, a new *yeshivah* was opened. It was named “Maharsha” in honour of Samuel Edels.

**THE HOSPITAL** ¶ In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, between eight and ten Jewish doctors worked in private practice in Ostroh. To provide poor Jews with access to medical care, local entrepreneur Moshe Zusman bought a large building and handed it over to the Jewish community in order to open a hospital there. The facility was opened on September 16, 1861, with Lev Altshuler as chief physician. The hospital had 20 permanent beds and could accommodate 100 outpatient visits per day; it also had a pharmacy and a shelter with four beds. ¶ The institution was financed from private donations, but in the 1920s, due to the difficult economic situation, it faced closure. To save it, the hospital staff came up with the idea of organising charity concerts and dinner parties. These were held at the A. Bludova Secondary School for women. Thanks to such events, it was possible to ensure the



Jewish cemetery in Ostroh, 2017. Photo by Christian Herrmann, [www.vanishedworld.blog](http://www.vanishedworld.blog).

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, the Jewish community of Ostroh numbered around 10,500 people. In September 1939, Soviet troops entered the town and deported many residents (Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians) to Siberia, first and foremost, those active in communal organizations and political parties. In July 1941, Ostroh was taken over by the Germans, who arrested and shot 300 representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia on the very first day of their occupation. Then, in two mass executions (in August and in September 1941), they killed another 5,500 Jews. Those who survived immediate liquidation were confined in the ghetto, and most of them were killed in the next mass execution on November 19, 1942. The executions took place near the forest of the New Town. In the 1990s, a monument commemorating Holocaust victims was erected there. It

financial stability of the institution. ¶ The Jewish hospital operated for more than 78 years and provided assistance to all the inhabitants of Ostroh, regardless of their ethnicity. It was closed when the Soviet authorities took over the town in 1939. All the equipment and property were transferred to the newly opened regional hospital.

was designed by Zalman Shoychet, born in Ostroh.

**Present day and memory** ¶ After the war, several dozen Jews who survived the Holocaust returned to Ostroh, including some who fought in partisan units. Later, most of them emigrated, but a small Jewish community is still present in the town. Its leader, Hryhoriy Arshinov, an architect, engineer, and restorer, managed to organise the restoration of the Jewish cemetery and has been working to save the historic synagogue building. Meanwhile the Ostroh Academy, a unique university of humanities, has opened a Centre for Jewish Studies (e-mail: [ostrohsemitology@gmail.com](mailto:ostrohsemitology@gmail.com)), headed by a talented medievalist Dmytro Tsolin, specialist in rabbinic Midrashim and Aramaic Targumim (translations of the Biblical text). Ostroh abounds in monuments and tourist attractions, and each year it is visited by increasing number of tourists.

Worth  
seeing

**Synagogue** (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), Edelsa St. ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Kozatska St. ¶ **Ostroh Academy**: the oldest Ukrainian educational and research institution (16<sup>th</sup> c.), converted into a Catholic academy in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. and later into a teachers' institute, re-established as a National University under the 16<sup>th</sup> c., 2 Seminarska St., +380365422949. ¶ **Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (15<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.), 4a Kniaziv Ostrozkykh St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Epiphany** (15<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Akademichna St. ¶ **Brick Tower** (14<sup>th</sup> c.):

former residence of the Ostrogski family, currently the **Ostroh Museum of Local History**, 5 Akademichna St, tel. +380365422593. 🏰 **Round Tower** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Akademichna St. 🏰 **Museum of Books and Printing** located in Lutsk Gate Tower (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Papanina St., tel. +380365423271. The main part of the exhibition is the collection of books from the local Museum of Ethnography, founded in 1909–1912. The rare exhibits include the Ostroh Bible printed by Ivan Fyodorov. The collection comprises about 3,000 exhibits, half of which are 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-c. manuscripts and antique books in Latin and Cyrillic scripts. 🏰 **Tatar Gate Tower** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), 65 Tatarska St. 🏰 **Museum of Numismatics**, 11 Nezalezhnosti Ave, tel. +380365422698. 🏠 **19<sup>th</sup>-c. residential houses**, some of them marked as historical sites with the names of the pre-1939 owners, including: doctor Vobly's house (10 Heroiv Maidanu St.); Weintraub's house (4 Heroiv Maidanu St.); Scheinenberg's house (45 Nezalezhnosti Ave); Scheinfein's house (2 Heroiv Maidanu St.).

**Mezhyrich** (5 km): the Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery (13<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏰 **Novomalyn** (12 km): remnants of the castle that belonged to Princes Maliński and Sosnowski (14<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏰 **Derman** (25 km): an Orthodox monastery founded by Princes Ostrogski, where Ivan Fyodorov worked; in the 20<sup>th</sup> c., it was turned into an Orthodox convent for women. The village is the birthplace of the famous 20<sup>th</sup> c. Ukrainian Diaspora writer Ulas Samchuk. 🏰 **Slavuta** (27 km): an operating synagogue; a Jewish cemetery with the grave of rabbi Moshe Shapira, a famous printer; a burial place of Holocaust victims; Church of St. Dorothy; the crypt of Princes Sanguszkos; the administrative buildings and stable of the Sanguszkos; commercial buildings, and a town hall.

Surrounding  
area



# Korets

Pol. Korzec, Ukr. Корець, Yid. קארעץ

*Rabbi Pinhas used to say: "I am always afraid to be more clever than devout." And then he added: "I should rather be devout than clever, but rather than both devout and clever, I should like to be good."*

Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*,  
trans. O. Marx, New York 1991

**A stroll with pleasure** ¶ The first reference to a settlement named Korchesk dates back to 1150 and is found in the Primary Chronicle, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century historical account of the history of the Slavic people also known as the Kiev Chronicle. In 1380, Grand Duke Jagiełło (Jogaila) of Lithuania transferred the lands of Korets to Prince Fedor Ostrogski. In 1386, the Ostrogskis built the castle here and redirected the course of the Korchik River. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement became the property of the Princes Koreckis, and after the 1596, Union of Lublin it became part of Lutsk County in the Volhynian Palatinate. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Korets was one of the largest towns in Volhynia. ¶ In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Korets gradually fell into decline, as the result of several devastating attacks of the Cossack army led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky in 1648–1649. The town began to revive only in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; manufacturing producing cloth, fabrics, and

leather goods were established. In 1788, the town owners Counts Potockis established a faience and china manufacturing plant, but they were forced to close it in 1831 after the local white clay deposits were exhausted. After the 1793 Second Partition of Poland, Korets came under the rule of the Russian Empire. After the peasant reform of 1861, part of the Great Reforms of Alexander II, the town became a significant commercial and industrial centre. In 1887, Korets had a brewery, two leather factories, a cloth factory, and five water steam mills; most importantly, annual fairs bringing international merchants and commodities from all over Europe were held 12 times a year. In 1898, Count Józef Potocki established a sugar refinery here. ¶ In November 1846, the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko visited the town; he later mentioned Korets in his short novel *Progulka z udovolstviem i nie bez morali* (Rus.: A Stroll with Pleasure and Not Without Morals, 1858). This is Shevchenko's impressions of the town:

” In the fields of Volhynia and Podolia one can often admire picturesque ruins of massive ancient castles, once magnificent, such as those in Ostroh or in Korets.



*In Korets even the church, a shelter of the embalmed corpses of the princely family of Korecki, has turned into a ruin. What, then, do these grim witnesses of the past say, what do they bear testimony to? Despotism and serfdom! Peasants and magnates!*

**The Jews of Korets** ¶ Jews settled in Korets in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though, according to the local legend, Jews settled there much earlier. As in other towns, the Jewish community suffered significant losses during the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Cossack revolution. By 1655, the devastation of the Cossack-Polish War left only 10 Jewish houses in Korets. The oldest *matzevah* at the Jewish cemetery dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and towards the end of that century a synagogue was built. The main occupations of the Korets Jewish population in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were crafts and trade; among other businesses, Jews owned two tanneries and 14 stores in the marketplace. ¶ In the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Korets was home to Dov Ber of Mezheritch, known as Maggid of Mezherich: after the death of the Baal Shem Tov in 1760, he gathered at his table in Mezherich (near Rivne) the new



A view of Korets, circa 1930, collection of the Historical Museum in Korets

generation of religious enthusiasts, who called themselves Hasidim, and who eventually established the key centers of the rising Hasidic movement in Karlin, Liady, Berdichev, Chernobyl, Hannipol, and Vitebsk. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of the Jews in Korets associated themselves with the Hasidic movement. In 1760, Rabbi Pinhas Shapiro, a close associate of the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov, moved to Korets from Shargorod and soon became known as Rebbe Pinhas of Korets. Inspired by their father, his sons established one of the most significant Hasidic printing presses in East Europe – the one in Slavuta.

**Pinhas ben Abraham Aba Shapiro** (Pinchas of Korets; 1728–1790) was an eminent Hasidic master, a colleague of the Baal Shem Tov. He was born in the town of Shklov (Szklów), where he received a traditional Jewish education. As a young man, he worked as a *melamed* in Korets, where he found himself in the centre of the budding Hasidic movement. He was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Baal Shem Tov. Rebbe Pinhas became the head of the Jewish community of Korets, and in the last period of his life also acted as the highest legal and spiritual authority for Hasidim in the towns of Slavuta and Ostroh. In 1790, at the age of 63, he set out from Ostroh on the long journey to the Holy Land, hoping to spend the rest of his life there. However, he died suddenly at the very beginning of his trip, in the town of Shepetivka (Szepietówka), on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Elul, in the year 5551 according to the Jewish calendar. He did not leave a Hasidic



Monument to Taras Shevchenko in front of the Regional Historical Museum in Korets, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

“ Rabbi Pinhas often cited the words: “A man’s soul will teach him”, and emphasized them by adding: “There is no man who is not incessantly being taught by his soul.” One of his disciples asked: “If this is so, why don’t men obey their souls?” “The soul teaches incessantly,” Rabbi Pinhas explained, “but it never repeats.” ¶ Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. O. Marx, New York 1991, p. 121.

**Hasidic printing house** ¶ In 1776, a Jewish printer (whose name is not known) arrived in Korets after obtaining a privilege from Count Józef Klemens Czartoryski to establish a Jewish printing press. The Korets printing press operated until 1819, and over 40 years it published about 93 books. As many other printing presses established in Volhynia and Podolia at that time, the Korets printing press published predominantly books on Kabbalah and Hasidism, prayer books with Kabbalistic commentaries and traditional books of Jewish learning containing glossas provided by Hasidic masters. That printing house played a major role in fostering the spread of Hasidic Judaism in Poland and neighbouring countries. In 1780, the Korets printing press published the book *Toldot Yaakov Josef* by Yaakov Yosef of Polonne, one of the first foundational books presenting the theology of Hasidism. ¶ In the 1780s, Jan Antoni Krüger, a Christian who owned a Hebrew printing house in Nowy Dvir (Nowy Dwór) took over the Korets

treatise yet his aphorisms and short commentaries on the Torah recorded by his disciples and children were published posthumously in a two-volume collection *Imrei Pinhas* (The Sayings of Pinhas) His *ohel* – gravesite – was reconstructed in the late 1990s and is located in the center of Shepetivka at the site of the oldest Jewish cemetery next to the central police station.

publishing house and ran it until 1786. He had an excellent understanding of the Jewish market – hence published major Kabbalistic books and Hasidic commentaries to Kabbalistic sources. In 1798, a printing company owned by Shmuel ben Issachar Ber Segal and his father-in-law Tzvi Hirsch ben Arie Leib Margaliot took over the Korets printing business. Yet the change of hands changed little in the books repertoire of the Korets printing press: till the mid-1830s, when this press was denounced by the anti-Hasidic minded Jewish censors and advisers and eventually shut down, Korets remained one of the keys which nourished the Hasidic movement in east Europe with Kabbalistic prayer books, classical sources of Jewish mysticism, and newest writings of the Hasidic masters.

**Synagogues** ¶ In 1865, Korets had 10 functioning synagogues, six of them Hasidic. But tragedy struck in 1881, when they all burnt down in a great fire: the Main Synagogue, the tailors’ and

shoemakers' synagogues, the Berezneshul, the Chernobyler-shul, and all the others. They were gradually rebuilt, and other synagogues were added thanks to the increase in Jewish population. In 1847, the town had 3,832 Jewish residents, and in 1897, 4,608 Jews, making up 76 percent of the total population. ¶ In 1910, there were 15 synagogues in Korets. In addition, there was a Talmud Torah school for poor Jewish boys and Jewish orphans, a private Jewish school, and a sizeable public library, and separate private Jewish vocational training schools for women and men.



An ohel at the Jewish cemetery in Korets, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Rabbi **Nechemia Hershehorn** (1833–1923) served as a rabbi of Korets for 59 years (1864–1923). He was exceptionally active in organizing various philanthropic services for the needy, particularly providing traditional education to Jewish children, disregarding their financial status. On many occasions, and in many of his articles in the Jewish press, he stressed the necessity to teach the Torah broadly conceived to young Jewish people seeking to prevent their assimilation. He bombarded state officials with requests to introduce classes in Jewish religion and Russian language at all Jewish educational establishments starting with the *cheder* (elementary school). Though he was successful in obtaining the permission, the Hasidim of Korets did not allow him to do so. In response, with the help from the local Jewish elites, Hershehorn created a modern Jewish school based on the local Talmud Torah. Unlike the traditional Jewish education which did not differentiate teaching elements of Judaic religion from teaching the basics of Hebrew language, the new school taught Hebrew grammar, the Tanakh, the history of the Jews, and Russian language. On the ground floor of the school building, there was a canteen for students, a prayer room, and a library, and in the yard there was an orchard where students acquired elementary skills in botany and agriculture. After the great fire of 1881, Rabbi Hershehorn made every effort to rebuild the main *beth midrash*. In 1883, a Jewish hospital was built, established by his initiative. ¶ Rabbi Hershehorn also established the Hebrew-language Tarbut library, which became an important spiritual proto-Zionist centre, as well as the National Credit Bank, an important institution for the local Zionist movement. Rabbi Hershehorn was an ardent Zionist. He attended a Zionists' convention in Minsk and was in long-lasting correspondence with many distinguished leaders of the movement. Together with his followers, he set up a Zionist club, in which he gave lessons in Hebrew promoting Zionist ideas in Korets. Every Saturday, he also gave lectures on Zionist and literary topics.

**The time of change** ¶ The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of political action in Korets. Branches of the Zionist organisations “Tseeirei Zion” and “Poale Zion” were established in the town, and from 1905, also a branch of the Bund (Jewish socialist Marxist movement). In 1914, a volunteer social relief society helping Jewish craftsmen was founded. Jews were active in all branches of social and economic life, too. Korets Jews managed a pharmacy and four pharmacy warehouses, wholesale companies, the town’s only public library, all three bookshops, leather factories, all three timber wholesale outlets, three factories producing mead, both steam mills, two cloth factories, two beer wholesale outlets, one printing house, four photographic studios, and 84 other businesses (including all 22 workshops and 21 groceries). There were also three Jewish doctors and three Jewish dentists in Korets. ¶ The Jewish population decreased during World War I, but still, in 1921, the town’s 3,888 Jews made up 83 percent of the population. In the interwar period, this number increased and reached 4,695 by December 1937. ¶ Like many towns in Ukraine, particularly in Volhynia, Korets changed hands many times during World War I and the subsequent post-revolutionary Civil War. Occupational administrations sought to exploit local resources and embezzle themselves at the expense of

the local population, among which Jews performed a prominent role. At the end of World War I, when Korets came under the West Ukrainian People’s Republic, Korets economy had been paralyzed. The new authorities introduced a new monetary system based on the circulation of large denomination banknotes, meaning that there was no way to obtain change. The Jewish community stepped in and, as a solution, started to print their own low-value notes, printed on poor-quality paper since the war was still going on and better-quality paper was impossible to come by. Each note bore the signatures of three leaders of the Jewish community, a stamp, and a serial number. It was possible to exchange that “Jewish money” for “official” money, thus helping the new administration to solve financial issues. ¶ After the Bolsheviks suffered serious losses in the 1920s fighting the Poles, new borders were established and Korets was incorporated into the revived Polish Republic. The establishment of the new borders had a negative economic impact on the town. Impoverished refugees escaping the pogroms and the new Soviet regime inundated the town. The new 1924 elections under Polish rule brought several Jews to the municipal council, and even to the position of a deputy mayor, but Jews found themselves a segregated and marginalized minority in a new Polish state.

**Rabbi Joel Sorin (Shurin) (1871–1927)** was a distinguished preacher and Torah scholar. He was born in Lkhvytsia in Poltava Province, to a poor Jewish family. From his childhood, he showed exceptional talent and soon earned his nickname of “the *illui* [child prodigy] of Poltava.” Having learned about the talented young man, the local rabbi Moshe Ber Luria helped him enrol in Volozhyn yeshiva, a prestigious Talmudic academy. After getting married, Joel Sorin moved to live with his father-in-law, Rabbi Elkhanan Shiff, in the town of Cherniche in Minsk



Province. His goal in life was to spread the Torah knowledge and Talmudic education and to found yeshivas in places where educational opportunities were limited. In 1897, he founded a yeshiva "Or Torah" (Heb.: Light of the Torah) in Brzeźnica, attended by 70 students, and a few years later he transferred it to Zviahel (Yid.: For Novohrad-Volynskyi). In the fall of 1920, when Polish forces were to transfer Novohrad-Volynskyi to the Soviet authorities in accordance with the Polish-Soviet peace treaty, most of the yeshiva's students left town and settled in the nearby Korets, where the "Or Torah" yeshiva, directed by Rabbi Sorin, was re-established. In the school year 1929/1930, the yeshiva boasted 160 students. Rabbi Joel Sorin died in Warsaw at the age of 61. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Gęsia Street (now Okopowa Street) in Warsaw.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ On September 17, 1939, Soviet troops entered Korets. Jewish institutions were liquidated and political parties disbanded. The Jews tried to adapt to the new reality by learning new trades or by setting up Soviet-style cooperatives for craftsmen. ¶ Early in July 1941, German troops entered Korets. The murder of the Jews and the destruction of Jewish economies and residences immediately ensued. For five weeks there was mass "hunting" for Jewish men, who were brought by brutal force into a pigsty near the municipal pharmacy. After gathering about 300 men (the group also included boys aged 10–12), the Germans transported them on trucks in the direction of Novohrad-Volynskyi. Once they were outside the town, the people were forced to dig ditches, in which they were buried alive. Similar operations were later repeated, resulting in the death of almost 1,000 Jews, who were buried outside Korets, near Kamienna Hill and Shytnia manor farm. ¶ According to the September 17, 1941, order of the District Commissar Dr. Beyer,

all Jews were obligated to sew yellow patches onto their clothes: on the back between the shoulder blades and on the left side of the chest. Every day they were taken to clean snow from the road to the village of Samostrily (Samostrzały, located 16 km away) and sent to the forest for various kinds of the humiliating and usually unnecessary manual work. The exhausted Jews were succumbing to various diseases and died in large numbers due to the lack of clothing and medicines. ¶ Early in 1942, a ghetto was established in Korets, where all the Jews from the town and the nearby villages were rounded up and confined. The Germans regularly carried out operations in which people unfit to work were murdered: children, elderly people, and the sick. ¶ On May 21, 1942, the Nazis liquidated the ghetto. They herded all the Jews and selected about 250 people who could still do some physical work. Others were executed after the Nazis searched them and confiscated any valuables. On September 23, 1942, the Germans finalized the final liquidation of the ghetto.

**Moshe Gildenman (1898–1957)** was a partisan commander, journalist, and prose writer. He worked as a construction engineer, owned a concrete factory,



Memorial at the site of the mass execution of Korets Jews, 2014, collection of the Regional Historical Museum in Korets

and was the head of the Jewish Painters' Association; he also founded a choir, an orchestra, and a theatre at the Jewish school. ¶ In May 1942, the day before the feast of Shavuot, the occupying forces and the local police killed 2,200 Jews from Korets, including Moshe's wife and his 13-year-old daughter. When the Jews gathered in the synagogue to say *kaddish* for the victims, Gildenman gave a sermon from the *bimah*, calling on the Jews to fight. ¶ In September 1942, during the liquidation of the ghetto, Gildenman, his son Simha, and 15 other young people managed to escape from the ghetto, cross the Sluch River, and hide in the forest. Moshe became the commander of a Jewish partisan unit (known as "uncle Misha's group"), which fought its way through to the forests of the Zhytomyr region. The unit carried out more than 150 combat operations and liberated 300 inmates from German camps. In 1943, it joined the Red Army. Moshe Gildenman and his son both survived and celebrated the end of the war in Berlin. ¶ From 1946, Gildenman lived in Poland, then Paris, and from 1952, in Israel. He wrote short stories and memoirs about his life as a partisan. In Israel, he worked for the Yad Vashem Institute, engaged in social activity, and wrote his memoirs, published in *The Memorial Book of Zviahel* (Novohrad-Volynskyi) in 1962.

**Memory** ¶ Only about 500 Jews from Korets survived the war. Most had escaped or were evacuated into the Soviet Union. In 1948, under a directive from the Korets municipal council, the former synagogue building was converted into a movie-theater. In 1959, the police broke up a *minyan* that was praying during Pesach in a private house. By 1970, only a few Jewish families lived in the town. ¶ Things changed radically after Ukraine became independent in 1991. Today, about 7,000 people live in Korets, which is located on the main route between Kyiv and Rivne. The numerous local Christian churches and the *ohalim* (burial sites) of famous

rabbis at the Jewish cemetery attract crowds of pilgrims. Part of the exhibition at the Regional Museum in Korets, founded in 2000, is dedicated to the history of the town Jewish community, and in the 1990s, memorial plaques were established at the sites of executions of Korets' Jews during World War II.

**The cemetery** ¶ Korets still has its old Jewish cemetery with 17<sup>th</sup>-century tombstones. Three outstanding Hasidic leaders are buried here: Rabbi Asher Tzvi (a disciple of Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, and the author of *Ma'ayan Ha-Hokhma* (Heb.: A Spring of Wisdom); Rabbi Yitzhak ha-Kohen (also the

disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch, and the author of *Brit Kehunat Olam*, Heb.: The Covenant of Eternal Priesthood); and Rabbi Mordechai (the head of the rabbinic court).

Worth seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Korotka St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Convent of the Holy Trinity** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 56 Kyivska St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of St. George the Victor** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 13a Kyivska St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas** (1834), 4 B. Khmelnytskoho St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Monastery of the Resurrection** (Voskresienskyi), 50 Staromonastyrskaya St. 🏛️ **Roman Catholic Church of St. Anthony of Padua** (1706), 6 Zaulok Kostelnyi. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of the Resurrection**, 4 Y. Konovaltsa St. 🏛️ **Ruins of Princes Korecki Castle**, 16a B. Khmelnytskoho St. 🏛️ **Czartoryski Little Palace**, “Hostynnyi Dim,” 75 Kyivska St. 🏛️ **Regional Historical Museum**, 45 Kyivska St., +380365122737. 🏛️ **Catholic cemetery**, Y. Konovaltsa St. 🏛️ **Municipal park**, 45 Kyivska St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of Sts. Cosmas and Damian** (1897), near Korets. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of St. Paraskeva Pyatnitsa**, near Korets. 🏛️ **St. Elias Orthodox Church**, near Korets. 🏛️ **The site of a mass execution of Jews from the village of Shytnia** (near Korets, at the entrance to the town from the direction of Novohrad-Volynskyi).

Surrounding area

**Velyki Mezhyrichi** (21 km): a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.), St. Anthony’s Church (1702); Piarist College (18<sup>th</sup> c.); Counts Stecki palace and park complex (late 18<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1848). 🏛️ **Hannopil** (37 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.) with the *ohel* of Dov Ber of Mezeritch; the Jabłonowski Palace (18<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏛️ **Novohrad-Volynskyi** (39 km): a synagogue (the only reminder of the building’s past is the memorial plaque in honour of Mordechai Zeev Feierberg); the remains of a fortress (16<sup>th</sup> c.); Lesya Ukrainka Museum; Kosach Family Museum.



# Berezne

Pol. Bereźne, Ukr. Березне, Yid.

בערעזנע

*Berezne had its respectable Torah scholars. It had its maskilim and dissenters, its tax collectors and social activists, and even its own lunatics. And so Jewish life would flow, like a quiet river. The shuls were filled with Jews perusing the Talmud and yellowed books by candlelight.*

G. Bigl, *Mayn shtetele Berezne*  
(Yid.: *My Town Berezne*), Tel Aviv 1954

## A town on the Horyn River ¶

The first written mention of this settlement dates from 1445, when Grand Duke Švitrigaila (Svidrigailo) presented it to Dymitr Sanguszko. The County of Berezne is mentioned in documents from 1552 – at that time, the town was an administrative centre. It used to be called Jędrzejów, Bereženka, or Bereźne (Berezhne), but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the name Bereźne (Ukr. Berezne) finally became formalized.

**The Jews of Berezne ¶** The first Jewish community in Berezne dates back to the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There were 48 Jewish houses in the town in 1764, 29 in 1784, and 37 in 1787. Still,

it was a small community: its first *kahal*, umbrella communal organization, was established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It maintained synagogues, educational institutions, a cemetery, the Linat Ha-tsedek Society (Heb.: A Nightly Shelter for the Righteous), and a *hekdes*h for the alms-seekers. ¶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 70 percent of the town residents were Jews. According to data from 1927, Jews made up 93 percent of the 2,900 town dwellers in Berezne (this does not include those residents who owned plots of land). There were also Ukrainians (1.3 percent), Poles (4.3 percent), and Czechs (0.6 percent). In 1928, 17 out of 21 members of Berezne town council were Jewish.

” **Hevra Kadisha [Burial Society] ¶** *One of the most noble achievements of Berezne’s Jews was its Hevra Kadisha [Burial Society, Heb.lit.: Holy Brotherhood]. Almost all the notable members of the Jewish community were members of the Burial Society. [...] Once a year they organized a meeting of all the members of the society, during which the chairman – in my time that was Yitzhok Pechenik (Josele) – reported about the annual activities. Next, the members recited “El mole rachamim” [God full of mercy] prayer and elected the new board, with the rabbi as the head. After this official part, there was a ceremonial supper with a glass of vodka, fish, meat, and compote. [...] The society took care of the deceased with proper respect [kvod ha-met]. Care was taken to ensure that the deceased was clad in a beautiful shroud. Showing respect to the deceased*





Berezne, circa 1930, a 3D model prepared by Polygon Studio as part of the Shtetl Routes project, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

was a great merit and mitzvah [the fulfilment of a commandment] in any shtetl. ¶ G. Bigl, *Mayn shtetele Berezne* (Yid.: My Town Berezne), Tel Aviv 1954

**The dynasty** ¶ At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a local landowner invited Rabbi Yechiel Michele Pechenik (d. 1849) from Pinsk to Berezne. As the legend has it, the local town-owner was jealous of Stolin, a town in Belorussia (today Belarus) that had developed thanks to a tsadik who settled there and his followers, the Hasidim who continually came to town as pilgrims. The

town-owner gave Pechenik a plot of land and helped him to build a house, hoping that the famous rabbi would attract Jews to Berezne and that this would bolster the town's economic development. This happened indeed, and the Pechenik family established here a new Hasidic dynasty, stayed in Berezne from that time onward, and contributed to further economic development.

“Michele was the son of a maggid [preacher] from Stepan, a disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch, a grandson of Rabbi David Haloi, and at the same time the son-in-law of a great Hasidic teacher, Rabbi Yechiel Michl, the Maggid from Zlotchov [Zolochiv]. When he had been in Stolin, Rabbi Michele would sit day and night studying the Torah at the town beth midrash, together with his son Yitzyk, the son-in-law of Rabbi Aaron of Chernobyl. The Rabbi's wife worked at a store and was the family breadwinner, so that her husband and son could devote themselves to the study. Rabbi Yitzyk had a reputation as an illui [child-prodigy]; he was highly respected and loved by the residents of Chernobyl. ¶ G. Bigl, *Mayn shtetele Berezne* (Yid.: My Town Berezne), Tel Aviv 1954

**The Jewish quarter** ¶ In Berezne, the typical shtetl architecture has survived in relatively good condition: the town center still has wooden and brick houses with wooden porches. The front part of the houses served as stores or workshops,

whose clients could enter from the street. When the children of a Jewish family married, new rooms were built as an addendum to the house. A characteristic feature of the houses in Berezne was their high hip roofs, almost as high as



[A] Berezne, town centre — Andriivska Street (formerly Piłsudskiego St.), 1928, photo archives of the Museum of Local Heritage in Berezne

[B] Berezne, Rzemieślnicza Street, circa 1930, Anna Skulska's archives, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

the buildings themselves. ¶ In the 1930s, most Jews lived in several streets of the town adjacent to the marketplace, including 11 Listopada, Zamkowa, Kopernika,

3 Maja, Korzeniewskiego, Pocztowa, Joselewicza, and Kilińskiego, forming a Jewish district associated after the war with the spatial memory of the shtetl. ¶ The 1922 map of the town indicated Szkolna Street, a small lane forming part of what is now Bukhovycha Street, running perpendicularly to the central Komisar-ska Street (now Andriyivska St.) as far as Lipki Street (now Kyivska St.). On this street, there were two synagogues and the rabbi's house in the 1920s–1930s. ¶ On 11 Listopada Street (currently Nazaruka St.), in 1934, there was a pharmacy and many craft shops. In 3 Maja Street (now Andriyivska St.), there were buildings housing a club and a reading room. There was also a mill here, owned by one of the Jewish families (a building that today houses a music school). ¶ In the market square, there were small stores run by the Berezne Jews. In total, about 90 stores functioned in the town. Regular market fairs also played an important role in the town's commercial life.

**“Fires in Berezne** ¶ *The whole town of Berezne was built of wood. Peasant huts had thatched roofs. A spark was enough for an entire house to be burnt down. What was usually behind the fires was peasants' mutual animosity. The Jewish houses had shingled roofs, so if there was a fire they would be ablaze in no time. In times of crisis, it sometimes happened that craftsmen set fire to the houses so that they could earn money by rebuilding them. This was the case when a fire broke out in 1908, and both craftsmen and timber merchants made money of it. Half of the town burnt down at that time. Twelve years later another fire broke out.* ¶ G. Bigl, *Mayn shtetele Berezne* (Yid.: My Town Berezne), Tel Aviv 1954.

**The synagogue** ¶ The Great Synagogue was built in 1910, on the basis of a square-shaped foundation with sides measuring  $9 \times 12$  m. It had separate small rooms in which carpenters, tailors, and shoemakers had their separate prayer quorums and prayed on

weekdays; the main sanctuary was used for services on Sabbath and holidays. ¶ After World War I, the building housed the Registry Office. Located at 3 Bukhovycha St., it has been completely rebuilt and is hardly recognizable.

## Educational and cultural institutions ¶

In 1917, a Tarbut school was founded in Berezne, with instruction in Hebrew. The best-known teacher at the school was Yakov Ayzman, who used Hebrew to inspire his students with Zionist ideas. There was also a secular I.L. Peretz School in town, with Yiddish as the language of instruction. ¶ There was also the Peretz Library on Pocztowa Street and a Zionist library on Komisarska Street. In both of them, one could obtain the current newspapers such as *Der Moment* (Yid.: The [Present] Moment) and *Voliner Shtime* (Yid.: The Voice of Volhynia). The town also boasted a drama group that gave performances in the “Ogniwo” club, located on Komisarska St. (the building has survived to this day).

“There was a Tarbut library, which had mostly books in Hebrew but also quite a few in Yiddish. [...] The librarians were: Gendler, the late Shmuel Toibman, and others, who worked there entirely on a non-profit basis. ¶ The Peretz Library was located in Efrim Litvak’s house in Pocztowa Street. It was a fairly large room, with capacious bookcases with books in Yiddish lined along its walls. The books included works by classic Jewish authors as well as masterpieces of world literature. Young people, especially, derived knowledge from this abundant resource, for this was one of the best equipped libraries in the area. The librarians [Yankiel] Pinchusovich and Feiga Liberzon helped the readers competently and knew each of them very well. Thanks to their knowledge, they educated the entire generation of readers. The Tarbut library could not compete with the rich resources of the Peretz Library. ¶ Two drama groups functioned in Berezne – one at the Peretz Library, and the other was a Zionist one. Both groups staged plays in Yiddish, either together or for each other. Some members of these groups showed considerable acting talents, so people of the theatre from outside Berezne would come and join the local drama groups to organise performances, which attracted crowds of the town’s residents. ¶ G. Bigl, *Mayn shtetele Berezne* (Yid.: My Town Berezne), Tel Aviv 1954.

**Cemeteries** ¶ Jewish cemeteries were located in the northwestern part of the town, on the banks of the river. The old cemetery was situated on the eastern side



[A] Berezne, Berka Joselewicza Street (formerly Szkolna St.), circa 1930, Anna Skulska’s archives, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Carpenter’s workshop of N. Klejman, before 1939, photo archives of the Museum of Local Heritage in Berezne

of the river, and the new one, established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was on the western side, next to the Catholic cemetery. According to witnesses, all *matzevot* at



[A] Synagogue in Berezne, circa 1930, Anna Skulska's archives, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Memorial at the site of the mass execution of 25 August 1942, in which 3,680 Jews were killed, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

this cemetery were wooden, and only the central *ohel* over the graves of the famous rabbis was made of brick. In the 1960s, the Soviet authorities established a new park with an artificial lake, thus, the cemeteries were flooded and destroyed.

## World War II and the Holocaust

In September 1939, the Red Army entered Berezne and established the Soviet rule which lasted for a year and a half. In June 1941, the Germans arrived and established a ghetto in the centre of the town (the area is now occupied by a marketplace and a secondary school with a boarding house). More than 3,000 Jews were confined there. On August 25, 1942, all the inhabitants of the ghetto were led out of the town, forced to dig a grave, and murdered by

the *Einsatzgruppe* soldiers. The local residents remember Doctor Lerner, who used to live with his family in a house on the hospital premises on Piłsudskiego Street (now Kyivska St.). To avoid the ghetto confinement in August 1942, he administered a lethal dose of morphine to his wife and little son, and then to himself. All three of them were buried in the garden next to the hospital. Few people managed to escape from the ghetto. The fugitives remained in hiding in the woods until the arrival of the Red Army. Seeking to save their lives, they forged identity documents or baptism certificates, and some joined Soviet partisan units.

## The grave in the Dendropark

Towards the end of the 1960s, at the place of the Berezne mass executions, they found exhumed human remains – the result of the sinister activities of grave robbers looking for valuables. Later, a dendropark (Arboretum, a kind of the botany garden with a variety of trees) was established in this area, which to some extent, protected the site and put an end to the practice of digging up graves. In the late 1980s, a memorial plaque commemorating the victims was established.

“The story of the survival of Rejzele Scheinbein and her family. I had a cousin Benjamin, who was a year older than me, and he was there [in the ghetto]. He was very clever; he would go up and down the streets and see what was going on. He came back to the house and he says to his mother and my mother, and to his sister: “We’re getting out of here!” He could see that something was underway – one could see the preparations. So, how do you get out of the ghetto as a Jew? My mother and my aunt put kerchiefs on their heads to look like peasant women [...]. And they ran into the forest [...], because they knew that in the forest they were safer. [...] We went earlier into the forest too – my uncle, my father, and me. And we thought that the others were all killed [...]. My uncle picked ten trees to represent a minyan [Jewish payer quorum]; he put on the tallit [...] and he said kaddish for his family, as we thought they were probably dead by now. [...] And



then we heard that my mother and my aunt survived and were hiding somewhere. So we had a reunion in the forest – a very happy reunion. [...] And all this because my cousin, who was only a year older than me, and who had enough sense and enough presence of mind to say: “We’re getting out!”

📌 Source: <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn42261>



**Berezne National Dendropark:** in the park there is the site of the execution and burial of Berezne’s Jews murdered in 1942, with a memorial plaque in two languages (Ukrainian and Hebrew). 📌 **Berezne National Local History Museum:** a building dating back to 1901–1905; in the 1940s and 1950s, the basement of the building was the NKVD torture dungeon, 8 Kyivska St., tel. +380365354869. 📌 **St. Nicholas Orthodox Church** (1845).

Worth seeing

**Mokvyn** (3 km): a former church (19<sup>th</sup> c.). 📌 **Zirne** (6 km): the Maliński palace and park complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.). 📌 **Sosnove** (28 km): a Jewish cemetery, the site of the execution of approx. 3,000 Jews (1942). 📌 **Hubkiv** (30 km): ruins of a medieval castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). 📌 **Marynin** (34 km): an open-air museum; the wooden Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (1801). 📌 **Sarny** (58 km): a memorial at the site of execution of 15,000 Jews (1942). 📌 **Rokitno** (75 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.). 📌 **“Nadsluchansky” Regional Landscape Park** (28 km).

Surrounding area



# Kovel

Pol. Kowel, Ukr. Ковель, Yid. קאָוועל

*Kovel was the largest railway hub in the East and the direct Warsaw–Kovel rail connection was faster than it is today. The trip took less than five hours.*

Michał Friedman

**The smiths of Kovel** ¶ Kovel is located in the very centre of Volhynia Province, on both banks of the Turija River, a tributary of the Pripyat flowing from south to north. The first written mention of Kovel is dated to 1310. Perhaps the town owes its name to the word *kowal*, meaning “blacksmith” – a common trade in this area in the 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. A local legend tells about a blacksmith who made a sword for Prince Danylo of the medieval Galicia-Volhynia Palatinate. ¶ On December 24, 1518, in Brest, King Sigismund I granted Prince Bazyli Sanguszko a privilege establishing the town around the medieval Kovel and granted the town with the Magdeburg law.

**The Jews of Kovel** ¶ Jewish settlement in Kovel began after the town was granted municipal rights in 1518. In 1536, Queen Bona confirmed the town privileges and obligated the Jews of Kovel to take part in repairing its walls and bridges. Additionally, she issued a special privilege allowing Jews to settle locally but only on streets designated for them and not among Orthodox Christians. In 1547, Bona imposed a tax

on Jewish houses (except the rabbi’s house) and made the Jews equal to the Christian population in terms of their privileges and duties before the crown.

¶ As elsewhere, devastating pogroms and bloody persecutions of the Jews took place during the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Cossack revolution. In 1650, however, local Jews managed to re-establish the *kahal* of Kovel and revive their economic activities due to the earlier privileges confirmed by King John II Casimir. ¶ The number of Jews in Kovel began to increase in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1765, there were 827 Jews registered in the town as poll tax payers (the tax had to be paid by every person aged one or above). Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Jews in Kovel exceeded the number of Ukrainians. In 1893, the total population of Kovel was 15,116, which included 5,810 Jews, 5,498 Orthodox Christians, 3,088 Roman Catholics, 612 Protestants, and 108 adherents of other religions. In 1921, the town had 32,500 registered residents, including 15,000 Jews.

“Kovel was a Jewish town, the outskirts of which, where the Ukrainians and Poles lived, formed a separate town. The river Turia flowed through the town. Kovel was divided into three different parts. On one side of the river there was the Old Town, called Zand [in Yiddish], or Sand, as it had been built on sandy ground. In the new part, on the other bank of the Turia, there was Kovel where the Poles lived, most of whom were employees of a railroad company [...]. That was a separate town. There were fewer Ukrainians than Poles there. The Ukrainian farms began just behind the main street. Those three worlds lived side by side. [...] ¶ That small county town was something more than a shtetl. It was a bastion of the Jewish Hebrew-speaking intelligentsia. The older people still spoke Russian, but the new generation had already adopted the Polish language. ¶ Anka Grupińska, *Stories of Polish Jews* (1). Michał Friedman talks about his family, the festival of Pesach, Trisk Hasidim, and Kovel, his hometown: <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/1075-z-opowiesci-polskich-zydow-1.html>



Kovel, Warszawska Street, 1938, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

**Synagogues and Rabbis** ¶ The best-known 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup>-century rabbis of Kovel and heads of the local *yeshivah* were Shimon and Yitzhak ben Nathan Shapiro and Yehuda (Yudl, Idl), a descendant of Yehuda Löw ben Bezalel (the Maharal of Prague). After Rabbi Mordechai of Nesukhozhe (currently the village of Toikut in Kovel Region) (1752–1800) settled in Kovel, Hasidim established in town their headquarters. ¶ A synagogue was built in 1660, but in 1744, it was destroyed by fire. In 1857, another fire destroyed nearly all the town, including the synagogue. However, the town was later successfully

rebuilt. ¶ By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were several synagogues in Kovel, one of them was the Great Synagogue, built in 1886–1907. This unique, though reconstructed, monument has retained its grandeur despite wars, revolutions, confiscations of Jewish religious property and its reconstruction. The former Great Synagogue in Kovel is located at the intersection of Nezalezhnosti St. and Volodymyrska St. and is one of the buildings of the local sewing factory, WKF Kovel. Before 2009, a Star of David was visible in front of the entrance to the synagogue, but later it was painted over.

“In Zand there was a large, beautiful synagogue, in a somewhat fortified style. The best Jewish cantors used to perform there on holidays: Koussevitzky, Rozenblatt, etc. There was also a choir, which several of my classmates were in. And there was one more synagogue in the town, a private synagogue, built by a local rich man, Eppelbaum. He lived in what was called a sinful union with a Ukrainian woman; I remember that the town always held it against him. The story was that he had built the synagogue in order to

A leaflet in Polish and Yiddish announcing a football game between military sports club "Kowel" and "Makabi" sports club, 1920s, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



wipe out that sin in the next life. We used to go there to pray on the important holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot [...]. That synagogue has remained in my memory as a tragic place. ¶ Anka Grupińska, *Stories of Polish Jews* (1). Michał Friedman talks about his family, the festival of Pesach, Trisk Hasidim, and Kovel, his hometown: <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/1075-z-opowiesci-polskich-zydow-1.html>

## “Theatrical life in Kovel”

In Kovel, just like elsewhere in tsarist Russia, theatrical performances in Yiddish were forbidden, and during World

War I the war ministry forbade even to write letters in Yiddish. Yiddish troupes from Warsaw, Vilnius, and other places performed in Kovel on rare occasions trying to outwit the authorities and circumvent the law. They announced their performances as plays in German, whereas in fact the plays were performed in Yiddish, presented on the posters as a dialect called “deichmerish – ivri teich” (Hebrew-German). Elements of German were stronger in such performances than in colloquial Yiddish. The performances were usually attended by the rich citizens and by Jewish-Russian intelligentsia. Ordinary spectators showed little interest in such artistic events. ¶ Paradoxically, the Yiddish theatre experienced a revival with the outbreak of World War I, during the German occupation, when the Jews were allowed to have cultural events and performances in their native language, that is, Yiddish. One of the stimuli that contributed to the emergence of the Kovel Jewish drama group was the difficult economic situation. Jewish refugees from nearby towns, fleeing from the war and the revolution, settled in their hundreds in Kovel. The town’s Jewish residents helped their brethren by organising a network of social services, for example, a mobile kitchen for a street canteen. Donations were scarce, therefore there emerged an idea of setting up a drama group that would combine business with pleasure: the group would demonstrate high artistic quality while the proceedings from the performances would be directed to the needy. ¶ The group had two enthusiastic leaders: the talented director Moshe Pugach and the generous patron and head of the group Moshe Kagan. Both were the loyal devotees of Melpomene, and both had gained theatrical experience in the country in which Jewish theatrical life was then thriving – namely, in the USA. Their main goal was to foster a love of the theatre among the masses and to develop a sense of the quality performance. The repertoire they chose included a selection of the best European dramas as well as several plays by Jacob Gordin and Avrom Goldfaden. Pugach and Kagan put on stage three–four plays a year and quickly gathered a cast of talented young actors. ¶ The activity of the Kovel Yiddish theatre group completely changed the perception of the Jewish theatre. It put an end to the contemptuous, but widely held, attitude towards “Tiyater” (Russian



derogatory for “theatre”) as a Purimshpiel and towards actors as “comedians” who would lead people astray (into debauchery). In the first years of its existence, the Yiddish theatre group also created a bond between the audience in Kovel and theatrical troupes from other cities, such as Vilnius and Warsaw, which came to Kovel and performed on the premises provided by the local drama group. These troupes received help, technical support, and good advice on how to win hearts and minds of the local audience. ¶ The Yiddish theatre group brought together people from all social strata. Even the representatives of the Jewish-Russian intelligentsia, educated in Russian literature and scornful of the Yiddish language, changed their attitude towards Yiddish literature and learnt to appreciate it. The “folkists” were active in running the group, too. And Zionist and nationalist circles were also attracted to the theatre group, particularly those attached to Hebrew culture. Even the community of religious Jewish town dwellers, who always opposed any theatrical activity as a sign of assimilation, made allowances for the sake of cultural development and started to attend performances. ¶ Thus Kovel Yiddish theatre group became a non-partisan, neutral cultural endeavour which brought together and accommodated many different political groupings, theatre and folk art enthusiasts, and those who aimed to raise the general cultural level of the otherwise provincial Kovel Jews. Each of the above groups contributed something to the group’s activity. This made the group popular and ensured the support of the entire Jewish community of Kovel. ¶ Based on Sefer Kovel (Hebr.: *The Memorial Book of Kovel*), ed. Yaron Karol Becker, Tel Aviv 1959.



Former Jewish school in Kovel, 2014. Photo by Serhiy Hladyschuk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre” Centre ([www.theatrn.pl](http://www.theatrn.pl))

**Michał Waszyński** (Mosze Waks, 1904–1965) born in Kovel in the family of Hasidic blacksmith. As a teenager he interrupted his education in yeshiva, went off to Warsaw and became one of the most colourful figures in the history of Polish cinematography. In the 1930s, he directed 37 films, including smash hit films such as *Antek Policmajster* (Police Chief Antek, 1935) and *Znachor* (Quack, 1937). The most important of his achievements is *Dybbuk* (1937), which is the film adaptation of S. An-Ski’s play written in Yiddish language. During World War II, Waszyński found himself in Siberia, from where, together with the Polish Armed Forces of General Anders, he went through the combat route through Iraq, Iran and Palestine to Italy, which he immortalized in the film *Wielka droga* (Long Road, 1946). After World War II, he lived in Rome. Although he did not direct films anymore, he became an important figure in the Italian film industry. He collaborated with Orson Welles, Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren. The story of his life can be seen in the documentary *The Prince and the Dybbuk* (2017) awarded at the Venice Film Festival.



## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, there were 17,000 Jews among the 36,000 inhabitants of Kovel. After the town was annexed by the USSR in September 1939, the new authorities considered its well-to-do dwellers as the exploiters and blood-suckers and partially confiscated and partially nationalised their property and real estate. For instance, the Grinblats lost the three

stores it owned, and Soviet officers were billeted in two rooms of their house. The same fate befell the Tenenboims, who owned a furniture factory. ¶ On June 28, 1941, Kovel was captured by German troops. Only a small part of the town's Jewish population managed to flee. About 1,000 Jews were killed during the first days of the occupation. On May 21, 1942, two ghettos were established. In one of them the Germans confined 8,000 people fit for work (and their family members), and in the other, located in the suburbs, they placed 6,000 people unfit for work. On July 2–4, 1942, the Jews from the second ghetto were transported out of the city and killed. On August 19, 1942, the Nazis began the liquidation of the first ghetto. ¶ After the Soviets again took over the town, only about 40 surviving Jews returned to Kovel.

**Cemeteries** ¶ Two Jewish cemeteries survived in Kovel until after World War II, but neither has survived to this day. One of them (in Volodymyrska St.) was liquidated by the Soviet authorities in 1970, when dozens of Jewish cemeteries in Ukrainian SSR were demolished, and the Taras Shevchenko Community Centre was built on the site. The gravestones were transported to a military base. The other Jewish cemetery (located in Varshavska Street), was also liquidated by the Soviets.

**Memorial site** ¶ A memorial dedicated to the Jews shot in 1942 is located in the forest, on the right side of the road to Kamin-Kashyrskyi, a few kilometres from the edge of town near the village of Bakhiv. In 1944, a memorial post

stood here with the number of 18,000 inscribed in it: the number of murdered Jews from the Kovel ghetto. In the 1960s, a high mound was constructed here. A granite monument was established in 1990, and further memorials were

unveiled in 2002 and 2015. Unlike the previous memorials dedicated to the “peaceful Soviet citizens” murdered by the “Nazi invaders,” the post-communist memorials explicitly mentioned the Holocaust and the Jewish victimhood.

- [A] Marketplace in Kovel, before 1918, collection of the National Library, Poland (www.polona.pl)
- [B] Workers during the construction of a street in Kovel, after 1928, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland
- [C] Former synagogue building in Kovel, 2014. Photo by Serhiy Hladyshuk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)



Former synagogue, mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. (now textile factory), 125 Nezalezhnosti St. 🕍 **Orthodox Parish Church of the Resurrection** (1877), intersection of Nezalezhnosti St. and Volodymyrska St. 🕍 **Fridrikson’s Pharmacy** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 89 Nezalezhnosti St. 🕍 **St. Anne’s Roman Catholic Church** (1771), 1a Verbytskoho St. 🕍 **Kovel Local History Museum**, 11 Oleny Pchilky St., tel. +380335232435.

Worth seeing

**Kolodiazhne** (9 km): The Lesya Ukrainka Museum. 🕍 **Turiisk** (20 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.) with a surviving ceremonial hall and about a dozen matzevot. 🕍 **Hishyn** (15 km): the wooden Orthodox Church of St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (1567), the oldest wooden Orthodox church in Volhynia. 🕍 **Lutsk** (73 km): the main city of the region; a *kahal* house (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) currently used by the local Jewish community; a former fortified synagogue (1626–1629), Lubart Castle (13<sup>th</sup> c.) with the Museum of Typography; the Orthodox Church of the Protection of the Mother of God (13<sup>th</sup> c.); Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul (1639); Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral (1755); numerous monuments, museums, and galleries. 🕍 **Zofiówka/Trochenbrod** (110 km): a memorial at the site where a town inhabited exclusively by Jews once existed, wiped off the face of the earth during World War II.

Surrounding area

# Volodymyr-Volynskyi

Pol. Włodzimierz Wołyński,

Ukr. Володимир-Волинський, Yid. לודמיר

*My grandfather's Jewish world, in which he believed that "God wanted a beautiful land where people could live and be happy," was almost completely destroyed by the Holocaust.*

Ann Kazimirski, *Witness to Horror*, 1993

**A thousand years** ¶ The millennium-old history of Volodymyr has been described by many Ukrainian, Polish, and Jewish authors. The oldest mention of the town can be found in the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Primary Chronicle* (also known as the *Tale of Bygone Years*), which reports that in 988, Prince Volodymyr (Vladimir) Sviatoslavich of Kyiv presented this Volhynian city to his son Vsevolod to rule. There is a questionable Arabic source mentioning the Jews of Volodymyr in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but this could not be substantiated. On the other hand, there are Old Rus sources testifying to the Jewish communal presence in town in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, supported by external evidence of rabbinic responsa. The description of the death and funeral of Prince Vladimir Vasilkovich in 1288 in the *Hypatian Codex* reads that "a whole host of people of Volodymyr wept over his death: men, women, and children; Germans, Surozhians, and Novogorodians; and the Jews wept, as they had wept when they were taken into Babylonian captivity after Jerusalem was conquered." ¶ With time, the town turned into an important trade centre. Merchants from Europe came

through Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland to Galician and Volhynian towns and cities, and further on to Kyiv. Due to their broad commercial networks, the Jews of the medieval Slavic state known as 'Kyivan Rus' (also Duchy of Kiev) were mentioned in 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-century medieval rabbinic sources.

**The Jews of Volodymyr** ¶ In the early modern times, the town's Jewish population established a *kahal* – an autonomous self-governing communal umbrella organization. The authority of the *kahal* of Volodymyr extended over the smaller sub-*kahals* nearby: in Lokachi, Kovel, Kysylyn, and some other places. The Jewish quarter was located in the northeastern part of the town, but Jews also lived in many other parts of the town centre. The streets in the Jewish quarter bustled with trade; small craftsmen offered their services here, too. The Volodymyr Jews prospered at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, engaged in active trade with Lwów (now Lviv), Lutsk, and Kyiv. Commodities were freighted from Ustyluh down the Bug River to Gdańsk, and then further to Western Europe and back. Volodymyr



was a town where one could see Jewish merchants from Turkey, Italy, Kyiv, and Cracow. ¶ At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and after Poland and Lithuania united their lands under one Commonwealth, Volhynia was incorporated into Poland, and the Jewish community prospered. Jews were active in crafts, trade, tavern-keeping, and tax collecting, as well as various lease-holding occupations (leasing fish-ponds, weights and measures, customs, etc.). As elsewhere, the Jews suffered from the bloody massacres during the 1648–1649 Cossack revolution led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Many Jews were killed during the mass violence of 1653, when the town was seized by the Commonwealth Lithuanian troops, and also during the Polish-Russian War (1654–1667), when the town was completely ravaged; there remained only two Jewish families in town. However, the community regenerated fairly quickly.

**Modern times** ¶ According to the 1897 census, Volodymyr had 9,883 inhabitants, including 5,869 Jews (60 percent). A Talmud Torah school was opened towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a yeshiva and the Russian state school for Jews were established. On May 5, 1900, a great fire broke out and destroyed 250 houses; six prayer houses burnt down, and 68 Torah scrolls were destroyed. The main synagogue also suffered damage. This catastrophe prompted the Jewish community to set up a mutual assistance fund a year later. ¶ Various political parties emerged at this time, too. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a branch of an organisation



called Hibbat Zion (Heb.: The Love of Zion) was established in town, and from 1906, there emerged also a branch of the Bund – the socialist Marxist Jewish proletarian party. The newspaper *Ha-Melits* (Heb.: The Advocate) reported that in 1903, the town had a hospital and a pharmacy. Most Jews worked in the cattle (especially horse) and grain trade. According to the 1910–1911 census, 7,060 out of the 15,622 inhabitants of Volodymyr-Volynskyi were Jewish. At that time, in addition to the synagogue, there were nine prayer houses. In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish vocational school was established. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, representatives of religious and political organisations set

[A] Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 1915, photo archive of the Historical Museum in Volodymyr-Volynskyi

[B] A market day at the town square in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 1930s, photo archive of the Historical Museum in Volodymyr-Volynskyi



up the “Kultura” (“Culture”) committee, which helped the Jewish poor and also ran a hospital, a theatre, and the Sholem Aleichem Jewish literature library. ¶

After the outbreak of World War I, the Jews suffered each time the town changed hands, and the introduction of the new order nearly always started with acts of mass violence against the Jewish population. After the withdrawal of Austrian troops, for example, Polish forces entered Volodymyr and carried out pogroms. After almost two years of fighting and alternate occupation by the Polish Army and the Red Army, Volodymyr-Volynskyi (then Włodzimierz Wołyński) eventually remained under Polish rule from September 13, 1920.

¶ In the 1920s and 1930s, the town had about 20 functioning synagogues. The Rabbi of Volodymyr-Volynskyi at that time was Yitzhok Grosman, who was succeeded in the 1930s by Yaakov Dovid Morgenstern, who died during the Nazi occupation. Technical and agricultural schools belonging to the Zionist-oriented Tarbut network opened

in Volodymyr: the former was established in 1925 and the latter in 1935. There were also schools with Hebrew as the language of instruction, “Beth Yaakov” and “Javneh;” a private Jewish secondary school (gymnasium) with instruction in Polish; and a yeshiva for boys. The youth scouting organisations included “Ha-tsofim,” “Ha-shomer ha-leumi,” “Ha-noar ha-tsioni,” and “Beitar,” the socialist Zionist organisation “Ha-shomer ha-tzair,” and a branch of the Zionist-Marxist party “Poale Zion.” A community kitchen provided food for the needy. On the eve of World War II, several Jewish schools functioned in Volodymyr: a Talmud Torah school, a “Beth Yaakov” school for girls from the Orthodox families, and a primary school, *cheder*. The yeshiva was attended by 138 *talmidim*. The “ORT” craft school trained tailors. There were also a library, a hospital, a national bank, a Jewish orphanage, an old people’s home, and two cinemas.

**The synagogue** ¶ The largest of the known Volodymyr synagogues was located in what is now Roksolany Street. But with the emergence of Hasidism, small prayer houses called *shtiebel*s also appeared. The main synagogue is believed to have been built in 1801. The members of its congregation were mainly wealthy people. The building survived World War II but was destroyed at the beginning of the 1950s. Its walls were so strong that tank carriers had to be used to pull them down.

**Rabbis** ¶ The first important rabbi in Volodymyr was Yitzhak ben Betsalel, known as the Gaon of Ludmir (*Ludmir*

being the town's Yiddish name). He enjoyed great authority and was the leader of the community in 1542–1576. Volodymyr was the birthplace of his grandson, **David ben Shmuel Halevi Segal** (1586–1667), also known as “TaZ”, an acronym of the title of his major work *Turei Zahav* (Heb.: Golden Rose). David stands out as one of the most highly recognised rabbis of his time. ¶ The leader of the Hasidic community in Volodymyr-Volynskyi **Shlomo Gottlieb Halevi Karliner** (1738–1792) was one of the most influential rabbinic scholars in the history of Hasidic Judaism. His mentor was Aaron Perlow of Karlin, who studied together with Shlomo under the guidance of the Great Maggid – Dov Ber of Mezherich. Aaron Perlow set up a centre of Hasidism in Karlin, giving rise to a movement that was later named Karlin-Stolin Hasidism. It is due to his influence that the *mitnagdim*, the opponents of the Hasidim – and later the Russian tsarist authorities – referred to the rapidly spreading Hasidic movement as the Karliner Jews. Shlomo Karliner was Aaron Perlow's best student and led the movement after Perlow's death. He enjoyed immense authority; his influence extended to the distant communities of Lithuania, Belorussia, and Volhynia. Reb Shlomo moved to Volodymyr in 1786 and established there a branch of Ludmir Hasidim. During his lifetime, he



Talmud Torah religious school on Kopernika Street in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 2014. Photo by Boris Bertash, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

became famous for many good deeds. He helped people regardless of their creed or ethnicity. He wholeheartedly embraced the teachings of Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, that one should be ready for death when starting to pray, since prayer, by its very nature, requires the one who prays to abandon himself or herself entirely. Rabbi Shlomo was shot by a Russian soldier when he was praying in the synagogue on July 10, 1792; he was buried at the Jewish cemetery, where Gagarin Park is now located. Exploratory work revealed the foundation of the *ohel* at the site of his burial, and in 1999, the *ohel* was rebuilt. ¶ The Hasidic dynasty of Ludmir in Volodymyr-Volynskyi was continued by Moshe Gottlieb (d. 1821), his son Shlomo, and his grandson Nahum, who were the leaders of the town community. The last tsadik of Volodymyr was Nahum's son, Gedalia.

**THE MAIDEN OF LUDMIR** ¶ Volodymyr-Volynskyi was the birthplace and home town of one of the most colourful figures in Hasidism, a charismatic female leader of the Hasidic community – **Hannah Rachel Verbermacher** (1806–1892), considered a *tsadekes* (a female righteous person, a *tsaddik*). She became famous for her healing skills and was known among the local people as the Maiden of Ludmir. Numerous scholars (such as Shmuel Horodecki or

Students and teachers  
in front of the Talmud  
Torah school, 1930s,  
reproduction from  
*Pinkas Ludmir; sefer  
zikaron li-kehilat Ludmir*  
(Hebr. A Chronicle of  
Volodymyr-Volynskyi;  
The Memorial Book of  
Volodymyr-Volynskyi),  
Tel Aviv 1962



Nathaniel Deutsch, the author of *Maiden of Ludmir. A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World*, (Berkeley 2003) described the life of that remarkable woman – the first (and only) female tsaddik in the history of Hasidic Judaism. Hannah Rachel was born into a wealthy Hasidic family and received an excellent education. Her followers, called the “Hasidim of the Maiden of Ludmir,” gathered around her. She ran a prayer house in Sokalska Street – a *beth midrash* in which her followers would gather, most of them poor members of the local community. She would remain hidden from the sight of her audience when delivering her teachings. The Maiden of Ludmir was known in all the nearby towns and attracted crowds of people, including learned scholars and rabbis. Men found this outrageous and she was forced to marry, but the marriage did not last long. She later emigrated to Palestine, where she gathered a Hasidic community around her. She died in Jerusalem on 17 July 1892 and was buried on the Mount of Olives – the burial place of some of the world’s most highly respected Jews.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the city was seized by the Soviet troops in 1939, the teaching of Judaism and of Hebrew was banned. Jewish schools were initially allowed to provide instruction in Yiddish, but they were soon closed altogether. The activity of all Zionist parties was halted and in 1940 their leaders were arrested and deported to Siberia. ¶ The Wehrmacht occupied Volodymyr-Volynskyi on June 23, 1941. Due to the large influx of refugees from Poland immediately after the outbreak of the war, it is impossible to stipulate how big the town’s Jewish population

was at that time. The town became the administrative centre of the District Commissariat of Vladimir-Volynskyi (Wladimir-Wolynsk). In the fall of 1941, a German military police post was set up in the town, with police troops numbering several dozen people. The troops were reinforced by local Ukrainian volunteers, and after 1943, also by Poles. ¶ Soon after the occupation began, the Nazis opened their hunting season: they caught Jews in the streets or in their homes under the pretext of work. Once assembled, these people were immediately executed in the prison yard, where





they were also buried. Mass murders were committed in other places, too. In April 1942, the Germans established a ghetto, to which they also transferred the Jews from nearby towns and villages. Divided into two parts, the ghetto was inhabited by about 18,000 people. In September 1942, about 15,000 people were murdered in the village of Piatydni. Another mass execution, in which several thousand more Jews lost their lives, took place in town on November 13, 1942. The 1,500 Jews remaining in Volodymyr were murdered on December 13, 1942.

**Memorials ¶** On September 17, 1989, a candle-shaped obelisk, 12 meters high, was erected in the village of Piatydni, on the road from Ustyluh to Volodymyr, near the site of mass executions of Jews. The mass graves are located 300 meters north of the obelisk. ¶ In 2010, a mass grave was discovered during excavations carried out in an old fortified settlement near the town. In that one grave the bones of 747 people were found and exhumed; 47 percent of these people were women and 27 percent were children. In 2014, a memorial to Holocaust victims was placed in Shevchenko Street, at the site of the ghetto.

**The Jewish cemetery ¶** Draho-manova St., where Gagarin Park is now located, is the site of the Jewish cemetery – one of the oldest in Central and Eastern Europe. Many eminent people were buried here. During World War II, matzevot were used for paving streets. Even just a few years ago it was still possible to see a pavement of matzevot along Wasylivska Street, with inscriptions already worn away. The destruction of the Jewish cemetery was completed in Soviet times. Some of the matzevot are known to have been used to make other tombstones, predominantly for Christian grave sites. School No. 2 with a sports field, a sports school, and a residential building, was built directly on the cemetery grounds.

**Traces of Jewish presence ¶** A few houses directly connected to the history of the Jewish community still survive in the town. For instance, at 81 Lutska Street there is a building that once served as a prayer house; on Pidzamche Street there is the building that housed the Jewish youth club “Akiva;” and on the wall of the house at 22 Danyla Halytskoho Street visitors can see the Ets Hayim symbol (Heb.: The Tree of Life). Another building surviving

[A] A stonemason from Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 1916, collection of Bildarchiv Vienna

[B] The ohel of Rabbi Shlomo Gottlieb on Kozatska Street in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 2015. Photo by Volodymyr Muzychenko

Memorial plaque at the site of the ghetto in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, 2015 Photo by Volodymyr Muzychenko

Worth seeing



to this day (at 2 Zelena Street) is the former elementary religious school for boys from poor families (Talmud Torah), which functioned until the beginning of World War II. One can see the Star of David in the form of a low relief in its brick wall. The buildings of the former Tarbut school at 24 Haidamatska Street and the former Beth Yaakov school for girls at 9 Drahomanova Street have also survived.

Municipal Local History Museum, 6 Ivana Franka St. tel. +380334221911; the exhibition includes Jewish objects of everyday use found in the town. **Former Talmud**

**Torah school** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 2 Zelena St. **Bulwarks of an old fortified settlement** (10<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> c.), Pidzamche St. **Orthodox Church of St. Basil** (14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> c.), Vasylivska St. **Orthodox Cathedral of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God** (12<sup>th</sup> c.), Soborna St. **Dominican Monastery** (1789), Danyla Halytskoho St. **Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas** (1780), Mykolayivska St. **Walls of the Capuchin Monastery**, Kovelska St., Drahomanova St. **Church of St. Joachim and St. Anne** (1790), Kovelska St. **Greek Catholic Church** (formerly a Lutheran *kirche*, 1890), Kovelska St. **Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Lord** (1762), Kovelska St.

Surrounding area

**Zymne** (7 km): the Zymne Svyatohorskyi (Holy Mountain) Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God (late 10<sup>th</sup>-c.; 15<sup>th</sup>-c. buildings).



# Luboml

Ukr. Любомль, Yid. ליבעמל

*The town held a noteworthy position among the Jewish communities of Volhynia.*

*Luboml. The Memorial Book of a Vanished Shtetl,*  
Tel Aviv 1974, Hoboken, NJ 1997

**Postage stamps ¶** In the 1920s, Luboml, located in the northwestern part of Volhynia, was the town with the highest percentage of Jewish population in the Second Polish Republic, and it was in Luboml, in 1918, that the world's first postage stamps using the Hebrew alphabet (and showing a synagogue) were issued.

**The Jews of Luboml ¶** The first mention of Luboml dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, though there had been earlier settlements here. The town began to thrive after the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Mongol invasions. The Jewish community of Luboml is believed to have been one of the oldest in Poland and Ukraine, and

for many centuries, it played a special role in the development of the town economy and culture. In his fundamental work *Yidn in amolikh Poyln in likht fun tsifern* (Yid.: *The Jews in Old Poland in Numbers*, 1958), Raphael Mahler states that as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there already were a small number of Jewish communities in Poland, Polesie, Belorussia (Lithuania), and the Land of Chełm (Kholm), and he brings the Luboml of 1370–1382 as an example. Under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Luboml was the seat of the Chełm Land starosty, and, according to the Jewish administrative division, the capital of the Belz–Chełm District.

**THE JEWISH NAME OF THE TOWN ¶** The Jewish residents of this Volhynian settlement called their little home town by the diminutive Yiddish *Libivne*, which, given the Slavic context of this nickname, implies “the beloved one.” In the rabbinic Hebrew texts, one will also come across the names *Libavne* or *Libavna*. Because of the similar-sounding names, Jews (even educated rabbis) often confused Luboml with Lublin.

**The synagogue ¶** In 1510 (or, according to other sources – in 1521), the Jewish community built a synagogue in Luboml that was one of the

most beautiful stone synagogues in Poland-Lithuania. It was located near the bulwark within the city limits, in the southwestern corner of the market



Postage stamps issued in Luboml in 1918. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

square. 🕍 Luboml’s Great Synagogue was built in the Renaissance style and had certain elements of a fortification. The outer walls, for example, were surrounded by a defensive gallery with observation holes. In the eastern regions of the Kingdom of Poland, such fortress-type synagogues were fairly common, although the synagogues of this type very rarely played a role in the town defence system, and were not built with a defence purpose. 🕍 In Luboml, the synagogue main building was cube-shaped, and the adjoining precinct for women was lower. Each of the interconnected parts of the building had an attic adorning the edges of the roof. Unique decorative elements on its outer face gave the building a majestic air. The entrance through the main vestibule

(Heb.: *pulish*) was adorned with two inscriptions – quotations from the Bible; at the bottom: “How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28:17), and at the top: “In the house of God we walked with the crowd” (Ps 55:15). Another inscription – “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, and your dwelling places, O Israel!” (Num 24:5) – was carved on the arches of the three large windows in the southern wall of the Great Synagogue. The inscriptions reminded the worshippers that the synagogue was a *mikdash me’at* – a little Temple, a *sui generis* replica of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, destroyed by Romans in 70 c.E. The architect of this magnificent building remains unknown.

“The Great Synagogue was the glory of the city and the source of its pride – though not the center of its religious life. The Jews of the city pointed from afar to the fortifications surrounding it, to the slope of its thick walls – but they did not rush to go inside. [...] During the week no one prayed there, and only on the Sabbath were its doors opened wide, though only a few minyanim [groups of ten men for prayer] came. This was also the only place in the city where the service was conducted according to the Ashkenazic rite, whereas in the rest of the places of worship they prayed in the Sephardic style, according to Hasidic custom. [...] During holidays and festivals, and on those days when the “congregation should be called together,” people instinctively came to the Great Synagogue. [...] During two months of the year, Elul and Tishri, the synagogue manifested majesty and greatness and drew many thousands. It was a custom that on the New Year all the old Torah mantles were hung on the walls. Metal wire was strung beneath the windows and all the mantles were hung there on rings – mantles of many ages, sizes, and colors, shining with silver and gold, gleaming with scarlet and azure. [...] Nowhere else was there a shofar as curved and as large as the one in the Great Synagogue; nowhere else was there an



ancient Pinkas [ledger] with the names of thousands of those who had passed away; and nowhere else was there a chest full of hundreds of defective Torah scrolls. [...] And when, on Simchat Torah evening, the synagogue filled with men, women and children – including non-Jews who came to join the Jews' celebration – it was a sight never to be forgotten. It's unlikely that this scene could have been repeated – hundreds of Jews carrying hundreds of Torahs, dancing through the *hakafot* (traditional circumambulations around the *bimah*). ¶  
Yakov Hetman, *The Great Synagogue*, in: *Luboml. The Memorial Book of a Vanished Shtetl*, Hoboken, NJ 1997, edited.

## THE GHOSTS OF THE GREAT SY- AGOGUE ¶

According to the *Sefer Luboml* (Hebr.: *The Memorial Book of Luboml*), during long autumn nights, when the wind would whistle and dogs would howl, the children of Luboml would listen with bated breath to terrifying ghost stories told by their grandparents. The book reports one legend according to which the souls of the dead come to the Great Synagogue at night to pray. This type of legend was very popular among the Jews of Eastern Europe, related to synagogues in general. In his novel *From the Fair*, Sholem Aleichem wrote: "And then the hollow sounds of voices came out of the Cold Shul. Strange, whining sounds, accompanied by sobs – the dead praying. They prayed every Saturday night in the Cold Shul. They prayed with a minyan. Who didn't know that?" By the Cold Shul the Yiddish writer meant the Great Synagogue, used for Shabbat, Passover, and High Holidays only. It was very expensive to warm it up – therefore daily prayers were conducted elsewhere in the prayer houses or in a "Warm Shul" – a smaller precinct adjacent to the Great Synagogue and separated from it, which was easier to warm.

We learn from the reminiscences penned by Yisroel Garfi (Grimatlicht) that, near the Great Synagogue and the *beth midrash*, there were separate *kloyzn* for groups of Hasidim and for craftsmen. Hasidic *shtiebel*s bore the following names, based on the *rebbe*



[A] Arcaded houses in Luboml, 1925. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Houses in the market square, 1925. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

followed by the congregation: Twersky (Trisker), Ruzhynsky (Ruzhiner), Kotsky (Kotzker), Radzynsky (Radziner), and Stepansky (Stepaner). The synagogue of Trisk/Twersky Hasidim was located on the right side of the *beth midrash*.



[A] Hebrew inscription over the portal of the synagogue in Luboml, circa 1930, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Synagogue in Luboml, a view from the southwest, circa 1930, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

**Prominent figures** ¶ One of the most famous rabbis of Luboml was Rabbi Hersh, who served from 1556 until the 1570s. From that time, for nearly a century, the rabbis of Luboml were among the most famous in Poland. One of them was Abraham Polak, a teacher and the author of numerous rabbinic works. A well-known rabbi late in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was Moshe Mes, who put 613 commandments in a poetic form and penned an important work on Jewish rituals. His books printed in 1591 in Cracow were reprinted in Frankfurt and Main in 1720, in London in 1958, and in Brooklyn in 1964.

One of the students of Luboml's Jewish school was Seweryn Lubomelczyk, born in Luboml (1532–1612), who converted to Catholicism as an adult and became famous across Europe as an eminent theologian and orator. Unlike it happened with other converts, Seweryn made a vertiginous career

in the Catholic world. The pope and Polish kings entrusted him with the most important matters. Seweryn of Luboml authored numerous theological studies and had considerable standing in the Dominican Order. ¶ **Frank (Ephraim) Rosenblatt** (1884–1927) was a literary critic, columnist, and doctor of philosophy, who was born in Luboml. He received a traditional religious education. Initially, he supported Zionism but later became disillusioned in Jewish diasporic nationalism, chose Marxism, and joined the Bund movement. In 1903, he was arrested by the Russian police and left for the USA on his release. He graduated from Columbia University in New York in 1910. Rosenblatt eventually became an economic expert in state institutions and also Secretary General of the Arbeter Ring (Yid.: The Workmen's Circle), a left-wing, non-profit Jewish organisation protecting Yiddish culture, supporting working people's rights, and propagating the ideas of social equality. Rosenblatt was one of the leading Yiddish-language American literary critics of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature. He began his literary activity in 1903 – first he wrote in Russian and then switched over to Yiddish. He published poems in various periodicals, such as *Tsukunft* (Yid.: Future). In the same journal, he published socio-political and economic articles and wrote about various literary issues. He authored profound studies devoted to the



Synagogue in Luboml, circa 1930, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

work of Sholem Aleichem, Avrom Reyzen, I.I.-M. Weisenberg, M. Winczewski, M. Rosenfeld, and others, as well as to the work of the key Russian writers.

According to 1564 tax records, there were 8 merchants and 26 craftsmen in Luboml, organised into guilds; there were 3 functioning Orthodox churches, an Orthodox monastery, and a synagogue. ¶ In 1564, the Jewish community paid 150 florins of tax – 1 florin per person. The Jews worked in crafts, leased land, and traded with Lwów, Kyiv, Brest, Przemyśl, Lublin, and Warsaw. Commodities were transported down the Bug River to Gdańsk and other cities. These were mainly timber, potash, wax, honey, salt, saffron, jewellery, and other commodities. The 1667 protocols of the Council of Four Lands list annual tax rates per person. Larger towns are listed separately, particularly Luboml with 8,100 guilders tax levied on the local

Jewish community. ¶ After a census in 1847, the Jewish community of Luboml had 2,130 members. By 1870, Jews already constituted two-thirds of the town's inhabitants. In 1897, the population of Luboml was 4,600, including 3,300 Jews – among them (according to the 1898 data) 349 craftsmen and 52 workers; 370 students received education under the guidance of 17 teachers, and 60 students attended the Talmud Torah school. ¶ During World War I, the town was occupied by Austrians. While a large number of local inhabitants had fled to Russia, most of the Jews remained. The mayor of Luboml at that time was David Wejtsfrucht-London, brother of the local rabbi Aryeh-Leib London.

It was in 1918, when Luboml was still under Austro-Hungarian occupation, that the municipal council issued postage stamps with Yiddish inscriptions. Those were part of a series of stamps issued that presented notable views of Luboml – including the Great Synagogue – and bore inscriptions in four languages: Polish,



Memorial to Holocaust victims in Luboml, 2008. Photo by Taras Mykytyn, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**The interwar period** ¶ The interwar period saw the heyday of Jewish cultural and social institutions in Luboml. In 1921, the town had a population of 3,328, including 3,141 Jews, and in 1931, Jews made up 91.3 percent of its residents. Many cultural and youth organisations and sports clubs were established; the Zionist movement, forbidden across the border in the USSR, experienced a second revival in Luboml under independent Poland. At the same time, however, many young people left their homes and set off abroad: for the USA, Palestine, Canada, and Argentina.

¶ Numerous Jewish businesses were family businesses, e.g. the Milstein brothers' shoe repair shop or the Rejzman and Kopelzon Vodka and Liqueur factory. ¶ Some Jewish craftsmen were members of the underground Communist Party of Western Ukraine and were persecuted by the authorities. Even though the authorities barred Ukrainians and Jews from high state offices, Jews and Ukrainians did elect their representatives to the municipal council and the county council.

Ukrainian, German, and Yiddish. The Yiddish inscription read "Shtetpost Luboml" (The City of Luboml). This was the first time that letters of the Hebrew alphabet (in which Yiddish is written down) appeared on stamps, and the first time a postage stamp bore the image of a synagogue.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the Germans entered the town and then retreated across the Bug after a few days, according to the secret addendum to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Some of the residents – those with communist sympathies – built a welcoming gate for the Red Army. On seeing this, a retreating unit of the Polish Army carried out a series of executions in retaliation. From October 1939, until June 1941, the town remained under Soviet rule. All social activity outside the official Soviet institutional framework was banned; the old Jewish cemetery was destroyed. On June 22, 1941, German troops entered Luboml again. In December 1942, the Nazis set up a ghetto encompassing the area of just a few streets. In the first days of October 1942, the Germans shot nearly all Jewish inhabitants (almost 5,000 people) in the forest near the brickyard close to the village of Borki. ¶ The synagogue functioned until the beginning of the Nazi occupation and survived in good condition. In the first months of the Nazi occupation, the new authorities forced the Jews to carry all valuable scrolls and books out of the synagogue, and then the Nazis burnt them. Afterwards, the Germans broke a hole through the wall of the synagogue, large enough for a truck to get in and out. The truck was loaded with



the clothes of people who had been shot and the goods looted from Jewish houses stockpiled in the synagogue. However,

the building of the synagogue did survive the occupation and was not pulled down until 1947, under Soviet rule.

“There were no barbed-wire fences as in other ghettos, but sentries were posted to see that no one got out. The Jews were careful not to leave the ghetto. Those who went out of the ghetto to work were accompanied by guards and were brought back into the ghetto after work, tired and depressed.” From the account by Rochl Leichter, in: *Luboml. The Memorial Book of a Vanished Shtetl*, Tel Aviv 1997, Hoboken, NJ 1997.

**The Jewish diaspora** In 1973, in Israel, on the occasion of the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luboml’s Jewish community, Jews from Israel, Canada, and the USA who had been born in Luboml published a large volume of memories about the town and its Jewish community. Thanks to the efforts of Aaron Ziegelman, a New Yorker born in Luboml, a large amount of material and documents was collected

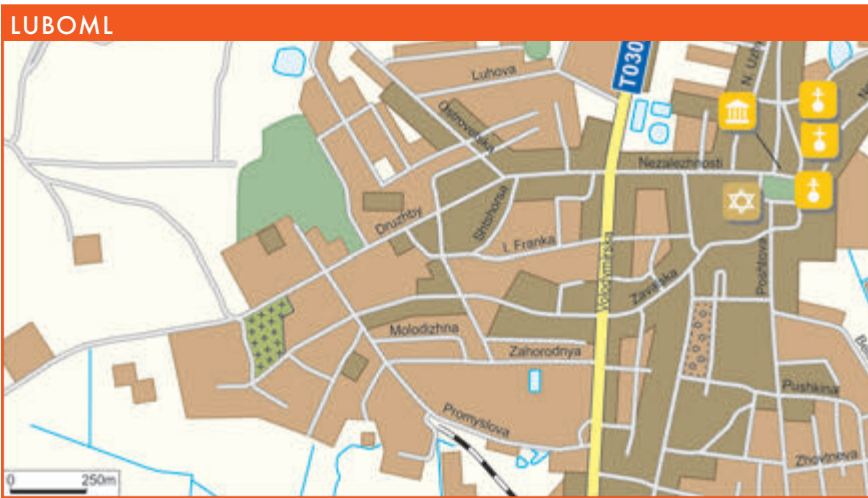
about the town’s Jewish community. A major exhibition of these materials and documents, entitled *Remembering Luboml*, was shown all over the USA, as well as in Jerusalem, London, and Warsaw. In 2003, a documentary was produced about the history of the town’s Jewish community, *Luboml. My Heart Remembers* (for more information, see: [www.luboml.org](http://www.luboml.org)).

**Jewish cemetery** with a memorial to Holocaust victims. **Holy Trinity Church** (1412), 16 Kostelna St. **Church of St. George** (13<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Yaroslava Mudroho St. **Landscape park and the outbuildings of the former Branicki Palace** (18<sup>th</sup> c.). **Local Heritage Museum**, 33 Nezalezhnosti St., tel. +380337724256.

Worth seeing

**Shatsk** (32 km). **The Shatsk Lakes** (34 km). **Ratne** (80 km). **Kamin-Kashyrskyi** (106 km).

Surrounding area



# Shtetl Routes Through Belarus



# Pinsk

Pol. Pińsk, Bel. Пінск, Yid. פּינסק

*It seems Jews are everywhere in Pinsk. Not only the whole town but also the trade of the whole country is thriving thanks to their activity. Craftsmen, merchants, hackney drivers – all of them are Jews, and nothing can happen here without a Jew.*

Nikolay Leskov, *Iz odnovo dorozhnovo dnevnika* (Rus.: *From a Travel Journal*), 1862

**The capital of Polesie** ¶ Pinsk, the capital of Pripjat Polesie, lies on a plateau, at the confluence of three rivers – the Pina, the Yaselda, and the Pripjat. The date of its foundation is believed to have been November 5, 1097: this is the date mentioned in the old Ruthenian chronicle, *The Tale of Bygone Years*. Next to the entrance to the castle there was a marketplace – the Old Market Square, where the town's main streets intersected. In the early modern period, the town's dominant architectural features became the commercial market square, with its Jesuit monastery complex (17<sup>th</sup> century), its town hall (1628), and its synagogue complex, as well as the houses of rich burghers, the clergy, and the nobility lined up. The Franciscan and Jesuit monastery complex is an excellent example of Vilnius Baroque style. After 1521, Pinsk came under the dominion of Sigismund the Old, who transferred the town to his wife Bona Sforza (1494–1557), Duchess of Milan, Queen of Poland, and Grand Duchess of Lithuania, for as long as she lived. ¶ In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Pinsk became a centre of trade in timber, salt, wax, smoked fish, honey, furs, metal wares, fabrics, and craft

articles. On January 12, 1581, King Stefan Báthory signed a privilege granting the town with the Magdeburg rights. The economic and commercial significance of Pinsk increased after the construction of two overland routes – Pinsk-Slonim and Pinsk-Volhynia – as well as canals connecting the Pripjat with the Neman and the Western Bug Rivers. The Mukhavets, Berezhina, and Oginski Canals served as routes for transporting goods from Pinsk to the Baltic and Black Sea ports.

**The Jews of Pinsk** ¶ On August 9, 1506, Prince Fyodor Ivanovich Yaroslavich of Pinsk signed an act granting the Jews plots of land on which to build a synagogue and set up a cemetery. This act is the first written mention of the Jewish community in Pinsk. About 15 families established a Jewish community here. ¶ Jews dealt in leasing various properties (mills, fish ponds, taverns, timber freight), but also in usury, tax and tariff collection, lumber, bread, and potash trade, as well as crafts. The *kahal* of Pinsk was one of the wealthiest in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but in 1574, due to numerous fires, epidemics, and other



Synagogue in Pinsk, 1929. Photo by A. Bochnig, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

disasters, the Jews of Pinsk requested the Grand Duke of Lithuania to exempt them from all taxes and fees so that they had the resources to rebuild their houses and restore their estates. They were granted the exemption for six years. ¶ At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Pinsk *kahal* was one of three main communities of the Lithuanian Vaad. Pinsk and its Jewish community suffered greatly during the Cossack invasions in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Supported by the town Orthodox residents, these wars devastated the Jewish community of Pinsk. The local Jewish community also suffered during the Russo-Polish War of 1654–1667, when the town turned into one of the battlefields. In 1654, Pinsk was burnt down by the Russian troops, and in 1660, the town was captured and

plundered again by the Russian forces and the Cossacks; many Jews were killed. The economic situation of the town became so precarious that the town was twice exempted from all taxes and duties for four years, in 1655 and in 1660. Further tragedies befell Pinsk and its Polish Catholic, Jewish and Eastern Orthodox communities at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in 1706, when the town was captured by the forces of King Charles XII of Sweden. ¶ The *kahal* of Pinsk turned to the Dominicans, the wealthiest money-lending institution in the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth requesting financial assistance: in 1693, it borrowed 1,000 zlotys from them, and in 1737, 16,630 zlotys. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Lithuanian Tribunal admonished the elders of the Jewish community of Pinsk and threatened them with expulsion from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or even to capital punishment if they failed to pay back the debts to the state treasury and private creditors. ¶ The following trade guilds were registered in the town inventory for 1764: blacksmiths, tanners, shoemakers, butchers, tailors, fishermen, furriers and some other craft guilds. ¶ With the spread of public philanthropy, a Jewish hospital was established in Pinsk (9 Zawalna St.) in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

” *The Jewish public hospital in Karlin was built and maintained thanks to Pinsk’s merchants. There are seven rooms, where sick people are placed according to the nature of their illness. [...] Doctor Fishkin, a Jew by birth and by religion, was an extraordinarily open-minded and honest man and enjoyed the respect of the entire town. He was known not only as a good doctor but also as a selfless one. His lifetime goal was to serve the people, forgetting about his personal interests. He was the one who originated the idea of building a hospital for the poor in Pinsk, sought to put his noble plan into practice, worked as a doctor in that hospital without receiving any remuneration, and died the way good*





people usually die: no one screamed about or announced his death anywhere. ¶ Nikolay Leskov, *Iz odnovo dorozhnogo dnevnika* (Rus.: *From a Travel Journal*), 1862.



**The Karolin suburb** ¶ In 1690, the starost of Pinsk, Jan Karol Dolski, set up an urban settlement in the village of Zagórze and named it Karlin (or Karolin). Pinsk and Karlin – this is what the Jews called it; Karlin, the contemporary name of Pinsk suburb, was separated from Pinsk just by Rowecka Street. The Jewish community of Karlin, burdened with less taxes, grew rather quickly: synagogues appeared, a *cheder*, a *mikveh*, and a cemetery were established; stores, granaries, and warehouses were built. The riverbed of the Pripyat was straightened by means of a canal, which gave Karlin an advantage over Pinsk: cargo and commodities transported by the Dnieper River were brought first to the quay of Karlin. Karlin began to outdo Pinsk in terms of turnover and residents' income, and the competition between the satellite Jewish community of Karlin

and the old and respectful Pinsk Jews took legal, economic, religious and socio-political forms. Particularly since karlin quickly became headquarters of the rising Hasidic movement, while Pinsk tried to protect traditional Lithuanian (Litvak or mintagdic, anti-hasidic) rites and customs. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Pinsk became the scene of a major controversy between Hasidic followers and the Mitnagdim, opponents of Hasidism. As a result of this controversy, the anti-Hasidic leaders of the Pinsk *kahal* forced Rabbi Levi Yitzhak (the future chief rabbi and head of rabbinic court of Berdichev and the famous Hasidic leader), who served a term as the chief rabbi of Pinsk to leave the town while Karlin turned into one of the headquarters of the rising Karlin-Stolin trend in the Hasidic movement.

[A] Men and boys in front of the charred remains of the synagogue, holding five Torah scrolls saved from the fire, Pinsk, photo published on 8 June 1923 in *Jewish Daily Forward*, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

[B] The interior of the synagogue in Pinsk, 1921, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

” If only I could love the greatest of *tsadikim* as God loves the worst of sinners. ¶ Aaron Karliner



[A] Old Jewish cemetery in Pinsk, 1916, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Hanna Gelman

[B] Male school of crafts in Pinsk, 1921, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv

The founder of the Karlin dynasty was **Aaron Karliner** (real name: Perlow; 1736–1772), son of Yaakov, a *gabay* (synagogue warden) from Janov, whose family, according to a legend, directly descended from King David. In his youth, under the influence of his uncle, Aaron, set off for Mezhyrych, where he became one of the favourite disciples of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Great Maggid of Mezhyrych who entrusted Aaron with the mission of spreading Hasidic Judaism in Lithuania (which at that time also included Belarus/Belorussia). The next tsadik of the dynasty was **Shlomo (Gottlieb) of Karlin** (1738–1792), a disciple of Maggid of Mezhyrych and Aaron Karliner. Persecutions of Hasidim by their fierce opponents, Mitnagdim, forced Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin to move to the Volhynian centre of Hasidic Judaism in

Ludmir (Volodymyr-Volynskyi), where the opposition to Hasidic Judaism was comparatively milder. Rabbi Shlomo was killed by a Cossack bullet during the Polish-Russian War of 1792, while praying in the Ludmir synagogue. Posthumously he entered many Hasidic legends. Hasidim believed that Shlomo “understood the language of trees, animals, and birds,” and they used to say: “Who can be compared to the holy Shlomo: after all, he is head and shoulders higher than the world.” ¶ The next leaders of the dynasty were the descendants of the founder of the dynasty, Rabbi Aaron: **Asher ben Aaron** (1765–1826) and his son **Aaron II** (1802–1872). Asher ben Aaron settled in the town of Stolin, near Karlin, in 1792; after this, Karliner Hasidim began to be called Stolin Hasidim and eventually, Karlin-Stolin Hasidim, as they are known to this day. Emphasising the religious value of physical work, Asher ben Aaron demanded that the Hasidim be diligent in all areas of work and condemned Jews who exploited non-Jewish workers. Denounced by the mitnagdim, who called all Hasidim *karlintsy* (using the name of karlin for all of them), Asher ben Aaron was arrested by the newly established Russian authorities as a “sect leader” in 1792, yet returned to Karlin after his release from prison. Under the leadership of his son Aaron II, Karlin Hasidism extended their influence in Polesie and Volhynia, establishing multiple *maamadot* – groups of volunteer financial supporters of the Karlin-Stolin Hasidic masters. In a treatise entitled *Beth Aaron* (Heb.: The House of Aaron), Aaron II stressed that everyday life, as well as prayer, is the service to God, and



Street trading in front of market halls in Pinsk, 1935, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

the attainment of spiritual excellence precipitates the coming of the Messiah. Aaron II, as well as some other Hasidic masters, for example, Israel of Ruzhin, provided spiritual and financial aid to the communities of Karliner Hasidim who settled in the the land of Israel. In 1867, he moved to Stolin. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the count of Hasidic masters in Karlin produced most famous tunes and songs for Shabbat and festival liturgy of that Hasidic trend which are used to-date among the followers of the movement and far beyond it.

**Synagogues ¶** In 1506, a synagogue was built next to the central market square in Pinsk, and in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century another one was established – a stone Great Synagogue, belonging to the *schneider-shul* ('Tailors' guild synagogue). The Great Synagogue was built in the times when the Renaissance style with its pseudo-military elements came to vogue in East Europe, therefore, it has ornaments that made some historians classify it as a defense

synagogue (although it never performed any defense function). It was burnt and desecrated many times, but was always rebuilt. In 1863, there were 27 synagogues and prayer houses in Pinsk, in 1910, there were 35, and in 1940, 43. ¶ Severely devastated during World War II, the Great Synagogue did not survive the post-war socialist reconstruction of the town, and in 1956, the Soviet authorities levelled it. In its stead, the town community centre was built. Other synagogues and prayer houses of Pinsk were destroyed as well. The last synagogue functioning in Pinsk in the Soviet times was the synagogue of Stolin Hasidim, also known as Kitaevskaya (Chinese; the name is connected with the clothes worn by Hasidim, made of satin called *kitaika* – Chinese textile – in Russian). It stood where there is now a busy intersection of Bielova and W. Korzha Streets.

**Jewish cemeteries ¶** The first Jewish cemetery in Pinsk was established at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, between Kotlarska and Zawalna Streets





Wooden houses in Pinsk, 1929. Photo by A. Bochnig, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

(Mashkovskogo St.). One of the people buried here was Tzvi Hirsch of Pinsk, the son of the Baal Shem Tov, the legendary founder of Hasidism. The Hasidic cemetery was located in Pushkina Street; it was the burial place of Aaron the Great of Karlin, his son Asher, Rabbi Dovid Friedman of Karlin, and also of Ezer Weizman (father of the first President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann). Both cemeteries were destroyed in Soviet times. At the site of the Hasidic cemetery, a monument was established to commemorate the Holocaust victims murdered in Pinsk in 1941–1943. There is a section at the municipal cemetery on Spokoynaya Street in which the Jews of Pinsk were buried after the war.

**Industrialisation in Late Imperial Russia ¶** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pinsk turned into one of the main Belorussian centres of metal and timber processing and the production of phosphor matches. In the 1860s, about 750–950 Jewish craftsmen lived in the town. The 1897 *Inventory of Factories and Plants of the Russian Empire* contained a list

of 18 enterprises from Pinsk and its vicinity; the directors of twelve of them were Jews. The largest ones included L. Gershman's match factory, tar factory, and repair shop (that boasted more than 300 employees), the factory producing spike heels for Lurie footwear factory (180 employees), and E. Eliasberg's stearin production plant (79 employees). The production of Tobal plywood invented by Alexander Lurie was also launched in Pinsk. Lurie was a monopolist of plywood production in the entire Russian Empire. In 1914, 49 of Pinsk's 54 industrial enterprises belonged to Jews. ¶ During World War I, the town was occupied by German troops. Under the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the County of Pinsk was to be incorporated into Ukraine, but the town changed hands several times: the Red Army, the Polish forces, and the troops under the command of General Bułak-Bałachowicz all took control. For the Jewish community, the most tragic event of that period was the 1919 shooting of 35 Jews: the Polish soldiers accused Jews of the Bolshevik conspiracy and executed them at the wall of the Jesuit college. This execution had a lasting negative impact on Polish-Jewish relations in the region. ¶ In the 1920s, Pinsk industry slowly but steadily revived after the wartime destruction. By 1936, despite the global economic crisis, 13 thriving industrial enterprises functioned in Pinsk; most of them were timber processing plants. Jews constituted the vast majority of artisans and craftsmen and a considerable proportion of physicians, lawyers, and teachers.





Market on the bank of the River Pina, after 1918, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

“ But I remember mostly the Pinsker blotte, as we called them at home, the swamps that seemed to me then like oceans of mud and that we were taught to avoid like the plague. In my memory those swamps are forever linked to my persistent terror of the Cossacks, to a winter night when I played with other children in a narrow lane near the forbidden blotte and then suddenly, as though out of nowhere, or maybe out of the swamps themselves, came the Cossacks on their horses, literally galloping over our crouching, shivering bodies. ¶ Golda Meir, *My Life*, 1975

**Education and charity** ¶ With the opening of the yeshivah (Talmudic academy) in 1632, Pinsk became an important centre of the rabbinic studies. In 1853, there was a Russian state school for the children of Jewish merchants as well as a Jewish elementary school for girls. In the 1860s, a Talmud Torah school was opened, and in 1863, a two-level Jewish state school opened its premises for those seeking secular and Russian-language education. Two private Jewish schools for boys were founded in 1878 (one of them with instruction in Hebrew), and in 1888, a Jewish vocational training school. In 1895, a certain I.L. Berger a member of the proto-Zionist (called at that time “Palestinophile”) organization Hovevei Zion, established a *cheder*

*metukan* – a Hebrew-based Jewish elementary school that taught Zionist values. Additionally, there was a branch of the Society for the Promotion of Education among the Jews of Russia (OPE) in Pinsk, a major assimilation organization sponsored by Baron Guenzburg with headquarters in St. Petersburg and public libraries throughout the Russian Empire. ¶ About a dozen schools functioned in Pinsk in the interwar years too: there was a school run by the Zionist-oriented Tarbut Society and a seven-year Midrash-Tarbut school – in 1936 it was divided into two schools with Hebrew as the main language of instruction; there was a private Jewish secondary school for girls with instruction in Polish; there were seven private Jewish primary



A riverside station on the Pina River, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

schools, two schools run by Poale Zion (Marxist-Zionist party), a vocational training school, and a commercial school. The five Jewish religious schools in Pinsk and karlin included three Talmud Torah institutions. In Bernardyńska Street in Pinsk (now Savetskaya St.) there was also a pompous yeshivah "Beit Yosef." In 1888, Shomer (pseudo.; real name: Nokhem Meyer Shaykevitch), the famous author of the exceptionally popular *shund* (kitsch) Yiddish novels, organised in Pinsk a Yiddish theatre. ¶ As in many Jewish communities in the Russian Empire, the Pinsk Jews established a number of social relief and philanthropic voluntary institutions. The major philanthropic *gemilut hasadim* (free-loan society) society was established in 1899. Records show that in 1903, 797 members of this society made voluntary contributions. Until the outbreak of World War I, about a dozen other institutions helped the poor, refugee and destitute Jews: in

1898, the Pinsk Women's Jewish Charity Association was established; in 1912, the Jewish Aid and Loan Association was founded; and in 1908 and 1913, two poorhouses were established: one by the Society for the Assistance of the Sick and Pregnant; another by the Society for the Assistance of the Poorest Jews. From 1914 on, there was also a Society for the Support of Jewish Teachers and Melameds active in the town.

### Political parties and organisations ¶

¶ In the 1860s, one of the first proto-Zionist (Palestinophile) groups of Hovevei Zion was set up in Pinsk, with Rabbi D. Fridman as its leader. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, branches of the Bund and Zionist organisations began to operate locally. Chaim Weizmann, a graduate of Pinsk's *Realschule* and the future first President of Israel, represented Pinsk at the Zionist congresses. ¶ Communist organisations were set up by D. Shlesberg and W. Shklarnik. Other organisations operating in Pinsk included a branch of the Marxist Zionist party Poale Zion and various Zionist-oriented youth organisations such as Freiheit, Betar, and Hechalutz. The Bund activists organized the workers' strikes, and with the help of the Jewish diaspora of New York and Chicago, they opened an orphanage, a number of cooperatives, and a workers' canteen, and evening courses for young professionals.

“Most of the young Jewish revolutionaries in Pinsk [...] were divided at that point into two main groups. There were the members of the Bund (Jewish Marxists), who believed that the solution to the plight of the Jews in Russia and elsewhere would be found when socialism prevailed. Once the economic and social structure of the Jews was changed, said the Bundists, anti-Semitism would totally disappear. In that better, brighter,

socialist world, the Jews could still, if they so desired, retain their cultural identity [...]. ♪ *The Poalei Zion (Labor Zionists) [...] saw it all differently. They believed that the so-called Jewish problem had other roots, and its solution therefore had to be more far-reaching and radical than merely the righting of economic wrongs or social inequalities. In addition to the shared social ideal, they clung to a national ideal based on the concept of Jewish peoplehood and the reestablishment of Jewish independence. At the time, although both these movements were secret and illegal, ironically enough the bitterest enemies of Zionism were the Bundists.* ♪ Golda Meir, *My Life*, 1975



Pinsk, former Rabbi Perlow's prayer house, 2008. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

In the 1920s and 1930s, 19 periodicals in Hebrew and Yiddish were published in Pinsk, including *Pinsker Woch* (Yid.: *Pinsk Week*) edited by M. Treibman, *Pinsker Wort* (Yid.: *The Word of Pinsk*), *Pinsker Shtime* (Yid.: *The Voice of Pinsk*), *Poleser Najes* (Yid.: *Polesie News*).

**A stroll through Pinsk** ♪ Present-day Lenin Street (formerly named Wielka Spaska, Wielka Franciszkańska, Wielka Kijowska, Tadeusza Kościuszki, and also Grosse Str.) leads to Lenin Square, in which there is a statue of Lenin. Ironically, it was this square that the main façade of one of the oldest stone synagogues of Belarus used to overlook.

“ The first house on the even numbered side belonged to Moshe Schmit, and it was written down in the history of Pinsk as the “Angielski” (“English”) hotel. It is an elegant three-storied house in modern style. The builders left an unpainted-over inscription in Polish, reading “A. L. Goldberg Commission sales.” Schmit’s house had an inner yard, in which there was Kagan’s Clothes and Haberdashery shop, the best in town. People used to say that one could step into it completely naked and leave it dressed and shod, donning a tailcoat, a bowler hat, lightweight shoes, and gloves, with a cane in one’s hand, all of these brand new and custom-made. What made the “Angielski” hotel exceptional was not just its furniture and the interior. It had also a telephone in every room, which made it very convenient for business people. And after their business matters were over they could drop in at the restaurants named Ritz and Paradis. The latter was made famous by its “taxi dancers” – ladies to dance with. ♪ Schmit’s house was also the traditional place where people met and started strolling along Pinsk’s first paved street. We are off for a “stroll along the Gas” – people in Pinsk used to say before the war, combining Polish and Jewish words [“gas” – Yid.: *street*]. ♪ T. Chwagina, E. Złobin, J. Liberman, *Pinsk – Poleskiye Jeruzalem* (Rus.: Pinsk – The Jerusalem of Polesie), Pinsk 2007.



The Jewish community building in Pinsk, 18 Belova St., 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the outbreak of World War II and the annexation of West Belarus into the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Pinsk became the centre of the Pinsk Region (*oblast*). Polish-Jewish refugees appeared in Pinsk as early as September 1939, coming mainly from Warsaw and Łódź. According to the October 1939 data, 1,771 refugees were registered in the town, most of them Jewish. In 1940–1941, 385 Jewish families (883 people) were deported from Pinsk to Siberia and Kazakhstan together with many other refugees from Poland, both Poles and Jews. ¶ On 4 July 1941, the German Wehrmacht occupied Pinsk. That day, 16 young Jewish men were shot in the forest. German authorities announced that the executed individuals were in fact the victims of Soviet terror. On July 30, 1941, a *Judenrat* (Jewish town council) was established. Its head David Alper, the former director of the Tarbut Society, resigned from this post after only a couple of days – as soon as he realized that the *Judenrat* had to bow to every whim of the Nazis. Together with several other *Judenrat* members, Alper was shot in early August 1941. The Nazis chose the site of the village of Posenichi

to execute people *en masse* – several thousand Jews were killed there. Another site of mass executions was situated near the village of Kozlyakovichi, where 1,200 Jews were shot. ¶ According to January 1942 data, 18,017 Jews were registered in Pinsk, including 11,911 women (66 percent) and 6,106 men (34 percent). ¶ On April 30, 1942, the ghetto was established. The following streets marked the borders of the ghetto: Zawalna, Albrechtowska, Logiszyńska, Teodorowska (currently: Zavalnaya, Kirova, 1 Maya, Gogola, and Partyzanskaya). According to May 1942 data, there were 18,644 people in the Pinsk ghetto. Several synagogues and prayer houses were in the ghetto area too, and the authoritative Rabbi Perlow provided services and attended to the traditional Jews. A few underground organisations were also set up. One group, led by Dr. Edward Prager, prepared to escape from the ghetto and form a partisan unit. Another group, led by Lolek Slutski, consisting of about 50 people and in touch with members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police was planning to set the town on fire the day before the liquidation of the ghetto. ¶ The liquidation began in the morning of October 29, 1942. The elderly patients of the hospital were shot on the spot or at the Karlin cemetery, which was within the ghetto borders. A group of 150 people managed to escape during the execution, but most of them were found and killed. After a search of the ghetto on November 10, 1942, more than 5,000 Jews were shot in the Jewish cemetery on Pushkina St. Only 150 craftsmen were left alive and placed in the so-called "little ghetto." But on December 23, 1942, all of its inmates were shot. In the spring of 1943, in the





Participants in Shtetl Routes tour guides training inside the functioning synagogue in Pinsk-Karlin, at 12 Irkutska-Pinskai Dyvizii St., 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Dobra Wola forest wilderness, occupation authorities carried out the operation of burning dead bodies and destroying the vestiges of mass extermination. ¶ About 25,000 Jews were murdered in Pinsk during the Holocaust. On July 4, 1944, Soviet troops entered the town.

**After the war** ¶ Most likely, only 42 Jews survived the Holocaust in Pinsk. Some had joined partisan units, others were saved thanks to the help of local dwellers. About a dozen people from Pinsk were subsequently recognized as the "Righteous Gentiles." ¶ After war, several hundred Jews who had been deported to the distant areas of the Soviet Union returned to Pinsk. In 1944, they rebuilt one of the synagogues (the one at 7 Pionierskaya St.). In 1948, the leader of the community, Sholom Yuzhuk, applied for the registration of the Jewish community and the synagogue, but a year later, the authorities confiscated the synagogue. Certain Burdo, a representative of the town

Jewish community attempted to question this decision, but the authorities transferred the building to the sports school. Rabbi Aaron Potapovski, who lived in the synagogue building, did not leave it, however, and led the services until 1954. In the 1960s, an unregistered Jewish community of about 80 people functioned in Pinsk, with its own rabbi. In 1966, the last synagogue was shut down. ¶ Jewish life started to revive after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of independent Belarus. In 1992, the Chaim Weizmann Jewish Cultural and Educational Society was founded, and on April 20, 1993, the Jewish religious community of Pinsk was officially registered. On April 10, 1995, religious services were resumed in the reconstructed **Karlin-Stolin synagogue** (12 Irkutsko-Pinskoy Divizii St., tel. +375165324320) for the first time after World War II. In 2000, the only Jewish religious boarding school in Belarus – "Beth Aaron" (9a Ostrovskogo St., tel. +375293643682) – was opened in Pinsk.

In 2014, a new school building named after the Bielski Brothers, the leaders of the famous Jewish partisan unit, was opened in Pinsk too. ¶ A few years

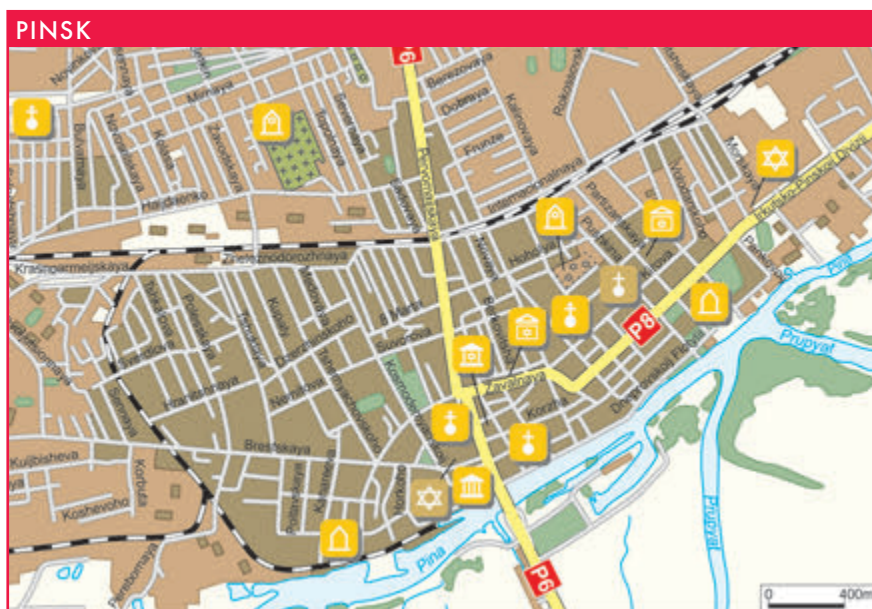
ago, the local **Jewish History Museum** (18 Bielova St), was founded by **Josif Liberman** (1947–2017), the head of the Jewish community of Pinsk.

**Worth seeing**

**Karlin-Stolin Synagogue** (1901–1904), 12 Irkutska-Pinskai Dyvizi St. ¶ **Jewish History Museum**, 18 Bielova St. ¶ Former “**confederate**” **synagogue** (1889), 109 Kirova St. ¶ Former **synagogue**, 63 Gorkogo St. ¶ Former **Jewish hospital**, 9 Zavalnaya St. ¶ Former **dorm** for the students of the Karlin yeshivah (1920s), during the Nazi occupation it served as the headquarters of the *Judenrat*, 42 Savetskaya St. ¶ Former **Jesuit College** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), Lenin Sq.; currently the **Museum of Belarusian Polesye**, tel. +375165316646. ¶ **Church of St. Charles Borromeo** (1770–1782), today the municipal concert hall, 37 Kirova St. ¶ **Franciscan Monastery and Church** (14<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.), Lenin St. ¶ **Bell tower** (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.), Lenin St. ¶ **Palace of the Butrymowicz family** (1794), 44 Lenin St. ¶ **Former Courtier School** (1858), 39 Lenin St. ¶ **Church of St. Barbara** (1786), the former Bernardine church, 34 Savetskaya St. ¶ **Former Kolodny hotel** (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), 5 Lenina St. ¶ **Former Warszawski Hotel**, 35 Kastyushki St. ¶ **Former Bristol Hotel**, 39 Dniaprovskay Flatylii St.

**Surrounding area**

**Pogost-Zagorodskiy** (34 km): a former yeshivah and synagogue (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a destroyed Jewish cemetery; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Church (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to the Holocaust victims in the “Mała Dolina” (“Little Valley”) wilderness, in the forest by the road to the village of Vyaz and in the former ghetto area. ¶ **Logishin** (22 km): Holy Trinity Orthodox Church; the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul with the painting of Our Lady of Logishin, Queen of Polesie (1907–1909); a Jewish cemetery with about 100 matzevot; a memorial at the Orthodox cemetery where Jews were executed.



# Davyd-Haradok

Pol. Dawidgródek, Bel. Давыд-Гарадок,  
Yid. דויד הורודוק

*Each and every individual was unique. [...] Simple, unassuming – poor but always cheerful – each Horodoker had his/her own wit and mannerisms.*

Itzhak Nahmanovitch, *David-Horodok up to the Second World War*, in: *Sefer zikaron David-Horodok* (Heb.: *Memorial Book of David-Horodok*), Tel Aviv 1957

**Town on the Horyn ¶** Davyd-Haradok was established in 1100 by Prince David, grandson of Yaroslav the Wise: the name of the prince gave the name to the town. Due to its location on the River Horyn, the town dwellers engaged in boat-building and river trade, centered at the local river port. Wood, bread, agricultural products, tar, and other goods were floated along the Horyn and further down the Pripyat

and the Dnieper rivers to Kyiv, as well as through the Oginski Canal to the Neman and further on to the Baltic Sea. On January 22, 1796, Davyd-Haradok obtained a coat of arms, the design of which reflected those economic activities of the town and which had a symbol of the river with a golden harbour, gates on both sides, and a golden ship reaching the river bank with three bales of goods.

” *Trade is quite significant, as this is a place visited by local people who either sell their products or pass them on to traders to take them to other towns; the products included ham, dried fish, different kinds of game, mushrooms, dried plums, etc., but, most importantly, tall calf-length boots – the pride of Davyd-Haradok’s shoemakers. All this is transported to Vilnius, Warsaw, and other cities every year. The residents are also famous for magnificent decorations of woven horse carts.* ¶ P.P. Semionov, *Zhyvopisnaya Rossiya* (Rus.: *Picturesque Russia*), 1882.

**The Jews of Davyd-Haradok ¶** Jews may have settled in Davyd-Haradok as early as the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century but the process of Jewish settlement was particularly intense in 1521–1551, when the town came under the rule of Bona Sforza, the Polish queen and the Great Duchess of Lithuania. The Jewish community of Davyd-Haradok was subordinated to the *kahal* in Pinsk.

A 1667 document notes that the *kahal* of Pinsk collected taxes from various Jewish communities, including the Jews of Davyd-Haradok. The Khmelnytsky Uprising in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century left the town residents in a difficult financial situation, leading to a conflict between the Jewish communities of Davyd-Haradok and Pinsk that was resolved through the intervention of the Radziwiłł family,

A view of the Haryn River and the harbour in Davyd-Haradok; the Orthodox Church of the Ascension is visible in the background. Photo by S. Hochmann, reproduction from Światowid magazine, 1936, no. 35



whose patronage made it possible for an independent *kahal* to be established in Davyd-Haradok. Davyd-Haradok was a fairly small trade and craft centre, but still, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century its artisans engaged in 35 occupations. Prince Radziwiłł's administration reform,

which resulted in the town residents being categorised as serfs, did not affect Jews, who were allowed to continue to work as free residents in crafts and trade as well as to keep their shops, lumber mills, tailor and shoemaking workshops, and a bathhouse.

” **The bathhouse** ¶ I can see before my eyes the long building with red bricks, the high narrow windows with the small square bracketed panes. In the first anteroom, a pile of branches lay prepared. [...] From there a door led to the “thrashing bath.” The “thrashing bath” or, as others called it, the “sweat bath,” constituted another world. [...] The thick steam was intermingled with the stench of dirty underwear hanging from sticks inserted in the overlying rafters. Not every heart could endure it. Indeed this is the reason that such a frail Jew as Boroch the Planter never experienced the zest of being steamed-out in the Jewish David-Horodoker “sweat-bath.” The only one who felt better there than at home was Zelig’s son Moishe Mordechai the Fat. The heat was never enough for him. When he got together with Maier Hershl the Butcher, then things really were spirited. First Maier Hershl shouted in his husky voice: “Throw on another bucket!” To pour a bucket of water on the boiling hot stones in the oven required great skill and Moishe the Fat was an expert. The heat increased with one bucket after another. The steam could be cut with a knife, as it was thick enough simply to choke a person. At this point they both climbed up to the highest step and their work began. They raised and lowered their branches to clear away the steam on all sides. One thrash and then another, and a third, a fifth, and a tenth. [...] And where did they go after the sweat-bath? To the mikve [ritual bath]. In the mikve room it was a little quieter. ¶ Berl Neuman, *Picture of a Town’s Sabbath Evening*, in: *Sefer zikaron David-Horodok* (Heb.: Memorial Book of David-Horodok), Tel Aviv 1957.





### The full bloom of the Jewish community ¶

The number of Jews in Davyd-Haradok grew constantly. In 1782, the town had only one synagogue, but in 1865 it had three, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had 5 *shuls* located close to one another: the Great Synagogue (also known as the Cold Synagogue, Yid.: *Kalte shul*), established thanks to the efforts of the glazier Pinchas Nowik; it was used from Passover to High Holidays, during late Spring–early Fall season, and was not used in winter as it was next to impossible to heat it. Therefore, it was called “cold” – not heated synagogue. There was also a *beth midrash* (study house) built by Zeev Yudovich; a *beth midrash* of the Ginsburg family; and the *shul* of Stoliner Hasidim (the so-called *shtibl*, derivative of the Yiddish for “chamber”), managed by Rabbi Abraham Kolton, known as “Malach” (Heb.: angel). ¶ Even though



Davyd-Haradok is located near Pinsk, Hasidim – those 18<sup>th</sup>-century religious enthusiasts – did not have much influence on the town’s Jewish community.

The Jews of Davyd-Haradok were under the cultural influence of anti-Hasidic minded Litvaks, and in many houses, there was a portrait of Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, known as the Vilna Gaon (d. 1797), who vehemently opposed the Hasidic movement. Having finished *cheder*, young boys continued their education in Litvak yeshivot. From 1917 on, the town also had a Hebrew-based and pro-Zionist Tarbut school, whose many graduates moved to big cities in order to pursue higher education. ¶ Still, a small local Hasidic dynasty that was a branch of the Kashevka dynasty (from the village known today as Kashivka in the Vohlynia, Ukraine) later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared in Davyd-Haradok. The dynasty was founded by Rabbi Shmuel of Kashivka, who was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhl of Kashivka; but this line was not very large and was virtually unknown in Volhynia. The second son of Shmuel of Kashivka was Rabbi Zeev-Wolf Ginsburg, who founded a Hasidic

[A] Wooden buildings in Davyd-Haradok, 1922–1937, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

[B] Wooden synagogue in Davyd-Haradok, 1929. Photo by A. Bochnia, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Science (PAN)



[A] The former Jewish school in Davyd-Haradok, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Yudovich's pharmacy in the centre of Davyd-Haradok, 1930s, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Bela Magala

court in Davyd-Haradok in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. After Zeev-Wolf, the dynasty was led by David, grandson Israel-Josef (d. 1899) and great-grandson Rabbi Zeev-Wolf (d. 1921). The last representative of this dynasty, Moshe-Yehoshua Ginsburg, was killed in the Holocaust,

**The first bookstore was opened in Davyd-Haradok in 1904; its owner was Shloyme Meyerovich Zagorodski. In 1910, the merchant Shloyme Kozief opened a printing house here, with a mechanical rotary printing press. In the interwar period, there were two Jewish libraries in the town. Jewish young people in town were passionate about sport, and the first Jewish sports team, "Kraft" (Yid.: Strength), was established in 1928. Two years later, another club – the Zionist-oriented Maccabee – was founded.**

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ On the eve of the war, about 3,000 Jews lived in Davyd-Haradok. The town was captured by the Soviet army in

and with his death the Kashivka dynasty disappeared. ¶ Industrialization of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries radically transformed the life of Davyd-Haradok. The town expanded to the left bank of the Horyn River, where two watermills were built on the old river bed – the left-bank part of the town is still called Watermills [Pol.: *Wiatraki*]. Workshops were also opened where pots, jugs, and containers for vineyards were manufactured out of metal sheets. The local distillery produced annually about 450 buckets (5,400 liters) of vodka made of potato, not of grain and called *peysakhovka* (suitable for Passover), as it did not contain leavened bread and was fit for Passover use.

¶ The first owners of passenger and cargo steamboats settled in town. A relatively small cargo and passenger steamboat, the "Leontina," sailed on the Horyn and was used to deliver raw material from Volhynia to the Finkelstein's tannery. Many residents worked at the local shipyard, established in 1830. Its last private owner was a Jew, Moshe Rymar. In 1939, after the town was captured by the Soviet army, the shipyard was taken away from the owner and nationalised.

September 1939, and incorporated into the BSSR. Then, on July 7, 1941, it was occupied by German forces. On August 10, 1941, 3,000 Jewish men aged 14 or

older were shot in the Chinovsk-Horki forest, about four kilometers from the town. Women, children, and elderly people were forced to travel on foot and settle in the overcrowded ghetto in Stolin. Some people were billeted to live in the empty residences, some were taken in by relatives or friends. The others were sent back to Davyd-Haradok at the beginning of 1942, where a ghetto was established between Yukhnevicha, Lermontova, and Gorkogo Streets, on the right bank of the Senezhka River (a tributary of the Horyn). The number of prisoners, including the inhabitants of Olszany (Alshany) and Siemihościcze (Semigostichi), was 1,200. The ghetto was liquidated on September 10, 1942. Its inmates, mainly women and children, were shot in the deserted region of the Chinovsk valley. About 100 Jews managed to escape, and some of them joined the partisans. ¶ The Nazis raised Jewish houses and synagogues and paved the road between Davyd-Haradok and Lakhva with material from the destroyed buildings (it was meant to be a retreat route for German troops).

**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ In Davyd-Haradok, as elsewhere in the private towns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jews lived in the central part of the town. Their houses frequently comprised a residential part as well as a store, workshop, and granary; the doors would open onto the street. Residents of Davyd-Haradok remember Jews as industrious people, good professionals who taught many Belarusians shoemaking and hairdressing. In the centre of the town lived a Jew called Rankin, who tanned hide and



sewed boots (his house has survived at 1 Gorkogo St.). Certain Muravchik had a privately-owned manufacture in his house at 1 Yukhnevicha St., today a municipal library. The Borukhin family had a mill and sawmill; the building today is the seat of the Town Council, at 2 Yaroslavskaya St. ¶ Neither the synagogue building nor either of the local Jewish cemeteries has survived. The synagogue was destroyed during the war, whereas the graveyards were washed away by the waters of the Horyn during water level rises in spring.

**Present day** ¶ Davyd-Haradok has 6,500 residents and is the second largest town in the Stolin District – a good starting point for a cruise of the Pripat River or a trip to picturesque Polesie marshes.

[A] The former Jewish quarter in Davyd-Haradok, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The former house of shoemaker Rankin in Davyd-Haradok, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**Worth  
seeing**

**Davyd-Haradok History Museum** (1908), a former school building, 11 Yurchenko St., tel. +375165551337. 🚩 **St. George's Orthodox Church** (1724). 🚩 **Former Catholic church** (1935–1936), Luchnikovskaya St. 🚩 **Orthodox Church of Our Lady of Kazan** (1913), Savetskaya St. 🚩 **Monument to Prince David** (2000), Savetskaya St. 🚩 **Former headquarters of the Polish Border Protection Corps** (1918–1931), Kalinina St. 🚩 **Monument to Holocaust victims in Chinovsk forest wilderness**, by Leonid Levin (7 km from the town).

**Surrounding  
area**

**Turov** (39 km): the place of origin of the Turov Gospel – the oldest Belarusian written text (11<sup>th</sup> c.); the castle mountain with a preserved fragment of the park; All Saints' Orthodox Church (1810); Sts. Borys and Gleb cemetery at the site of the first Orthodox monastery and the burial place of St. Cyril of Turov; Jewish cemetery; wooden buildings; landscape museums. 🚩 **Lakhva** (93 km): in September 1942, an uprising broke out in the local ghetto; it was probably the first Jewish uprising during World War II; a Jewish cemetery; a memorial to Holocaust victims; former wooden Jewish houses; the Orthodox Church of the Nativ-



ity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1870). 🚩 **Lenin** (110 km): a Jewish cemetery (16<sup>th</sup> c.), the only Jewish cemetery in the world with preserved wooden matzevot; a monument at the site of the mass execution of approx. 3,000 Jews. 🚩 **Kozhan-Gorodok** (134 km): a devastated Jewish cemetery; a memorial to the victims of the 1942 execution; the Uniate Church of St. Nicholas (1818); a 500-year-old oak, one of the oldest trees in Belarus.

The Haryn River, 2014.  
Photo by Paweł Sańko,  
digital collection of the  
“Grodzka Gate – NN  
Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))





# Stolin

Bel. Столін, Yid. סטולין

*Stolin was a beautiful city and its scenery was rich and beautiful. Rivers, forests, trees and fields surrounded it. A city that was vibrant with a proud Jewish life.*

Tova Klein-Rabinovitz, *Thoughts and Memories*, in: *Sefer zikaron Stolin*, Tel Aviv 1952, <http://www.jewish-gen.org/yizkor/Stolin/Stolin.html>; trans. by Sara Mages

## Table at the Horyn River ¶

Located in the Polesie region 15 km from the Ukrainian border, Stolin extends on both banks of the Kopanets River all the way to where it flows into the Horyn River. Various legends explain the town's name. According to one, there was once a lake on the site of today's town, in which 100 tenches (*lin* in Slavic languages) – a type of fish – were once caught (“100” – *sto* and “tench” – *lin* in Polish). Another legend says that 12 brothers who ruled over seven towns on the Horyn used to meet at a table that stood where the town now lies (in Russian, стол – *stol* – means “table”).

¶ Although archaeologists believe the town origins can be traced back to medieval period, the first written mention of Stolin dates to 1555 and can be found in the Inventory of the Pinsk and Kletsk Principalities. In the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Stolin was part of the Turov-Pinsk Principality. From the mid-16<sup>th</sup>

century, it belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. After the 1793 (Second) Partition of Poland, the Stolin lands were incorporated into the Russian Empire.

¶ In 1886, Stolin had 121 households inhabited by 815 people. They were an Orthodox church, a synagogue and Jewish prayer houses, a Catholic chapel, a commune office, an inn, a distillery, an agricultural school, a tea-importing company, a post-office station, and 20 stores. Local people dealt with agriculture, livestock breeding, farming, fishing, and wood-cutting and freighting. According to the 1897 census, the town had grown to include 250 households and 3,300 people.

**The Jews of Stolin ¶** It is not known when exactly the first Jews settled in Stolin. In 1765, the local Jewish community numbered 408 people. The first stone synagogue was built in 1792.

” We will remember you, our quiet town, your streets and the row of shops that stood in your centre in the market square; your synagogues' yards (the *shulhoef*) next to the Rebbe's "court;" the magnificent buildings of the Tarbut School and the orphanage; the Zionist library and the charitable institutions [...]. We will remember, with trembling, your Jews: Hasidim, Mitnagdim and Maskilim. ¶ Aryeh Avatichi, *Yizkor Memories*,

A meeting of school students from the Tarbut schools in Stolin and Davyd-Horadok, 1928, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Yehuda Schiffman



in: *Sefer zikaron Stolin*, Tel Aviv 1952, <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Stolin/Stolin.html>; trans. by Laia Ben-Dov, ed. by Irit Dolgin.

**The synagogue building complex ¶** The white stone synagogue established between 1792 and 1793 is the oldest preserved stone building in the Stolin region. It is also the only 18<sup>th</sup>-century synagogue built in the late Baroque style with elements of Neoclassicism that has survived in Belarus to the present day. Starting from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a departure from the traditional central plan can be observed in the architectural style of Belarusian synagogues. The Stolin synagogue does not have a traditional *bimah* with pillars supporting the vault. Built on a rectangular plan, it stands out with its unusual two-storey façade with cut corners and a small triangular pediment. Similar architectural features can be found in palace buildings of that time. Inside, there are partially preserved frescoes. Adjacent to the synagogue, there were three or four *batei midrash* (study and prayer houses), used in winter. ¶

Opposite the synagogue a former yes-hivah building still stands – a white and pink building with a balcony and a sloping roof. In the past, it was equipped with a special mechanism that lifted the two sloping parts and opened the roof, so that it could be used as a *sukkah* during the Sukkoth holiday (that requires a temporary – and natural – roofing). Some sources claim that the last rabbi of Stolin, Moshe Perlow (1892–1942), lived in this building.

**Stoliner Hasidim ¶** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Stolin was an important centre of the Hasidic movement. The Stolin dynasty was founded by Rebbe **Asher Perlow** (1765–1826), son of the famous Rabbi Aaron Perlow of Karlin (Aaron the Great, 1736–1772), a disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch and the author of *Sefer Beit Aaron* (Heb.: The Book of Aaron's House) with a commentary on the Torah. Asher Perlow moved the

dynasty from Karlin (now Karolin district in Pinsk) to Stolin. Rabbi Aaron II, known as “the man of Mlynov” or “the holy grandfather,” spent his entire life in Stolin. This is what he said about prayer:

“One should stand up to pray only in a joyful frame of mind. “Whenever a prayer is uttered something is born... And when is something born?... When the prayer is uttered joyfully. But prayer uttered (Heaven forbid!) in sadness bears no fruit. [...] Not only when praying should a man be happy, but whatever he does should be done joyfully, for, by joyfulness he will be able to remove himself from everything evil and to bring himself closer to the good. One must beware of sadness and melancholy, as of all the other sins and vices.” ¶ Pinsk: *sefer edut ve-zikaron le-kehilat Pinsk-Karlin* (Heb.: Pinsk. Book of Memoirs and Remembrance of the Pinsk-Karlin Community), ed. by W.Z. Rabinovitch, Tel Aviv 1966–1977, trans. by E. Stepak.

**Musical tradition** ¶ The Stoliner Hasidim were famous for their outstanding musical skills. Aaron Perlow’s *Sabbath Hymn* was included in many Hasidic (and not only Hasidic) prayer books, and about 20 different melodies were composed for it. A recording of the hymn performed by the Stoliner



Hasidim in 1958 is kept at the YIVO archives in New York. ¶ Stoliner musicians (*klezmerim*) masterfully performed Eastern European folk melodies. Their charming music resounded not only throughout the town but all over Belarus, much to the delight of both the Jewish and non-Jewish populations.

“Every Jewish shtetl [...] had its own klezmerim and other entertainers who would play for all the Jewish weddings. They would play at the wedding feast for the father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, guests and relatives from both sides, and especially for the bride and the groom – a bride and groom taking the first precarious steps in their unclear life... The music stirred the public, and especially the young couple, who were moved to reflect on the tenor of the past and their long life ahead. The townspeople believed in an old saying: “As the klezmerim played, so it went in life.” ¶ Yale Strom, *The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore*, Chicago 2002

[A] Former synagogue in Stolin (1792–1793), 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Former tzadik’s court in Stolin, Moshe Perlow’s yeshiva since 1922, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[A] Former Jewish houses in Stolín, 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershinskaya, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Gravestone of Mordechai Lekhovicher at the Jewish cemetery in Stolín, 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershinskaya, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Asher Wainshteyn (1890–1983), a Stoliner Hasid and a musician in a local klezmer band that toured the region in 1906–1919, brought Klezmer traditions from Stolín to the United States. He settled in the USA after World War II and continued the musical tradition of his town, which he passed on to the American klezmer musician, violinist, and director Yale Strom, along with a manuscript of Stolín melodies. The manuscript contains nearly 100 tunes played by Stolín klezmer musicians before World War I, a time when different cultures and religions existed side by side. In addition to original Jewish melodies, the manuscript included the Ukrainian *hopak*, the Polish *mazurek*, *polka*, and *skoczna* (a fast folk dance with hopping); Russian *padespan* (a ballet dance danced in pairs), Tchaikovsky’s waltz Op. 51 No. 6, and more.

The tsaddikim of Karlin-Stolín Hasidic dynasty shared a love of music as well. Rabbi Aaron the Great performed songs of his own making. His Shabbat evening prayers sent the faithful into spiritual ecstasy: the Hasidim danced and sang until early morning hours, often leaving the houses of prayer and celebrating in the streets. The Karlin-Stolín *nigunim*

(Hasidic melodies) created during those celebrations often became popular. Rabbi Aaron encouraged others to introduce instrumental music into traditional ritual prayer, organising two orchestras for Motzei Sabbath (Saturday evening), hanukah, Purim, and intermediary days of Sukkot, when playing instruments is not prohibited.

“During such visits at the tsadik’s court, a Hasid would forget about his bitter, sad, and woeful everyday life and find a haven for his tired body and weary soul. Released briefly from his worries through a general joy, he would rise to a state of self-oblivion.” Yale Strom, *The Book of Klezmer: The History, the Music, the Folklore*, Chicago 2002.

The great tsadik of Stolín, Rabbi Israel Perlow was also a music-lover and received at his court eminent composers, who wrote new *nigunim* for Jewish liturgy. The most famous of them were

Jacob of Telekhany and Josel Talner. Rabbi Perlow’s children were musically talented, too. Three of his sons played in a band that performed on the eve of Simkhat Torah.





## **A Matzo Bakery for the Needy ¶** *The baking of Matzo for Pesach/*

*Passover in Stolin started immediately after Purim. Balebatim [Yid.: homeowners], especially the “wealthier” ones, were the first to bake matzos in the bakery, while the poorer folk, the paupers and the needy, had to wait until the final week before Pesach, for they did not have the necessary funds to purchase flour and to pay the bakery dues. [...]*

*¶ The Rav, however, and the activists in town, saw to it that no poor person would be left without Matzo [...]* ¶ *Then, in 1904, the Zionists of Stolin decided to deal with this vital issue in a way that would help the multitudes. They went and rented a separate Matzo bakery, solely for the purpose of providing free Matzo for the needy. They called it “The Zionist Matzo Bakery.”* ¶ *To finance this project they held a fundraiser among their friends and people of the town; the tens of rubles that came in were enough to pay for the rent, the tools and the baker’s salary. Wood for the oven was collected from the townsfolk, and the daughters of the town volunteered to knead and roll out the dough. Other men volunteered to bring water and run the bakery etc.* ¶ *The men behind this bakery idea and those who ran it included: Shlomo Roseman, Alter Muchnick, Yehuda Leib Hoberman, Yitzchak Blahousky, Leibel the Chazzan and others. [...]. At the end of the Matzo-baking season the Zionists gave the profits to Rabbi Fialkov to distribute to the needy.* ¶ *Yankel Rabinovitz, A Matzo Bakery for the Needy, in: Sefer zikaron Stolin (Stolin; A Memorial to the Jewish Communities of Stolin and Vicinity), Tel Aviv 1952, <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Stolin/Stolin.html>; trans. by Aaron Housman.*

**Economic development ¶** The Jewish community of Stolin grew rapidly toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the 1897 census, the town had a population of 3,342, including 2,489 Jews (74.4 percent). The economic growth of the region was fostered by the construction of a railway line between Luninets and Rivne, which connected the south and the north of the country. Stolin benefited also from its location near the Radziwiłł family estate in the nearby village of Mankoviche (now part of the town). A wonderful landscape park at the estate has survived to this day, but the palace was destroyed in 1943. ¶ Initially, there were no big industrial establishments in Stolin. Goldberg’s bakery was opened in 1899 and Kolodny’s sawmill in 1911. During the interwar period, a few mills operated in the town: in 1929, Gleiberman’s mill

processed 900 kg of grain a day; Berko Frankel’s mill at 1 Market Square – 3,000 kg of grain a day; and Sokhar Shklaver’s mill at 8 Wygonna St. – 2,000 kg of grain a day. Jewish merchants Durchyn, Furman, and Israel Zarakhovich traded in timber and salt, also acting as creditors in Prince Radziwiłł’s business affairs. Stolin had 50 stores (e.g. Liberman’s and Bashkin’s groceries, Kontarovich’s haberdashery, Fialkov’s household store, Motorin’s office supplies), as well as bars and restaurants (the most popular ones were run by Goński, Tukin, Winnik, Wysocki, Rogozinski, and Kosmowicz). There were hotels, owned by Gleiberman, Rodkievich, and Hoberman; and also Samson Motorin’s printing house, Kogan’s sparkling water plant, and Ruchocki’s cinema. ¶ All market fairs were held in Rynkowy (Market) Square (now Kamsamolskaya St.). Its central

A Hasidic rebbe from Stolin with his followers, on his way to attend his son's wedding, Stolin, photograph published on 3 June 1923 in *Jewish Daily Forward*, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



part was filled with peddlers and sellers of agricultural produce, who displayed their products on carts, while rows of stalls were located around the market. On non-fair days, Jews travelled to neighbouring villages and settlements to sell their goods. ¶ Soviet rule was established in Stolin in November 1917, and then from February 1918, until December, 1919, the town was occupied by the Germans. The Treaty of Riga (1921) returned this territory to Poland, and on December 6, 1925, Stolin County (Pol. *powiat*) was established in the Polesie Voivodeship (Region). ¶ In the interwar period, the town had a kindergarten, a *cheder*, a Tarbut school, a Talmud Torah, and a Yavneh religious school. In 1925, the Jewish community administered a synagogue, a *mikveh*, a cemetery, and three houses of prayer. The chairman of the community board until 1939 was Asher Fialkov.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ With the establishment of Soviet rule in the territory of West Belarus in 1939,

Jewish communities were disbanded and their property nationalised. The ensuing arrests and repressions affected religious leaders, communal activists, members of Zionist organisations, and the Bund. Many Jewish refugees from western and central Poland arrived in Stolin. On July 12, 1941, the Nazi Germans entered the town. They established a ghetto in the early spring of 1942 and confined all the Jews there (including Jewish women and children from the Stolin region). The ghetto was bounded by Poleska St. (from the riverside), Kosciuszko St. (now Savetskaya St.), Rynkowy Square (now Kamsamolskaya St.), Unii Lubelskiej St., and the river (in the west), with Naberezhnaya St. running through its centre. The ghetto in Stolin was liquidated on September 11, 1942, on the eve of the Jewish new year (*Rosh hashanah*), when about 7,000 Jews, were executed. During the entire occupation period, the Germans and their collaborators killed a total of 12,500 people, including approx. 8,500 Jews, in the Stasino forest. ¶ The Germans spared a few doctors

from the local hospital, as they needed extra medical assistance; among these doctors there were Dr. Roter – hospital ward head (who later helped partisans in the forest), Dr. Henryk Rid with his wife Ewa and 3-year-old son Sasha, Dr. Poznański with his wife Henia, and a vet named Akharonger with his wife. Helped by a Stolin priest Fr. Franciszek Smorcewicki, a forester named Kijowski, and two Baptists, Stefan Wasilewicz and Agafia Mozol, who hid these strangers for several months, the doctors spared by the Nazis managed to escape and make it to the partisan underground.



Rabbi Osher Fialkov and his shammes walking across the market square to collect alms for the poor before the feast of Pesach, Stolin, 1929, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

In 1979, Smorcewicki, Wasilewicz, and Mozol were awarded the title of “Righteous Gentiles.”

“ Here is the text of a farewell letter written by Stolin ghetto prisoner Shlomo Bieloguski and given to his son in 1945: ¶ *My dear Libele, Mojshale and Gershale! Yesterday I sent you two greetings in Abrasha's letters, which he handed over to trustworthy people. I hope that you will receive them if you survive, with God's help. And now, my dears, I must say goodbye to you for the last time. I wish you all the best in life. Let good Fate shine on you more brightly than it did on me and all the Jews of Stolin. No human pen can describe our pain and what we have experienced, or everything that happens to those who expect death at any minute. But that is our Fate and it cannot be changed, my dear and dearest. You must live together. I appeal to you, Libele, and I ask you to do everything in your power to stay with the children until they grow up and can take care of themselves. Mojshale, I oblige you to replace me in the family. Live in peace with Mashele, Gershale, and your mother. And if you ever have a chance, try to get to Bezalel and to Fana in Israel. [...] ¶ Mashele, be a devoted daughter. I believe and hope that you will always live in harmony with your mother and listen to her advice. Know that there are not many such mothers as yours. [...] Finally, I turn to you, Gershale, my son, who has always been dedicated to everyone, body and soul. Remain so in the future. I kiss all of you from afar on the last day of my life. Be happy and live well. ¶ Your Shlomo. Thursday, three o'clock at night, 10.09.1942*

**Remembrance and revival** ¶ In 1960, a monument was erected at the site of the mass grave in Stasino, but some years later it was taken down. In October 1993, a new monument was established. It has the form of an open book with writing in Hebrew on one page and in Russian on the other. ¶ After

World War II, people from remote parts of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia came to settle in Stolin, which suffered a major population decrease. There were Jews among those resettled, but it was not until 1999 that it became possible for a Jewish community to be officially registered here. The Stolin Jewish Cultural

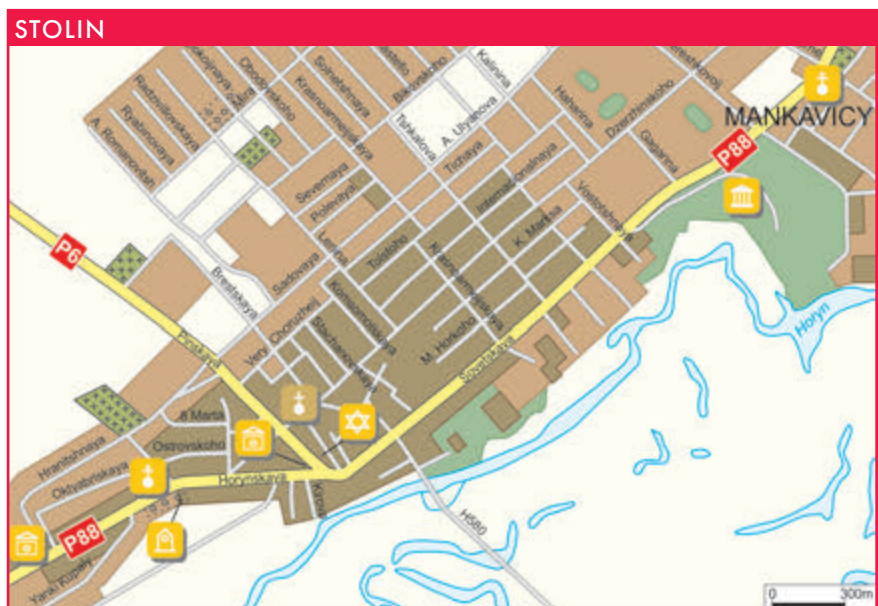
and Educational Association “MOST” “Yakhad” were also established.  
and the Progressive Judaism community

### Worth seeing

Synagogue ruins, Telmana St. ¶ Former yeshiva building, Pinskaya St. ¶ Grave of Rabbi Mordekhai Lekhovicher at the site of the destroyed Jewish cemetery, 63 Garynskaya St. ¶ Krupnik’s house, formerly housing Aizenberg’s liquor and metal store, Goński’s canteen, and Motorin’s office supplies store; 1 Pinskaya St. ¶ County Office building (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Lenina St. ¶ Market stalls (19<sup>th</sup> c.–1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.), Kamsamolskaya Ploshchad (Sq.) ¶ Distillery building (turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 2 Tereshkovoi St. ¶ Stables (turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 22 Tereshkovoi St. ¶ Tuchman’s manufactory, currently “Slovianski” Bar, 6 Kamsamolskaya Ploshchad (Sq.). ¶ Fikangor’s manufactory, currently the Food Cooperative, 5 Kamsamolskaya Ploshchad (Sq.). ¶ Chernik’s pharmacy, currently Paritetbank, 9 Kamsamolskaya Ploshchad (Sq.). ¶ Motorin’s printing house building, 55 Savetskaya St. ¶ Memorial to the murdered Jews of Stolin, Stasino forest. ¶ Orthodox Church of the Ascension (1939), wooden architecture, 64 Garynskaya St. ¶ Mankovich Park in the estate the Radziwiłł princely family. ¶ Stolin Museum of Local History, in the Mankovich Landscape Park, tel. +375165562396.

### Surrounding area

Luninets (49 km): the memorial house of Jakub Kolas, one of the founders of the Bielorusian literature; the former printing house of the Aizenbergs; former Jewish houses in Gagarina St.; the monument at the mass grave in the woods of Magula and Borovschina; Church of St. Joseph (1931); the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1912–1921). ¶ “Rafting on the Pripyat River,” a 45-kilometre water trail. ¶ “Into the boggy labyrinths” trail (a 26-km hiking trail through the Olmany Swamps Nature Reserve).





# Motal

Pol. Motol, Bel. Моталь,  
Yid. מוֹטלע

[We] *had our own house – one storey, with seven rooms and a kitchen – some acres of land, chickens, two cows, a vegetable garden, a few fruit trees. So we had a supply of milk, and sometimes butter; we had fruit and vegetables in season; we had enough bread – which my mother baked herself; we had fish, and we had meat once a week – on the Sabbath. And there was always plenty of fresh air.*

Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error. The Autobiography*,  
Philadelphia 1949

**Hebrew greeting** ¶ Motal, the birthplace and childhood home of Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, is probably the only town in Belarus that has a sign in Hebrew posted by the road leading out of town. ¶ The earliest written mention of Motal is found in the documents of the Lithuanian Metrica from 1422, where it was referred to as a private estate in the Principality of Pinsk. In 1520, it was the property of Prince Fyodor Ivanovich Yaroslavich, who later donated it to the Orthodox Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Leszno. After Yaroslavich' death, Motal became the possession of the Polish King Sigismund I the Old, who then transferred it to his wife Bona Sforza. In 1555, Motal was granted Magdeburg rights and became a craft and trade centre. Its large fairs attracted people from all the surrounding area. ¶ In 1706, the Swedish troops entered Motal, burning it down and killing most of its inhabitants. On November 28, 1746, King Augustus III of Poland confirmed the privileges for the town. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Motal had the status of a county town in Brest Palatinate. In 1795, it was incorporated

into the Slonim Province, then into the Lithuania Governorate, and from 1801, it was made part of the Grodno Province of the Russian Empire.

**The Jews of Motal** ¶ In 1562, “a Jewish landlord and tax collector from Kobryn Favish Yeskovich,” who leased the right to collect taxes on merchandise, complained to Savostian Druzhylovitski that the ruler of the district did not allow him to collect taxes in his town of Motal and in the neighbouring villages. This document suggests that Jews collecting taxes – the wealthiest, best-connected and most respectable Jews in the eyes of the Polish nobility – were known to the inhabitants of Motal, but it is not certain whether they were permanent residents there. The presence of a Jewish community in the town is attested to in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Pinsk cadaster includes two documents dated August 13, 1652. In one of them, an Orthodox priest, Nikolai Baranovich, complained about two Jews from Motal, Leiba Girshevich and his son-in-law, who assaulted him during a dispute that took place on Sunday, when the Jews were engaged in building a house in the town. ¶ According to

A portrait of cantor Reznin, Chaim Weizmann's teacher, 1920s. Photo by Weintraub, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



the 1806 census, there were 152 Jews in Motal (64 men and 88 women); by 1811, the Jewish community had grown to 222 members. According to the 1897 census, Motal had a total population of 4,297, including 1,354 Jews. In 1921, the Jewish population totalled 1,140 (26 percent).

“According to Chaim Weizmann's memoirs, Motal lay in one of the darkest and most forgotten corners of the Jewish settlement zone that the tsarist authorities had designated, but still for people from the villages situated on the farther shores of the lake, it was a metropolis. This metropolis – muddy in spring and autumn, frozen in winter, and dusty in summer – had no post office, railway, or paved roads, and the living conditions there were so primitive that modern Westerners

would find them impossible to imagine. The Weizmanns, however, prospered quite well. Chaim's father was a resourceful lumber trader; his uncle floated lumber down the river to Gdańsk and took Chaim on his raft, which had quite a comfortable hut with a kitchen and a bed. Because of the water routes that ran all the way to the Baltic and the Black Sea, neither Chaim nor his family had the feeling that the world was closed. ♣ Małgorzata Szejnert, *Usypać góry. Historie z Polesia* (Pol.: To Heap Up Mountains. Stories from Polesie), Cracow 2015.

**Two clans** ♣ There were two influential feuding Jewish clans in Motal: the Czemyryński (Chemerinsky) family and the Piński (Pinsky) family. The former were members of the municipal board, while the latter served on the religious community board. In February 1883, the Czemyryńskis filed a complaint with the Grodno Governor against Abram Piński, who had allegedly come drunk to the synagogue, asking to replace Piński with Rabbi Shmul Rubinstein. Piński denied the accusations and claimed that he had urged fellow believers to pray for the Great Emperor and his family.

The feud between the two clans lasted for centuries and entered memoirs and *belles lettres* written about Motal. ♣ The Czemyryńskis, who had settled in Motal around the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, left an indelible mark on the history of Motal Jews, with many important people descending from this family: the *kahal* chairman (Lejzer Czemyryński), rabbis (Wewel Arielovich), the synagogue warden (Israel Czemyryński and Ezer Weizmann), communal treasurers (Avigdor Czemyryński), butchers, and innkeepers and the writer Haim Chemerinsky (1861–1917), the author

of the influential Hebrew book *My Shtetl Motale*. Not to mention Chaim Weizmann himself.

**Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952)**, the first President of Israel, came from the Czemeryński family on his mother's side. His father, Ezer Weizmann (1850–1939), arrived in Motal to study and it was there that he met Rachela, daughter of the Motal land leaseholder Michel Czemeryński. They married in 1866. Chaim was the third of Ezer Weizmann and Rachela's 15 children. He spent his childhood in Motal and at the age of 11 was sent to school to Pińsk, where the rest of his family also moved in 1892. Weizmann's house in Motal is partially preserved and currently (after being relocated) stands at 1 Bannyi Zavulok. In 2010, the Pińsk Jewish community together with the Museum of Belarusian Polesie, organised a temporary exhibition at Weizmann's house.



Former house of Chaim Weizmann in Motal, 2014. Photo by Margarita Korzeniewska, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Synagogue** ¶ On Motal marketplace, a synagogue and an Orthodox church stood opposite each other. Located in the corner of the marketplace. The synagogue was a wooden structure with a shingled roof, built in the characteristic synagogal style of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was completely destroyed by fire during World War II, but legends about it have been preserved.

“ In the town of Motele there is a synagogue about which tales of wonder are told. I have heard them myself from an old man who lived there. Listen now to what they say about that synagogue: ¶ There was once a rabbi in the town who was a great genius and a saintly man, a tsadek, may his memory be blessed. Even the Gentiles greatly respected him. ¶ One day it happened that the lord of nearby castle got sick (God keep us from the same) and the doctors despaired of his life. The nobleman decided to send a servant to the holy man to ask him for a blessing. As it happened, the nobleman was actually a great anti-Semite but, because he was in such trouble, the rabbi was willing to give him a blessing. ¶ And the nobleman did indeed recover. Since the town of Motele did not have a synagogue, the lord had the idea of donating lumber to the Jewish community so it could build one. He gave the Jews twelve of the largest trees in his woods, and from those twelve trees they built a synagogue so large that today it holds a congregation of two hundred. ¶ A considerable time has passed since its construction, but the synagogue still looks practically new. And to this day, when a misfortune (God forbid) happens in the town – when someone is sick for instance, or a disaster threatens the community, people gather to pray at the grave of the holy rabbi, may his memory be blessed. ¶ B. Silverman Weinreich, “The Old Shul in Motele,” in: *Yiddish Folktales*, New York 1988.

**Heder** ¶ In 1895, a *heder* was located on Pińska Street in the house of Judel Portny.



**[A]** A scale model of Motal at the local Museum of Folk Art in Lenina Square, 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershitskaya, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**[B]** Museum in Lenina Square in Motal, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

“Next I was taken to Motele, which was already quite a distance. My mother arranged an apartment for sleeping and eating and a Rebbe and Cheder. She then kissed me, said to me “Be well my child”, and went home. I stood there heartbroken – I couldn’t hold myself back. I went to a corner and cried bitterly. [...] The next day, I went to Cheder and did my best for a few days. I didn’t have another choice – I was too far from home. Then came Thursday. I waited for my mother to come see me but she didn’t come. My heart filled with sadness. [...] ¶ The next day, Friday, I took the black bread with jelly. I took these sandwiches and went on pretending nothing had happened. Later, the Rebbe sat down next to me and said to me, “You are learning so well, you have a good head. If you learn well, the angels will throw money at you.” On Monday, this happened. The

angels threw money at me. The Rebbe sneaked to the back and suddenly, kopecks were falling. This went on for a few days until suddenly one day a boy screamed out, “Rebbe, throw me also a kopeck.” I pretended like I didn’t know what was going on, and waited for my mother to come on Thursday. My mother came to Cheder and hugged and kissed me. The Rebbe said to my mother, “Your son has a precious head, the angels are throwing him money.” I shouted, “Rebbe, you are a liar.” Despite the great embarrassment and trouble I caused my mother, she laughed. From then on, I didn’t believe him. I understood that it was a made-up thing, that when she hired the Rebbe, she gave him a few kopecks to throw. In the old country, no one threw money, neither the Rebbes nor the angels, because they all were poor. ¶ From Motal to Chicago. An Autobiography by David Chez, 1902–1976, translated from Yiddish by Rutie Gold, <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/motal/memories.htm>

**Leonard Chess (1917–1969)** – the founder, along with his brother Phil, of the record company Chess Records, which played a crucial role in popularising blues and rock ‘n’ roll music in the USA after World War II. Born in Motal, he immigrated to Chicago together with his family. There he co-owned several nightclubs with his brother. The first step toward his overwhelming business success was purchasing the shares of Aristocrat Records. The company was then renamed Chess Records and produced albums by such stars as Chuck Berry (ranked the fifth greatest performer of all time by the *Rolling Stone* magazine), blues man Muddy Waters, and The Flamingos (an American male vocal group included in the rock ‘n’ roll Hall of Fame), whose hits



were at the top of the charts. Leonard Chess was the heart and soul of his company; when he died, the status of Chess Records gradually declined.

**Economic life** ¶ Commercial traditions in Motal date back to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Big fairs were held there eight times a year, during important Catholic and Orthodox holidays, when Gentile merchants were coming to Motal on a pilgrimage to local churches and Jews, a dominant force on the marketplace, could trade with them; smaller trading fairs took place every week and attracted tradesmen from the whole neighbouring area. The biggest fair was held on the festival of Corpus Christi, in May or June. The Memorial Book of Motal describes street peddlers who bought various items at fairs and then sold them to the residents of nearby towns and villages. Street peddlers were no real competition for stationary stores because they charged more for their goods. ¶ Small industry started to develop in Motal at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of two candle workshops, three smithies, a fullery, and a horse-driven mill. In 1914, the fullery and steam butter factory were owned by Josel Pomerants, while the local tannery belonged to Aaron-Berek Gotlib. ¶ In the interwar period, Polish authorities did not segregate Jewish communal life thus Motal became the centre of an independent community with its own administration, police, and a fairly large fire brigade. The majority of residents were Orthodox Christians (74 percent) and Jews (26 percent). In the 1920s and 1930s, the town's life centred around the marketplace, with its 85 stores offering a wide variety of goods – meat, snuff, alcohol, utensils, furniture, shoes, etc. ¶ Alcohol production was

one of the most profitable local business activities, as evidenced by the presence of three distilleries and two breweries in town, as well as countless taverns and bars. Takeaway sale of alcohol was permitted only with a licence, which was more often granted to Polish residents, not to the Jews. Jews leased their licenses from Poles, which allowed them to open their own stores. There were occasional incidents that tainted the reputation of respectable shopkeepers, e.g. on July 1, 1928, Chana Szac's liquor store was closed after a police search had revealed counterfeit vodka sold there. ¶ In the 1920s, Motal had a cooperative mill, six slaughterhouses (four of them belonging to Jews), and a tannery. These pre-war business traditions were revived in the 1980s, when Motal enjoyed rampant economic development as a thriving center of the fur coat industry. Sausages made in Motal are still wellknown throughout Belarus. ¶ Jews in Motal also worked as medical doctors serving all the townspeople, Jews and Gentiles. The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening of a shelter with three beds located in a room next to the public baths. In 1913, all of its staff (a doctor, a dentist, and a midwife) were Jewish. Later on, medical treatment was provided by a feldsher, or emergency paramedical practitioner, named Schaudier at his surgery, and in the 1930s, by physician Szyja Feldman. In 1922, there was also a private pharmacy and two pharmaceutical storehouses owned by Jews.



“ On *Rosh ha-shanah* it was the same as on *Shabbat*. The whole family (but not the girls) went to the shul. We girls just went there to listen to the sounding of the shofar. [...] After the *Kiddush* and the *Hamotze* [blessings on wine and bread – eds.], it was customary to dip a piece of *challah* in honey and make a blessing for a sweet and good year. [...] On the first day of *Rosh ha-shanah* [...], young and old went to the lake and emptied out their pockets, ridding themselves of

their sins, chanting some psalms and the last three verses of chapter seven of the Book of Micah where it reads: “[...] and they will cast all of their sins into the depths of the seas.” Hence, the ceremony is called *Tashlich* (symbolic “sending” of the personal sins into the waters – depth of the seas). ¶ *Sukkot*. We had a permanent, built-in [*Sukkah* – temporary dwelling with a roofing made of green tree-branches or woodsticks]. We kept our library there during the rest of year. It was a large room. The wooden roof was built so when pulled with a rope it opened and exposed the sky. [...] We decorated it. We had all meals there for 7 days, no matter how cold it was. We had our own *etrog* [citron fruit – one of the four species used on *Sukkot* for ritual purposes – eds.] and *lulav* [closed frond of the date palm tree] and took pride in their beauty. ¶ *Passover*. Because there were no matzoh factories, the matzoh had to be baked at home, mostly in our house as we had a large kitchen, dining room and good oven. [...] Several families made use of the facilities, and they pitched in because the baking had to be done in haste. The work was divided, a person for each of the following tasks: to measure the flour, pour the water, knead, divide the dough, roll the dough into round cakes, to smooth the cakes with a little cog wheel to prevent its rising in the oven, to keep the oven hot, to shove the cakes in the oven and a carrier to put the baked matzot onto a white sheet. ¶ Sarah Heller, *Celebrations of Jewish Holidays in Motele*, contributed by her daughter Tauby Shimkin, <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/motol/celebrations.htm> (edited).

## World War II and the Holocaust ¶

In September 1939, Motal was captured by the Red Army. After the Germans took over the town on June 26, 1941, SS men carried out the extermination of the Jewish population (August 2–3, 1941). Adult men were marched towards the village of Osovnitsa (2 km west of Motal), while women, children, and elderly people were taken to the woods of Gaj near the village of Kalily

(500 metres from Motal). Over just a few days, the Jewish community of Motal (almost 3,000 people) ceased to exist. Only 23 people survived.

**Memory ¶** In 2004, on the initiative of a descendant of Motal Jews who immigrated to the USA, the old Jewish cemetery was cleared up and fenced. A few matzevot have survived to this day at this cemetery, as old as Motal’s Jewish

community. The new Jewish cemetery, set up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was completely devastated during the Soviet era and is now overgrown with a forest. ¶ In 2010, an exhibition was organised at Chaim Weizmann's old house in cooperation with the Pinsk Jewish community and the staff of the Belarusian Museum. The exhibition featured pre-war everyday household objects that had never been shown before, such as candlesticks, prayer

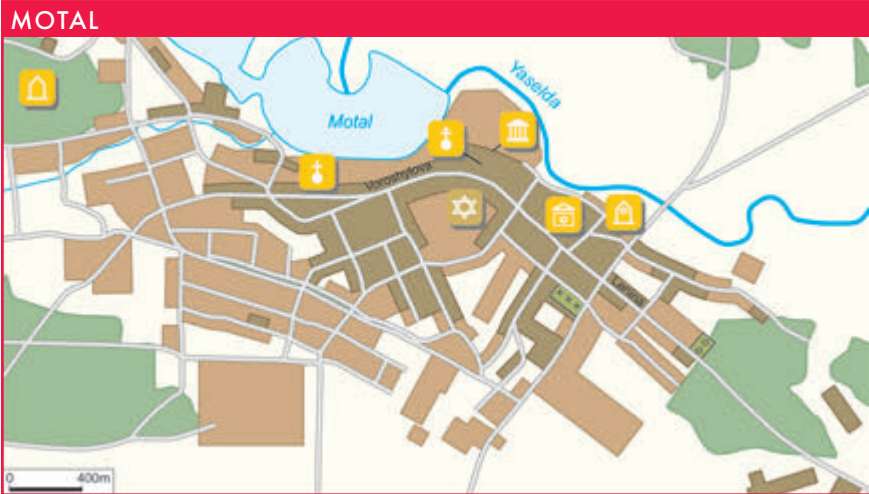
books, a tray, a sauce boat, a jewelry box, mortars and pestle, a shoemaker's toolbox, a laundry wringer, and ink writing utensils. It also displayed a painting by Arkadiy Shusterman (painted in plein-air to commemorate the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust in Belarus), which depicts the oldest Jew born in Pinsk – Chaim Krasilski – wearing religious attire and donning a *tallit* (a prayer shawl), a kippah (*yermolka*), and *tefillin* (phylacteries).

Former house of Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel (partially preserved), Bannyi Zavulok. ¶ Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (1888). ¶ Sts. Boris and Gleb Chapel (1986). ¶ Motal Museum of Folk Art, Lenina Sq., tel. +375165258753.

Worth seeing

Ivanava (20 km): the site of the martyrdom of St. Andrew Bobola (1657); the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1848); the Orthodox Church of the Protection of Our Lady (1901); former Jewish brick houses (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a monument at the execution site on Inkubatornaya St.; a monument in the Rudzki Forest at the site of mass executions of Jews from Motal and Ivanava. ¶ Khomsk (29 km): memorials at the site of mass executions and at the old Jewish cemetery. ¶ Telechany (45 km): a former wooden house of prayer (currently a residential building); wooden houses; a manor house (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity (1934); the Ogiński Canal; a Jewish cemetery with a few matzevot; a monument on the mass grave in the Grechishche forest wilderness. ¶ Drohiczyn (50 km): a former Jewish hotel, whose guests included Golda Meir (1912); a *cheder*; a pharmacist's house; a smithy; two monuments on execution sites; the Orthodox Church of the Epiphany (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Eliza Orzeszkowa lived in nearby Ludwinów (between 1858 and 1864).

Surrounding area



# Kobryn

Pol. Kobryn, Bel. Кобрин, Yid. קאברין

*At first glance, Kobryn seems to be a beautiful and elegant town because it is all interspersed with orchards and partly surrounded by a canal and by the Mukhavets River...*

Translated from: P.M. Szpilewski, *A Journey Through Polesie and the Land of Belorussia*, 1858

**Origins** ¶ Kobryn first emerged on an island, where the Kobrynka River flows into the Mukhavets River. The Upper and Lower Castle were built later. In the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Kobryn became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1532, Bona Sforza, the wife of Poland's King Sigismund I the Old, was granted the rights on the County of Kobryn. It was under her dominion that the Queen Bona Canal was built; the canal is now the oldest structure of this kind in Belarus. Polish writer and ethnographer P.M. Szpilewski wrote that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century "there still was a beautiful and majestic castle with twelve towers and a separate, smaller one with a fence of sharpened poles, a drawbridge at a huge gate, and high walls, [...] Queen Bona lived in it." In 1586, Kobryn came under the dominion of Queen Anna Jagiellon; in 1589, she brought the town's residents a document granting the town Magdeburg rights, signed by King Sigismund III Vasa, thus allowing a high level of self-administrative power.

**The Jews of Kobryn** ¶ Accounts were handed down from generation to generation that Kobryn's Jews had

come from the Germanic lands and thus were genuine Ashkenazim. In the memorial book of Kobryn, published in Yiddish in the 1950s in Argentina, it states at one point that Jews appeared in Kobryn in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, reportedly attested to by the oldest inscriptions on a gravestone at the old Jewish cemetery. However, according to a more reliable opinion found in the same book, the oldest tombstones in the cemetery date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. ¶ In fact, the first written mention of a Jewish community in Kobryn is found in a 1514 document, in which King Sigismund I the Old confirmed the already existing privileges for the Jews of Kobryn which his brother Alexander Jagiellon had granted to the Jewish communities in Lithuania in 1503. In 1563, Jews comprised 25 out of the 377 households in Kobryn. Their activity was described as follows: "Kobryn's toll and *kapszczyzna* [the fee for the sale and manufacture of alcohol] from inns serving beer, mead, and distilled beverages are all held by the Jews." ¶ In 1910, Kobryn had a private Jewish school for boys, several reformed *cheders*, a Talmud Torah school, a yeshiva (founded towards the





Market square in Kobryn, 1906–1914, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century), a seven-grade Tarbut school taught in Hebrew, a school taught in Yiddish, and a two-grade Orthodox Jewish Beit Yaakov religious school for girls, founded by Rabbi Noah Weinberg.

There was also a theatrical troupe, working under the guidance of film director Peisach Boim and the Markuze brothers, and a local football team “Ha-Koach” (Heb.: Strength).

“ I go out into town. Opposite the hotel there is an Orthodox church. Next to the Orthodox church there is a monument to Kościuszko: a stone bust, surrounded by cannons and cannonballs. The inscription on the monument reads: “In memory of the expulsion of Muscovites – from the residents of Kobryn”... I pass it by. I move on. A tin lady and then a wooden officer with two left legs are looking at me from gently swaying signboards. Through small, clean windowpanes I can see the glowing light of candles and the white of tablecloths. The night is a Friday night: the Sabbath. Inside their homes, the residents of Kobryn are having a joyous supper. Through the gaps in doors and lintels comes the smell of fish, saffron, and Sabbath bread. It saturates the night. ¶ Separately, far from the flickering Sabbath candles, the cold autumn moon is shining. It is shining high over the rooftops, over the gutters, over the market square, over the wooden bridge across the Mukhavets, and over the Mukhavets River. ¶ [...] A sleeping horse is drawing an empty cab with a sleeping driver across the dull bridge. In the grass between the pavement stones, crickets are chirping regularly. The Sabbath candles behind the window panes of the houses have melted down. Kobryn is asleep. ¶ Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, “Myjcie owoce!” (“Wash fruits!”), *Wiadomości Literackie*, 1933, no. 43.

**The Hasidim of Kobryn ¶** A dynasty of tsaddikim has been associated with

Kobryn since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was started by Moshe ben Israel of Kobryn



(1783–1858), and his successors were: his grandson Noah Naftali of Kobryn (d. 1889), David Shlomo (d. 1918), Moshe Aharon (d. 1942), and Baruch Joseph Zak (d. 1949). Another Hasidic rabbi, Menachem Nuchim ben Yehuda Leib Einstein, was born in Vysokaye (Wysokie Litewskie). Having completed his education among the Hasidim of Slonim, he moved to Kobryn and, in 1846, founded a Slonimer Hasidim Shtiebel,

which functioned until World War II. Chaim Zundl, born in Kobryn in 1856, graduated from the yeshiva in Brest and became famous as the Kamenetzer Maggid. He was one of the founders of the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement in Russia known as Palestinophile movement which emphasized modern Hebrew learning and support of the settlers and vocational training specialists in the ottoman Palestine.

” Like Joseph with his brothers... A touching meeting of a Kobryn rabbi with his two brothers ¶ “Parizer Hajnt” reports: A rabbi from Kobryn and the head of a yeshiva, Pesakh Pruskin, arrived in Paris this Friday on his way to America. His meeting with his two brothers, Parisian engineers and industrialists in the aeroplane business, whom he had not seen for 50 years, was very touching. The rabbi was three years old when they last had met, and the engineers were nine and fourteen. They were orphans, and their uncle – the well-known doctor Rabinovich, who translated a part of the Talmud into French – took the elder children to Paris, where he provided them with education. The brothers did not correspond with one another, and all the ties between them seemed to have been broken forever. On Friday, the brothers met. There was a striking contrast between the elegant gentlemen wearing formal clothes and the dignified-looking rabbi, dressed in satin, wearing a luxuriant grey beard. One other thing turned out – the brothers were unable to communicate. After 50 years, the engineers did not speak a word of Yiddish, and Rabbi Pruskin spoke no French; he only whispered: “Like Joseph with his brothers”... ¶ They all remained silent for a long while, until their hearts spoke. They began to look at family photographs. Tears started to flow down their cheeks – after 50 years, the brothers’ feelings revived. They communicated with the help of an interpreter... ¶ Lubliner Togblat, 2 Dec 1929



[A] Parade on the Jewish feast of Lag BaOmer on the streets of Kobryn, reproduction from *Kobryn zamlbuch (an iberblik ibern jidishn Kobryn)*", ed. Melech Glotzer, Buenos Aires 1951

[B] Hasidic tzadik Rebbe Pininke Shick, reproduction from *Kobryn zamlbuch (an iberblik ibern jidishn Kobryn)*", ed. Melech Glotzer, Buenos Aires 1951

**Economic life** ¶ Almost all Kobryn industrial enterprises were managed by the Jews: brickyards belonged to Mote Weinstein, Shlomo Pintchuk, and Shlomo Rimland; the lumber mill – to the Hurwitzs; three steam mills – to the Broitbards and Yedvabs; butter factories – to the Katzs, Leizers, and Aliniks; the string factory – to the Kobrinets and Kramans; the cigarette factory – to the

Tenenboims; furniture factories – to the Mezrichs and Słomiańskis; tanneries – to the Pintchuks; the bakery – to the Gorzańskis; the soap factory – to the Mazurskis; the soda water factory – to the Palevskins and Wiesensteins; and the candle factory – to the Tenenboim brothers. The *Kobryner Shtime* (Yid.: The Voice of Kobryn) was the main local Yiddish newspaper.

” Jewish drivers’ hackney cabs – prototypes of today’s taxis – moved quickly through the town. From a tailor and shoemaker to a clockmaker, locksmith, blacksmith, leatherworker, and metalsmith, Jewish craftsmen dominated everywhere and their mastery was unrivalled. They took photographs, cut people’s hair, showed films, and even treated the ill – for a majority of practising physicians were also Jewish. For the picture to be complete, it should be added that financial operations in the town were carried out by several little Jewish commercial banks, and readers were catered to by the Brenner Library, which had 1,400 volumes of books and 175 readers. ¶ Alexei Martynov, *Pamiati kobrynskovo yevreystva* (In Memory of Kobryn’s Jewry), Kobryn 1991.

## Pogroms, epidemics, and fires

¶ Over centuries, Kobryn experienced various kinds of disasters. In September 1648, the Cossack troops of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, set Kobryn on fire. According to Nathan Hanover’s contemporary chronicle, 200 Jewish families were killed at that time. Later,

Kobryn was ravaged twice by Swedish troops: in 1666 and at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A local saying was even coined about those hard times, in Yiddish – *Gei tzu di shvedn!* (Yid.: Go to the Swedes!). In 1662, the town was plundered by the Polish-Lithuanian troops, commanded by Marshal



Residents of Kobryn in front of the workshop of capmaker A. Belske, reproduction from *Kobrin zamlbuch (an iberblik ibern jidishn Kobrin)*, ed. Melech Glotzer, Buenos Aires 1951

Žeromski. In 1711, bubonic plague claimed the lives of more than a half of Kobryn population. The epidemics

led, among other things, to a decline of trade and crafts. In 1895, 310 dwelling houses burnt down in a fire; the very next year another fire consumed 210 houses, leaving more than 2,000 people homeless, and another fire in 1905 destroyed 104 houses. ¶ Hardship and legal strictures led to mass emigration of Jews to America. Specific factors in this were the regulation enacted in 1882 that prohibited Jews from leasing land in the rural areas and the introduction of liquor production and sale monopoly in 1897. In 1906, about 1,500 people from the County of Kobryn left for the USA and Canada.

“Zariski was a man caught up in many of the central conflicts of the twentieth century. He was torn between his early dedication to communism and his later, more sober, reflections on the success of capitalism. He was torn between an allegiance to an intellectual world that ignored the politics of race and his emotional need to find safety for those members of his family who escaped the Holocaust. ¶ Carol Parikh, *The Unreal Life of Oscar Zariski*, New York 1991

**Oscar Zariski** (Aszer Zarycki, 1899–1986), a brilliant 20<sup>th</sup>-century American mathematician, was born in Kobryn to the family of Betsalel Zarycki, a learned Talmudist, and Chana Tenenbaum, a local shop owner. The mathematical talents of the future Harvard University professor manifested themselves as early as his study in the gymnasium (secondary school) in Chernigov (now Chernihiv, Ukraine), where the boy escaped with his brother during World War I. He went on to study in Kyiv and Rome, from where he emigrated to the USA in 1927. In America, Zariski was given a chance to make full use of his intellectual potential, as shown by his awards and achievements: he was a Cole Prize winner for outstanding contribution to the field of algebra, a member of the Fields Medal Committee, Vice-President and President of the American Mathematical Society, a Wolf Prize winner (as the originator of the modern approach to algebraic geometry through its interface with commutative algebra), and a Steele Prize laureate for his lifelong contribution to the field of mathematics. His services as a teacher devoted to his students were rewarded with the National Medal of Science, awarded by the US president in 1965.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the capture of Kobryn by the Red

Army on September 20, 1939, some of the Zionist youth escaped to Vilnius and



later made it to Israel, in most cases – through central Asia or China.

“ The new authorities immediately launched an all-out attack on private trade. They crushed it without mercy using odd taxes and other repressive measures. ” Alexei Martynov, *Pamiati kobrynskovo yevreystva* (In Memory of Kobryn's Jewry), Kobryn 1991.

Kobryn was captured by German forces on June 23, 1941. In the fall of that year, the local Jewish population (about 8,000 people at the time) were confined to a ghetto, consisting of two separate parts. The inmates in ghetto “A” were Jewish professionals (specialised workers, artisans, doctors, and others) as well as physically strong people. Its borders ran along Suvorova St., Svobody Sq., Pervomayskaya St., and Kirova St. Ghetto “B” was for elderly people, women, children, and invalids. Its borders coincided with the western part of Svobody Square as far as the bridge and the right side of Savetskaya St. and Sportivnaya St. The head of the *Judenrat* was a former wholesale merchant named

“ On the first days of occupation, the Jewish prayer house at the beginning of Oktyabrskaya Street was set on fire. As a result, the entire quarter between Oktyabrskaya and Internatsionalnaya Streets burnt down. In July 1941, in the fields of the Patryki estate, the first Jews were shot – about 200 people caught in a manhunt in the streets. Soon afterwards, near the village of Imielin, 180 Jews suffered the same fate. [...] In July 1942, all the population of ghetto “B”, more than 2,000 people, were transported to the station of Bronna Góra, where they were shot together with other Jews from the Brest Region amounting to 50,000 people. In November 1942, the inmates of ghetto “A” – more than 4,000 – shared their fate; they were killed on the southern outskirts of Kobryn, in the fields of the “Novyj put” kolkhoz (the place was later named “The Valley of Death”). In December 1943, the last Jews of Kobryn were also shot there – 72 specialists in various fields, whom the Nazis had used as professionals. ” Alexei Martynov, *Pamiati kobrynskovo yevreystva* (In Memory of Kobryn's Jewry), Kobryn 1991.



Angielovich. The *Judenrat* building was located at the former Jewish cemetery in Pervomayskaya Street.

[A] Former synagogue in Kobryn, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Old architecture in Kobryn, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



A matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Kobryn, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Young people formed an underground group led by a Jewish police official. When they found out about the death of their families in the executions carried out on October 15, 1942, they started an uprising. The uprising was brutally put down, and 150 people were killed. ¶ About 100 Jews managed to escape from the Kobryn ghetto. Many of them joined partisan units. During the liquidation of the ghetto, a group of children managed to escape too; they found refuge in a church. Two priests, Jan Wolski and Władysław Grobelny, harboured 8 Jewish children in the church, but they were denounced and shot next to the church, together with the children. ¶ The overall

number of Holocaust victims in Kobryn amounts to about 6,900 Jews. In 1975, on the southern outskirts of Kobryn, an obelisk was erected at the site of the mass execution of Jewish people carried out in 1942.

**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ The Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of the town, in Kutuzova Street, was devastated during German occupation and almost completely destroyed in Soviet times. Only a few matzevot can be found there today. There is also a memorial plaque placed at the beginning of the 2010s, with an inscription in Hebrew, English, and Belarusian. ¶ In July 1944, 64 Jews returned to the town. In the 1950s, the Jewish community of Kobryn was refused formal registration and the main synagogue building, dating back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was converted into a brewery. From the late 1980s until 2000, the building had no owner. In 2003, the Jewish religious community of the city of Kobryn obtained a state registration. The organization's plans include the renovation of the synagogue.

### Worth seeing

Former synagogue (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), 40 Pervomayskaya St. ¶ Jewish cemetery, Kutuzova St. ¶ Former post office building (1846), 106 Savetskaya St. ¶ Alexander Suvorov Park, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. it belonged to Aleksander Mickiewicz, poet Adam Mickiewicz's brother. ¶ Former Spaski Monastery building (1465, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.), 11 17 Verasnia St. ¶ Orthodox Co-Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky (1864–1868), designed by I. Kalenkevich, 17 Lenina St. ¶ Manor house (1790), the Alexander Suvorov house-museum, 16 Suvorova St., dedicated to the most illustrious 18<sup>th</sup>-c. Russian field marshal. ¶ Memorial in honour of the first great victory of the Russian army over Napoleon on 27 July 1812. ¶ Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (1465); in 1913 the Orthodox church was transferred from the Bazarovyi Sq. (now Svobody Sq.) to the cemetery, Pervomayskaya St. ¶ Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas (1750–1860), 2 Nikolskaya St. ¶ Orthodox Church of St. George (1889), 104 Lenina St. ¶ Former prison (1821), Savetskaya St. ¶ Former Maria Rodziewicz Gymnasium (1910), School No. 1, 94 Savetskaya St.

**Horodets** (23 km): the former *mikveh* building; a Jewish cemetery with a memorial to Holocaust victims; the Orthodox Church of the Ascension of Our Lord (1735); remains of a manor house. **¶ Hrushava** (29 km): “Dewajtis” oak; a memorial plaque and the grave of the parents of Maria Rodziewiczówna, a celebrated interwar Polish writer. **¶ Antopol** (33 km): two former synagogue buildings (19<sup>th</sup> c.); market halls; a Jewish cemetery with 100 matzevot; a memorial at the grave of Holocaust victims in Chojniki forest wilderness; Resurrection Orthodox Church (1854). **¶ Brest** (46 km): Brest Fortress (1833–1842); the remains of the Great Synagogue, currently a cinema; the Ekdish synagogue; the Feivel prayer house; a synagogue, a Sunday school, and a kosher canteen in Kuybysheva St.; the buildings of Isaac Hendler’s printing house and the Tachkemoni school (attended, among others, by the future Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin); ruins of a convent of Bernardine nuns (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1856); St. Simeon’s Orthodox Church (1868); the Polish Bank (1926); the Railway Technology Museum. **¶ Kamyanyets** (51 km): a former synagogue and a yeshiva (1932); dayan’s house; former Jewish houses with the Stars of David and traces of *mezuzot*; rabbi’s house; the White Tower, a bastion (13<sup>th</sup> c.); Orthodox Church of St. Simon; the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1925). **¶ Skoki** (52 km): the Niemcewicz family palace and park complex (1770s); a cemetery of

Soviet soldiers and World War II victims. **¶ Volchin** (82 km): the birthplace of Poland’s last king, Stanisław August Poniatowski; the layout of the old town with the market square; a former Jewish prayer house; Holy Trinity Church (1729–1733); Orthodox Church of St Nicholas (wooden, mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery with several dozen fieldstone tombstones. **¶ Damachava** (89 km): the former mikveh and rabbi’s house in Gogola Street; in the forest, next to the memorial of the execution site, several post-war matzevot; Orthodox Church of St. Luke (1905).



# Pruzhany

Pol. Pruzhana, Bel. Пружаны, Yid. פּרוּזשענע

*I wanted to begin by saying that I left Pruzhany, but which of you, dear readers, is strong enough in geography to know about Pruzhany?*

J. Kraszewski, *Memories from Polesie, Volhynia, and Lithuania*, Vilnius 1840

**A little town** ¶ Pruzhany has been known since 1487, at first as Dobuchin – at present, this name belongs to a village seven km from Pruzhany. Initially, the settlement developed at the intersection of two routes: the Sialets Route, linking Europe with Muscovy, and the Ruzhany Route, also called the Vilnius Route – later, Jews named that route the Jatke gas (Jateczna St.). This route was used in 1551, when the body of the deceased young queen Barbara Radziwiłł was carried from Cracow to Vilnius, via Pruzhany. The Sialets route was the one that King Władysław IV chose in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, when he was going to wage war against the Khmelnytsky's Cossacks. The Napoleon army used it too, when it marched on Moscow in 1812, and Russian tsars followed it when they came to Warsaw and went on wild hunting expeditions in the Białowieża Forest.

¶ Until 1519, Pruzhany was part of the Principality of Kobryn. After the death of Kobryn's Prince Jan Szymonowicz, the Grand Duke of Lithuania Sigismund I the Old granted the settlement to Marshal Kościwicz. On May 3, 1588, the Queen of Poland and the Grand Duchess of Lithuania Anna Jagiellon granted it with

the Magdeburg municipal rights. After 1795, Pruzhany became part of Russia.

**The Jews of Pruzhany** ¶ Most likely Jews lived in Pruzhany from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1450s, the town already had a functioning Jewish cemetery and a *Hevra kadisha* (Heb.: Burial society). Its first synagogue was probably built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and stood for 400 years until it burnt down in a fire that devastated the town in 1863. In 1495, the Jews were expelled from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but they were allowed to return a few years later. The names of Jewish merchants from Pruzhany appear in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century tax register of the town of Brest. Various surviving documents contain records connected with Jewish life in this town: in 1560, a Jew from Kobryn, one Faivush ben Josef, obtained a lease on a distillery in Dobuchin; in 1562, a Jew from Brest, Peisach ben Ajzik, leased an inn; in 1583, Mordke ben Yankiev traded in goat skin with the merchants in Lublin; in 1583, Eliyahu ben Chaim brought Moravian cloth, paper, raisins, figs, plums, oil, pepper, and rice to Pruzhany from Lublin.

¶ In 1623, the Jewish community of





A clown performs on the street in Pruzhany, summer 1916. Photo taken by a German soldier during World War I, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Gamal LTD., Kibbutz Sarid

Pruzhany reported to the Brest *kahal* (communal regional umbrella organization). At the meeting of the Lithuanian Council (Vaad, the umbrella organization of the entire duchy) that took place in Pruzhany in 1628, it was decided that the Vaad meetings would continue to be held in the town; but in fact no such meeting took place in Pruzhany after that. ¶ In 1644, Władysław IV granted the Jews of Pruzhany with special privileges, which also included basic privileges Jews received in the private towns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth such as those to purchase houses and plots of land in the market square and along the streets, to produce and sell wine, to brew and sell beer and mead, to trade, to work in crafts, to build synagogues provided that they did not resemble Catholic churches, to forego tax payments for the plots of land used for synagogues or Jewish cemeteries, and many others. Though he confirmed the basic privileges in 1650, King John Casimir, who succeeded Wladyslaw, prohibited Jews from purchasing new plots

of land on which to build synagogues. These same privileges were confirmed by John III Sobieski (1677) and Augustus II (1698). ¶ Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the post of rabbi in Pruzhany was taken by the famous Joel Syrkes, a renowned scholar and rabbinical authority, the author of *Beith Khadash* a collection of responsa the acronym of which gave the rabbi his name – the Ba”kh. ¶ In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pruzhany was a well-known pottery centre. In 1857, there were 14 small businesses here, county schools and two-grade parish schools, six hospitals, two Orthodox churches, a Catholic church, a synagogue, and several Jewish prayer houses. In 1873, the town had four functioning synagogues and a free Jewish hospital, and from the mid-1860s, there was also a Jewish state school. ¶ A charity called Linas ha-Tsedek (Heb.: An Overnight Stay for the Righteous) was founded in 1880, and the Organisation for the Assistance of Homeless Jews was set up in 1899. The 1890s saw the establishment of a proto-Zionist Palestinophile club, and



Market square in Pruzhany, 1938, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

from 1900, Zionist organisations became active, among them Tiferes Bakhurim, Pirkhei Zion, and after 1903, also Tzeirey

Zion. In 1904, left-wing Zionists and Bundists united into one party, Kadima. In October 1905, a self-defence unit was formed to protect local Jewish population from the anti-Semitic mob in the times of revolutionary violence. ¶ By 1910, the town had nine functioning synagogues and a Talmud Torah school. The chief rabbi was Berko Joselevich Kontorshchik, and Moshe-Fishel Berkovich Goldberg took over in 1915. A description of the rabbis who arrived in Saint Petersburg to attend a convention of rabbis in 1910 mentions a rabbi from Pruzhany:

“ The figure who inspired particular admiration was Rabbi Elijah Feinstein of Pruzhany. A good-looking old man with a long luxuriant beard as white as the moon, with wise and lively eyes, gave an impression of a patriarch; he spoke little, but his every word was a result of deep thought and honest conviction. Such rabbis inspire respect for the inner spiritual life that they are filled with. ¶ Feliks Kandel, *Istoriya rossiyskich yevreyev* (The History of Russian Jews), Jerusalem 2014

In 1913, Jews owned all four pharmacies, one branch of a bank, one restaurant, and an inn, as well as 166 market stores. The only jeweller working in Pruzhany was Jewish; five Jews made money by renting out furnished rooms. ¶ A school with Yiddish as the main language of instruction was opened in 1915. It was closed down the next year, but a new Jewish school started to function, with instruction in German. In 1917, the Yiddish school was reopened. It was also then that a Jewish old people's home was established. ¶ In 1921–1939, Pruzhany (Pruzana) and the lands around the town came to be incorporated into the reconstructed Poland as a county center in Białystok Voivodeship (Palatnate). In 1919, with the help of the JOINT – the American Jewish Joint

Distribution Committee – an orphanage was established. In the 1920s and 1930s, local branches of various Jewish parties and organisations operated in Pruzhany, and five Jewish schools functioned. In 1922, they established a seven-year Tarbut school with Hebrew as the language of instruction (in the 1927/1928 school year it had 229 students and employed eight teachers). Later, a five-grade Jewish school was opened, run by TSYSHO (*Tsentrale Yidishe Shul-Organizatsye*, Yid.: Central Yiddish School Organisation), with Yiddish as the language of instruction, and an eight-grade classical Jewish gymnasium or secondary school was also established (in 1929/1930, it had 163 students and six teachers; in 1935, 116 students and nine teachers). The Jewish community of Pruzhany ran

two nursery schools. In 1922, a branch of the Jewish Cooperative Bank was opened, and 1931 saw the opening of a branch of Bank Handlowy (Commercial Bank). In 1929, a yeshiva began to function. The weekly newspaper, the Yiddish newspaper *Pruzhener Lebn* (Yid.: The Life of Pruzhany) was published in 1930–1939, and the Zionist weekly *Pruzhener Shtime* (Yid.: The Voice of Pruzhany), also Yiddish, began



to be issued in 1931.

In 1930, the “Pinkas” publishing house released a book titled *Pinkas fun der shtot Pruzhany* (Yid.: A Record Book of the Town of Pruzhany) edited by Gershon Urinsky, Meir Wolanski, and Noah Zukerman. In more than 300 pages, the book described the history and the present-day life of the residents of Pruzhany. Its particular value lies in the fact that the memorial books of most towns were not written until after the Holocaust. This book about Pruzhany has had two post-war editions, in Buenos Aires in 1958, and in Tel Aviv in 1980.

19th-century market halls – cloth halls in Pruzhany, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Pruzhany (then Pruzana, Poland) was seized by the Red

Army. On June 23, 1941, it was taken by German troops. Pruzhany became part of the Białystok District (East Prussia).

“ The war found me in the borderland town of Pruzhany, where I worked as a doctor at the hospital. On June 22, 1941, I was on night duty. At 3:30 am, the Germans started to bomb the town. The Germans entered the town on June, 23, and then, having jumped out of their cars, they began to rob and beat the Jews. ¶ Doctor Olga Goldfein. *Shorthand Notes*, based on *Chornaya Kniga* (Rus.: The Black Book), ed. I. Erenburg and W. Grossman, 1947.

On 10 July 1941, the Gestapo arrived in Pruzhany. Arrests began and the first executions were carried out (18 Jews were shot in the forest, two km from the town). In August 1941, Jewish women and children were forcibly resettled to Pruzhany from Hajnówka and Narewka Mała, where the men had been executed. ¶ On September 25, 1941, a ghetto was established, which included Dąbrowska and Kobryńska Streets and stretched as far as the bridges, Brzeska St. and Czerczewska

St. and included all the adjacent streets (now Kobrynskaya, Svobody, Lenina, Kirova, Ostrovskogo, and Tormasova Streets). ¶ Between the fall of 1941 and the spring of 1942, about 4,500 Jews from Białystok and about 2,000 Jews from the towns and cities of the western districts of Belorussia were resettled into the ghetto: from Białowieża, Stołpca, Novy Dvor, Kamiyanyets, Zamosty, Byaroza, Sharashova, Bluden, Malecz, Slonim, Ivatsevichy, and from nearby villages. ¶ According

Memorial at the Jewish cemetery in Pruzhany, devoted to the people killed during the Holocaust, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchik, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



to Doctor Olga Goldfein, 6,000 out of the 18,000 inmates of the Pruzhany ghetto died over the winter of 1941/1942 due to cold, hunger, and deprivation. The communities of nine local synagogues had to pay a substantial ransom to the Nazis, but after that the Nazis completely devastated the synagogues. ¶ Early in November 1942, the Nazis surrounded Pruzhany ghetto with barbed wire. The dwellers of the ghetto were informed that there would be an evacuation. Everyone knew about the annihilation of Jewish communities in the nearby villages and towns, and, therefore, a group of doctors, teachers, and lawyers decided to commit group suicide. They took morphine and turned on the gas. Neighbours saved the doctors and their families; only one of them, Tzvi Nitzkin, died. Still, a total of 47 ghetto inmates did take their own lives. The deportation of the Jews was postponed and the subsequent registration of the ghetto's dwellers showed 9,976 Jews in the ghetto. ¶ In spring 1942, underground organisations were set up in the ghetto. A group of Jews working in the barracks and in warehouses began to gather

weapons and fix the broken German guns. They also established contact with partisans. More than 20 ghetto dwellers escaped into the forests, carrying weapons with them. ¶ On the morning of January 28, 1943, the Nazi soldiers and the auxiliary police surrounded the ghetto. The Jews were informed that they would be sent to Silesia to do forced labour, but instead, about 10,000 people were packed into railway wagons and sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp. The transports were dispatched until January 31, 1943. About 2,000 people managed to hide and survive the operation, but later most of them were found and murdered. ¶ Only about 20 Jews from Pruzhany survived the Nazi terror. On 17 July 1944, the town was liberated. One woman, Olga Goldfein, was saved by a nun, Genowefa Czubak. In 2001, Ivan, Anna, Aleksandr, and Lidia Pauk were honoured with the titles of Righteous Gentiles for saving the lives of teacher Moshe Judevich and his wife Regina, who escaped from the Pruzhany ghetto to her friends in the nearby village of Chakhets.

**Memorials** ¶ In 1965, an obelisk was erected at the site of mass executions in the Slobodka forest (one km northwest of the village of Slobodka). On November 21, 2005, the community of the refugees from Pruzhany Region (residing in Israel) established a memorial to the Holocaust victims at the old Jewish cemetery.

One of the houses in Pruzhany bears a memorial plaque commemorating the Fridberg family, murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The plaque was funded by **Abraham Fridberg-Harshalom**, born here in 1926, who was the only survivor of the family. His story is told in the book and documentary entitled *Alive from the Ashes* (Jerusalem, 1988) and on the website: [www.harshalom.com](http://www.harshalom.com)



**Traces of Jewish presence ¶**

A former synagogue building from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has survived in Pruzhany. It is now used for industrial purposes and can be found behind the Baptist church in Tomasova St. ¶ There is also a large surviving Jewish cemetery in Gorin Kolada St. Although the cemetery has been partly destroyed, about 2,000 fieldstone matzevot can be found

there. ¶ When in Pruzhany, it is worth visiting the Pruzhany Palace Museum, whose collection includes magazines and books in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as a collection of graphic works by Moshe Bernstein (1920–2006), a painter from nearby Byaroza, who lived in Israel after the war. The collection presents the life of Jewish towns.

Worth seeing

Former synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), Tormasova St. ¶ Jewish cemetery, Gorin Kolada St. ¶ Szwykowski Palace – Pruzhany Palace Museum (1850s), 50 Savetskaya St., tel. +375163221896. ¶ Chapel at the Catholic cemetery (1852), Kafanova St. ¶ St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral (1866), Komunistichnaya St. ¶ Church of the Assumption (1883), 39 Savetskaya St. ¶ Cloth hall (1896), Savetskaya St. ¶ Pharmacy building (1811), 20 Savetskaya St.

Surrounding area

Sharashova (20 km): a Jewish cemetery with approx. 2–3 thousand matzevot; former Jewish houses (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Holy Trinity Church; the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas ¶ Bluden (36 km): a former synagogue and cheder building, currently a shop; the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas (1887–1888). ¶ Byaroza (40 km): ruins of the Carthusian Monastery (1648–1689); a former prison; the Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1860); St. Michael Archangel Orthodox Church; Holy Trinity Church; the former Jewish school and a building with a Hebrew date (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a monument in the forest near the village of Smolarka.



# Slonim

Pol. Słonim, Bel. Слонім,  
Yid. סלֶאָנים

*Playing with his peers a game of the strange-sounding name “klipa” in 1930s Slonim; listening to visiting cantors in the Slonim synagogue; together with his father reading newspapers that had been imported from Warsaw or London; learning Latin at school; and going to the synagogue every Saturday and on holidays, Briker lived in a big world.*  
Galina Levina, on the childhood Slonim memories of Tzvi Shefiel (chairman of the Association of Slonim Jews in Israel)

**Beginnings** ¶ The first mention of Slonim dates back to 1252 and states that the Prince of Galicia Daniel Romanovich sent “his brother [...] to Vawkavysk and his son to Uslonim” to fight against the Lithuanians. From the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, Slonim belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and in 1531, it was granted the Magdeburg rights allowing the town a high level of self-governance and considerable economic independence. In 1586, the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Lew Sapieha, became the head of Slonim town council, soon transforming it from a provincial town into an important political centre. Under Lew Sapieha, the local castle was extensively reconstructed, and a new stone palace (called the Sapieha Palace) was established next to it. In 1597–1685, the palace hosted meetings of the nobility of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, held before the Sejm’s sessions and attended by deputies and senators. To be able to receive so many visitors, Sapieha built guest houses close to the castle. He also paved the marketplace plaza and streets, planted orchards, and built new bridges. In 1591, the Magdeburg rights for the

town of Slonim were confirmed by Sigismund III Vasa, and in 1605, Lew Sapieha managed to obtain the “right of staple” on foreign merchants, obliging international merchants moving through Slonim to stop at the town council and offer their merchandise for sale. In the same year, Sapieha founded the first local weaving guild. ¶ From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Slonim was a major trade centre, owing its popularity mainly to the Grand Lithuanian Hetman Michał Kazimierz Ogiński, who founded several companies there and built a canal that connected the Yaselda (a tributary of the Pripyat) and the Shchara Rivers. The town appearance changed; a town hall and a church were built, and new market stores were set up. About 1770, Ogiński also established a court theatre and an orchestra. The theatre employed professional dramatic and opera actors from Poland and Italy, painters, ballet dancers, and a choir made up of serfs. As a result, Slonim (as well as also privately owned Shklov) became known as the “Athens of the North.” ¶ In 1795, after the Third Partition of Poland, Slonim was incorporated into the Russian Empire. From 1919 to 1939, it was again



Jewish cemetery in Slonim, 1930s, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv

part of Poland as the capital of Slonim County in Nowogródek Voivodeship (Palatinate).

**The Jews of Slonim** ¶ The first mention of Jews in Slonim comes from 1551, when the town was listed in the register of Jewish communities exempt from the household tax, the so-called *srebrszczyzna* (silver tax). In 1623, Slonim Jews reported to the *kahal* of Brest, but three years later, the Slonim Jews formed an independent community with their own *kahal*. In 1660, many Jews of Slonim were ruined as a result of local clashes started by Hetman Stefan Czarnecki's soldiers during the Potop era – a period of devastation in Polish history with its Cossack wars, peasant rebellions, Swedish and Muskovy invasions and internal military clashes. ¶ At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the town's Jews traded in lumber and wheat, engaged in the production and sale of alcohol, and carried out various crafts. The Ogińskis encouraged merchants and craftsmen, including Jewish ones, to settle in Slonim. As a result, by 1766 the Jewish population numbered 1,154 people residing in and around the town and 4,289 in the whole

of Slonim County. ¶ The chronicle of the local Bikur Holim (Visiting the Sick) society, which provided help to poor and sick Jews, notes that an annual fast was introduced to commemorate the events of the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Sivan, year 5524 (17/18 June 1764), when Russian troops clashed near Slonim with the Polish levy of the nobility (*pospolite ruszenie*) commanded by Prince Karol Radziwiłł. The approach of the armies to the town provoked fear among the Jews, who expected a pogrom. Soon, fasting gave way to collecting donations for the hospital's needs.

**Economy at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century** ¶ In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the town population increased: in 1797, there were 1,360 Jews and Karaites living in Slonim; in 1847, there were 5,700 Jews, and by 1847, their number reached 11,515. ¶ Jews earned their living from trade (selling lumber, fur, and leather), transport, wood processing, manufacturing metal products, firing bricks, and tanning; some of them owned steam mills. The first textile factory was founded in 1826 by a Jewish entrepreneur. It employed 35 people, including

Members of the Butchers' Synagogue, who built their synagogue on the ruins of the old one thanks to the help of the Association of Slonim Jews in America. Sitting in the middle, wearing a top hat, is the rabbi, surrounded by his assistants and other dignitaries of the town. Photo published on 21 October 1923, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



20 Jews. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 30 small factories were opened in Slonim, almost all of them belonging to Jews. Jewish entrepreneurs contributed significantly to the town's modernisation; for instance, a water supply system was built thanks to one Grisha Konicov, a Jew who invested into the urbanisation of his native town. ¶ The first Jewish workers' organization was set up in 1897, followed by the establishment of the Bund, Poale Zion, and the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party branches. From 1905 to 1906, a united self-defence unit of Jewish socialist parties operated in town. In 1913, Jewish workers went on strike to protest against the Beilis trial in Kiev, where the tsarist police instigated by the anti-Semitic Black Hundreds and the Union of Archangel Michael accused Menahem Mendel Beilis, local Jewish clerk, of committing a ritual murder and allegedly killing Andrei Yushchinsky, a Christian boy. In 1921, 6,917 Jews lived in Slonim constituting 71.7 percent of the population. All political parties that existed in Poland at that time had their local branches there. Yet in the 1930s, the Zionists (especially the Revisionist Zionists inspired by Zeev Jabotinsky) were particularly influential.

**The synagogue** ¶ In 1642–1648, the Great Synagogue was established in Slonim with the permission of King Władysław IV. It was built on the site of a wooden *shul* that had burnt down. The Great Synagogue was built as an important part of the town defence system, and its massive stone walls hid a richly decorated interior, filled with stucco ornaments and wall paintings. The main façade of the synagogue featured compositional and artistic arrangements characteristic of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Baroque school. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the synagogue was significantly rebuilt, but some original stuccowork and drawings have been preserved. ¶ In 1881, the synagogue was badly damaged by fire. It was re-opened thanks to donations, but as this was done without the permission of the authorities, the building was put under arrest. On May 11, 1883, rich Slonim town dwellers requested the governor to re-open the synagogue and allow them to use the money they raised to “restore the synagogue to a satisfactory condition.” ¶ The synagogue was in operation until 1940. After the war, it served as a warehouse. Since the mid-1990s, the building has been abandoned, falling into decline and awaiting renovation. In



2001, it was handed over to the Jewish Religious Union of the Republic of Belarus. ¶ Another synagogue building, constructed in the modernist style in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, still stands at 26 Kamunistychnaya St. Today, it houses the medical school gym.

**The dynasty of tzadikim** ¶ The founder of the Slonim Hasidic dynasty of tsadikim was **Avraham ben Yitzhak Weinberg** (1804–1883), head of the Slonim yeshiva and one of the most prominent Hasidic leaders of his time. His influence extended to the Jewish communities of the northern Polesie region, all the way from Slonim to Brest-Litovsk and from Kobryn to Baranovichi. ¶ When Weinberg was still alive, Noah (d. 1927), one of his grandsons, settled in the land of Israel, in Tiberias, where he spread the rites and customs of Slonim Hasidism. In 1942, Slonim Hasidim founded in Jerusalem a Talmudic academy named Bet Avraham Slonim. From 1955, their leader was Noah's son, Avraham III. One of Jerusalem's streets



was named after the founder of the dynasty – Avraham of Slonim.

[A] Interior of the synagogue, the bima, and the aron kodesh, circa 1920, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Synagogue in Slonim, circa 1920, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

**Rabbe Avraham Weinberg said the following:** [...] *melody is like a hammer and words are like a nail. Man wants to drive a nail into the wall, but is prevented by hard stones. So he hits the nail with a hammer, and drives it into the wall. If he hits the wall instead of the nail, the wall will crumble and this will be of no avail.* ¶ With this metaphorical description, Weinberg wanted to emphasise that singing *zmirot* (lyrics) from the holy books to a cheerful or sad melody made particular sense because, when hearing the melody the human heart opens up and words carrying holiness and faith can penetrate the inner soul.

**Social and educational life** ¶ In the 1880s, there were 21 synagogues and prayer houses in Slonim. In 1910, the town had seven synagogues, several prayer houses and *cheders* (elementary Jewish schools), a Talmud Torah school,

and four private Jewish schools (two for boys and two for girls). In the interwar period, there were Tarbut secondary schools with instruction in Hebrew and TSYSHO schools with instruction in Yiddish.



**[A]** Great Synagogue in Slonim, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**[B]** Interior of the Great Synagogue in Slonim, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Jewish press in Slonim** ¶ The emergence of the Jewish press was an important sign of the profound changes that took place in the Jewish community of Slonim after World War I. The first local publication was *Unser Zhurnal* (Yid.: Our Journal), published by the Jewish community from 1921 and edited by its president Moshe Zabłocki. Originally a weekly, it was later issued more often (until 1925), in cooperation with a Jewish newspaper based in New York, *Morgen Zurnal* (Yid.: The Morning Journal) and with the help of the Slonim Association in the USA. ¶ Another title was *Slonimer Wort* (Yid.: The Slonim Word), also edited by Moshe Zabłocki, but under the auspices of the Zionist Congress. It was issued between 1925 and 1926. The year 1927 saw the appearance of a biweekly *Unser Shtime* (Yid.: Our Voice), edited by Yekhezkiel Rabinovich and founded under the pressure of the Poale Zion (Right-wing branch) party members. According to accounts in the Slonim Memorial Book, this periodical, which was published on an on-and-off basis until 1933, was distinguished by its high-quality journalism; it served primarily as the party platform to attract new followers. ¶ In 1929,

Poale Zion made another attempt to issue its own newspaper under the title of *Slonimer Leben* (Yid.: Slonim Life), which relied mostly on students submitting essays and news for its publication. The same year saw the re-emergence of *Slonimer Wort*, which appeared regularly every week for the next 10 years (from August 1929 until September 1939). It was a Friday supplement to a Warsaw-based daily *Haynt*, printed and circulated in 600 copies but read by about a half of the 10,000 Jews in Slonim. *Slonimer Wort* actively defended the policy of the National Minorities Club in the Sejm, a faction defending non-Polish and non-Catholic minorities in the independent Poland. It engaged in polemics both with the Orthodox party Agudat Yisrael and with the Marxist-oriented Bund. It supported young literary talents and wrote about important everyday life issues. ¶ The success of *Slonimer Wort* encouraged other political parties to issue their own publications. Revisionist Zionists published *Slonimer Woch* (Yid.: Slonim Week) in 1933. The Agudat Yisrael issued *Slonimer Yidishe Shtime* (Yid.: The Jewish Voice of Slonim), especially before the elections of 1930, 1932, and 1935; and the Bund had its

*Der Weker* (Yid.: The Alarm Clock).

¶ In addition, before elections to the Jewish community, one-off issues were published, as well as leaflets, prospectuses, and brochures of various political parties and social organisations. Zionist youth organisations were particularly active in this respect. They could not afford a printing press of their own, so they used a hectograph (an early copy machine) to publish papers in Hebrew. Ha-shomer Ha-tzair issued *Ha-medurah* (Heb.: Bonfire) for its adult members, *Sha'agat Ha-kfir* (Heb.: The Lion's Roar) for the younger, *Ha-tsofe* (Heb.: Scout) for scouts, and *Mesibah* (Heb.: Festive Gathering) for everyone. Another Zionist youth organisation, "Gordonia", published similar papers: *Dvareinu* (Heb.: Our Words), *Aloneinu* (Heb.: Our Papers), and *Aspaklaria* (Heb.: The Glass). Moreover, secondary school students had their own magazines devoted to poetry and prose. Sixteen of these were issued in Hebrew under the title of *Ha-netsots* (Heb.: Spark). A similar collection was published in Yiddish, titled *Bieriozke* (Yid.: A Small Birch-tree), and five brochures were issued under the ambitious title *Ha-heder – Voice of Hebrew Youth*. A humorous magazine *Kundas* (Heb.: Joker) appeared occasionally.

**Jewish sports life** ¶ Sports classes organised by the Zionist youth organisation Ha-shomer Ha-tzair encouraged young Jewish people to take up sports more seriously. This was also in line with the youth Zionist ethos, which sought, following the motto of Max Nordau, one of the leading European Zionists, to "create a muscular Jew" as



the antithesis of "a yeshivah student, a frail and round-shouldered Talmudist." The first sign of this trend was the establishment of the Jewish Sports Club, which brought together about 50 young men who, following the example set by the Polish soldiers of the local military garrison, decided to form their own football team. Soon, football games were played between the Jewish Sports Club, the Polish garrison team, and the Żyrowa Street seminary team. ¶ The first political party to start a sports club for socialist athletes was Poale Zion. Established in 1926 as "Kraft" (Yid.: Strength), the club was later renamed "Ha-poel" (Heb.: Worker). The Revisionist Zionists inspired by Zeev Jabotinsky responded by opening the "Trumpeldoria" sports club named after the war hero Josef Trumpeldor, while the Bund socialists founded a sports club under the poetic name of "Morgenstern" (Yid.: Morning Star). In 1930, a branch of the world Jewish organisation Maccabee was opened in town, soon to be joined by the Jewish Sports Club. An honorary committee supporting Maccabee was appointed. Also, fund-raising was organised, enabling the Slonim branch of Maccabee to expand its sports activities.

Former synagogue on Kamunistychnaya St. in Slonim, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**A** Pre-war Jewish house in Slonim, 2014. Photo by Irina Pivovarchyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**B** Slonim, town centre, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

At the beginning, its members included 100 Jewish athletes in different sections: gymnastics, cycling, swimming, and rowing on the Shchara River, as well as skating and skiing sections in winter. The Maccabee football team played regularly against other Jewish teams, as well as against the garrison team, the Polish office workers' sports club, the Żyrowa Street seminary team, and other Jewish clubs from the region. The garrison pitch was enlarged and could be used also by the Jewish clubs, following their agreement with the garrison. Once opposition by Orthodox Jews to having sports competitions on Saturdays was overcome, the stadium on Skrobova St. held regular games attracting crowds of Jewish sports fans. The competitions between Polish and Jewish athletes were

not always peaceful, with football games sometimes turning into brawls. In the late 1930s, there were four Jewish sports clubs in Slonim with a membership of about 500, out of approx. 7,000 Jewish residents of the town.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Soviet troops captured Slonim. The town became the centre of the Slonim region in the Baranovichi District of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. Refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland started to flood into the town. According to the records of October 30, 1940, there were more than 15,000 of them (mostly Jews but also Poles). Immediately after the Soviets installed their rule, they suppressed and outlawed all Jewish communal activities, shut down religious institutions, and banned political organisations other than communist. Hundreds of religious Jews and political activists were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. As a result of deportations, the number of refugees in Slonim significantly decreased. On April 12, 1940, the NKVD, Soviet secret service deported approx. 1,000 Jews, and a few months later the Bund activists shared their fate. Well-known Jewish leaders from Slonim, including Dr. Shmuel Wajs, Dr. Isaac Efros, and vice-mayor Boris Piasecki, were also deported. ¶ Slonim was taken over by the German army on June 25–26, 1941. At that time, the town Jews numbered 22,000, constituting two-thirds of the local population. The first operation aimed at liquidating the Jews was carried out on July 14, 1941. Seven km from Slonim, near the village of Pietrolewicze, more



than 1,000 Jewish men were executed. The second *Aktion* was carried out by the SD troops on November 14, 1941, when more than 10,000 people, including all members of the *Judenrat*, were transported to the village of Czepielów (now Chapyaleva, 12 km from Slonim) and shot. On December 24, 1941, it was announced that all Jews had to move to the ghetto. From January to March 1942, the Slonim ghetto received Jews from Dziarechyn, Golyinka, Byten, Ivatsevichy, and Kosava. Ghetto dwellers organised an underground organisation called the Anti-Fascist Committee. Though supervised by the Germans and the police, ghetto prisoners who repaired and cleaned weapons for the Nazi troops in the local mechanical shops managed to smuggle parts of weapons, grenades, loads, rifles, and uniforms out of the ghetto. One of the organisation's members was Erich Stein, a German Jew and an engineer who supervised the labour camp workers; this greatly facilitated the collection of weapons. Once contact with the partisans was established, weapons, warm clothes, soap, salt, and radio receivers were sent to the forest. Dr. Abram Blumovich and Dr. Ciesława Orlińska helped send medicine to the partisans. Underground activists started to escape from the ghetto to the forest – individually at first, and then in small groups. ¶ When the third operation of liquidating the Jews was carried out in Pietrolewicze, from June 29 to July 15, 1942, it met with armed resistance from underground activists, resulting in eight Germans killed and seven wounded. More than 70 armed young Jews were accepted into the Shchors partisan unit, the rest organised a “family camp.”



Monument on Petrolewicz Hill near Slonim, dedicated to the memory of Jews murdered by the Nazis, 2014. Photo by Paweł Szaiko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Nonetheless, during the third operation, around 10,000 Jews were shot and buried, while 700 men and 100 women were left in the so-called “small ghetto.” In December 1942, they too were executed. About 400 people from the Slonim ghetto survived.

**Memorial sites ¶** In 1964, a 12-metre obelisk was established in the village of Pietrolewicze (at the forest of Krzywa Góra), at the site where Slonim ghetto prisoners were executed in June and July 1942. To commemorate those killed on the Chapialewa Fields and on the Slonim–Baranovich road, memorial stelae were erected in 1967. Another stela was placed in 1979 in the open field near Morgi on the right side of the Slonim–Derewnaja road, where approx. 2,000 Jews were shot and buried in 1942. The year of 1994 saw the creation of a memorial site at the former Jewish cemetery on Brest St., which had been destroyed in the Soviet times. The monument there, commemorating the Jews of Slonim and the region, was designed by Leonid Levin. Behind it, some remnants of gravestones can be found. No trace has been left of the other

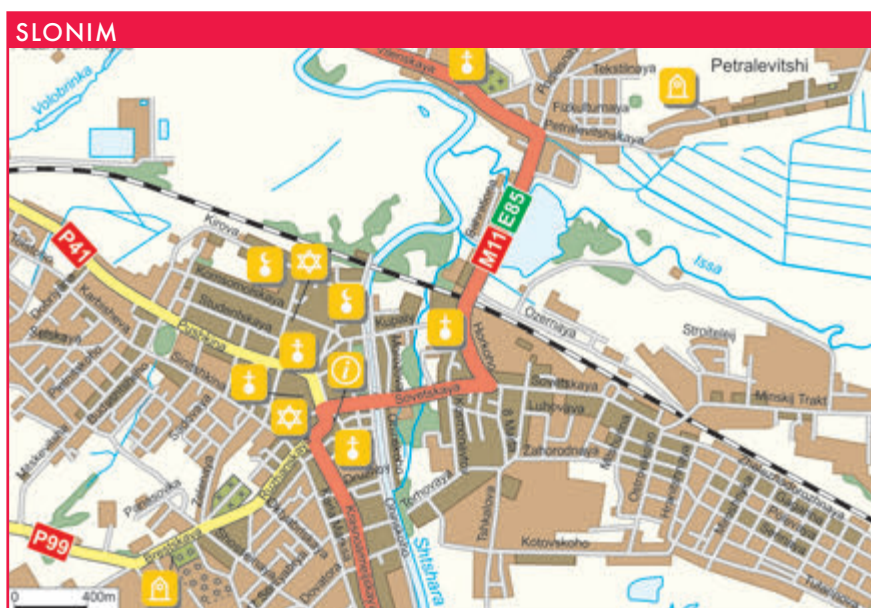
two Jewish cemeteries in Slonim – on                      on Gorky St.  
Shkolnaya St. (near the synagogue) and

**Worth  
seeing**

**Great Synagogue** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 1 Savetskaya St. ¶ **Former Hasidic synagogue** (20<sup>th</sup> c.), 26 Kamunistychnaya St. ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Brest St. ¶ **Town hall** (mid-18<sup>th</sup> c.), 6 Savetskaya St. ¶ **I.I. Stabrovsky Local History Museum in Slonim**, 1 Lenin Sq. ¶ **Church of St. Andrew the Apostle** (1770–1775), Lev Sapeha Sq. ¶ **Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary** (1645), 11 Pervomayskaya St. ¶ **Holy Trinity Orthodox Church** (17<sup>th</sup> c.), 23 W. Krayny St.

**Surrounding  
area**

**Albertin** (within the town's borders): a palace and park architecture complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.) comprising: a manor house, an outbuilding, farm buildings (a barn, a windmill, etc.), sculptures, and a scenic park with a lake. ¶ **Zhyrovichy** (11 km): the Basilian monastery and Cathedral of the Dormition of the Mother of God (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Synkovichy** (12 km): St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church – the oldest defence Orthodox church in Belarus (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.); buildings of the former manor farm and distillery. ¶ **Aziarnitsa** (26 km): a Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.) with fragments of destroyed gravestones. ¶ **Palonka** (30 km): a Jewish cemetery (18<sup>th</sup> c.), the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker (1924). ¶ **Bycień** (30 km): a Jewish cemetery with about 100 gravestones (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary (17<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Dziarechyn** (34 km): a Jewish cemetery with about 150 matzevot; neo-Gothic Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a former presbytery and the gateway to a Catholic cemetery; a monument at World War II mass graves; Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration.



# Ruzhany

Pol. Różana, Bel. Ружаны,  
Yid. ראָזשענאָ

*Lie down and sleep, little one  
Listen, I will sing you a song  
A long, long time ago, far, far away,  
There was a town*

Aharon Libuszycki, *Shir eres* (Heb.: Lullaby),  
Warsaw 1900

**A Sapieha residence** ¶ The first written mention of Ruzhany (Różana) dates back to 1490. The magnate family of Sapieha received Ruzhany into their possession in 1598 and made the town their main residence. Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lew Sapieha, the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, had a castle built on a high hill of Ruzhany; the castle was often visited by the members of royal family. After a visit to the castle of Ruzhany, Władysław IV Vasa said that he had “[...] spent nine days in unspeakable luxury as the marshal’s guest.” Additionally, he was showered with gifts by the generous host and received “[...] a Belgian carpet worth 10,000 zloty, a ring for the queen, bought for 16,000 zloty, and a sable fur bought for 3,000 zloty in Moscow [...]” Thanks to the efforts of the Sapiehas, Ruzhany was granted Magdeburg municipal rights and its own coat of arms. Ruzhany Castle, rebuilt in 1784–1786 and designed by Johann

Samuel Becker, was a magnificent palace and park complex that used to be called the “Belorussian Versailles”, or the “Versailles of Polesie”. Yet, the estate approached the brink of bankruptcy, which forced Aleksander Sapieha to lease the palace out in 1829 to a Jewish entrepreneur, Mordechai Pines. ¶ Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz recollects: “In Różana, the princely estate once owned by Hetman Pociej, a famous drunk, I saw a different ‘library’ of cups [...]. These were cups that could hold two or more bottles, and which had different shapes: of sticks, pistols, or bears. What a pity! It was from those unmeasured vessels that the fathers and grandfathers had drunk away Poland’s wellbeing, happiness, independence, and unity. They rested in peace, whereas we and our children have to suffer because of their idleness and inactivity.” ¶ From 1786 until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the palace hosted a factory producing silk fabrics, velvet, and cloth.

“What can you say: for a small town such as Ruzhany, the return – after a hundred years – of the family that had built the town [...] was an extraordinary sensation. The Catholic church, the Orthodox church, the monastery, administrative buildings, and so on – everything was built by the Sapiehas, and the most magnificent

Ruzhany, Sapieha family estate. In the chapel of the palace, the body of St. Casimir rested for a few years after it had been taken away from the Vilnius Cathedral during the wars of 1655. Postcard from the 1920s, drawing by Napoleon Orda, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))



edifice was the huge castle, which had once towered over the town and of which now only ruins were left. Most people probably had a poor knowledge of history, but they did know that Ruzhany meant the Sapiehas. ¶ After the mass, a little crowd gathered in front of the church – very solemn, but joyful. [...] Everyone welcomed us and wished us happiness and many years of life in the family hearth again. ¶ Suddenly, just like in Nowogródek, a serious-looking elderly Jew with a long beard approached us and, bowing with great dignity, invited us to his place because he had something very important to tell my Dad. After the welcome was over, and after a short visit at the presbytery, we went to the house they showed us. He introduced himself to us as Pines, treated us to tea with some kind of bagel, and told us a story of his family, which settled in Ruzhany at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It turned out that shortly before the November Uprising, his grandfather together with my great-grandfather Eustachy drew up a sales contract for the Ruzhany Castle, which was later converted into a textile factory by his grandfather. Our interlocutor bent down and took out the original certificate of sale from the lower drawer of the desk; the certificate stipulated that the buyer would pay as much as he would manage to collect quickly within a certain time, provided that if any Sapieha, the seller's rightful heir, ever returned to Ruzhany, the palace was to be returned to him for the same price. ¶ – You are now reclaiming your rightful inheritance, Your Grace, so the contract is valid and I return your property to you in accordance with the contract. I know that Your Grace will not take it back now, as it is merely a worthless ruin, but a contract is a contract and I just wanted to inform you about it. ¶ We finally learnt that, when joining the November Uprising as a volunteer, grandfather Eustachy knew very well that it was only a patriotic bid that could not possibly succeed; he also knew he would not return to Ruzhany and the rest of his estate. Unfortunately, it is often rumoured that Sapieha sold his family hearth to Jews in order to have money for debauchery. ¶ Eustachy Sapieha, *So It Was...* Eustachy Sapieha's Undemocratic Memoirs, Warsaw 2012

**The Jews of Ruzhany** ¶ The first mention of the Jews of Ruzhany comes

in a record stating that, by the 1623 decision of the Lithuanian Vaad, Ruzhany



became part of the Brest *kahal* region. Decades later, in 1662, the Ruzhany community received the status of an independent *kahal*. The Jews living there suffered severely during the Great Northern War between Russia and Sweden (1700–1721). Despite that, the community was considered prosperous, and in 1721, it paid 1,100 zlotys of poll tax (the same amount was collected by the entire Vilnius community). Later, the situation of the Jews deteriorated to the point that they began leaving Ruzhany. In 1766, the community diminished to 326 members, 154 of them living in the town. ¶ As the result of the Third Partition of Poland (1795), Ruzhany became part of the Russian territory. In 1847, there were 1,467 Jews living in Ruzhany, and in 1897 there were 3,599 (71.7 percent of the population). After the opening of six textile factories and several spinning mills in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Jews from the town and the surrounding area began to work there. In 1810, Itzko Leibovich, Berko Meierovich, and Gershko Yankielevich opened a textile factory there. By 1829, Jews owned three local textile factories. Some Jewish families grew vegetables and engaged in fruit farming on leased land. In 1850, two Jewish agricultural settlements



Bima in the synagogue in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

were established near Ruzhany – that was part of greater Nicholas I’s plan to transform the trading Jew, whom he deemed unproductive, into agricultural workers engaged in manual labor. Jews from those villages were among the first émigrés from Bielorrussia to the land of Israel, where in 1884, they established the farm of Ekron, subsequently *kibbutz* Mazkeret Batya. In 1875, almost all of Ruzhany burnt down in a fire; the flames also destroyed Jewish prayer houses and the synagogue.

### Accusations of ritual murder ¶

The Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary (1908–1913), *Yevreyskaya entsyklopedia* (Rus.: The Jewish Encyclopaedia) contains the story of a blood libel that took place in Ruzhany:

“In 1657, on the eve of Easter, the body of a child from a Christian family was found in the Jewish quarter – “a victim of the Jewish thirst for blood,” as rumour had it. The crowd was ready to attack the Jews, but the town’s authorities prevented that from happening. [...] The municipal court accused the entire *kahal* of ritual murder and demanded that two representatives of the congregation be surrendered. The two chosen were Rabbi Israel Ben Sholom and Rabbi Tobia Ben Josif (they may actually have volunteered for the sake of sanctifying the name of God by becoming martyrs). The execution was carried out on the second day of Rosh ha-shanah. [...] The Jews remember the martyrs to this day. [...] At the local cemetery, a stone-built memorial to the murdered victims was erected (and renovated in 1875).



[A] Pre-war houses in the former Jewish quarter in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Former yeshiva and synagogue in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

The story had a continuation, centuries later, told here by Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, a Russian economist and a Gulag prisoner, whose father-in-law was related to one of those who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century volunteered for martyrdom to save the community.

“My father-in-law, Ruvim Yevsevich Zakheim was a taciturn Jew, immersed in holy books. Sometimes he would argue loudly with some old men in Hebrew. The argument concerned different interpretations of the Talmud, and for several thousand years it had intensely preoccupied Talmudists, living in their own world, very distant from issues of everyday life. [...] In 1930, my father-in-law ceremonially entered my room, where I was sitting at my newborn son's bed. – I need to talk to you. Do you want to circumcise

the child? I knew the old man had prayed to God that I would give birth to a daughter because he knew that a boy would remain uncircumcised, which would have been a tragedy for him. [...] – No, I cannot do that – I said categorically. – But your son won't be a Jew! Do you understand what this means? I didn't understand. It seemed completely irrelevant to me if my son would be Jewish or Chinese: after all, he would live in the time of communism! [...] – Do you know the origins of our family name? The old man took out of his pocket an old leather case decorated with the Star of David and an inscription in the Jewish language. Inside the case there was a parchment scroll. He solemnly read to me an incomprehensible text in Hebrew and translated it. The content of the manuscript was as follows: “In the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the town of Ruzhany, the body of a child from a Christian family was found before Passover. The Jewish community of Ruzhany was accused of ritual murder. The influential prince who owned the town announced that he would wipe the whole community off the face of the earth if they would not give up the murderers within three days. For three days and nights, the entire community prayed for rescue in the synagogue, and in the morning on the fourth day two old men went to see the prince and confessed to the ritual murder. The old men were hanged at the gate of the castle.” The community prepared two documents and gave it to the families of those killed. One of them was in my father-in-law's possession. It certified that the old man (the name was specified) was not a murderer but had sacrificed his life to save the community, that prayers would forever be said for his soul in the synagogue in Ruzhany, and that his family would be given the name of Zakheim, which means “zerekh keidesh geim” – “his seed is sacred.” His family should last forever and ever, and if there is no male descendant, the daughter would give

that family name to her husband after marriage. My father-in-law read the document and gave me an inquiring look. ¶ – If he is not circumcised, I cannot give him this document, and he is the descendant of the family. ¶ I wanted very much to get that scroll, and I was sorry for the old man, who hoped I would not resist any longer. ¶ But I persisted. Offended, he went out of the room and took his treasure with him. My father-in-law died a long time ago. The scroll was lost during the war. The last Zakheim, my son's son, will soon be one year old. He is learning to walk. He is unable to keep his balance yet, and he sways on his plump legs. I look at him and think to myself: How many storms have swept over mankind since the 17<sup>th</sup> c., when the document for the Zakheim family was issued “forever and ever”... ¶ One Zakheim, head of the municipal executive committee, was torn apart during the White Guard rebellion in 1918. Four others were killed in the war. Several people died in the furnaces of Auschwitz. ¶ My husband was shot in the basement of the Lubyanka in 1936. ¶ Olga Adamova-Sliozberg, *Put’* (Rus.: Journey), 1993.

**Modern times** ¶ In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish hospital was established in Ruzhany. In 1883, a charity called Linas ha-Tzedek (Shelter for the Righteous) was founded and a Talmud Torah school functioned, with about 300 students. It was in Ruzhany that one of Russia's first branches of the Zionist organisation Hovevei Zion (Heb.: Lovers of Zion) was established; in 1884, its representatives attended a convention of Palestinophiles (the name for proto-Zionist activists) in Katowice. In 1904, a self-defence organisation was organized here to prevent pogroms.

In 1905–1907, various political parties across the Russian political spectrum were active in the town. ¶ In the interwar period, the number of the town Jewish residents gradually decreased, with 3,718 Jews living here in 1921 and 3,500, in 1939. The Jewish community tried to maintain their Jewish education and culture; the town had a Tarbut secondary school with Hebrew as the main language of instruction, a Yiddish secondary school, a private elementary school, and an amateur theatre. The religious community also maintained a nursing home.

**Yechiel Michael Pines** (1843, Ruzhany – 1913, Jaffa) – a religious and Zionist activist, writer, and teacher, proponent of religious Zionism (called Mizrahi movement, in modern-day Israel – a national religious camp). He advocated multiple Jewish reforms, particularly educational, but thought that the religious life of the Jews should be left intact. He taught at the yeshiva in Ruzhany inspiring religious students with the idea of a settlement in the land of Israel. In 1878, having arrived in Jerusalem as a representative of the London-based Montefiore Foundation, he studied the possibilities of enlarging Jewish presence in Palestine. He was one of the founders of the association Thiyat Israel (Heb.: The Rebirth of the Jewish People), the aim of which was to make Hebrew a colloquial language. He also served as a superintendent of charities run by the Ashkenazi Jewish population in Eretz Israel. Pines's works were published posthumously in three volumes in 1934–1939. The Israeli settlement (*moshav*) Kefar Pines was named in his honour.



[A] The renovated main gate and rebuilt guardhouses of the Sapieha Palace in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Exhibition at the museum in the Sapieha palace complex in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Writers** ¶ One of the descendants of the Jews from Ruzhany executed during the ritual murder trial was **Meir Kryński** (1863–1916), a teacher, and an author of textbooks both in Hebrew and in Yiddish. He founded the first illustrated periodical devoted to literature and art published in Yiddish, *Roman Tseitung* (Yid.: A Gazette of Stories, 1906–1907), and was a co-founder of the Folkist daily *Der Moment* (Yid.: The Moment), perhaps the most widely read Yiddish newspaper with circulation about 40,000 copies. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. Ruzhany was also the hometown of **Aharon Libuszycki** (1874–1942), a Hebrew poet and

translator, and the writer **Zelig Sher** (Shereshevsky) (1888–1971), the author of many books and memoirs in Yiddish. Sher studied at the yeshivot in Ruzhany and Slonim and learnt the weaving trade in Vilnius. He was an active member of the Socialist Zionist movement (Poalei Zion). After emigrating to the USA in 1909, he started to publish articles and short stories in American newspapers and magazines. During World War I, Sher served in the American army and fought on the French front, where he was wounded. When he returned, his short stories – both those about the war and others – began to appear in Jewish American periodicals: *Forverts*, *Der Tog*, and others, and the author himself became one of the editors of *Di Tseit*. **Melech Epstein** (1889–1979) had a similar history. He was a historian, a journalist writing for the *Forverts* (Yid.: Forward), *Der Tog* (Yid.: Day), and *Morgen Fraykhait* (Yid.: Morning Freedom), an activist involved in trade unions, socialist parties, and the Communist Party of the USA, which he left in August 1939, after the USSR and Nazi Germany signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Twenty years later, he described his experience with the Communist Party in the book titled *The Jew and Communism. The Story of Early Communist Victories and Ultimate Defeats in the Jewish Community, U.S.A., 1919–1941*.

**Yitzhak Shamir** (Jaziernicki) (1915–2012) – an Israeli politician, who served twice as Israeli Prime Minister. In 1935, he emigrated from Ruzhany to Palestine. Besides the prime ministership, he held a number of other senior political positions: in the Mossad (Israeli Intelligence Service), in the Herut (a political party



whose priority was to establish a Jewish state encompassing the entire historical territory of Israel), and in the Knesset.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the outbreak of World War II, Ruzhany was initially captured by the Red Army. The Jewish population swelled due to the influx of several thousand refugees from the areas occupied by the Third Reich. The Soviets deported most of them to the distant regions of the Soviet Union such as Siberia and Kazakhstan, but some remained in Ruzhany. With the beginning of the Nazi occupation (in July 1941), a tribute payment and forced labour duty were imposed on the Ruzhany Jews; the Jews were forced to wear bands with the word “Jude” on their right arms. The Nazis established the ghetto that existed for a short time only. As early as November 2, 1941, Jews from the ghetto were transported to the Treblinka death camp. The entire urban center of Ruzhany, where the ghetto was located, was burnt down. ¶ In 1965, an obelisk was erected in Ruzhany to commemorate the victims of the Nazis; as it was routinely done in the USSR, the inscription on the memorial mentioned only the peaceful “Soviet citizens,” and purposefully neglected the fact that a majority of the victims were Jews.

## Traces of Jewish presence ¶

Numerous houses built before the war by the Jewish inhabitants of the town remain till this date; one of them is the former pharmacy. The local history museum exhibition in the partly restored castle has a section devoted to the Jews of Ruzhany.



**The synagogue complex ¶** At 6 Jakuba Kolasa Street in Ruzhany, the synagogue building has survived, established probably towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the design of Samuel Becker, the court architect of the Sapiehas. A two-storey brick building with a main prayer room, it was in use until 1940, when it was closed down by the Soviet authorities. The building is currently in a state of ruin, but a stone *bimah* has survived. Next to the synagogue stands the building of the former yeshivah, opened around the 1840s. In 1855–1888, the rabbi of Ruzhany was Mordechai Jaffe (1820–1891), one of the illustrious pioneers of the first *aliyah* in 1888.

**The Jewish cemetery ¶** There is a Jewish cemetery with more than 200 surviving matzevot in Tchyrvonarmieiskaia Street. The oldest ones date back to the first half of 17<sup>th</sup> century, which means they are among the oldest preserved matzevot in Belarus.

Matzevot at the Jewish cemetery in Ruzhany, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Worth  
seeing**

**Synagogue complex**

(18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.), the former synagogue and *yeshivah*, 6 J. Kolasa St. **¶** **Jewish cemetery** (17<sup>th</sup> c.). **¶** **Castle**, formerly the residence of the Sapieha family (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Pianierskaya St. **¶** **Holy Trinity Church** (1617), Tchyrvonoarmieiskaia St. **¶** **Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul** (1675), 2 17 Verasnia Sq. **¶** **Former Basilian monastery** (1788). **¶** **Church of St. Casimir** (1792). **¶** **Former inn** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.), Tchyrvonoarmieiskaia St.

**Surrounding  
area**

**Lyskava** (20 km): ruins of a synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery with about 150 matzevot;

the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God (1933); the former missionary monastery (1763–1785); Franciszek Karpiński's grave; Holy Trinity Church. **¶** **Kosava-Paleskaie** (26 km): the Puśłowski Palace (1838); Orthodox Church of St. Anthony (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Most Holy Trinity (1878); a Jewish cemetery; the manor house in Meračovshina in which Tadeusz Kościuszko was born. **¶** **Izabelin** (38 km): the former stone synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the rabbi's wooden house (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1778); tombstones connected with the history of Lithuanian Calvinism; Orthodox Church of St. Michael (late 18<sup>th</sup> c.). **¶** **Ivatsevichy** (38 km): the manor house of the Gołuchowski and Jundźwiłł families (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial at the grave of World War II victims; a plaque commemorating the designation of a triangulation point that was part of the Struve Geodetic Arc in 1830, established to mark and measure the meridian. **¶** **Porazava** (42 km): a brick synagogue, currently a warehouse; the old and new Jewish cemeteries; Church of St. Michael Archangel (1825–1828); Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (1872); the manor house in the Bogudzięki estate (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Catholic cemetery with a chapel (1894). **¶** **Vawkavysk** (49 km): a Jewish cemetery, a collection of documents and ephemera from the Vawkavysk ghetto at the Vawkavysk War and History Museum in the manor house called Bagration's House; Castle Hill (14<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Wenceslaus Church (1841); St. Nicholas Orthodox Church (1847); January insurgents' cemetery. **¶** **Bronnaya Gora** (50 km): a memorial at the site of the extermination of more than 50,000 people, mostly Jewish.



# Haradzishcha

Pol. Horodyszcze, Bel. Гарадзішча,  
Yid. האָראַדישטש

*Fejga's shop was the prominent one – the largest and the richest, where you could buy chocolate, sweetmeats, and Glauber's salt. At Fejga's you could hear the latest gossip from the vicinity of Haradzishcha.*

Translated from: Jan Bułhak, *Kraj lat dziecińczych*  
(The Land of Childhood), Gdańsk 2003

**Origins ¶** Haradzishcha, on the Servetsh River, is mentioned for the first time in written sources in 1413 as a settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Some local scholars believe that Haradzishcha was actually the legendary Voruta, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the times of its first Grand Duke, Mindaugas. In 1506, the Niemirowicz family, who owned Haradzishcha, defeated Tatar forces nearby. Their Tatar captives subsequently formed the Tatar community of Haradzishcha. A Muslim cemetery (*mizar*) survived in town, and one of the streets until recently was called Tatarska Street (currently it is Praletarskaia St.). In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the then owners of Haradzishcha – the noble family of Chodkiewicz – converted from Orthodox Christianity to Catholicism, leaving the Orthodox churches they had established. The new owner, Trojan Piotrowski, built a Calvinist church that was later converted into a Catholic church and then again back into an Orthodox Church: since 1868, it has functioned as Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. ¶ At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, 2,631 people lived in the

town, including 2,108 Jews (80 percent). During World War I, Haradzishcha came under the German occupation. The front line coincided with the Servetsh River. During the occupation, many photographs were taken that recorded the almost complete destruction of Haradzishcha. The 1828 population was only one-third of the pre-1914 population: 1,021 residents, including 760 Jews.

**The Jews of Haradzishcha ¶** In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Haradzishcha changed its official status from a grand-ducal residence to a town. The town received the privilege allowing for regular market fairs, due to which the town attracted craftsmen, traders, and merchants, including Jews. The Jewish community of Haradzishcha numbered 422 people in 1766, and 277 people in 1834, which amounted to nearly a half of the town population. In 1840, Jews owned 48 houses which were inhabited by 55 families. At that time, the town was home to the families of craftsmans Michel Krolowitz and Chaim Gudamovich, tavern keepers Beniamin Bogatun and Shmoila Vonkhadlo, butcher Mendel Molchadsky and others. The Jews lived

Wooden buildings in Haradzishcha, 1936. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



in the centre of the town. In the main street (formerly Nowogrodzka, now Edunova St.), several early 20<sup>th</sup>-century wooden residential buildings have survived. ¶ In 1852, a wooden synagogue and a wooden *beth mid* were established. The community's rabbi at that time was Hirsch Vonkhadlo. The community

also had its own *mohel*, who performed circumcisions, and a kosher butcher. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a brick synagogue was built in the centre of the town. There were also four prayer houses. In Soviet times the synagogue building housed a community centre, but it was pulled down in 1999.

” **The legend about Marshal Piłsudski saved by a Jew** ¶ During the Polish-Soviet Russia War of 1919–1920, Józef Piłsudski was hiding from the Bolsheviks and found himself in the vicinity of Haradzishcha. Legend has it that a Jew by the name of Lickiewicz from Haradzishcha (or, according to a different version, from the village of Arabovshchina, which is part of the Haradzishcha district) saved his life. ¶ *The Jew disguised Piłsudski in his wife's female jacket and told him to milk the cow. After the danger was over, Lickiewicz led the commander to his unit. Piłsudski gave the Jew a Vilnius-style sukmana (a peasant coat) as a reward, and a few years later he sent him a permanent pass to the Belweder – the Warsaw residence of Poland's leader. When Lickiewicz visited Warsaw, Piłsudski, already the Chief of State, gave him money, with which he built a steam mill that worked in the village of Arabovshchina until the 1980s.* ¶ Translated from: Tomasz Krzywicki, *Szlakiem Adama Mickiewicza po Nowogródzczyźnie, Wilnie i Kownie* (Following the Footsteps of Adam Mickiewicz Through the Land of Navahrudak, Vilnius, and Kaunas), 2006.

**World War II and the Holocaust** ¶ In September 1939, a wave of refugees flooded into western

Belorussia, the territory of which had been seized by the Red Army. In August 1940, 1,337 refugees were registered





in Haradzishcha. The size of the Jewish community increased to nearly 3,000 people. Some were arrested and deported deep into the USSR. At the beginning of 1940, a school teaching in Yiddish was opened. The German occupation began on July 10, 1941; only a few days after the Germans arrived, a ghetto was established and executions of the local Jews began. On October 20–21, 1941, after an SS unit arrived in the town, more than 1,500 Jews from Haradzishcha were shot at the Pohorelce forest wilderness and in the Michnovshchina Forest, both just a few kilometres from the town. The victims included several dozen representatives of the local intelligentsia: doctors, teachers, and lawyers. Further liquidation operations were carried out in the Haradzishcha ghetto in spring and summer 1942. During the German occupation, which lasted until December 24,

1943, about 4,000 local inhabitants were killed, many of them Jews.

**The Koldichevo camp** ¶ In the village of Koldichevo, six kilometers from Haradzishcha, a Nazi death camp functioned from March 1942 until June 1944. More than 22,000 people were killed there – mostly Jews, but also Roma, Belarusians, and Poles. ¶ In 1964, a memorial was established to the victims of fascism, the inmates of the Koldichevo camp. An inscription reading “to the victims of the Holocaust” was added in 1994. In 2007, near the former entrance into the camp, on the road from Baranovichi to Navahrudak, a memorial to the victims of Koldichevo was unveiled. Three religious symbols were placed on it: a Star of David, an Orthodox cross, and a Catholic cross. The memorial also includes a plaque commemorating the Roma killed here.

Church, school, and holiday centre in Haradzishcha, 1930s. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

“**A diary from the Warsaw Ghetto, written by Chaim Kaplan, born in Haradzishcha** ¶ Chaim Kaplan, the author of one of the four diaries written in the Warsaw Ghetto that have survived, was born in Haradzishcha in



1880. In 1905, he moved to Warsaw, where he set up one of the first primary schools teaching in Hebrew, which he ran for the next 34 years. He authored *Hebrew Grammar* (New York 1926), a *Haggadah* with commentary (New York, 1927), and an anthology of articles on Jewish education and pedagogy (Warsaw, 1937). His Warsaw Ghetto diary covered the period from September 1, 1939 to August 4, 1942. Chaim Kaplan was murdered in Treblinka, probably towards the end of 1942 or at the beginning of 1943. The diary was first published in English in 1965, under the title *Scroll of Agony*.

### Traces of Jewish presence ¶

Haradzishcha's cemeteries bear witness to the many ethnicities and religious groups that contributed to the history of this place. Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, and Tatar cemeteries were located in different parts of the town. The wooden houses along the streets of Haradzishcha, standing on the high foundations where there used to be Jewish shops, give the town a special atmosphere.

#### Worth seeing

**Traditional architecture** (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.), Edunowa St. (formerly Nowogrodzka St.). ¶ **Jewish cemetery** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Naberezhnaia St. ¶ **Catholic Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Mickiewicz St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross** (1764), a wooden church, reconstructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., 28 17 Verasnia St.

#### Surrounding area

**Wrzątek Spring**: a non-freezing hot-water spring near the village of Jasieniec. ¶ **Koldichevo** (6 km): a memorial at the site of the Koldichevo death camp (1942–1944); foundations of the prison within the camp; the remains of the Szalewicz family manor park. ¶ **Zaosie** (12 km): the wooden manor house in which the poet Adam Mickiewicz was born and lived, currently a museum. ¶ **Lake Świtezianka** (16 km): a 1.5 sq. km lake that inspired Adam Mickiewicz's ballad *Świtezianka*. ¶ **Molchad** (25 km): a synagogue (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a former Jewish inn; a Jewish cemetery with approx. 150 matzevot; a memorial at Popowe Hill forest wilderness; the Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. ¶ **Baranovichy** (28 km): two former synagogues, currently a vet clinic and a residential building (19<sup>th</sup> c.); two yeshivas, currently



[A] Old settlement in Haradzishcha. From the 11th to the 13th c. this was the town of Mindaugas, the first King of Lithuania, 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershinskaya, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Former Jewish street in Haradzishcha (formerly Nowogrodzka St., now Edunova St.), 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershinskaya, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[C] Memorial in the village of Koldichevo, dedicated to the 22,000 Christians, Jews, and Roma murdered in the Koldichevo death camp, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

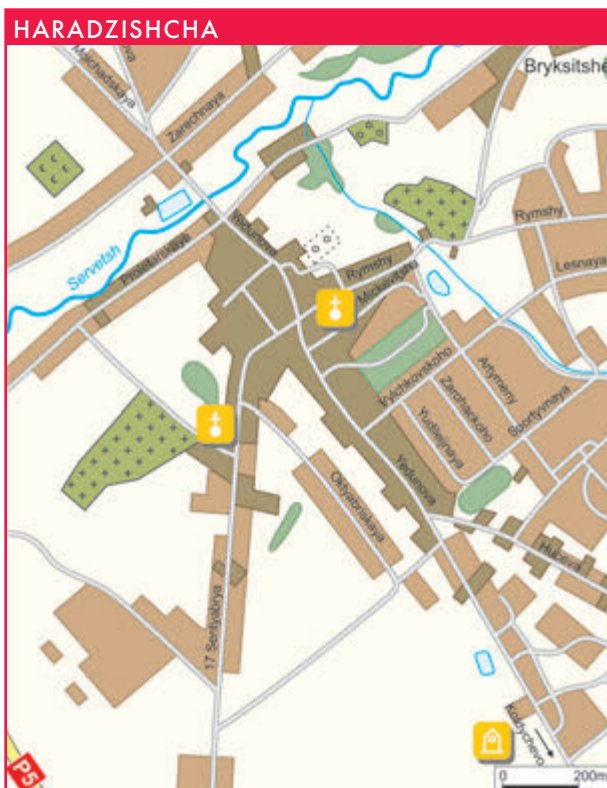
[D] A matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Haradzishcha, 2014. Photo by Tamara Vershinskaya, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[E] Remnants of the Koldichevo death camp, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

school buildings; a Jewish cemetery with two memorials; the Orthodox Church of the Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women; the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1924); the Orthodox Church of the Protection of the Mother of God (1921); a fire station from the times of the Second Polish Republic; the manor houses of the Królewski and Razwodowski families; the buildings of a post office, a bank, and the municipal slaughterhouse; civil servants' housing estate (circa 1925); a collection of *Judaica* at the Local History Museum. ¶ **Novaia Mysh** (29 km): a former synagogue, currently a community centre; a former rabbinical school; a brick-built inn; a neo-Gothic distillery building; a Jewish cemetery with Rabbi Yechiel Musher's *ohel*; a memorial to the victims of an execution in the forest by the road to Kazliakevichy; the Church of the Transfiguration (1825) with baroque interior decorations moved from Nesvizh; an Orthodox church (1859); an interwar Polish school; the remains of a Polish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.);

Chodkiewicz Castle fortification walls; remains of the manor alley. ¶

**Liakhavichy** (45 km): the birthplace of Jakub Szynkiewicz (1884–1966), the Great Mufti of Polish Tatars, who rendered great services to that community (1884–1966); a former synagogue, currently a tinned-food factory (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); brick Jewish houses (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a monument at the site of Chodkiewicz Castle; Church of St. Joseph (1910); a Catholic and Orthodox cemetery with ruins of chapels.



# Mir

Bel. Mip, Yid. מיר

*Here the people saunter along at a very slow pace. Life in Mir does not exactly have the hustle and bustle of New York City!*

Ruchoma Shain, *All for the Boss*,  
Jerusalem 1984

**Beginnings** ¶ The first mention of Mir dates back to 1395, when the town was burnt by the crusading Teutonic Knights on their Christianization mission through the towns of Lida and Navahrudak. In 1486, Mir became the property of the Illinicz family and then in 1569, of the Radziwiłłs. In 1579, Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł gave the local dwellers the privilege allowing for producing and selling mead, beer, and vodka. The multi-cultural character of the town at that time was reflected in various religious buildings that

surrounded the marketplace: a wooden mosque (not preserved), the synagogue complex, the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, and St. Nicholas' Catholic Church. ¶ Mir became famous thanks to its castle and a park complex – a 16<sup>th</sup>-century architectural monument. Built in the Gothic and Renaissance styles, the castle belonged to the families of Illinicz (1568), Radziwiłł (until 1828), Wittgenstein (until 1891) and Świętopełk-Mirski (until 1939). In 2000, Mir Castle was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mir was known as the “Gypsy capital”: it was home to Jan Marcinkiewicz, a Gypsy king of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, to whom Karol Radziwiłł (nicknamed “My Dear Sir”, Pol. *Panie Kochanku*) in 1787, granted the privilege of the chief judge over all the Gypsies residing in the area.

“ There are five main streets. [...] The entire town is no larger than an area of five or six city blocks on the East Side of New York, with a population of five hundred Jewish families [...]. The river is used by the people to swim in during the warm weather. Clothes are also washed at the river bank in the spring and summer months. [...] The electricity is controlled by the town electrician, who switches on the lights before nightfall and off at midnight. I had noticed that on most evenings our light bulb goes off and then on again at around the same time. To my surprise, I learned that the electrician uses this as a signal to alert his wife that he will be coming home shortly for his evening meal! ¶ Ruchoma Shain, *All for the Boss*, 1984.





Yeshiva students, Mir,  
photo published on 23  
January 1925, collection  
of the YIVO Institute for  
Jewish Research

**The Jews of Mir** ¶ The Jewish community of Mir was established at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and grew rapidly, soon receiving its own jurisdiction (earlier the Jews of Mir had been under the jurisdiction of the Nesvizh *kahal*) as well as membership in the Lithuanian Vaad. Mir Jewish community hosted several Vaad conventions: in 1697, 1702, and in 1751. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the town was a major trade centre, developing thanks to Jewish merchants and their fur trade with Leipzig and with the Baltic ports such as Königsberg and Memel. Mir was also the site of many annual fairs and weekly markets; its St. Nicholas Fairs, for example, held twice a year (on 9 May and 6 December) and lasting 2–3 weeks each, were famous for horse trade. ¶ Local stores in Mir enjoyed high sales: in 1822, 18 stores had a turnover of 100 to 900 roubles (approx. 323 roubles per store, which was a price of a very fancy house or a drive-in tavern in a shtetl). As a Polish romantic poet Władysław Syrokomla noted, the stores were full of high-quality cotton and silk

products. These fancy goods available in Mir for sale gave rise to a saying, “she has already gone to Mir,” referring to a woman who was getting ready for marriage: it meant that she was preparing her dowry and purchasing fancy commodities. ¶ The Jews of Mir enjoyed a reputation as outstanding craftsmen who – according to Ruchoma Shain – “[...] could turn an old thing into a new one so well that even in Paris nobody dreamt about it.” ¶ In 1806, the Jewish population of Mir numbered 807 (including 30 merchants and 106 tailors); in 1833, it stood at 1,583 (75.5 percent of the town’s population), in 1847 – at 2,273, and in 1897 – at 3,319 (about 62 percent of the town’s population). Most Jews worked as craftsmen and tradesmen; some of them were wealthy merchants with extensive trade contacts, as can be seen in the 1832 records of the Leipzig fair, which listed several residents of Mir. The Jews of Mir were also involved in industry. In 1839, a cloth factory that belonged to guild merchant Mejer Czarny produced 3,200 pieces of cloth worth 2,400 roubles.



[A] Mir Castle, 1930s, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

[B] The yeshiva in Mir, circa 1920, collection of Mir Castle Complex Archives

Additionally, Mejer Czarny leased Prince Wittgenstein's cloth factory.

In 1814, in his petition to the Governor of Grodno, merchant Boruch Czarny requested a reward for his services: "In July 1812, when foreign troops invaded our borders, I served under Count Platov, taking part in various expeditions to find out the enemy's location and other information. This task I carried out, risking my own life. In return, Count Platov promised to present me to His Imperial Majesty for a decoration. But due to the rapid retreat of our troops, I was left without a written confirmation of whether or not Count Platov fulfilled his promise. The enemy seized all my property and house in Mir, where I live, and even threatened to kill me." It is not known if the petition was success-

ful, although this was one of many petitions of the Russian Jewish guild merchants who purveyed the Russian army with fodder and victuals during the campaign against Napoleon's invasion and served as spies in the Russian army interests.

According to the data collected in 1834 by the provincial administration, Mir – with its 2,198 Jewish residents – had the following Jewish institutions and officials: five *shuls*; eight temporary *shuls*, eight elementary schools for Jewish children; as well as eight cantors, five trumpet players, two town rabbis, two other rabbinic scholars with ordination but without a communal rank, one lawyer, five judges, five experts in Torah recitation, three kosher butchers, and six *mohalim* (specialists in circumcision). The 1853 data on synagogues and Jewish prayer houses included the following information: "[...] in the town of Mir there is one synagogue and five prayer houses. The synagogue is wooden and

"cold", and next to it there is a "warm" house of study – beth midrash. There are four small brick prayer houses, all of which have been in existence for about 200 years, but there is no information or documents about when and by whom they were founded. The number of the observant Jews is 1,520." The synagogue complex was located in the town centre close to the marketplace, on a plot that belonged to the Jewish community. This place was called a school court or *szkolisko* (Rus.: *школице*); the latter name is still remembered by the oldest inhabitants of Mir. ♪ In 1886, the town had eight *shuls*, including two Hasidic ones. All of them were destroyed in a fire on August 9, 1892.

## Philosopher ¶ Solomon (Shlomo)

**Maimon** (Heiman ben Yehoshua, 1753–1800), the famous radical rationalist philosopher and educator and one of the most insightful commentators and critics of Immanuel Kant, was born in the village of Suchowiborg near Mir. He attended a *cheder* in Mir and then studied at the yeshiva in the town of Iyvanets. Already at the age of 11 he was considered an *yilui* (a genius) in the rabbinic sources, memorized several tractates of the Talmud, and was a sought after groom. He had his and his bride's parents arranging his marriage, and three years later he became a father. Maimon supported his family by giving private lessons in the nearby towns. In his spare time, he studied Jewish philosophy, European languages, drawing, natural sciences, and Kabbalah. Around the early 1770s, his spiritual quest brought him to Maggid of Mezherich, then the head of the first Hasidic court and study group; his account of his visit became one of the earliest outside sources on the growing Hasidic movement, which Maimon described accurately yet critically. The next direction of his quest was Berlin. Maimon travelled to Prussia, leaving behind his wife and family. In 1786, after

a long journey, unsuccessful attempts to settle in Berlin, and an attempt to get baptised, he returned to Berlin, where he dedicated himself to the study of Kant philosophy, to which he dedicated his first book *Transcendental Philosophy* (1790). Kant saw and highly assessed Maimon's work, emphasizing that none of his critics understood his philosophy as profoundly as Maimon did. Kant's remark influenced the Maimon's life – he started publishing philosophical books and articles as well as works on mathematical physics and algebra, which were appreciated by Goethe, Schiller, Humboldt, and other outstanding European thinkers and scientists. In scholarly literature, Maimon is referred to as a German, Polish, or Jewish philosopher, although he spent most of his life in Belorussia. It is in Belorussia where his worldview was formed, where he discovered books with Latin script, where he read his first scientific books by Enlightened thinkers, Jewish and Gentile, and where he began his literary and scientific work. Published in Berlin in 1793, Maimon's autobiography (*Lebensgeschichte*) constitutes an important source of information about the history of Belarusian Jews, the Haskalah, and early Hasidism.

“From childhood I had a great inclination and talent for drawing. True, I had in my father's house never a chance of seeing a work of art, but I found on the title page of some Hebrew books woodcuts of foliage, birds, and so forth. I felt great pleasure in these woodcuts, and made an effort to imitate them with a bit of chalk and charcoal. However, what strengthened this inclination in me still more was a Hebrew book of fables [...]. My father indeed admired my skill in this, but rebuked me at the same time in these words, “You want to become a painter? You are to study the Talmud, and become a rabbi. Who understands the Talmud, understands everything.” ¶ Solomon Maimon, *Autobiography*

The shtetl of Mir was home to many well-known Jewish scholars, politicians,

and statesmen as well as social, cultural, and religious activists. These included:



[A] Exhibition at the castle in Mir devoted to the ghetto, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sariko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))

[B] Former Jewish houses in 17-ha Vier-asnia St. in Mir, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sariko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))

**Yeshivah** ¶ The year 1815 saw the opening of one of the most famous Jewish institutions of higher learning, the Mir *yeshivah*, today one of the most famous Talmudic academies. Founded by Rabbi Shmuel Tiktin (or Tiktinski), it enjoyed an exceptionally high reputation from its earliest days, and in terms of the number of students it was second only to the Volozhyn yeshiva. It earned itself the name of "The Yeshivah of Roshei [Heads of] Yeshivahs," since most future teachers and leaders of the Lithuanian Talmudic academies studied there. At the head of the Mir yeshiva were eminent figures such as: Yeruham Leibovitz (1874–1936), Chaim Leib Tiktinski (1824–1899), and Eliezer Yehuda Finkel (1879–1965). This educational establishment brought together important Jewish religious authorities, and in its heyday it accommodated about 500

Zalman Shazar (1889–1947) – a scholar, writer and journalist, an active Zionist, the third president of Israel; Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1817–1893) – one of the leading rabbis of his generation, head of the world-famous *yeshiva* in Volozhyn; and Heinrich Sliozberg (1863–1937) – an outstanding Russian-Jewish lawyer and social activist.

“Five hundred young Jewish boys bent over books were silently repeating the words of the Torah. Their combined whisper sounded like a tide, like a fresh gust of wind filling the sail.”  
Ruchoma Shain, *All for the Boss*, 1984.

students from around the world: Great Britain, Holland, France, Germany, Sweden, America, Canada, South Africa, and other countries. ¶ Following the generally accepted tradition, yeshiva students ate their meals in the houses of the town's well-to-do residents, engaging their hosts in academic discussions, which often ended in a successful marriage between a talented student and a rich man's daughter. The students were important for the town economy because the town residents earned their living by providing various services to them (renting rooms, doing laundry, etc). Students were also the main customers of small stores and craft shops. ¶ Mir is remembered by students as "[...] a town consisting of five streets, where you meet friends wherever you go [...]." The American Ruchoma Shain, the American-born wife of a Mir yeshiva student, wrote in her memoirs: "[...] I am impressed with the custom of wives supporting their families to permit their husbands to devote all their time to



Torah study. In addition, they brought up children and ran the house. Is it any wonder that they knew everything and could do everything in the world?” ¶ The Mir yeshiva was the second only to Volozhyn yeshiva, which was established

in 1803 and created a blueprint for all other yeshivahs in Lithuania, including that of Mir. After the Volozhin yeshiva was forcefully shut down, the Mir yeshiva took its place and kept its position until World War II.

After Mir was incorporated into the USSR in 1939, the yeshiva was relocated to Vilnius. Its students managed to escape the Holocaust, fleeing to Shanghai with visas issued by Chiune Sugihara, Consul for the Empire of Japan in Kovno (Kaunas). Sugihara was later awarded the title of a “Righteous Gentile” for rescuing Jews. After World War II, branches of the Mir yeshivot were founded in New York and Jerusalem. At present, the Jerusalem-based Mir Yeshivah boasts over 8,500 students, it is the largest yeshiva in the world.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, Mir was annexed to the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. When the Nazis captured the town on June 27, 1941, about 1,500 Jews were executed immediately while others were confined in a ghetto, which

was later moved to the Mir Castle. On August 9, 1942, members of the Jewish underground organised an escape from the ghetto after Oswald Rufeisen, a town police interpreter, warned the Jews about the Nazi plans to liquidate it. Those who remained were killed on August 13, 1942.

**THE STORY OF OSWALD RUFEBISEN** ¶ The story of **Aaron Shmuel** (Oswald Rufeisen; b. 1922, Żywiec – d. 1998, Haifa), a Jew who became a Catholic priest and Carmelite monk is dramatic. Together with several Mir ghetto prisoners, he fled the ghetto the day before the mass shooting in June 1941. Once outside, Rufeisen passed himself off as a *Volksdeutscher*. In December 1941, Serafinowicz, the head of Mir police, offered him the position of an interpreter. In June 1942, Rufeisen warned the ghetto prisoners of the planned *Aktion*; he helped them to get weapons and organise an escape. However, not all Jews in the ghetto trusted him, and he was given away. He was arrested, but miraculously managed to escape and returned to Mir. For ten months he lived hidden by four nuns, and it was then that he converted into Catholicism. After the war, he moved to Israel, where he was ordained as a Catholic priest. As a priest, he settled in the Discalced Carmelites’ monastery on Mount Carmel and worked as a tour guide. ¶ He became a protagonist for *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, a popular Russian novel by Ludmila Ulitskaya. The author borrowed the main facts of Rufeisen’s biography from the book *In the Lion’s Den. The Life of Oswald Rufeisen*, by the American author Nechama Tec.

**Cemeteries** ¶ There are four cemeteries in the town, reflecting the religious

beliefs of its inhabitants (Orthodox, Catholic, Tatar, and Jewish). The Jewish



[A] New yeshiva building in Mir, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The shulhof (synagogue complex) in Mir, with the main synagogue and the merchants' synagogue, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

cemetery is located in the northeastern part of the town, at Pionierskaia St. The cemetery is fenced, with an entrance through an open gate. During the Nazi occupation, many of its gravestones were stolen and used for construction purposes. Several hundred gravestones have survived to this day. A narrow path to the left of the entrance leads to the grave of Yeruham ha-Levi Leibovitz, son of Abram, known as Mashgiah (here – spiritual supervisor, d. 1936). He was a lecturer at the Mir yeshiva and the author of religious books including *Sefer*

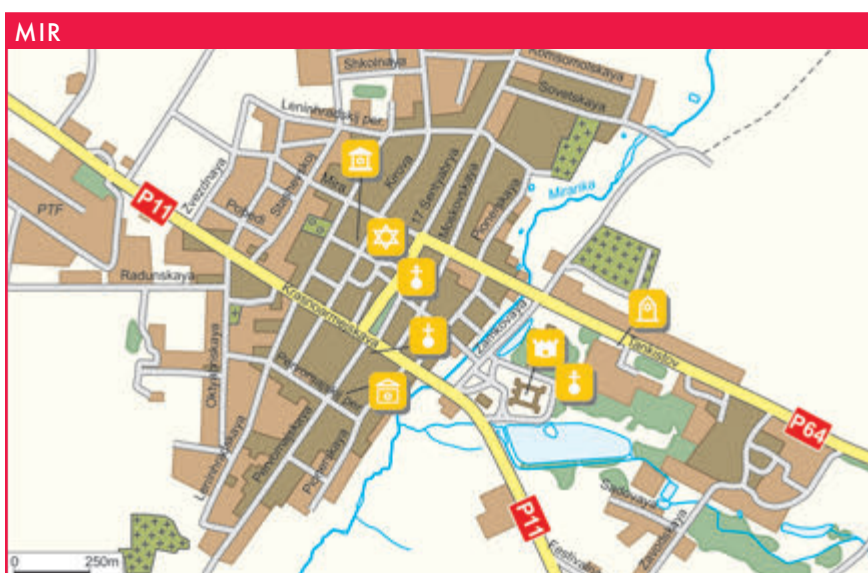
*da'at, hokhmah u-mussar* (The Book of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Ethics) and *Sefer da'at torah* (The Book of Torah Knowledge). His recently reconstructed grave draws Jewish pilgrims from around the world.

**Traces of Jewish presence ¶** The only **synagogue complex** that has been preserved in Belarus is located at Kirava St. in Mir. It consists of a synagogue, a *beth midrash*, a *kahal* building, and a *yeshivah*. Other surviving buildings connected with the Jewish community include: a *cheder*, a *mikveh*, a pharmacy, and a Jewish bank. Many items connected with Mir history and culture can be found in the **museum** "Mirskij Posad" privately run by Victor Sakel. The museum is located near the synagogue complex in a former inn. One of its rooms is entirely devoted to the history of Mir Jews (it has a collection of Jewish religious items, books and magazines in Yiddish, musical instruments, and everyday objects). ¶ The Mir Castle hosts a branch of the National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus. It includes 39 permanent exhibitions, one of which is devoted to the life of the Jewish community of Mir, especially the Holocaust period. The tragic events of the Holocaust are commemorated with obelisks at the mass graves of ghetto prisoners.

**Worth seeing**

Former great synagogue complex (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Kirava St. ¶ Victor Sakel's "Mirskij Posad" Museum, located in a former inn, 2 Kirava St. ¶ Former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 1-ha Maya Ave. ¶ Jewish cemetery, Savetskaja St. ¶ Catholic cemetery, Leninhradskaja St. ¶ Orthodox cemetery. ¶ Tatar cemetery. ¶ Castle (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.) with a museum, in which one of the exhibitions is dedicated to the life and death of the Jewish community of Mir, 2 Chyrvono-armiejskaya St. ¶ Church of St. Nicholas (end of the 16<sup>th</sup> c.–early 17<sup>th</sup> c.) 1-ha Maya St. ¶ Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.), 17-ha Vierasnia St.

**Turets** (14 km): the Orthodox Church of the Protection of the Mother of God (1888); a Jewish cemetery with a few matzevot and a monument. 🚩 **Stowbtsy** (21 km): a former synagogue, currently a factory (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a *mikveh*; Church of St. Anne (1825); the remains of two clerical colonies (circa 1925); the Mickiewicz family manor house in Okinchitsy – the birthplace of Jakub Kolas, one of the founders of Belorussian literature; a Jewish cemetery with about 200 matzevot; a memorial to the victims of World War II. 🚩 **Novy Sverzhen** (23 km): synagogue ruins; the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul; the Orthodox Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; a watermill; a cemetery of Polish soldiers from 1919–1920; a Jewish cemetery. 🚩 **Ishkaldz'** (23 km): Holy Trinity Church – the oldest church in Belarus (circa 1472); 🚩 **Nesvizh** (31 km): Radziwiłł Castle, currently a museum; Corpus Christi Church with the tombs of the Radziwiłł family (1587–1593); a Jesuit college (1586); Slutsk Gate (1690); a town hall with market halls (1752); a manor-style clerical colony (1925); a Benedictine convent and Church of St. Euphemia (1590–1596); a Bernardine monastery; the wooden yeshiva building; a grave of Holocaust victims at the municipal cemetery. 🚩 **Klets** (50 km): a Dominican monastery (1693); the former Dominican Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, currently the Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Church (1683); a watch tower of the Border Protection Corps (1924–1925); a former *yeshiva* (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery. 🚩 **Dzyarzhynsk / Koidanov** (59 km): a site of mass executions during World War II; a former yeshiva (1892); the Orthodox Church of the Protection of Our Lady; Church of St. Anne. 🚩 **Uzda** (64 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a former mikveh (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross; the burial chapel of the Zawisza family; a Tatar cemetery (*mizar*); the Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul 🚩 **Kapyl** (65 km): the birthplace of the classic Yiddish author Mendeley Moche Sforim (Sholem Yakov Abramovich, 1836–1917). *Judaica* collection at the Local History Museum, a former synagogue; Jewish cemetery with about 100 matzevot; buildings around the market place (19<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Ascension; a Tatar cemetery.



# Valozhyn

Pol. Wołożyn, Bel. Вало́жын,  
Yid. וואָלזשין

*People come here to study to become rabbis, not only from different parts of Russia and Europe, but also from all over the world – from America, or even from Japan. [...] and the Jews here [...] do not chatter like magpies, in a foreign language; no, they firmly cling to their faith, customs, and tongue...*

Yadvihin Sh. (Anton Lyavitski), 1910

**Włoszyn** ¶ The first written reference to Valozhyn (more often referred to in Jewish sources as Volozhin) can be found in German chronicles from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, where it features as “Flosschein” or “Włoszyn” (Vloshin) – a name used by the Teutonic Knights. In 1407, Valozhyn became the property of the Palatine of Vilnius, Albertas Manvydas (Wojciech Monwid), who obtained it in his possession from Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania. The town belonged subsequently to the families of Manvydas, Wieriejski, Gasztold, Śluszka, Radziwiłł, Czartoryski, and Tyszkiewicz. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Valozhyn was located in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – first as part of the Vilnius Voivodeship, then in the Navahrudak (Nowogródek) Voivodeship, and then again in the Vilnius Voivodeship. ¶ In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town enjoyed a privilege for a weekly “bazaar day.” In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town consisted of a market and three streets, and by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it had as many as five streets (Wileńska, Smorgonska, Mińska, Krzywa, Tylna), two Catholic churches,

and two Orthodox ones. The number of households grew from 83 in 1690 to 107 in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and 186 in 1790. ¶ In 1793, Valozhyn was incorporated into the Russian Empire as part of the County of Ashmyany (Oszmiana) in Vilnius Province, and in 1803, it was purchased by Count Józef Tyszkiewicz. In the years 1803–1806, Tyszkiewicz founded a palace and park complex that included a large orangery (designed by A. Kossakowski) in the town centre, as well as the Church of St. Joseph. At that time, the town had a population of 2,446 residents. ¶ In the 1880s, according to the contemporary description, Valozhyn had “three Orthodox churches, a temporary magistrate’s office, a police station, the estate administration building, a folk school, a post office, a pharmacy, a mill, a synagogue, two prayer houses, stores, and taverns. The peasants work in farming, while Jews work in trade. Five fairs are held during the year, their turnover reaching 4,000 roubles, and markets take place every Sunday.”

**The Jews of Valozhyn** ¶ Most likely the first Jews settled in Valozhyn in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to the



1766 census, the local *kahal* numbered 383 members. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 2,000 Jews accounted for more than 70 percent of the town's population. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the town had 523 houses (including two brick ones), and the population of 2,446 (406 Orthodox Christians, 140 Catholics, and 1,900 Jews). The Jews of Valozhyn enjoyed their most prosperity in 1803–1840, when the town was administered by Józef Tyszkiewicz. In a document of 1809, he granted them special economic privileges and established the amount of tax they were to pay. The following provisions were also favourable for them: "All Jewish-owned land, as well as houses, malt houses, distilleries, shops, or any kind of building located on this land, both existing and planned in the future, should be considered the property of Jews and of their heirs, on which they are required to pay an annual tax; the synagogue, school, hospital, bathhouse, and cemetery are exempt from this tax." In 1900, the Vilnius (at that time, Vilna) Province Governor requested the approval of the elected Jewish members of the municipal Land council because, as he wrote, "the Valozhyn community consists exclusively of Jews, and there are no Christian townspeople here at all." ¶ The synagogue played a significant role in the life of the Jewish community. Not only was it a house of prayer and learning, but it also served as the communal meeting place, its spiritual and social centre. The 1868 census listed three prayer houses in Valozhyn, one brick and two wooden ones. According to 1897 correspondence, the Jews of Valozhyn had one synagogue



90-year-old shochet Yehuda Avram worked as a ritual slaughterer and food controller for 70 years, Valozhyn, photo published on 16 March 1924 in *Jewish Daily Forward*, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

and four *batei midrash* (prayer and study houses).

**The mother of all yeshivot** ¶ The spiritual life of the town flourished in particular due to the yeshiva founded in 1803 by **Chaim ben Isaac** of Valozhyn, disciple of the illustrious Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, the Vilna Ga'on. The Valozhyn yeshiva (usually referred to as the Volozhin yeshiva) and also known as Etz Chaim (Heb.: Tree of Life) – became the blueprint for large Talmudic academies across Eastern Europe as well as in Israel, North America, and other countries. Known as *Em a-yeshivot* (Heb.: The mother of all yeshivot), it greatly influenced the religious and spiritual life of the so-called *Litvaks* (Lithuanian or non-Hasidic Jews), who became the backbone of modern Jewish Orthodoxy. The yeshiva building was completed in 1806 (and, according to some sources, rebuilt after a fire in 1865). It attracted students from different countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, the Habsburg Empire, and the United States. In



A panorama of Valozhyn, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

the late 1880s, the number of students exceeded 400. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, despite the reservations of the yeshiva spiritual management, a new Musar (Ethics) movement began to penetrate the groups of students at the Volozhin yeshiva. The institution was also increasingly influenced by the ideas of the Haskalah, while in the 1880s many of its students were attracted to various proto-Zionist groups and even founded a Nes Tsiona student group of Palestino-philosophes, supporting the settlement of Jews in the land of Israel and raising funds for the purpose . ¶ The Volozhin yeshiva distinguished itself from other institutions of that kind both in terms of its organisation and its teaching methodology. It relied not only on funding collected in Valozhyn, but also on financial support from distant Jewish communities, including those in Siberia, Central Europe and the USA. As the result, it was free from any local influences and pressures and had the local community depending on the operation of the yeshiva, not vice versa. The learning

process took place 24 hours a day, which reflected the view of the yeshiva founder that the existence of the world was directly linked to a non-stop study of the Torah. Entrance examination, and self-education was required from all the students. Additionally, every student received a small scholarship sufficient to meet his modest needs which students used to pay to the Valozhyn dwellers for residence and services. ¶ The Volozhin yeshiva was shut down in 1893 by the tsarist educational authorities who required that the secular subjects be included into its curriculum. It was soon reopened but never achieved the renown it enjoyed from 1803 to 1893. The yeshiva continued to function until World War I – it was only after the front line came close to Valozhyn the classes were discontinued and the yeshiva was moved to Minsk. It resumed its activity in 1921, though with a reduced number of students, and operated until World War II, when its last 64 students were executed by the Nazis. ¶ One of the graduates of the Valozhyn yeshiva was

the great Hebrew poet **Haim Nachman Bialik** (1873–1934), who humorously depicted the atmosphere of the yeshiva

in his poem *Ha-matmid* (Heb.: A non-stop Torah learner):

[...] / *Within those walls, not one day, but six years, / Have watched his toil – his childhood ripened there / Too soon, his youth matured there ere its time, / His eyes were darkened and his face grew white. / [...] / Some go to spend the Solemn Days at home, / Some spread to neighbouring villages and there, / Delivered from the dread Superior's eye, / Disport themselves beneath the kindly roof, / Where pride and pity wait such learned guests. / And some have been expelled and leave in haste / And sadly to their fathers these return. / But one remains, stuck faster than a nail! //* Translated from Hebrew by Helena Frank, <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/talmud-student>

**TORAH SCHOLARS** ¶ **Haim ben Isaac of Volozhin** (1749–1821) – a rabbi and teacher, a disciple of Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (known as the Vilna Gaon), and the founder of the yeshiva, was born and died in Valozhyn. His major work *Nefesh ha-hayim* (Heb.: Soul of Life) was published posthumously in 1824. ¶ **Haim Soloveitchik** (1853–1918) – an outstanding Talmudic scholar, the head of the yeshiva at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the founders of the famous Soloveitchik dynasty of Talmudic scholars. During his life, Soloveitchik did not publish any works, but his teachings were spread in Lithuanian yeshivot by his students. He published very few of his rabbinic novellae – only those that he considered absolutely proven. The method of Halakhah (legal aspects of Judaism) study proposed by Soloveitchik is still used in Lithuanian-type yeshivot.

” Of medium height, well dressed, with a typical belly, a gold chain, a tiny French beard, and parted hair. All this made Orie Poliak look just as a rich man should look like. Everyone treated him with respect and was the first to wish him a good day. After his wife died, he lived alone in a big house on Wileńska St, opposite the pond. The house had many rooms and a spacious guest room with paintings on the walls and upholstered furniture. The children, however, were more interested in his collection of butterflies and insects. Every box had both a Latin name and a common name written on it. When thinking of wealth in Valozhyn, one simply said: “If I were Orie Poliak ....” ¶ The first and most important barber in Valozhyn was Moshko der Sherer (Yid. scissors). His clients were the wealthy and prominent people of the town, officials of the Count, officers, etc. [...] The other barber – Alterke – did not have a hair salon. In one room there was a chair, a mirror on the wall, and a desk with hairdressing tools. His clients were poor and less important people, artisans, labourers, and youth. Here they all felt at home, [...] especially when Alterke left his client in the middle of the haircut or shave, and went to another room to calm a crying baby. And there were many crying babies, every year a new one was born. Alterke had a goat, which he left to graze on the empty square between his house and the beth midrash. The boys dragged the bearded animal to the beth midrash door, opened it, and let the goat saunter between praying Jews wrapped in a tales (prayer shawl). They watched the resulting confusion for



**[A]** A matzeva at the Jewish cemetery in Valozhyn, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**[B]** The yeshiva in Valozhyn, also known as Etz Chaim, founded in 1803 by Rabbi Chaim of Valozhyn, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Philanthropist** **¶** **Israel Rogosin** (1887–1971) was born in Valozhyn into an Orthodox family. In 1890, at the request of Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (then head of the Valozhyn yeshiva), Israel's father Samuel Eliezer traveled to the USA to raise funds for the yeshiva. A year later, he was joined by his wife Hana and their four children. In 1895, Samuel Rogosin set up a textile mill in Brooklyn, which became a profitable undertaking. In 1903, he decided to found a yeshiva modelled on the one in Valozhyn and left the mill management to his 16-year-old son Israel, who turned out to be an extremely talented entrepreneur. In 1912, the mill employed 200 workers; eight years later their number grew to 1,000, working in five mills. In April 1956, Rogosin founded Rogosin Industries Ltd., a viscose fibre plant. In

some time and then closed the door and ran away happily. **¶** Osher Malkin's memories in: *Valozhyn. Sefer shel ha-ir-shel yeshivat Etz Haim* (Heb.: *Valozhyn. The Book of the Town and Etz Chaim Yeshivah*), Tel Aviv 1970, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

1958, the production was transferred to the newly established town of Ashdod in Israel, at the request of the Israeli Minister of Trade and Industry, Pinchas Sapir. Israel Rogosin became a genuine philanthropist: he donated \$1 million for the establishment of the Centre for Jewish Ethics in New York and \$2.5 million for the construction of ten schools throughout Israel, three of them in Ashdod. He founded a medical treatment and research institute for the study of kidney diseases – the Rogosin Institute in New York.

**Sculptor** **¶** **Max Kalish** (1893–1945) was born in Valozhyn into an Orthodox Jewish family that later emigrated to the United States. He graduated from the Cleveland School of Art and went to study in New York and Paris. He became famous for his sculptures of American workers. He also worked on decorations for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (San Francisco, 1915). During World War I, Kalish served in the medical corps, where he helped to design prostheses for wounded soldiers. In 1944, he created 48 figures of social workers entitled *The Living Hall of Washington* for the Smithsonian Museum in Washington.

## **World War II and the Holocaust**

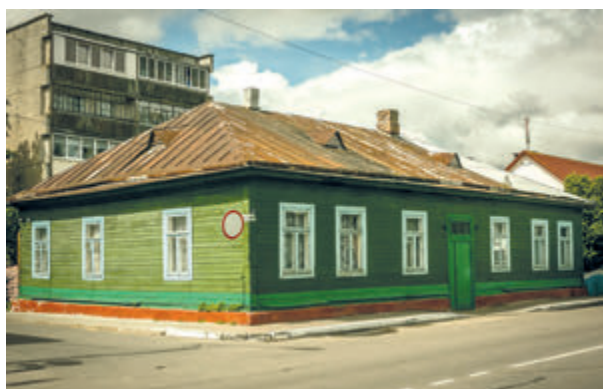
**¶** In September 1939, Valozhyn was



seized by the Red Army, and on June 26, 1941 it was occupied by the Nazi Germans. Soon after taking over the town, the Germans established a ghetto and set in motion their plan of exterminating the Jews. Local Jews organized an underground resistance group. According to the documents in the National Historical Archive of Belarus, six *Aktions* were organised in Valozhyn between 1941 and 1944, in which approx. 3,500 people were executed. The bloodiest events took place in June and July 1942, when about 2,000 Jews were shot at the Jewish cemetery. Soviet army troops captured Valozhyn on July 5, 1944. **¶ A monument to ghetto prisoners** is located near the town, at the foot of Wysoka Góra (High Hill), where about 1,000 people were executed in September 1942. Another **monument at the mass grave of Jews** (100–220 elderly, women, and children) murdered in October and November 1942 can be found at a municipal stadium. In the spring of 2015, a park was planted around it.

### Traces of Jewish presence ¶

A fenced **Jewish cemetery** with several hundred surviving gravestones is located on a hill north of the yeshiva building, at the intersection of Kirova and Kupala Streets. In the 1990s, with funding from foreign Jewish organisations, the cemetery area was cleared up and gravestones were restored. Here are buried the Volozhin yeshiva founder Haim



ben Isaac and other rabbis associated with the town; there are also the mass graves of Holocaust victims and a plaque commemorating the Jews of Valozhyn murdered during World War II. The last burial at the cemetery took place in 1957. The cemetery is taken care of by the town's last remaining Jewish inhabitants. **¶** After World War II, the yeshiva building was converted into a grocery store. In 1998, when former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres (born in the nearby town of Vishnieva) visited Valozhyn, it was agreed that the building would be reconstructed to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the yeshiva establishment. Today, the building of the yeshiva is under the auspices of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities of the Republic of Belarus and a memorial plaque has been placed on it. In 2010, a commemorative 10-ruble silver coin dedicated the Volozhin yeshiva was released by the National Bank of the Republic of Belarus.

A former Jewish house in Valozhyn from the early 20<sup>th</sup> c., at 13 Savetskaya St., 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

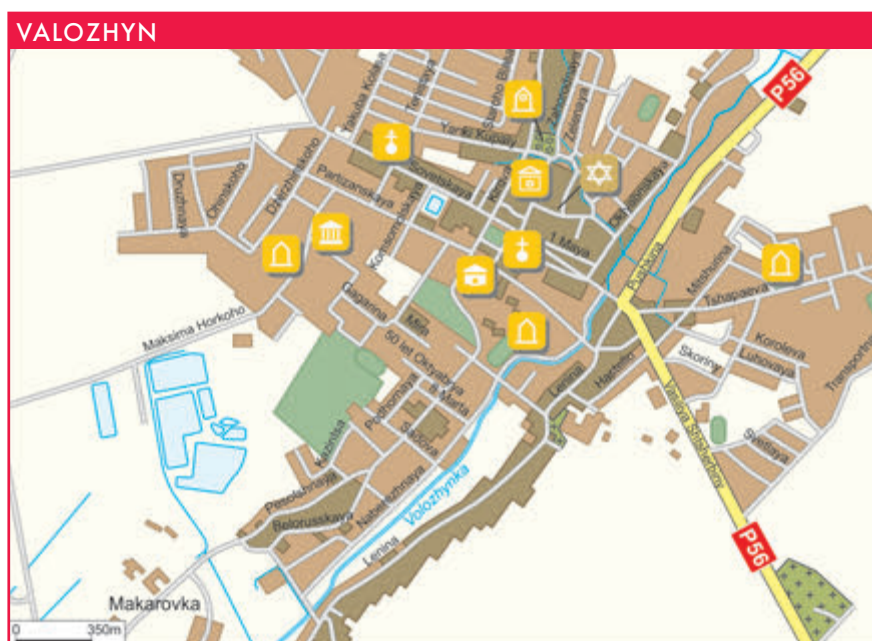
**Vishnyieva** (23 km): the birthplace of Shimon Peres; the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1442); the Orthodox Church of Sts. Cosmas and Damian (1865); the manor house of the Chreptowicz family; a Jewish cemetery; a mass grave of Holocaust victims in the village of Helenowo. **¶ Haradok** (30 km): a former synagogue (1875); a former Jewish water mill (19<sup>th</sup> c.); ruins of a *yeshiva* (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery with about 100 matzevot,

Surrounding area

a memorial to Holocaust victims; Holy Trinity Church (1884); a hill fort (11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> c.); the Literature Museum. 🏛️ **Ivyanets** (32 km): a former synagogue (1912); the rabbi's house, now a music school (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; Church of St. Michael the Archangel, called the “white” church (1702–1705); a Franciscan monastery; Church of St. Alexis, called the “red” church (1905–1907); a Catholic cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.); remnants of manor farm buildings; the House-Museum of Apollinaris Pupko. 🏛️ **Maladzyechna** (37 km): a former synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); military buildings: an officers’ casino, an NCOs’ manor house, commander’s office, and barracks (1922–1939); a Trinitarian monastery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a railway station; an Orthodox church (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial complex – Stalag 342 on Zamkova St.; a castle with remains of ramparts of a bastion castle (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.). 🏛️ **Rakaw** (40 km): wooden buildings of the former Jewish street; a Jewish cemetery (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial to fire victims at the site of a burnt synagogue; Transfiguration Orthodox Church (1730–1793); the Cemetery Church of St. Anne (1830); the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1906); the Museum–Art Gallery “Yanushkevichy”; a hill fort near the church. 🏛️ **Radashkovichy** (56 km) a former yeshiva, currently a store (19<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Elijah; Holy Trinity Church; a Jewish cemetery on a hill; a World War I cemetery of Polish soldiers. 🏛️ **Zaslavye** (58 km): a historical and archaeological museum; Transfiguration Church (1577); ruins of Jan Hlebowicz’ bastion castle; an old Christian cemetery; a Jewish cemetery.

Worth  
seeing

Former yeshiva (1806), 2 Kirova St. 🏛️ **Jewish cemetery**, Kirova St. 🏛️ **Valozhyn Regional Museum of Local History** 9 M. Gorkogo St.; tel. +375177255865. 🏛️ **Tyszkiewicz palace and park complex** (1782–1806), Belarusskaia St. 🏛️ **Church of St. Joseph** (1816), Svobody Sq. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of Sts. Constantine and Helena** (1886), Savetskaia St. 🏛️ **Municipal palace** in the former Market Square, the southern part of Svobody Sq.



# Ashmyany

Pol. Oszmiana, Bel. Ашмяны,  
Yid. אשמעניא

*I remember a man whose name I cannot recollect. [...] On every Thursday, the market day, he would go around with a cloth bag and collect silver coins from the shopkeepers; by the way, some of the shops were so tiny that they looked like small cupboards [...].*  
Memories of Aliza Gofstein, *Oshmana – My Hometown*, in: *Sefer zikaron le-kehillat Oshmana* (Heb.: *Oshmana Memorial Book*), Tel Aviv 1969

**Beginnings ¶** The establishment of Ashmyany is traditionally linked to the Lithuanian expedition of Prince Yaroslav the Wise in 1040, but the first mention of the settlement dates from 1341. After the death of Grand Duke Gediminas of Lithuania, Ashmyany came into the possession of his son Jaunutis. The origin of the town's name is usually associated with Lithuanian words: *aszmenies* – “blade,” or *akmenas* – “stone,” although in the chronicles of the Teutonic Knights in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, the town is referred to as *Aschemynne* (“a town with wooden buildings”). ¶ In 1556, Ashmyany was granted Magdeburg rights, confirmed in 1683 by King John III Sobieski and later by the last King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Stanisław August Poniatowski.

**The Jews of Ashmyany ¶** The first documentary mention of the Jewish community in Ashmyany dates to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jews were attracted by the proximity of the town to Vilnius, which was conducive to the regional economic development, as well as by the municipal status of Ashmyany, which created favourable

conditions for the development of trade and crafts. In 1766, the *kahal* had 376 taxpaying members, and towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a total of 2,212 Jews and Karaites were registered in the County of Ashmyany (Oszmiana). In 1897, Ashmyany had 7,214 residents: 3,832 Jews, 1,981 Belarusians, 812 Russians, and 525 Poles.

**The synagogue ¶** The construction of the synagogue, which has survived to the present day, was completed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (in 1902 or, according to other sources, in 1912). This synagogue is a red-brick building, rectangular and austere in form. Its external ornamentation includes pilasters at the corners and between the windows and a round window over the entrance. There is also a beautifully tiered roof. The façade is decorated by a wooden pediment with carved figures of lions. The plastered walls of the interior are embellished with painted floral designs. On the pilasters, there are small recesses with symbolic representations of animals and insects. The dark blue ceiling, imitating the starry sky, is especially impressive. In 1940, the



A panorama of the town of Ashmyany from the direction of the River Ashmyanka, 1919–1939, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

synagogue was closed, and the building began to serve as a warehouse. In 2015, an exhibition room of the Franciszek Boguszewicz Museum of Local History in Ashmyany was opened there.

**The town's religious life** ¶ Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, three or four prayer houses functioned in the town in addition to the synagogue. In 1846–1860, the head of the Jewish community of Ashmyany was Rabbi Meir Kohen, elected to the post five times and approved by decrees of the Vilnius Guberniya Government. In 1859, Rabbi Kohen was awarded one of the highest distinctions at that time – the gold medal “for services, to be worn on the St. Stanislaus ribbon around the neck.” The medal was granted at the initiative of the municipal police, on whose behalf a request was submitted to the provincial administration to award the rabbi because he performed his duties “honestly and diligently.” ¶ The community in Ashmyany became known due to **Mordechai Rozenblat** (1836–1916, known as Motele Oshmianer), an eminent theologian and Kabbalist who

served as the rabbi of Ashmyany for more than 10 years. Rozenblat was well known as a *tsaddik* (a righteous person with charisma) and gained a reputation as a miracle-worker whose blessings came true. Thousands of people from all over Lithuania came to see him, Jews and Gentiles. The general respect and love for him is confirmed by the words engraved on his tombstone: “Herein concealed is a holy ark, a truly great [rabbi], a prince of the Torah and a spring of fear [of the Almighty], a teacher and a luminary of the Jewish nation...” ¶ Rabbi **Yehuda Leib Fein** (1869–1941) was also one of the most prominent spiritual leaders of the Jews in Ashmyany. In 1906, he opened a small yeshiva in town. During World War I, he showed great devotion in helping Jewish refugees. After his appointment to the post of the rabbi of Stolin in 1920, he continued his commitment to social issues. In the 1930s, Rabbi Fein vehemently protested against the ban on *shekhita* (Jewish ritual slaughter needed for the preparation of kosher meat) in Poland. He perished in the Holocaust.



Ashmyany was the birthplace of the writer and traveler **Yakov Sapir** (b. 1822, d. 1885, Jerusalem). After an expedition to the Middle East, he published his travelog *Even Sappir* (vol. 1 – 1866, vol. 2 – 1874; republished in 1969), which contains important information about the life of Jews in the Middle East in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Sapir devotes special attention to Yemen, describing the everyday life and customs of its Jewish inhabitants. He was the first to publish fragments of the Yemenite Jews' poetry; he also described the syntactic and phonetic features of the Hebrew language used by Yemenite Jews. One of the settlements in the Judea Mountains, *Even Sapir*, was established in 1950 and named in his honour.



Synagogue in Ashmyany, 1930s, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

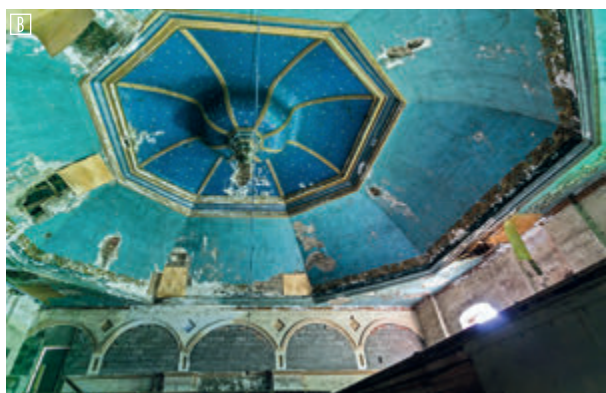
### The entrepreneurs of Ashmyany

¶ In the 1890s, Jewish factory owners occupied key positions in the town's developing economy. Lev (Leiba) Strugach (1842–1906) owned yeast and distillery plants. The factory founded by the Strugach family continues to produce yeast through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the village of Budenovka, one kilometer from Ashmyany, ruins of the former Strugach family estate have been preserved: a modernist-style house, outbuildings, remains of the orchard, the place for a pool, and the stone wall with columns at the entrance gate. Lev Strugach, his wife, and his son Abram were shot by the Nazis in 1942. They were buried in the Jewish cemetery. ¶ Other

entrepreneurs included the owners of tanneries (Aviel Piktushanski, Leizer Bloch, Itzek and Yankel Sołoducha), the owners of a snuff tobacco factory (Borukh Rishdinski and Shlomo Gershator), and the owner of a plant manufacturing raisin wine (Yulyi Schmidt). The mineral water plant belonged to Berko Daniłowski, and the local printing house – to Ziska Mekel. The owner of the brewery was Josef Yezelson.

**Jewish farmers** ¶ In addition to the Jewish entrepreneurs, merchants, and craftsmen, there were also farmers among the Jews of Ashmyany; about 58 of them lived in the vicinity on the eve of World War I.

“After obtaining a plot of land, the Jewish farmer would build his farm and plan his farming following the ways of the local peasant, the “goy”; he would fence off an area of a few dunam, using wooden poles and logs to make the fence. In the yard, he would build his dwelling-house and farm-buildings, then dig a well. The fields were in the shape of long narrow strips. It often happened that the field would be only 15–20 metres wide and several kilometres long. Between the different strips there was a path about 50 centimeters wide, which was not cultivated and was therefore overgrown with all kinds of weeds, amongst them sorrel, which grew here wild, and all sorts of berries. They used to pick



[A] Former synagogue in Ashmyany, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Dark blue ceiling in the Ashmyany synagogue, imitating the starry sky, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Jewish schools** ¶ Children aged 5 to 13 received elementary education from *melameds* (elementary-school teachers); each *melamed* taught 6–9 students. Parents paid from 4 to 12 roubles per student for half a year of instruction.

Initially, in order to work as a *melamed*, one had to finish a Jewish school and have good basic knowledge of Russian. In 1872, there were 18 *melameds* in Ashmyany, teaching 132 students. The teachers were Leib Baron, Kapel Shylevich, Josef Kikovich, and others. In 1876, a rule was introduced that a *melamed* should have higher or secondary education or be a graduate of a rabbinic seminary (two existed at that time in the Russian Empire, one in Zhitomir, another in Vilnius/Vilna). The teaching process was supervised by the rabbi – and by the

them and make preserves for the winter [that were] usually served for dessert on Shabbat, after the cholent. ¶ Those Jewish farms and villages were scattered like tiny islands in the sea of the native peasants. Yet between the two communities there were good neighbourly relations, there was even friendliness towards each other, until the ill winds began to blow in Poland, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. ¶ The Jewish farmers were bound, body and soul, to their own community: they saw to it that their children received a traditional Jewish education. On festive days they would leave their farms in their neighbours' care, so as to be able to celebrate the Holy Days with all the Jewish community. ¶ Memories of Moshe Becker, in: *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Oszmana* (Hebr.: *Oshmana Memorial Book*), Tel Aviv 1969, trans. by Yocheved Klausner, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)

police, who reported to the provincial administration, the situation in the field of Jewish education, particularly how Jews were learning Russian language. ¶ After completing several years of instruction under a *melamed*, a child could continue education at the Jewish state school in Ashmyany. Tsarist authorities began to establish Jewish state schools in the 1840s seeking to promote Russian culture among the Jews. In the 1850s and 1860s, the school in Ashmyany had one class of 35 students. Apart from that, there was a private one-class female boarding school (with 12 students) and a private Jewish school for girls. In 1881, a one-grade Jewish primary school with a preparatory class functioned in the town, and in 1910, a state boys' school with a department for girls was opened.

With craftsmen in mind, a school with classes taking place on Saturdays was established in Ashmyany. In addition to the schools with the Yiddish language of instruction, schools with Hebrew language of instruction also emerged (Tarbut and Yavneh), usually with Zionist political orientation. The Tarbut school building has survived and is now situated in Mickiewiczza Street.

“Great were the sacrifices of a large part of the population to ensure Jewish education for their sons and daughters. Those people did not send them to the State elementary school, where tuition was free, but with their meager resources founded a Hebrew school. This school became an example for the whole surrounding region. I see before my eyes the worried parents from the Parents’ Committee who used to gather in our house. Where would they find a place? Finally a corner was found in a religious school for the nine of us. The sacrifices were great indeed, since the graduates of the Hebrew schools were bound to encounter many difficulties after finishing school.” ¶ Memories of Aliza Gofstein, in: *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Oszmana* (Hebr.: *Oshmana Memorial Book*), Tel Aviv 1969, trans. by Yocheved Klausner, [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)

**Political turbulence** ¶ The population of Ashmyany included a large group of workers and artisans, who welcomed revolutionary ideas and new socialist political agenda. A particularly important year for the workers of Ashmyany was 1896, when a series of riots took place. A Bund-type Marxist labour organisation operated in the town at that time, which campaigned among the workers in Yiddish, Russian, and Polish. In 1896–1897, Ashmyany tanners fighting for their social rights held more than ten strikes, inspired by the tanners of the town of Krynki where the tanners

captured the town council and held Soviet power. ¶ From the mid-1890s, a branch of the Jewish socialist Bund operated in Ashmyany coordinating the activities of Jewish workers against the local administration and entrepreneurs. As a sign of solidarity during the revolution of 1905, it opposed the repressive measures taken by the tsarist administration against proletarians in Łódź and Odessa. Together with the social democrats, its members set up an armed, self-defense unit of 40 people. At that time, the local branch of the Bund had 150 active members.



[A] Wooden inn in Ashmyany, 1930s. Photo by Jan Bulhak, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Former residence of the Strugach family, owners of the yeast family in Asmyany, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))





[A] Students and teachers at tailoring classes posing in front of the vocational school, founded in 1919 by YEKOPO (Rus. *Evreysky Komitet Pomoshchi Zhertvam Voiny* – Jewish Relief Committee for War Victims). The slogan in Yiddish on the paper banner reads: “Work makes life sweet”; Ashmyany, 1 August 1921, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

[B] Rabbi Menashe’s grave at the Jewish cemetery in Ashmyany, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[C] The tombstone of Leiba Strugach (Lev Davidovich Strugach, 1842–1906), at the Jewish cemetery in Ashmyany, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In autumn 1939, the town was captured by the Red Army, and the Soviet administration took radical steps towards nationalisation of all privately-owned industries. It seized Jewish-owned commercial and industrial enterprises, and repressed the non-employed people: they were arrested and deported to the Eastern parts of the USSR. All Jewish religious schools were shut down following a ban on religious education, and only secular schools were allowed to function: it was at those Yiddish and socialist-oriented schools that the Sovietisation of the young generation took place. According to data from August 31, 1940, four schools functioned in the town: Belorussian, Polish, Russian, and Jewish. A part of the Jewish population supported the new authorities. Jews held seats in the town council, and Zalman Yudovich became Chairman of the Executive Committee – among the 35 members of the Executive Committee there were 10 Jews. Ashmyany town councillors included the director of the local children’s home Sonia Shleifer, the editor of the local newspaper Yankel Chaimovich, and the leader of the blacksmiths’ union Solomon Karchmer. ¶

When the Nazis occupied Ashmyany on June 25, 1941, the town filled with refugees from the surrounding area. There was no time for the Jewish population to flee. The occupation authorities established a *Judenrat*, headed by a rabbi. The *Judenrat* was forced to execute the Nazi orders concerning the supply of Jewish property for the Germans’ needs. ¶ The first extermination operation (*Aktion*) took place in the summer of 1941.

Between the end of July and August 14, 1941, some 1,000–1,200 Jews were killed in Ashmyany. In October 1941, a ghetto was established: in Polna St. (currently Avdieieva St.), Wileńska St. (currently Krasnoarmieiskaia), and as far as Savietskaya St., including the synagogue. Initially, the Jews were allowed to leave the ghetto after showing a special pass, and once a week they were also allowed to do shopping at the market. They were later deprived of this possibility. With time, the occupation authorities tightened the regulations for ghetto dwellers. They were sent away to labour camps to do forced labour, or to death camps, where mass executions were carried out. The United Partisan Organisation of the Vilnius ghetto sent Liza Migun (Magun) to Ashmyany to organise rescue for ghetto inmates. Thanks to her activity, about 80 people escaped from the ghetto and joined the partisans. ¶ Few Jews of Ashmyany survived. The names of about ten of them are known. Some lived to see the end of the war in Vilnius, Dachau, and Stutthof; others survived because they hid outside the ghetto’s walls. One of these survivors is Aron Segal, who, with his mother, found shelter on the “Aryan side” in Ashmyany. David Deul survived a mass shooting and managed to get out



of the death pit. He was then hidden by a Belarusian family.

**Memorials** ¶ In 1958, a memorial stele was established in the Lugovshchina forest opening, at the site of the execution of 573 Jews from Ashmyany. In the Roista forest opening, a mound was constructed and an obelisk was erected in 1967 to commemorate 353 Jews from Ashmyany shot at the beginning of July 1941. In 1967, a memorial plaque was placed near the small village of Uglivo at the grave of 700 Jews shot in November 1942. ¶ About 100 Jews lived in Ashmyany in the early 1980s, but most of them left for Israel with the last wave of emigration from the Soviet Union.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ The earliest burials at the Ashmyany Jewish cemetery took place in its southern section, where about 180 *matzevot* from the first half of 19<sup>th</sup> century have survived. The tombstones in the western part of the cemetery, about 370 *matzevot*, are arranged in even rows; they date back to a later period and bear inscriptions in Yiddish, Hebrew, or Russian. The nearly 200 graves in the northern part of the cemetery date to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are also two special gravesites at the cemetery: one of them is the *ohel* of Rabbi Menashe Shmuelzon, and another *ohel* most likely indicates a place where a damaged Torah scroll is buried. Surviving to the present day



is the well where people symbolically washed their hands when leaving the cemetery. Closed in 1969, the cemetery was renovated in 2008–2009 at the initiative of Avina Shapiro, a native of Ashmyany, thanks to funds collected by the Ashmyany Compatriots' Association in Israel. With the help of the local public utility company, most of the *matzevot* were restored and the entire cemetery was enclosed with a wall.

Former synagogue, Savietskaia St. ¶ Jewish cemetery, Krasnoarmieiskaia St. ¶ Franciszek K. Boguszewicz Museum of Local History in Ashmyany: the exhibition includes F.K. Boguszewicz's personal belongings, objects of archaeology and numismatics, items of everyday use, works by folk artists, as well as documents and photographs dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 2000, it was moved to the building of

Worth  
seeing

a pharmacy once owned by a Jew, Ilya Vladimirovich Ajzensztadt; 128 Savetskaya St., tel. +3750159342593. 🏛️ **Church of St. Michael the Archangel** (early 15<sup>th</sup> c.): in 1900–1906, it was renovated in the Vilnius Baroque style, and in 1950–1990, it served as a factory; masses were resumed in 1990; 17 Verasnia Sq. 🏛️ **Franciscan church (ruins)** (19<sup>th</sup> c.): fragments of the previously pulled down late-Gothic 16<sup>th</sup>-c. church were used in its construction; Frantsishkanskaya St. 🏛️ **Orthodox Church of the Resurrection of Christ** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), renovated in 1988–1990, Savetskaya St. 🏛️ **Water mill**, built towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. 🏛️ **Hospital (currently the court building)**, erected in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c.

### Surrounding area

**Halshany** (22 km): a wooden water mill; buildings around the market square (19<sup>th</sup> c.); ruins of the Sapieha Castle (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of St. John the Baptist and the Franciscan monastery (1<sup>st</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.); St. George's Orthodox Church; ruins of a chapel; a hill fort; a Jewish cemetery. 🏛️ **Baruny** (23 km): the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul and the former Basilian monastery (late 17<sup>th</sup> c.); a World War I cemetery. 🏛️ **Kreva (Krewo)** (30 km): Algirdas Castle (mid-14<sup>th</sup> c.); the place where Grand Duke Jogaila (Jagiełło) of Lithuania married Polish Queen Jadwiga and the Union of Krewo was signed; a former *beth midrash* (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; a collection of *Judaica* at the school museum; the Orthodox Church of St. Alexander Nevsky (1854). 🏛️ **Smarhon'** (35 km): the birthplace of Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever as well as poet, prose writer, and playwright Moshe Kulbak; a collection of *Judaica* at the school museum; Church of St. Michael the Archangel (early 17<sup>th</sup> c.); World War I fortifications. 🏛️ **Mikhalishki** (54 km): a Jewish cemetery with about 150 matzevot and a memorial; Church of St. Michael the Archangel (circa 1670); a cemetery chapel (1885); the Brzostowski manor house; the birthplace of poet Menke Katz. 🏛️ **Svir** (75 km): stone foundations of a synagogue; the former Jewish restaurant and hotel, currently a hospital; a Jewish cemetery with more than 200 matzevot; the Byszewski Palace (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of St. Nicholas (1653); wooden Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



# Ivye

Pol. Iwie, Bel. Іўе, Yid. אייווע

*The town is of a considerable size and quite densely built up. It trades mostly in linen, of which fairly large quantities are sold. Horses and cattle are traded during ten annual fairs.*

Czesław Jankowski, *The County of Oszmiana*,  
Cracow 1898

**Beginnings** ¶ Located by the Ivyanka River, Ivye is mentioned in sources from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century as a grand-ducal court. The origins of the town's name are not quite clear: according to some sources, it comes from the name of a tree, the weeping willow, which is common to the local fauna; others point to a Tatar legend, which says that a castle was built here at the request of Duchess Eve, wife of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas, and that this gave rise to the settlement. ¶ In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Arian heresy was banished elsewhere in Europe, Poland welcomed the persecuted minority. Ivye became a centre of Arianism, with a printing house and an Arian school whose headmaster between 1585 and 1593 was the well-known thinker and educator Jan Licyniusz Namysłowski. The school became known as the Ivye Academy and provided education not only to the Arian children but also to Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics. The subjects taught there included ancient philosophy, history, law, rhetoric, ethics, music, medicine, physics, Justinian's Code, Aristotelian logic, and, of course,

languages – Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Polish, and Belarusian. ¶ In 1598, Yvye had two taverns and 129 households, while 19 farms outside the town were allocated to the Tatars (who are believed to have been brought to the area by Duke Vytautas in the 14<sup>th</sup> century). In 1634, the town consisted of a market, three streets, and 180 households. The mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century wars led to a sharp decrease in the town population: according to the inventory of 1685, only 91 houses in Ivye and eight Tatar houses near the town were inhabited. ¶ In 1795, the Ivye area was incorporated into the Russian Empire, with Ivye becoming the administrative centre of a commune in the County of Oszmiana (Ashmyany) in Vilnius Guberniya. From 1843, it belonged to the Zamoyski family. ¶ In 1861, about 10,000 peasants in the Ivye land rebelled against the agrarian reform. The revolt, known as the 1861 Ivye Peasants' Uprising was suppressed by substantial military forces (four companies of infantry regiments). ¶ In 1864, eight fairs were held in Ivye: on January 1, February 2, May 28, June 18, September 29, November 1, and November 11. From

**A** Ivye, a fragment of the town after a fire, 1929. Photo by Muller, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

**B** A street in Ivye. Drawing by B. Tomaszewski, reproduction from Czesław Jankowski's book *Powiat Oszmiański: Materiały do dziejów ziemi i ludzi. Część 3* (Ashmyany County: Materials for the History of the Land and the People. Part 3), Saint Petersburg, 1898



June 29 to September 29, weekly fairs and bazaars took place on Sundays, and in the remaining part of the year they were organised on Wednesdays. The Ivye fairs were known mainly for cattle sales. Apart from the stalls set up on market days, 17 shops and four taverns operated in the town (data of 1897). Local inhabitants made their living also as craftsmen and fishermen. ¶ In 1897, Ivye had 2,828 residents and 387 households. There was a church,

a chapel, a synagogue, three other Jewish prayer houses, a mosque, a folk school, a pharmacy, a mill, 17 small shops, and four taverns. Fairs were held five times a year. In Napoleon Orda's *Guide to Lithuania and Belorussia* (Vilnius, 1909), we read: "Ivye – a small town in the Oszmiana County in Vilnius Guberniya. Its 5,000 inhabitants include 3,500 Jews, 800 Catholics, 500 Tatars, and 30 Orthodox Russians."

**Tatars have been living in Ivye for centuries. The wooden mosque built in 1884 was the only operating mosque in the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic during the entire Soviet period. The town is sometimes called the "Tatar capital of Belarus."**

**The Jews of Ivye** ¶ The first information about the Jews in Ivye comes from the 1685 town inventory. Out of 61 homesteads, nine were inhabited by Jews. The following are mentioned among them: Israel Szmilwicz, Yehiel Hoszkiewicz, Abram Morduchoiewicz, Szapszaj, Hoszko, Leyzer, Peyzel, and Hirszel; all of them lived in

Nowogródzka St., which led to the marketplace. ¶ Many Jews were artisans or craftsmen, working as tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, or rope-makers. In 1852, they tried to organise a guild but the authorities rejected their request. As a result, a simplified craftsmen's board was established, which consisted of the tailor Jankiel



Zoseliowicz, the blacksmith Nachim Ginzburg, and the shoemaker Szmaj Bloch. The council included four master tailors, a blacksmith, and a master shoemaker. In addition, five Jews from Ivey – three carpenters, a rope-maker, and a day-worker – formed a so-called non-artisan guild. Many Jews worked in the “drinking” business – the production and sale of alcohol. According to 1866 records, there were 10 taverns and 4 inns in the town. Some Jews of Ivey tried to find a niche in the manufacturing industry; for example, Jankiel Lewin opened a match factory in 1890. Jews worked also in medicine. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Leib Flaum was a freelance physician, while Arie Bojarski ran a pharmacy. ¶ Yehuda Leib Bloch’s memoirs illustrate the ubiquitous poverty reigning among the Jews in Ivey:

“Almost everyone thanked God for a piece of bread and a few potatoes. My father told me that when he had been a little boy and when he was coming back home from the cheder during Hanukkah with his friends, they saw a few potatoes drop from a cart. The children put those frozen, half-rotten potatoes into their pockets. There was no end to joy at home, as there were fresh potatoes to cook. The houses were not heated in winter because few could afford the “luxury” of buying wood. All year, people wore the same “clothes,” repaired and turned inside out. Deep faith gave them the strength to face harsh living conditions. People were poor, but not unhappy.

¶ Yehuda Leib Bloch, in: *Sefer zikaron li-kehilat Ivya* (Hebr.: *Memorial Book to the Community of Ivey*), Tel Aviv 1968.

Before World War II, the town had its seven-year Tarbut school, taught in Hebrew. Jewish and Tatar children attended a Polish seven-year school, too.



[C] Wooden synagogue in Ivey, circa 1915, collection of S. Mirocznik

[D] Synagogue complex in Ivey, circa 1915, collection of S. Mirocznik

The Jews of Ivey had their own theatre and a soccer team. ¶ In the town center, there was a synagogue built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and an old Jewish cemetery



Former synagogue complex in Ivye, 2011. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrn.pl](http://www.teatrn.pl))

nearby, to the west. The buildings of the synagogue complex have survived to this day.

**Notable people** ¶ Ivye was the birthplace of **Haim Ozer Grodzieński** (1863–1940) – a halakhist, religious and social activist, and spiritual leader of the Lithuanian Orthodox Jewish community; the (unofficial) Chief Rabbi of Vilnius. The main street of the Israeli town of Petah Tikva bears his name. ¶ Other notable people born in the town include **Shakhno Epstein** (1881–1945) – a social activist, journalist, and literary critic. He was the chief editor of the Kharkov magazine *Di Rojte Welt* (Yid.: *The Red World*). Between 1942 and 1945, he was secretary-in-charge of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the Soviets attacked Poland in September 1939, Ivye became part of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. Then, from June 29, 1941, to July 7, 1944, the Ivye land was occupied by the Germans, who established a ghetto in the town (February 1942), confining 3,000 people there. The ghetto was liquidated on May 12, 1942. After the

war, 2,524 bodies were found in a mass grave near the village of Staniewiczze at the southern edge of the forest. What happened to the others is unknown. ¶ Only a few Jews survived: Four families from the Ivye region have been awarded the title of "Righteous Gentiles."

## Traces of the Jewish presence

¶ Three buildings of the synagogue complex of Ivye have been preserved (houses no. 9, 11, and 13 located on Pervomaiskaia St.); in one of them there is now a sports school. Late 19<sup>th</sup>-century and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish houses are located on Karla Marksa St., Pervomaiskaia St., and Komsomolski Square. One of them features a fragment of a Hebrew inscription with the year when the building was established, according to the Gregorian calendar (1929). Not much is left of the **Jewish cemetery** of Ivye. It has been partially built over and only fragments of its stone wall have survived. ¶ A stele was erected in 1957 at the mass grave of ghetto prisoners killed near the village of Staniavichy. Every year, Jews gather for prayers in the Staniavichy forest on the Memorial Day for the Jewish community of Ivye (May 12). In 1989, a memorial was set up in



Staniavichy, with the words of the Soviet Yiddish poet Aaron Vergelis inscribed on the monument. In 1994, a performance was staged there that was directed by the American ballet dancer, choreographer, and director Tamar Rogoff, whose grandfather left Ivye in 1911.

**Roots** After the war, six Jewish families lived in Ivye. Tamara Borodach (Koshcher), long-time school director in the town of Lida, now living in

Israel, grew up in one of them. Born in 1949 into a large and happy Jewish family, she is the initiator of the “Roots” international project and organises trips for Jews with ancestry in Belorussia to the places where their families lived and died. Over 25 years, 2,500 people have taken part in such trips.

[A] Hebrew inscription on one of the houses in the town centre, 2011. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Mosque in Ivye, 2011. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**”** *I was the youngest and the most inquisitive of all the children. I asked my father about Jewish Ivye from before the war, about who had lived there and where, how it had happened that the houses were still standing, and the people who had lived in them were dead. He told me about five schools and two theatres: about a yeshivah, the fire brigade orchestra, craftsmen and their small shops, delicious Jewish food, about Nachimowski’s windmill and Dr. Małalide, about his family and neighbours. [...] Children who were born after World War II of Jewish families, reacted strangely to holidays observed by others: on Sundays, Catholics dressed up in their best clothes and went to church; on Fridays, the Tatars prayed in their mosque, located at the end of Savetskaya St., where I lived; the so-called Soviet citizens went to a club – which used to be a synagogue – to celebrate Soviet holidays. Only six Jewish families returned to Ivye after the war. There was no place for them to celebrate their holidays. Nor were there people to celebrate them with. [...] For a long time I would call the Jews of Yvye my uncles, truly believing that they were my father’s (Moisey Koshcher’s) brothers. [...] As a child, until I was five years old, I used to think that 12 May was a Jewish holiday. Our parents dressed us up, put us in a cart or a “truck” – the only one in post-war Ivye, and we drove or walked to the forest. However, for some reason, the adults took shovels and rakes with them. The forest was the place where the Jews of Ivye gathered, those lucky ones who had miraculously survived the war, at the front and as partisans, in the evacuation, or avoiding the extermination of May 12, 1942 by chance. As a child, I was not able to put together the overall picture: people crying,*





**[A]** Monument to the harmony of religions in the Ivey Land, 2015. Photo by Ina Sorkina

**[B]** Memorial plaque at the mass grave of Holocaust victims in the Staniavichy Forest, 2011. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



raking and covering some holes, which sometimes revealed children's shoes, toys, bones – these were made by local residents looking for some gold teeth and other gold things. [...] [Returning years later to visit, we] were received with bread and salt in museums, schools, municipal offices, and villages. We met the authorities' representatives and journalists, the radio and television, local residents, the Jewish community, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, folk and music groups. We sang partisan songs by a campfire, drank vodka, lit candles on the Jewish memorials, said the Kaddish, wept, and looked for inscriptions on the weed-overgrown and moss-covered graves. The people who had survived the war told those who came – adults, children, and grandchildren – the story of their families, their town, and their people. After such trips, they understood each other better. [...] Sabbath candles were lit, the Kaddish was said, but there is still no answer why, on one sunny day in May, the whole Jewish town of Ivey disappeared, as did thousands of other small towns in Eastern Europe. There is no answer to why some other people's fires are burning in the houses, why we are left only with the graves of those dear to our hearts. ♡ Tamara Borodach (Koshcher) *To See Ivey and Die*, 2015. Account written for the Shtetl Routes project, collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre

Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Ivey also features the **Museum of National Cultures**, the only institution of this kind in the Republic of Belarus, with its permanent exhibition devoted to the history and culture of this multi-ethnic town. One of the museum rooms tells the story of Jewish culture.

The year of 2012 saw the unveiling of a monument in honour of the friendship and harmony of religions in the Ivey land – Roman Catholics, Orthodox





Former synagogue complex – the main synagogue and two *beth midrashim* (late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), 11 Pervomaiskaia St. ¶ Ivey Museum of National Cultures 6 17 Verasnia St.; tel. +375 159 526 896. ¶ Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.), Karla Marksa St. ¶ Mosque (1884), the only operating mosque in Belarus during the Soviet era, 76 Savetskaia St. ¶ Tatar cemetery, Savetskaia St. ¶ Chapel of St. Barbara (first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.) ¶ Orthodox Church of St. Gabriel Zabłudowski (1994–1995), 1 Pervomayskaya St. ¶ Watermill (19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Elements of urban architecture dating back

Worth seeing

to the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.

Lipnishki (15 km): a Jewish cemetery; Church of St. Casimir (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); a manor park with a preserved outbuilding. ¶ Traby (30 km): former Jewish houses (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) including the rabbi's house; *Judaica* in a school museum; a cemetery with approx. 100 matzevot; the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1900–1905); Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church ¶ Lida (42 km): Gediminas' Castle (14<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1770); the Piarist church, now the Orthodox Church of St. Michael the Archangel; the remains of a monastery which housed a Piarist college; a wooden church in the Slabodka district (1930s); a Jewish cemetery, a Catholic cemetery (1797); barracks of the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; a brewery (1876); the building of Hetman Karol Chodkiewicz Gymnasium (secondary school) (1929).

Surrounding area

# Navahrudak

Pol. Nowogródek, Bel. Навагрудак,  
Yid. נאָוֹגראַדאָק

*The new inn not distinctive in style or in line;  
While the other was built to an older design,  
Tyrian carpenters' pattern, it is now well known,  
Which the Jews had adopted and took for their own:  
A style of architecture they through the world carried,  
Abroad quite unknown; we from the Jews it inherit.*

Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*  
(trans. Marcel Weyland)

## **The cradle of Belarusian statehood** ¶

The earliest settlement at the site of present-day Navahrudak was set up in about the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and the first written mentions of it dates back to 1044. External threats from Crusaders, Mongols, and Tatars prompted the union of the Principality of Navahrudak with neighbouring Lithuania into one state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which gave the town the honorary title of one of the residences of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania. A visible sign of its status was the castle with seven towers, once believed to be the strongest fortification in Belorussia, the construction of which lasted from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. All that remains of its former glory are the ruins of three towers, ramparts, and a deep moat. ¶ In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Navahrudak was also the seat of the Orthodox metropolis of Lithuania, and from 1581 to 1775, the Supreme Tribunal of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania convened here.

## **The Jews of Navahrudak** ¶

Towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania settled Tatars in

Navahrudak and the surrounding area.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community became an integral part of the town and an active participant in its social, economic, and spiritual life. First mentions of the Jewish community date back to 1529. ¶ The 1560s inventory informs that in return for fulfilling their municipal obligations the Jews of Navahrudak obtained 20 parcels (plots of land) in the town and two shops in “a municipal row amongst Christians.” In 1636, King Władysław IV Vasa allowed the Jews to build stone houses and stores to prevent fires in town, and in 1646, he granted Jews with further privileges, allowing them to own houses and plots of land, to engage in trade, to establish buildings for religious purposes, and to establish cemeteries.

**The synagogue** ¶ In 1648, a stone synagogue was established in Navahrudak in place of an older, wooden one. Prayer and study houses functioned, too: for example, in 1861, the town had four wooden and six stone batei midrash. ¶ The synagogue operated uninterruptedly until World War II. After the war, the synagogue building



[A] Ruins of the castle in Navahrudak, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sańko, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Market square in Navahrudak, early 20th c., collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

served as a warehouse, and in the early 1960s, it was torn down as part of the Soviet atheistic campaign. ¶ Navahrudak boasts several outstanding rabbinic scholars such as Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Rabbi Spektor interceded on behalf of the Jews before the Russian high-ranking officials and was considered

an outstanding and unparalleled legal authority (*posek*).

### **Jewish-Christian relations ¶**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, due to natural increase, the Jewish community grew significantly pushing Jews to settle outside the sections of town designated for them and purchasing

The interior of the synagogue in Navahrudak, a view of the *aron kodesh*, 1920-1930, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



land from Christian burghers. Well-to-do Jewish merchants managed to settle within Prince Radziwiłł's *jurydyka* (i.e. jurisdiction district; currently Minskaya, L. Setchko, and 1 Maya Streets). ¶ In 1652, Jan Kazimierz King of Poland and the Grand Duke of Lithuania, issued a privilege permitting the rebuilding of Navahrudak (town hall, shops, bakeries, butcheries, houses) after a devastating fire. However, the privilege barred Jews from purchasing real estate in the town, allowing them to settle only outside the town walls. In 1724, under a proclamation issued in Nowogródek (Navahrudak) Palatinate, Jews and Tatars were barred from hiring Christians for work.

When King Stanisław August Poniatowski visited Navahrudak on August 23, 1784, the first ones to welcome him were Jews who carried candles and were followed by trade guilds with the *landvogt* (communal elder), who made a speech in the King's honour and gave the monarch the keys of the town. In the evening, the town hall, churches, the synagogue, and the town houses were illuminated, fireworks organized, and balls held to celebrate the monarch's visit.

**Economic life** ¶ In 1799, contract fairs (at which wholesale merchants exchanged bills of sale) were allowed to be held in Navahrudak: from March 19 to March 23 and in the ninth week after Easter. These contract fairs drew over 1,000 people, who bought and sold silk and linen textiles, dishes, sweetmeats, and fish, and also colonial such as Chinese and Indian tea and Turkish snuff tobacco. A special area was designated for the wholesale trade of bread, vodka, wool, and tar. According to the memories of Jan Bułhak, a Belarusian and Polish photographer born in Navahrudak, "contract fairs gathered all the landowners and peasants, as well as merchants and traders from the farthest regions of

the country. The gathering was so large and magnificent [...] that even a theatre from Vilnius came to give performances during the contract fairs [...] and Navahrudak became a real capital." Contract fairs were a good time for young people to date and marry. Parents deliberately sent their sons to these fairs, knowing that the entire regional elite attended them. Contract fairs enjoyed considerable popularity until 1863, when the Russian government decided to entirely suppress the economy in the former Polish areas and instead establish market fairs in the interior Russian provinces. ¶ In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement of Jews in Navahrudak underwent several changes.



At the beginning of the century, the vast majority of Jewish houses were located in Żydowska St. (30 buildings) and Walewska St. (41 buildings; now Savietskaya and Lenina Streets). In 1825, Jews lived in Zamkowa, Kowalska, Trojecka, Sienieżycka, Walewska, Żydowska, Słonimska, Franciszkańska, Szkolny Dwór, Voskriesienskaya, Bazylińska, and Przesiek Streets as well as in Wójtowszczyzna and Racewłanski Lanes. Houses in Kowalska Trojecka, Słonimska, Voskriesienskaya, and Przesiek Streets were inhabited by both Jews and Christians. Jewish stores were located in market stalls in the town square. ¶ Jews were at the forefront of local commerce and industry. The Leitneker's tilery was opened in 1860; it became widely known after its products were awarded the bronze medal at the 1882 all-Russia fair. In 1893, Zelman Hirsch Shlomovich established a textile factory equipped with a 214-horsepower steam engine. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the town had a steam mill, a brickyard, an earthenware factory, two factories manufacturing pots and tiles, and two distilleries. Among other businesses, Jewish entrepreneurs ran pharmacies, public baths, a hotel, several photographic studios, a barber's shop, and a notary public office. There was a hospital, too. Visitors could stay in one of three hotels: the "Europa," the "Warszawa," and the "Petersburg." According to the 1897 census, Navahrudak had 7,887 residents, whose native languages were: Yiddish (4,992 people), Belarusian (1,676), Tatar (475), Polish (401), Russian (319), Ukrainian (16), and German (5).



**Palatinate capital ¶** In the interwar period, Navahrudak (then Nowogródek) became a voivodeship (palatinate) capital in the Second Polish Republic. In 1935, the town had 9,567 residents, 1,055 houses, two Catholic churches, two Orthodox churches, three synagogues, a mosque, a Polish and a Belarusian secondary school, and two hospitals. The choice of accommodation for visitors increased, with the construction of a number of hotels: the "Europa," "Paryż" (in Zamkowa St.), "Szwajcaria" (near the Castle Hill), "Targowy" (Kościelna St.), "Brazylia" (Mickiewicza St.), "Italia," and "Wileński" (Piłsudskiego St.). In his memoirs, Stanisław Czajewicz, who visited Navahrudak on his pilgrimage to

[A] Synagogue in Navahrudak, 1920–1930, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

[B] Market halls at the market square in Navahrudak, circa 1916, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

the sites connected with Adam Mickiewicz's life, noted that the town's oldest restaurant, run by one Liponer, offered an array of freshly prepared dishes and high-quality service (the waitresses wore

dark dresses, white caps, and aprons). He wrote that such elegant service was nowhere else to be seen, including the local casino.

**Alexander Harkavy (1863–1939)** was a famous linguist, journalist and writer born in Navahrudak, where he received a traditional Jewish education. In 1879, he took up a job at a printing press in Vilnius. After 1881 pogroms in the Russian Empire, he emigrated to the USA, where his artistic career blossomed. *English Teacher* (1891), his English-language textbook, sold 100,000 copies. ¶ Harkavy translated European classics such as *Don Quixote*, into Hebrew, wrote books about the history and culture of America, lectured in Yiddish and social sciences at academic institutions in New York. His most significant achievement is considered to be the publication of dictionaries: English-Yiddish and Yiddish-English (40,000 words, more than 22 editions) as well as Yiddish-English-Hebrew (1925). ¶ It is possible to visualise and understand the world of the shtetl of Navahrudak and its residents thanks to the documentary film *Nowogródek. 1931*, produced by Zenit Studio, Warsaw, with the help of Alexander Harkavy whose visit to his home town was featured in the film.

**Cultural life and education** ¶ In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, girls from Jewish families were able to study at E.W. Kudryatseva-Mele's four-year secondary school (gymnasium). On March 17, 1910, the *Nasha niva* Bielorrussian-language newspaper reported that the school had "half of the students who were Jewish girls, and the other half Bielorrussian country girls." Graduates of the gymnasium often went on to work as teachers. ¶ In 1919, a seven-year Hebrew school was set up as one of the Tarbut schools network. There was also Shlomo Volfovich's religious school, which later became part of the Mizrachi school network. Several *hadarim* functioned in the town, too. ¶ One of the two local Jewish libraries had a collection of more than 300 volumes of literature in Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and Russian. In the 1930s, two Yiddish-language

newspapers were published locally: *Novogrodker Lebn* (Yid.: The Life of Nowogródek) and *Novogrodker Woch* (Yid.: The Week of Nowogródek).

**The yeshivah** ¶ Among Jewish higher educational institutions, the yeshiva established in 1896 by Rabbi Yosef Yuzl Horowitz ("The Old Man of Navahrudak"; ca. 1848–1920) stands out. It was part of the Jewish Ethical Movement (*Musar*), which placed special emphasis on ethical aspects of Judaism (and lesser on legal). ¶ With the outbreak of World War II, the yeshiva was transferred to Vilnius, where several students managed to survive the Holocaust by obtaining Japanese transit visas issued by the Japanese Consul Chiune Sugihara. With these, they travelled by Trans-Siberian railway through Vladivostok to Kobe. From there, some of the students

eventually left for the USA, some for Israel, and some for Great Britain. At present, various branches of the Novogrudok yeshiva called *Beit Yosef* (Heb.: House of Yosef, in honour of Yosef Horowitz) operate in New York (Brooklyn), Jerusalem, and London. Consul Chiune Sugihara was posthumously awarded the title of the “Righteous

Gentile.” ¶ Some other yeshiva students survived because they were deported to Siberia by the Soviets after the USSR annexed Lithuania. Rabbi Avi Shafran, whose father was among them, produced an album of songs in Yiddish performed by yeshiva students (the songs had been recorded before World War II). Rebbe Avi Shafran recalls:

“Listening to Novogrudok yeshivah students sing, and knowing from my father’s tales how cruel the fate was to them, each time I was transfixed by the optimistic power of their songs. And I couldn’t understand where these young people drew such carefree spirituality from, and where they found the joy of life that pervaded every sound they produced. [...] It was not until a few years later that I was able to find the answer to this question. [...] The spiritual strength of Novogrudok yeshivah students increased and intensified thanks to their unshakeable faith in the Most High. They were not discouraged by the vanity of human life. Life difficulties, persecutions, and smear campaigns were a test of constancy in striving to do the Creator’s Will and to bring the light of His Torah to the world... ¶ Avi Shafran, *Fire, Ice, Air. A Polish Jew’s Memoir of Yeshivah, Siberia, America*, Baltimore 2012 (edited).

## World War II and the Holocaust ¶

On September 18, 1939, Red Army troops entered Navahrudak (Nowogródek, Novogrudok). The Soviet authorities nationalised private enterprises and institutions, and Jewish schools were all merged into one nine-year school, taught in Yiddish. Some of the town’s residents were deported to Kazakhstan or Siberia. ¶ With the German occupation of the town at the beginning of July 1941, the Nazis began the persecution of Jews. According to September 26, 1941 special order, Jews were obligated to wear a yellow star on their chest and back. They were forbidden to leave the town without official permission and also barred from trading, coming to the market, having contact with the Christian community, etc. In winter 1941, after several stages of

selection involving two formal questions about profession or trade and the number of children, about 1,500 people were confined in the Navahrudak ghetto in Przesiek Street, where they were forced to work for the German administration. Others were transported to the village of Skridlevo and shot. Between 4,000 and 5,100 people were murdered at that time. On August 7, 1942, the 36<sup>th</sup> Estonian Police Battalion carried out a second liquidation operation, in which 4,000 Jews were transported out of the ghetto and shot near the village of Litovka (2 km from the town). The day before that operation, 500 people – qualified specialists – were resettled to the newly established labour camp in Korelicka Street (now Minskaya St.). A further several hundred people were shot on February 4, 1943 during the final liquidation

The wooden building of the Jewish school in Navahrudak, 1918–1939, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)



of the ghetto in Przesiek, and on May 7, 1943, the last, fourth *Aktion* took place, in which 250–370 people from the labour camp were executed. ¶ On September 26, 1943, there was a mass escape from the labour camp in Korelicka Street. About

250 people managed to flee through an underground tunnel, about 200 metres long. Some were caught in a manhunt and shot on the spot, but about 150 made it to the forest and joined the partisan forces.

**THE JEWISH RESISTANCE MUSEUM** ¶ In 2007, the world's only Museum of Jewish Resistance was opened, housed in the Secondary School of Agriculture in Navahrudak (64–66 Minskaya St.).

The Museum was established at the former barracks from which the ghetto dwellers escaped. The exhibition was designed by Tamara Vershitskaya, then director of the Navahrudak Museum of Local History and Culture, and Jack Kagan, one of the surviving escapees. Tel. +375159721470.

Part of the exhibition at the Jewish Resistance Museum in Navahrudak, 2015. Photo by Agata Radkowska



**The partisan unit of the Bielski brothers** ¶ The fugitives from the ghetto in Navahrudak managed to survive by joining the troops of the Jewish partisan unit formed by the Bielski brothers: Tuvia, Asael, and Alexander (Zus).

The brothers organised the first family partisan camp in the early summer of 1942, renamed in 1944, the Kalinin



unit. Tuvia's 1,230-strong *otriad* was the largest Jewish partisan unit in Europe.

¶ The unit's base looked like a town, with 20 dugout dwellings built in two rows along a main street. In the center, there were the staff, workshops, and the drill ground. The dugouts, each housing around 40 people, were organized into units inhabited by people of similar social rank. The hospital and the quarantine unit for patients with typhus had 27 doctors, nurses, and dentists. Watchmakers repaired firearms, 18 tailors mended clothes and sewed underwear out of linen, 20 shoemakers repaired and made footwear out of leather processed at the tannery, which also served as a synagogue. Blacksmiths shod horses and prepared elements necessary for the repair of weapons. The bakery baked several kinds of bread, while the butcher shop produced sausages and cured meat. There was a school, a bath, a soapworks, and a barber shop. There was also a prison. ¶ In 1944, along with part of the unit, Asael Bielski joined the Red Army and died in Malbork (in Poland) just before the end of the war. Tuvia and Zus Bielski survived and first emigrated to Palestine; then, in 1955, they moved to the USA and settled in New York. ¶ In 1986, the people saved by the Bielski brothers organised a banquet in their honour at New York's Hilton Hotel. Six hundred people gave a standing ovation to 80-year Tuvia Bielski. Born in 1906, Tuvia died in 1987 and was buried with honours on the Herzl Hill in Jerusalem. ¶ Prof. Nechama Tec wrote about the Bielski brothers in his book *Defiance*; the book served as the basis for a 2008 film, directed by Edward Zwick and featuring James Bond actor Daniel Craig.



[A] A view from the Jewish cemetery in Navahrudak, 2015. Photo by Tal Schwartz, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



[B] Monument to Adam Mickiewicz in Navahrudak, 2014. Photo by Paweł Saliński, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Memorials** ¶ About 11,000 Jews were murdered in Navahrudak during the German occupation. Only about 600 people, or 10 percent of the town's pre-war Jewish community, survived the Holocaust. Most of them emigrated to Israel and the USA. Currently, Navahrudak has a small group of Jewish residents but no Jewish community. ¶ In the 1960s, monuments were erected at the sites of mass executions, but (as elsewhere in the Soviet Union) their wording only commemorated the death of the peaceful "Soviet citizens." In the 1990s, at the initiative of survivor Jack Kagan – and at his expense, memorials were erected at the mass execution sites



Café-Bar "Rim" in Lenina Square in Navahrudak, 2014. Photo by Paweł Sariko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

whose inscriptions contained information about who the murdered people were. One of these monuments is located

near the village of Skridlevo (1995), the second one stands 2 km from Navahrudak, outside the village of Litovka (1993), and the third one is at the end of Minskaya Street (1993), at the site of the last mass murder, committed on May 7, 1943. On each memorial there is a text in Belarusian, English, and Hebrew.

**The cemetery** ¶ A Jewish cemetery, located on a high, wide hill on Sadovy Pereulok Street, near the Muslim cemetery, has survived. Around 700 tombstones still stand, the oldest one dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**THE TOWN OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ** ¶ Navahrudak was the childhood town of the great Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian poet and social activist Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855). From 1924 to 1931, the so-called Immortality Mound was constructed in his honour. In 1938, a museum devoted to the poet was established in town. In 1992, a monument to Mickiewicz was erected (sculptured by W. Januszkiewicz). ¶ Mickiewicz was a staunch philosemite, favourably disposed towards his contemporary Jews, and an ardent critic of anti-Jewish bias. Such attitudes are reflected both in his works and in his social activity. One of the main images in his epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* (1834) is the innkeeper Jankiel, a talented dulcimer player, who remains faithful to the Jewish tradition and at the same time supports Polish anti-imperial insurrection. Mickiewicz believed that the union of the Catholic Poles and the Polish Jews would lead to a spiritual and economic revival of the country – as Polish union with Lithuania had once given rise to the powerful Commonwealth. ¶ During the Crimean War (1853–1856), Mickiewicz proposed to organise a Jewish Legion to fight against Russia, similar to General Zamoyski's Polish regiment and the Cossack regiment commanded by Sadik Pasha (real name: Michał Czajkowski, 1804–1886). In 1855, Mickiewicz went to Istanbul to convince Turkish authorities to support the Jewish Legion. He died there, failing to carry out his plans.

### Surrounding area

**Vselyub** (15 km): a former synagogue; a Jewish cemetery with isolated tombstones; the Church of St. John the Baptist (15<sup>th</sup> c.); St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church; a palace and park complex and the O'Rourke family tomb chapel; the town's buildings (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.) ¶ **Kareluchy** (24 km): the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help; the Orthodox Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1866); a manor farm house; a distillery; a Tatar cemetery. ¶ **Lubcha** (26 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a former cheder and mikveh; wooden

houses and shops (19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; Radziwiłł Castle (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Holy Prophet Elijah (1910); a church converted into a dwelling house. 🚩 **Delyatichi** (32 km): a former synagogue, currently a school (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the remains of a Jewish cemetery; three wooden houses at the market square, formerly owned by Jews (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1867).

Worth seeing

Castle (11<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> c.) 🚩 **Orthodox Church of Sts. Boris and Gleb** (12<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> c.) 🚩 **Old parish church (*fara* church)** (late 14<sup>th</sup> c.–1712). 🚩 **Franciscan church and monastery** (1780), converted into the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in 1846. 🚩 **Dominican Church of St. Michael** (1724). 🚩 **Mosque** (1855). 🚩 **Dwelling houses** (19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamkova St., Lenina Sq. 🚩 **Cloth hall (*sukiennice*)** (1812). 🚩 **Convent of the Sisters of Nazareth** (1930s). 🚩 **Palatinate Office building** (1920s and 1930s). 🚩 **Former railway station building** (1920s). 🚩 **Bank building** (1920s and 1930s). 🚩 **Mindaugas Hill**, according to a local legend, the burial place of Grand Duke Mindaugas; in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. there was a Christian cemetery there. 🚩 **Adam Mickiewicz Mound**, constructed in 1924–1931. 🚩 **Navahrudak Museum of Local History and Culture**, 2 Grodnenskaya St., tel. +375159721470. 🚩 **Jewish Resistance Museum**, 64–66 Minska St., authors of the project: Tamara Vershitskaya, Jack Kagan. 🚩 **Adam Mickiewicz House-Museum**, 1 Lenina St. 🚩 **Monuments**: to Adam Mickiewicz, St. Elizeusz Lavryshevski, Yakub Kolas, Vladimir Vysotsky, the Unknown Soldier, and compatriots killed in the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1985). 🚩 **Magdeburg Law Memorial Stone**, erected in 2011 to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Navahrudak receiving Magdeburg municipal rights.



# Dzyatlava

Pol. Zdzięcioł, Bel. Дзятлава, Yid. דזיעטאל

*People spoke Yiddish, prayed in Hebrew, learnt Polish, and talked in Belarusian with their non-Jewish neighbours.*

Bernard Piński's account,  
Yad Vashem Institute collection

**Zetel** ♣ Dzyatlava (Zdzięcioł) is first mentioned in documents in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, when it was a village in the territory of the Troki (today Trakai, Lithuania) Palatinate. In about 1492, Grand Duke Casimir IV financed the construction there of the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1498, Grand Duke Alexander transferred Zdziecel (Dzyatlava) to Lithuanian Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski, for life possession, giving him the privilege to transform it into a town. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Prince Ostrogski built a wooden Orthodox church and established a wooden fortified castle (referred to in documents as Zdzietelo mansion). ♣ The 1580 inventory of the town lists 118 houses, a market square, and five streets. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dzyatlava became the property of the Sapieha family of Polish magnates. From 1624 to 1646, Prince Sapieha built a stone church, the Church of the Assumption of the Mother of God, and a hospital. From 1685, the town was owned by the Radziwiłł family of the wealthiest and most influential Polish magnates, who erected a two-storey palace in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This was

torn down during the Great Northern War in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and rebuilt in 1751 on the site of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century castle. ♣ During the Great Northern War, in 1708, Russian troops were quartered in the vicinity of the town, while Tsar Peter I stayed in the town for a week. Later, Dzyatlava was taken over by the Swedes, who set fire to the town and the castle. In 1784, the town had 186 houses, five streets, and three blind alleys; there were three mills, a school, a hospital, and a bathhouse. Following the Third Partition of Poland in 1795, the town became part of the Russian Empire. Because its last owner, Stanisław Sołtan, took part in the Polish November Uprising against the Russian dominion (1830–1831), his property was confiscated by the state treasury, and soldiers were quartered in his palace and farm buildings. ♣ In 1866, as part of the Russification policy, Zdzięcioł was officially renamed Dzyatlava after the 1864 Polish rebellion against Russia. In the documents of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the town was referred to as Zdziecel (Zdziacel, Zdietiel), but the Jews called it “Zetel,” as there is no letter representing “dz” in Yiddish.





Children at the market square in Dzyatlava, circa 1920. Photo by Leibovich, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

**The Jews of Dzyatlava** ¶ The history of the Jewish community of Dzyatlava dates back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and is primarily linked to the Polish private ownership of the town; the 1580 town inventory lists a certain Misan, a Jew, as one of 10 house owners at the marketplace. According to the 1699 inventory, there were 126 houses in Dzyatlava, of which 25 belonged to Jews. ¶ After the partitions of Poland, the condition of Jews deteriorated not only due to the tsarist policy, but also because of wars, confiscations, and frequent fires, like other towns built mainly of wood. Dzyatlava suffered from at least nine fires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A blaze in 1874 destroyed a synagogue, 211 houses, and 119 farm buildings, resulting in damage amounting to 134,500 roubles. ¶ Some fires were allegedly started by arson; for example, over several days in April 1844, eight fires were set deliberately: on Friday night (April 7), a pigsty belonging to a Jew, Wolf Wolsin, was set on fire; the following night the same happened to Wolf Razważski's pigsty, then to Lejzer Giercowski's pigsty, peasant Mikhaïl Chucheyka's shed, and the shed of a peasant widow, Anna Grajewska. The suspects – three soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup>

Mounted Light Artillery Division stationed in the town and a peasant from Dzyatlava – were arrested. ¶ On the night of October 19, 1844, a fire broke out in Zaulek Kościelny destroying Abram Levin's barn and granary, with a loss estimated at 424 roubles, approximately the price of a luxury house in the area. As the community was becoming increasingly impoverished, 35 Jews from Dzyatlava requested tax allowances and cash benefits to be able to rebuild their houses destroyed in fires. In response, the provincial administration decided that wood should be given to those families. This decision, however, was not implemented, as “there was not enough wood in the forests near Dzyatlava to satisfy even the needs of state peasants.” ¶ The Jewish population of Dzyatlava gradually increased. In the late 1860s, the town had 1,576 inhabitants, including 1,241 Jews (78 percent of its entire population, but 100 percent of its merchants and burghers). ¶ In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the town economy improved. The 1900 address directory *The Russian Book of Industry, Agriculture, and Administration* listed the following companies belonging to Dzyatlava's Jews: a pharmacy, mead

Members of the ARVI theatrical circle with a band. Photo taken on the 10th anniversary of the circle, Dzyatlava, 1927, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



breweries, and trading companies dealing in colonial goods, iron artifacts, leather and other manufactured goods, grains, and eggs. In addition, the town was famous for producing wooden parquet known as “Dzyatlava parquet.”

**Religious life** ¶ Many notable rabbis and religious activists came from Dzyatlava, including Haim Rapoport (c. 1700–1771), who served as a rabbi in Dzyatlava in 1720–1729 and was later a rabbi in Lwów; Yakov Krantz (1741–1824), known as the Maggid of Dubno, perhaps the most famous preacher in East Europe; Israel Meir ha-Kohen Poupko (1838–1933), known as the Hafetz Haim (after the title of his main work), founder of the Radun yeshiva, and the paramount East European legal authority and religious thinker in the 1870s–1930s; Tzvi Josef Reznik (1841–1912), head of the Suwałki yeshiva; Reznik’s son Menachem Risikoff (1866–1960), an Orthodox rabbi and prolific religious writer in Brooklyn,

NY; and Baruch Sorotzkin (1917–1979), head of the Telz yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio. ¶ In 1867, the town had one wooden synagogue and four Jewish prayer houses. The stone synagogue built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century has been preserved to this day. It is currently used by the fire brigade, but the position of its side windows – one row of large windows and two rows of smaller-sized ones – clearly indicates its former function. Next to the synagogue there was once another prayer house, but a bank was built in its place in Soviet times.

**Interwar period** ¶ From the fall of 1915 to December 1918, Dzyatlava was occupied by the Nazi Germans. From March 1918, it was part of the Belorussian People’s Republic, and in 1919 it was captured by Polish troops. Following the Treaty of Riga in 1921, Dzyatlava was incorporated into the Second Polish Republic as an administrative centre of a community (*gmina*) in the County of Nowogródek (now Navahrudak), in the

Nowogródek Voivodeship (Palatinate). ¶ In the interwar period, Jews accounted for around 75 percent of the town population, with about 3,450 Jews living there in 1926. Out of 621 Jewish families, 303 earned their living from crafts (working mainly as tailors and shoemakers) and 210 from trade. There were four mills and three traction engines which generated electricity and supplied power to the town. Electricity was supplied until midnight, and just one light bulb was allocated to each house.



Market square in Dzyatlava, before 1934. Photo by Jan Bulhak, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

“The town population consisted of 6,000 souls, 4,500 of them Jewish; the rest were Belarusians and a few Poles. Cultural institutions in Dzyatlava included a Jewish school (approx. 100 children and 6 teachers), a Hebrew school (250 children and 7 teachers), and the community-run Talmud Torah school for poor children (100 children and 4 teachers), established as early as in 1909. Jewish children also attended a state primary school. They continued their education in secondary schools in Grodno, Lida, and Vilnius. A permanent cinema operated in the town. A Jewish theatre group staged performances. There was a large Jewish library. ¶ Liza Kaplińska, Account No. 301/2092, Archive of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

A school with Yiddish as the language of instruction was established in 1921, and eight years later, a Tarbut school with Hebrew as the language of instruction

was opened. There were also traditional *hadarim* (Yid.: for Jewish elementary school) and a Talmud Torah school.

“When my father was 6 years old, he was sent to one of the four Zetel schools, which was called Talmud Torah; it was a Jewish religious school where they also taught the Polish language. [...] Officials, such as police officers, judges, or municipal administration officials, did not speak Yiddish. In the Talmud Torah, lessons were conducted in Yiddish, but secular subjects were taught in Polish. Religious subjects were taught in Hebrew, but translated into Yiddish for discussion. ¶ Account by Bernard Piński, collection of the Yad Vashem Institute

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the Red Army took control of Dzyatlava in September 1939, the town was incorporated into the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, receiving the official status of an urban-type

settlement and becoming the capital of the Baranavichy District. ¶ On June 30, 1941, the Third Reich forces entered Dzyatlava, and repression against the Jewish community started soon after. Jews were arrested, forced to wear the



**[A]** Torah scroll. Exhibition devoted to the Jews of Dzyatlava at the school museum, 2015. Photo by Paweł Sariko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**[B]** Memorial at the site of the mass grave at the Jewish cemetery in Dzyatlava, 2015. Photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

Star of David, and deprived of their valuables; members of the Jewish intelligentsia were shot, and a *Judenrat* was set up. On December 15, 1941, about 400 Jewish workers were transported to the ghetto in Dvarets. December 1941 saw the emergence of the Jewish resistance movement. Its members tried to acquire weapons and ammunition and established contacts with partisan units. On February 22, 1942, an order was issued setting up a ghetto in Dzyatlava around the synagogue and on Lisogorska and Slonimska Streets. As many as 4,500 Jews were crowded in this small area. On April 30, 1942, the Germans, aided by the local police, started to drive people out of their houses and to round them up in the market square. Those who were found hiding or tried to put up resistance were killed on the

spot. Skilled Jewish men were selected and kept behind, while the rest were transported to the nearby Kurpieszowski Forest and shot. Around 1,200 people were killed on that day. The last extermination operation took place on August 6, 1942, when approx. 200 young men were selected and transported to Nowogródek, while the rest were taken to the Jewish cemetery and forced to dig a mass grave for themselves. Around 2,000 were killed in this operation, which brought an end to the Jewish community of Dzyatlava.

**Memorial sites** ¶ About half a kilometer north of the town, on the left of the road to Navahrudak, 2,800 Dzyatlava residents were murdered by the Nazis in April 1942. In 1945, an obelisk to commemorate them was erected. At the Jewish cemetery on the southern outskirts of Dzyatlava, there is the mass grave of 3,000 local residents who perished at the hands of the Nazis in August 1942. An obelisk was erected there in 1945, too, and in 2003 a commemorative plaque with the Star of David and inscriptions in Hebrew and Polish was put up. ¶ The history and culture of Dzyatlava's Jews is shown in the school museum located in the local middle school.

**Jewish cemeteries** ¶ Nothing is left of the old Jewish cemetery that was located next to the synagogue. Its area has been built over completely. A partially preserved newer Jewish cemetery, with only a few dozen gravestones with different degrees of damage, is situated in the southern part of the town. A concrete wall was built around it in 1997, thanks to the efforts of the descendants



of the Dzyatlava Jews. In 2006, thanks to the Simon Mark Lazarus' foundation, another memorial was unveiled at the cemetery, commemorating the 54 Jews

of Dvarets killed here in 1942. "Eternal memory to the victims of the Holocaust. May their souls be bound in the bond of life."



Former synagogue, currently a fire station (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Pervomayska St. ¶ Jewish cemetery, Oktiabrskaya St. ¶ Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1624–1646), Lenin St. ¶ Wooden Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Peremogi St. ¶ Dzyatlava Palace (owned by the Radziwiłł and Sołtan families) (18<sup>th</sup> c.), Sverdlov St. ¶ “Żybortowszczyzna” manor house of the Domeyko family (early 19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Historical buildings (turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ Christian cemetery ¶ Dzyatlava Museum of Local History, 12 Pervomayska

Worth seeing

St., tel. +375156321341. ¶ School museum at the local middle school (with a separate room devoted to the history of the Dzyatlava Jewish community), 4 Krasnoarmeyska St.

**Kozlovshchina** (22 km): a Jewish cemetery; a memorial at the mass grave of the Holocaust victims; a water mill (1859); the Drucki-Lubecki family burial chapel (1843); the Drucki-Lubecki family manor house (19<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Dvarets** (13 km): the Church of St. Anthony of Padua; the Orthodox Church of the Protection of Our Lady. ¶ **Navajelnia** (13 km): a memorial to Holocaust victims at the railway station; a historic column (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1876–1879); the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. ¶ **Lipichany Forest**: a landscape reserve.

Surrounding area

# Radun

Pol. Raduń, Bel. Радунь, Yid. ראדין

*Radun was a quiet shtetl with low houses. Their straw roofs were blackened with mould, and tiny windows were often skewed to one side because of age.*

A. Rywkes, *The Hafetz Haim's Yeshivah*, in: *Lite* (Yid.: Lithuania), New York 1951

**Beginnings** ¶ Radun was first mentioned in the 1217 *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* chronicle. In 1387, Władysław Jagiełło (Jogaila), Polish King and Grand Duke of Lithuania granted “the settlement of Radun and the entire estate, together with all the servants, people, villages and livestock,” to Skirgaila Alexandrovich, as can be read in a document issued to Alexandrovich. According to the census of 1538, Radun consisted of seven streets leading to the marketplace, 210 Christian houses, 35 beer stores, one vodka store, and seven shops selling mead. Jews were not allowed to settle there. The town was granted Magdeburg rights in 1649, and in 1795, Radun became part of the Russian Empire.

**The Jews of Radun** ¶ Because of its status *De non tolerandi Judeos*, forbidding Jews to settle within the town walls, Jews could not settle in Radun until 1679, when John III Sobieski granted them with the privilege of permanently residing in town. In 1765, the Jewish community of Radun and its vicinity had 581 people. Over five–six centuries, Jews were either allowed or forbidden

to settle in Radun, but they always returned. They built a synagogue, sent their children to a *cheder*, earned their living from trade, lease-holdings, and crafts, and engaged in charity. In 1866, Radun had 101 houses inhabited by 869 people (361 Catholics and 508 Jews), a wooden parish church, a synagogue, a state school, and a municipal office. In 1885, there was a tannery, a brewery, 14 stores, three inns, and four smithies in the town. Market fairs were held every Thursday. ¶ As there was no river near Radun, the only source of water was a communal well located on a small municipal square. As the place to get fresh water, it also served in summer as a busy meeting point for Jewish women, whose children would splash around at the well, and for the peasants who pulled up there and, having left their carts, went shopping in the Jewish stores. In spring and autumn Radun was full of mud, as none of its streets were paved. ¶ The town boasted a yeshiva, founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then rebuilt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tall white building with large windows and spacious bright rooms attracted hundreds of Jews from all over Europe. These yeshiva

students added colour to the routine and, at times, quite monotonous life of the shtetl and constituted another source of income for the town's inhabitants.

### The Hafetz Haim and the Radun yeshiva

¶ The fame of the Radun yeshivah was probably exceeded only by that of its founder – the prominent Talmudic scholar and the paramount rabbinic authority **Israel Meir ha-Kohen Poupko** (1838–1933), known as the Hafetz Haim of Radun. The name under which he is known throughout the Jewish world today came from the title of his first book, published anonymously in Vilna (Vilnius) in 1873 and focused on the laws of *lashon ha-ra* (evil talk, gossiping). Its title, *Hafetz Haim* (Heb.: Desire Life), comes from Psalms 34:14–15: “Who is the man that desireth life, and loveth days, that he may see good therein? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.” Thus the book outlined most important legal rulings (*hilkhot*) from biblical and rabbinic sources and various Jewish practices that targeted ethical aspects of gossiping and evil talk. The popularity of the book – as it often happens in Judaic tradition – made people refer to its author with the name of his book. ¶ Israel Meir Poupko was a son of Arie Zeev, a pious Jew and a graduate of the Volozhin yeshiva. Israel Meir's love for learning was fostered by his father, who took him to Vilna (Vilnius), then the center of Ashkenazic Judaism, where he met with the local Torah scholars. Even as a little boy, Israel Meir amazed everyone with his remarkable memory. After he married Frida ha-Levi Epstein, he moved to Radun, where he continued the study of



rabbinic tradition, spending days and nights at the local *beth midrash*. In 1869, he established a yeshiva of his own, known as the Hafetz Haim. Rabbi Israel Meir refused to accept a salary for serving as rabbi and subsisted on the money that his wife earned running a store. He always taught his students not to study too much at the expense of their health and made sure that none of them went hungry. The custom of different families providing meals for students, called *esn tog* (Yid.: eating days), was simplified at the Radun Yeshiva. To spare students the embarrassment of asking for food and to avoid distracting them from their classes, Radun's residents delivered food directly to the yeshiva. If some student

[A] Rabbi's house in Radun, 1920–1930, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Dr. Franklin Kasman

[B] Market day at the market square in Radun, 1920–1930, collection of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, Photo Archive, Tel Aviv, courtesy of Dr. Franklin Kasman



**[A]** Boys posing for a photograph at the market square, Radun, 1920s, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

**[B]** Above the entrance to the wooden synagogue there was an inscription in Hebrew, reading: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous will enter through it," 1920s, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

happened to be left without lunch, the yeshiva head himself brought in a hot lunch for him. Later, kitchens were built, and Hafetz Haim's daughters – Reizel, Faiga and Sara themselves cooked and served the food. ¶ At the outbreak of World War I, in order to save his students, Hafetz Haim left the yeshiva and travelled with them to the town of Smilavichy near Minsk, where they found temporary refuge. When the Bolsheviks came to power, Hafetz Haim allowed the Jews to flee Radun even if it violated the Sabbath, because he believed that their lives were in danger. ¶ Israel Meir was a founder and spiritual leader of the Agudath Israel Orthodox movement,

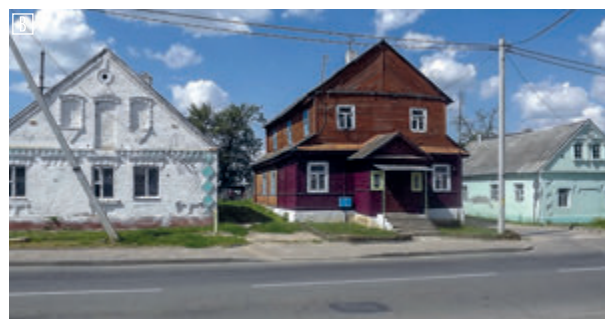
and he opened the First General Convention of the Agudath Israel. In 1924, he initiated the establishment of Vaad ha-Yeshivot – the Central Committee managing the affairs of Eastern Europe's yeshivot. He had foreseen the extermination of the Jewish population in Europe and the establishment of a Jewish state. ¶ Hafetz Haim devoted more than 65 years of his long life (he died in Radun in 1933) to his yeshiva and left an indelible mark on Jewish religious thought. Elhanan Waserman (head of the Baranovichi yeshiva) made the following comment on the modestly of Hafetz Haim's life: "If he wants to hide from us with his brilliant mind, we will, with our small minds, find him."

¶ Hafetz Haim authored many works on moral, ethical, and halakhic issues. These include: *Shmirat Lashon* (Heb.: Guarding One's Tongue, 1876), *Ahavat Hessed* (Heb.: Introduction to Charity, 1888) devoted to the sin of slander, and *Mahaneh Israel* (Heb.: The Camp of the sons of Israel, 1881) about the way halakhic rules should be observed by tsarist army soldiers of Jewish origin. His *Mishnah Berurah* (1894–1907) – a detailed commentary on the *Orach Haim* (asection of the *Shulchan Aruch* Code devoted to everyday Jewish life) has been accepted as one of the main sources of the Halakhah for many decades by the entire Ashkenaic Jewry. ¶ The Hafetz Haim yeshivot founded later on by Israel Meir's followers in New York and Israel breathed a new life into the Lithuanian traditions of Jewish religious and academic life.



body – was where these Jews' emphasis lay. Although few in the community were rich or knowledgeable enough to engage in full-time study, most people looked up to these *sheyne Yidn*, these Jewish “beautiful people.” With that ideal squarely in mind, parents hoped to raise their sons to be scholars, to work with their minds and not with their muscles, even if most fathers were butchers, bakers, porters, coachmen, and so on. [...] Rather, the superstars of the Jewish town were the sedentary types who stuck to their books. Of course, in keeping with Jewish tradition, even the most committed students participated in outdoor games on Lag B'Omer – the Jewish field day. But there was no social sanction for daily and violent pastimes – fighting [was] ‘un-Jewish’ in the extreme. ¶ Jack Kugelmass, *Jews, Sports, and the Rites of Citizenship*, 2007.

Interestingly enough, when ruminating about how he was raised and educated, Rabbi Hafetz Haim publicly regretted that he had not devoted enough time in his youth to physical fitness. A sounder body, in his view, would have helped him become an even greater scholar. Addressing his disciples during a lecture at the Radun yeshiva, he said: “Do not study too much. Man must preserve the body so that it does not grow weaker or fall ill, and for that it is crucial to rest and relax, to breathe fresh air. One should go for a walk in the evening, or rest at home. If possible, one may have a swim in the river, for this, too, is an excellent way of strengthening the body.” Despite Hafetz Haim’s reputation and prestige, his remarks did not inspire yeshiva students to start a physical training movement. On the contrary: the prevailing opinion was that physical



activities were a loss of valuable time that should be spent on Torah study.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ Before World War II, there were about 800 Jews in Radun. In September 1939, Radun was incorporated into the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, and on July 1, 1941, it was captured by the Wehrmacht troops. In November 1941, the Germans rounded up the Jews from nearby villages and secluded them in the Radun ghetto (1,834 people in total). ¶ On May 11, 1942, during the liquidation of the ghetto, the Nazis and their local accomplices executed 1,137 people. During another liquidation operation, carried out in the field 100 metres west of Radun, about 180 people fled, but 20 of them were shot to death.

[A] The graves of Israel Meir ha-Kohen, the founder of the Radun yeshiva, and other lecturers of that school at the Jewish cemetery in Radun, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Traditional Jewish architecture on Savetskaya Street in Radun, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**A** **B** Former yeshiva at 29 Savetskaya Street in Radun, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

“ [...] Mother was devoted to the Jewish faith with all her soul. My father did not protest. She brought us up in this faith. [...] I remember that when I came back home, she was sewing and singing beautifully. These were the songs about Eretz Israel [Hebr. The Land of Israel] and about the Jewish nation. They were all in Yiddish. Sad songs. ” Avraham Aviel, Yad Vashem Institute collection.

Avraham Aviel was born in 1929, in Dugalishok, a Jewish farming village on the outskirts of Radun. He managed to escape from the mass shooting in the Radun ghetto, where his mother and younger brother were killed. His father and older brother were shot later, when they were hiding from the Nazis in the nearby forests. Avraham joined the partisans and, together with other Jewish survivors, fought against the Nazis until 1944. After the war, Aviel settled in Israel. He wrote a book about the Jews in Belarus and was a witness at Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem. The life of Aviel and his family as well as the fate of Belarusian Jews during the Holocaust are presented in a documentary ...*But Who Could I Pray For?* (Israel 2010) produced by Yad Vashem within "Witnesses and education" project.

executed ghetto prisoners, later replaced with a memorial to the Radun Jews ("To the Victims of the Holocaust"). ¶ By the road to Novy Dvor, about a kilometer from the town, there is a Jewish cemetery. It covers an area of about 2.8 ha (six acres) and is fenced and well-maintained. Hafetz Haim's *ohel* is there and has been renovated in recent years; there are also gravestones of the yeshiva's teachers, a dozen old stone matzevot, and a contemporary gravestone from 2007. In the 1990s, a memorial was erected to the Jews of Radun killed in the mass executions during World War II. ¶ The story of Radun's Jews is shown in an exhibition at the school museum of the Radun middle school. The exhibition includes copies of the privileges granted by King John III Sobieski and Augustus III, Hafetz Haim's works, and archival photographs.

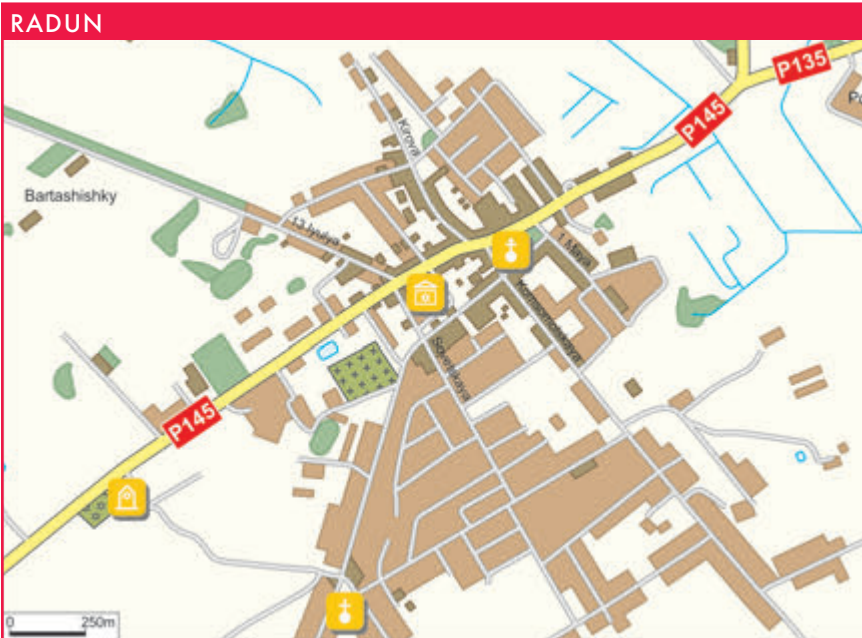
**Memorial sites** ¶ After Radun was liberated in July 1944, 32 Jews returned to the town. In 1961, a sculpture of a soldier was put up on the grave of the

**Voranava** (32 km): a former synagogue (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); the wooden Orthodox Church of St. Alexander Nevsky; the Scipio del Campo Palace (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a pharmacist's house. 🕍 **Bieniakoni** (44 km): a former synagogue, currently a library (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a wooden funeral parlour; Church of St. John the Baptist (1900); the railway station building (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the grave of Maryla Wereszczakówna – the poet Adam Mickiewicz's muse. 🕍 **Hajciunishki** (57 km): considered to have been the prototype of the village of Soplicowo described in Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*; the fortified manor house of the Nonhart family (1613); the ruins of a Calvinist church (1633).

Surrounding  
area

Former **Hafetz Haim's Yeshivah** (1882), currently a cultural centre, 29 Savetska St. 🕍 **Jewish cemetery** (17<sup>th</sup> c.) (at the road towards Novy Dvor). 🕍 **Our Lady of the Rosary Church** (1929–1933), Lenin St. 🕍 **School Museum**, 36a Lenin St.

Worth  
seeing



# Zhaludok

Pol. Żołudek, Bel. Жалудок,  
Yid. זשעלודאק

*Zhaludok had three schools with instruction in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Polish, and two synagogues – the old and the new one. I remember Rabbi Sorochkin; there were branches of the Hechalutz and Beitar organisations.*

Miron (Mordechai) Morduchowicz's Account, in: *Zheludok. Pamiat' o evreiskom mestechke* (Rus.: The Shtetl of Zheludok in Contemporary Cultural Memory), Moscow 2013

**Beginnings ¶** Zhaludok is mentioned for the first time in the 1385 documents written by the spies of the Teutonic Order, who mentioned the settlement as a country estate of the Ściegiewiłowicz family. From 1486, Zhaludok enjoyed the status of a town, and in 1512 it was included in the register of the Grand Duke's mansions in the Lida County. In the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the town became the property of the Sapieha family of the wealthy Polish magnates. In 1680, the Zhaludok demesne – a large estate situated on both banks of the Neman River, which consisted of a manor house, the town, villages, arable lands, and forests – came under the rule of Kazimierz Frankiewicz-Radzimiński. In February 1706, Zhaludok served as the headquarters of the Swedish King Charles XII. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Zhaludok demesne passed to the Tyzenhauz family, who gave it its original urban design with the central elliptic square and six streets radiating from it. This design has been preserved till today. In 1835, Zhaludok became the property of the Uhruski family. The new owner's son, Ludwik Świętopełk-Czetwertyński, built a palace near the

town. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zhaludok was the centre of a commune (*gmina*) in Lida County.

**The Jews of Zhaludok ¶** The Jewish community of Zhaludok emerged at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century poll-tax register, the Jewish community of Zhaludok numbered 287 tax-paying Jews, which means that the town was inhabited by around 600 Jews. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the Russian authorities had implemented laws restricting Jewish residence in the countryside, the percentage of Jews in the population of Zhaludok increased significantly and ranged from 53 to 73.5 percent. The town's commercial and industrial development relied on Jewish merchants and artisans. In 1830, Zhaludok had a population of 349 people, 17 brick and 24 wooden houses, two stores, and seven taverns. ¶ In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, horse fairs were held in the town on Pentecost Sunday. This was also the time when match-making was arranged and students were recruited for various





Talmudic academies. ¶ In 1852–1853, guilds were established in nine towns of Lida County, including Zhaludok. They brought together 329 artisans of different trades. Zhaludok had 26 guild craftsmen, such as tailors, shoemakers, saddle-makers, glassmakers, painters, hatters, butchers, blacksmiths, and beekeepers.

**Religious life** ¶ At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two synagogues in Zhaludok. In 1899, the Jewish community requested permission to build another one. In the petition, it was pointed out that there was one heated and one unheated synagogue in a town that had 200 Jewish households with 1,500 people of both sexes. In winter, the synagogue could not hold all those who wished to participate in the services. For this reason, the community requested permission to build “one more wooden *shul*, or, if the authorities find [a possibility to allow] a brick one, we agree, as we have enough funds to build a *shul*.”

The petition included a design plan with both the existing and the planned buildings in Targowy Square. In his response to the Vilna province office, the Lida County head administrator wrote that the third prayer house was planned to be built on the plot of land where there already were two brick synagogues, but this was not possible because the plot was too small. The Board refused to enlarge it or find a different one. Nevertheless, the county head thought that the third prayer house was necessary because of overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions during religious services in the two existing *shuls*. Still, as is evident from the archival documents, the building was not established.

**20<sup>th</sup> century** ¶ During World War I, in August 1914, 36 Jews (Zhaludok residents and Princess Czetwertyńska’s tenants) were called up into the Russian army. Their families, left without breadwinners, received financial aid. Some Zhaludok residents were evacuated

Third-of-May parade in the market square in Zhaludok, with the Volunteer Fire Brigades participating, 1926; visible in the background: the spire of the fire station, the western side of the old synagogue, and the house with a balcony belonging to Shmuel of Grodno. Collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



[A] The building that housed the Jewish school in Zhaludok in the early 1930s, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The early 20th-century mikveh in Zhaludok, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

to the Samara province. ¶ In 1921–1939, Zhaludok was the centre of a township in Lida County, Nowogródek Voivodeship, in the newly independent Poland. According to the 1931 census, the town had 274 houses inhabited by 1,552 people: 1,053 Jews, 467 Catholics, 31 Orthodox Christians, and one Lutheran. In addition, the princely manor farm in Zhaludok included 14 houses and 242 people: 204 Roman Catholics, 21 Orthodox Christians, and 17 Jews. ¶ In 1925,

three schools operated in Zhaludok: a state school taught in Polish (255 students), a private Orthodox Jewish school taught in Hebrew (58 students), and a private Jewish school taught in Yiddish (101 students). ¶ Industrial establishments included a brickyard, a tannery, two distilleries, an open sand pit and gravel mine, a bakery, a small brewery, and a watermill. There were 10 stores trading in colonial goods, 10 groceries, one tobacco store, and three restaurants. Zhaludok also had three medical institutions (two medicine warehouses, a hospital, and a pharmacy) whose staff included one doctor, one dentist, and two medical assistants. Financial operations were handled by the community bank.

### From Zhaludok out into the world ¶

Zhaludok was the home town of several well-known intellectuals. One of them was **Ben Avigdor** (Abraham Leib Shalkovich), who was born in Zhaludok in 1867 and moved to Warsaw in 1891. He received a traditional Jewish education. A writer and publisher, he was one of the first to revive and popularise Hebrew literature in the spirit of critical realism. Avigdor's stories and novels are among the first prose works in Hebrew to focus on the problems of individual characters rather than on the history and culture of the Jewish people in general. He died in Karlovy Vary in 1921.

**Pinchas Kremień** (Krémögne) was born in Zhaludok in 1890. Between 1908 and 1912, he studied at the Vilna Art School, where he made friends with Chaim Soutine and Michel Kikoine. In 1920, he illegally crossed the border, penniless, and then made his way through Germany to Paris. He met his old friends there and made new ones, such as Modigliani and Chagall. Kremień painted in the spirit of moderate Expressionism, mostly still lifes and landscapes. The best period of his painting career is considered to be between 1916 and 1920. During World War II, he was

a hired worker in a village in southern France. His paintings were exhibited in Paris, London, Philadelphia, Lausanne, Geneva, Cannes, and Moscow. Kremień died in 1981 and was buried in Paris.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ After the establishment of the Soviet rule in 1939, the synagogue in Zhaludok was converted into the Red Army House. In 1940, the Jewish population of Zhaludok stood at 70 percent (1,708 out of 2,436 inhabitants). Several refugee families from Łódź arrived here. In addition, more than 200 Jews lived in the village of Orla. A week before the outbreak of the war between Germany and the USSR, several traders, artisans, and representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia were arrested and sent to prison in Lida. Some managed to return to the town at the end of the first week of the war. ¶ The Germans marched into Zhaludok on June 27, 1941, shooting six Jews denounced as communists in the first liquidation operation, and then establishing a ghetto on July 10, 1941. ¶ Secret religious services were held in the



ghetto on Rosh Hashanah (21 September) and Yom Kippur (1 October); Rabbi Chaim Shlomo Weinstein took part in them. ¶ Nochum Szyfmanowicz, who was born in Zhaludok, recalls:

[A] Former synagogue in Zhaludok, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

“The local authorities fled with the beginning of the German-Soviet war. During the week of anarchy that followed, until the Germans entered the town, village peasants pillaged Jewish houses, especially the ones where they encountered no resistance. The Germans burnt the town, leaving only the suburbs, where they established a ghetto. The Jews were crowded together, several families in one room. Some locals joined the police and cooperated with the new authorities; others were ready to help, but the majority remained indifferent. ¶ On May 9, 1942, a general operation was carried out. All the people were herded into a ditch that had been dug outside the town. The Germans and policemen carried out the shooting. The only person who survived was a boy, Fishele Zborowski. He got out of the ditch and escaped but was caught by the Germans again. Our whole family, about 30 people, were killed in the pogrom – my mother and father, my sister Enia – a beautiful dancer, and others. My mother managed to save only Shloymele, hiding him in a furnace and covering it with bricks. At night, he managed to get out and ran away. After wandering around for a long time, he found several partisans and got himself admitted

[B] The Czetwertyński (Chetvertynsky) manor house in Zhaludok, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

into a partisan unit. Shloymele, who was 19, often went on a reconnaissance missions; he was brave and always wanted to be in the forefront. In the last clash, he was mortally wounded. ¶ I survived only because at the time of the execution I was working in a neighbouring village, from where I was transferred to Lida. The partisans had already been there then. One night, a liaison came to take a surgeon from the ghetto to the forest. On October 15, 1942, together with him and a few other companions, we escaped from the ghetto, taking with us some faulty weapons. The partisans treated Jews in different ways. Some showed sympathy, but others did not conceal their hostility. I served in a partisan unit on equal terms with the rest, I carried out tasks, lay in ambush, and kept guard. Boruch Levin escaped together with me. The police had sought him, so he had to hide all the time until he escaped to the forest. In the unit, Boruch became something of a legend; he derailed 18 trains and was put forward for the title of a Hero of the Soviet Union, but he did not receive it. After the war, Boruch Levin went to Palestine and lived there until 1981. He died at the age of 70. ¶ *Zheludok. Pamiat' o evreiskom mestechke* (Rus.: The Shtetl of Zheludok in Contemporary Cultural Memory), Moscow 2013.

Zhaludok was liberated by Soviet troops in July 1944, but none of the surviving Jews returned to the town.

**Memorial sites** ¶ In 1959, an obelisk was erected at the site of the execution of Zhaludok's Jews (one kilometer east of the town, 300 metres from the Jewish cemetery). In 2002, a memorial plaque was placed on the obelisk with an inscription in Russian, English, and Hebrew, reading: "Here lie buried more than 2,000 innocent Jews of Zhaludok and Orla, barbarously murdered by the German fascists and their collaborators on May 9, 1942. May the memory of the fallen be eternal." ¶ In 2012, the Moscow-based "Sefer" Centre for University Teaching of Jewish Civilisation, in cooperation with the University of Grodno, organised a summer school

in Zhaludok. Its participants made an inventory of the Jewish cemetery and conducted interviews with those residents who still remembered their Jewish neighbours. The result of the project was an online publication *Zheludok. Pamiat' o evreiskom mestechke* (Rus.: Zheludok. The Shtetl of Zheludok in Contemporary Cultural Memory, Moscow 2013), which is available at: [http://sefer.ru/Zheludok\\_sbornik.pdf](http://sefer.ru/Zheludok_sbornik.pdf) ¶ The publication presents inscriptions from all the matzevot found at the Jewish cemetery (about 500, the oldest ones dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century). Commemorative plaques were placed on the former synagogue and *mikveh*. Also the traditional buildings on Orlańska St., once inhabited almost exclusively by Jews, have survived to this day.

### Surrounding area

The **Struve Geodetic Arc**, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, is located on the way from the train station in Razhanka, close to the village of **Lopaty** (8 km). ¶ **Orla** (11 km): a Jewish cemetery. ¶ **Murovanka** (15 km): the fortified Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary – one of the most precious monuments of Belarus (16<sup>th</sup> c.). ¶ **Razhanka** (21 km): a former synagogue, now the Orthodox Church of St.



Nicholas the Wonder-maker (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the rabbi's house and former Jewish houses (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.); Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1674); stables of the former Razhanka estate (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery.



**Buildings in Żydowska**

– Orlańska St. (currently Krasnopartyzanskaya St.).  
Jewish cemetery with about 500 matzevot, located on the eastern outskirts of the town, 300 metres from the memorial to those executed in May 1942.  
Former synagogue (currently a cultural centre), 5 Bateriava St.  
Former mikveh, 150 metres from the synagogue, Bateriava St.  
Former Yiddish school, 23 Oktyabria St.  
Former Hebrew school, 23 17 Verasnia St.  
Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1853–1854) built in the Classicist style, 21 Savetskaya St.  
Świętopełk-Czetwertyński palace and park complex (late 18<sup>th</sup> c.–early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) Pervomayskaya St.

Worth seeing

# Astryna

Pol. Ostryna, Bel. Астрына, Yid. אסטריין

*The wooden synagogue near the marketplace, the hearth and heart of the Jewish community. [...] The centre of worship and study [...], it was literally never closed.*

Leo W. Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a scholar*, Philadelphia 1978

**Beginnings ¶** The first written mention of Astryna dates to the 1450 inscription in *The Lithuanian Metrica*. In the 15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century, Astryna was under the king's rule and was the centre of a *gmina* in the County of Troki (Trakai). In 1520, King Sigismund I the Old, who owed one A.I. Chreptowicz “500 times three score groszy,” gave him “his manor of Astryna, to pay the amount back, for three years and then until his death.” In 1641, Władysław IV granted the town Magdeburg rights and a coat of arms. ¶ In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Tatars settled in the vicinity of Astryna for the first time. This was connected with King Sigismund I's gift of land to Aziubek-Soltan, the khan's son. Having received land near Astryna, Aziubek started the princely family of Ostryński – the most influential Tatar noble family in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Tatar prince's descendants held important offices at the ducal court, had the right to maintain their own armed troops, and were directly subordinate to the Grand Duke. ¶ In 1795, Astryna was incorporated into the Russian Empire and was leased out on a long-term basis to the Governor of Kherson. ¶ In 1885, Astryna was home

to 1,210 people living in 295 houses. The town had a municipal office, an Orthodox church, a chapel, two Jewish prayer houses, a school, 10 market stalls, a brewery, a water mill, and a tannery. A market fair was held every Sunday.

**The Jews of Astryna ¶** The earliest mentions of Astryna's Jews date back to 1569, when the local community was subordinated to the Grodno *kahal*. In 1765, there were 436 registered poll tax payers in Astryna and the surrounding area. In 1897, there were already 1,440 Jews living here, making up 59 percent of the population. ¶ At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two synagogues were built in Astryna: the “cold” (functioning from Passover through the High Holidays) and the “warm” (functioning from the High Holidays through Passover); they were erected in place of the previous synagogues, which had burnt down. A bathhouse was also built at that time. All these buildings have survived to the present day.



A view of Astryna, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

**Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887–1974)** was a scholar, philosopher, and historian born in Astryna, a Harvard University professor, the first chairman of the Judaic Studies Center in the United States. ¶ In his thirst for learning Wolfson resembled a Jewish gaon: he would spend days and nights over books, resisting the temptations and distractions that could entice him away from study. He published his first work when he was still a student. This is what Astryna looked like in the future scholar's eyes:

“Ostrin is a small town, surrounded by thick forest. In its center is a wide, sandy marketplace which contains the town well. On one side of the marketplace stands the white church building encircled by a stone fence; on the other side stands the black, wooden synagogue with its trebled roof, which is never closed. A number of narrow, unpaved streets, commencing at the marketplace, run in curved lines for about half a mile on each side. The houses around the market and those near it are inhabited by Jews, who are the merchants, the mechanics, and the professional men of the community. These are hewed log houses built at a distance of some yards from each other. Their roofs are shingled, their windows high, and in some cases the frames painted red and white. At the extremities of each street the moujiks live in their humble thatched dwelling places, each of them having in its front a well, a pen, some trees, and a dog lying in wait. ¶ Leo W. Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a Scholar*, 1978.

**The interwar period** ¶ According to data from 1919, Astryna (then Ostryna) had 1,841 residents, 1,067 of whom were Jewish. From 1921, the town functioned as the centre of a municipality (*gmina*)

in Lida County, and from 1926 – in the Shchuchyn County of Nowogródek Voivodeship (Palatinate) in the Second Polish Republic. There was a TSYSO school there, influenced by the Bund



[A] Former synagogue in Astryna, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Tarbut Jewish school, Astryna, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

and with Yiddish as the language of instruction, and a Tarbut school, run by Zionists, with the instruction in Hebrew. Towards the end of the 1920s, a Hakhshara, a special training program for the Jewish youth, was launched in the local forest, preparing young people for emigration and settlement in Palestine.

**”** *The **maggid** was a multi-faceted preacher who delivered colourful sermons on a variety of ethical themes, using a combination of stories and parables to give either harsh rebuke or gentle persuasion. From time to time, such preachers came to the village. As soon as one arrived, he would hang a notice on the door to the synagogue informing the public as to when he would speak and his subject. By the time the sermon began, the synagogue would be filled to capacity, standing room only.*

*Each maggid had his own signature melody by which he preached. The sermon would be generously peppered with verses from the Torah, the Talmud, and the great classic Jewish sages, heavily dosed with humorous anecdotes. When the preacher described the waiting terrors of Gehinnom (the place of punishment in the afterlife), the audience could feel its feet burning and smell their singed beards. When he spoke of Gan eden (the place of reward in the afterlife), his listeners thought they could feel the bliss and taste the ecstasy awaiting each upright and righteous Jew “after a hundred and twenty years”. All the men would nod their heads sagely as they followed the message of the maggid while the women in their separate gallery wept with excitement. Laborers who had worked hard all day fell asleep with expressions of nakhas (satisfaction) on their slumbering faces, their tired heads leaning on the wooden shtenders (high tables for prayer books or the Talmudic tractate). Every sermon was based on the weekly Torah portion and incorporated practical moral lessons applicable to the people’s daily lives. Among the maggidim were some real “fire and brimstone” preachers whose sermons were a lively topic of conversation even after the preachers had long left the village to move on to their next appointment. Collectors visited each home in the village the next day in order to collect donations for the maggid who had spoken the previous night. ♣ Sefer zikaron li-kehilot Szczucin, Wasiliszki, Ostrin, Nowidwor, Rożanka (Heb.: Book of Remembrance for the Communities of Shtutshin, Vasilishki, Ostrina, Novi Dvor, and Rozanka), Tel Aviv 1966, retrieved from [www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor](http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor)*

## World War II and the Holocaust

♣ The Soviet invasion of Poland in

September 1939 put Astryna within the borders of the USSR. The activity of



Jewish religious and secular organisations was banned. In 1940, Jews made up 73 percent of the town's population. In addition, about 500 Jews lived in the village of Novy Dvor, 10 km to the northeast. At the beginning of World War II, eight refugee families from Warsaw and Łódź had arrived in the town, but after the Soviet rule was established, they were deported to Kazakhstan. ¶

German forces seized Astryna on June 24, 1941; the Jewish population faced repression: contacts with the local community were prohibited, forced labour was introduced, and Jews were compelled to wear yellow armbands. Eyewitness accounts reveal that the first mass killing of Jews in Astryna took place in the second week of German occupation.

¶ A resident of the town, Mordechai Cyrulnicki, who managed to survive the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, recollected:

“Executions by shooting became frequent and normal in our little town. They took place on the market days, in order to frighten the peasants living in the surrounding area. The commander, who lived in the regional centre, Shchuchyn, often came to Astryna, and then we knew that people would be shot. ¶ The account by Mordechai Cyrulnicki based on *Chernaia kniga* (Rus.: The Black Book), ed. Ilya Erenburg and Vassily Grossman, 1947.

The ghetto in Astryna was established in October 1941. According to different

estimates, between 1,200 and 2,000 inmates were confined there.

“In early December 1941, Jews from all the nearby villages, as well as from Novy Dvor and Dąbrowa were rounded up in our town. They said that all the weak and ill ones had been killed on the way. During the establishment of the ghetto, 10 more people were shot. Further orders followed, and there were further executions. Leib Mikhel-evich and his sister Feige-Sore were shot for secretly bringing some grain to the ghetto. Osher Bojarski was caught grinding grain – and he was shot, too. ¶ The account by Mordechai Cyrulnicki, based on *Chernaia kniga* (Rus.: The Black Book), ed. by Ilya Erenburg and Vassily Grossman, 1947.



[A] Prayer house and cheder in Astryna, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The original Jewish buildings surviving in Astryna, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



**A** Entrance to the synagogue in Astryna, before 1939



**B** Soccer team at the Hebrew school



**C** Shmuel Dolgov, the cantor (hazan), before 1926

**D** Tailoring course, 1930. Source: Sefer zikaron le-kehilot Szczuczyn Wasiliszki Astryna Nowy-Dwor Rozanka, Tel Aviv 1966



The liquidation of the ghetto began on June 6, 1942. At the end of October 1942, the Jews from the ghetto in Astryna were transported to the Kolbasino camp, 5 km from Grodno, which was the transit point for the Jewish

population on the way to Auschwitz and Treblinka. The few survivors (Vladimir Glembocki, Shlomo Bojarski, Mordechai Cyrulnicki) were liberated by the Red Army in 1945. ¶ Mordechai Cyrulnicki recollected:

“ I was born in 1899 in the town of Astryna, currently the Grodno Region. I lived there with my family until the Nazi invasion. I had a large family: 5 children. I had wonderful children. All of them were students. With the arrival of Soviet rule, the elder daughter, Gala – she would have been 22 now – was admitted to the Grodno secondary school of engineering and construction and got promoted to the second grade in the spring of 1941. My eldest boy, 17-year-old Yakov, attended a factory-based printing vocational school. The others were still in school: 16-year-old Joel was promoted to the 9th grade, 13-year-old Wiktor – to the 8th grade, and the youngest girl, Łania – only 9 years old – would have been in the 4th grade. ¶ The account by Mordechai Cyrulnicki, based on *Chernaia kniga* (Rus.:The Black Book), ed. by Ilya Erenburg and Vassily Grossman, 1947.

### Traces of Jewish presence ¶

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings of

the synagogue complex have survived in Pereulok Zhukovskogo Street. The

former synagogue now houses a community centre, and the former *beth midrash*, currently abandoned, served as a production plant after World War II. In the former Mogilna Street (now Mart Eighth St.) the site of the former Jewish

cemetery has survived, though without any tombstones. Fragments of matzevot can be found in the pavement next to the community centre (the former synagogue).



Former synagogue complex, Pereulok Zhukovskogo St. ♣ Hill fort (10<sup>th</sup> c.) ♣ Transfiguration Orthodox Church (1855), 5 Grodnenskaya St. ♣ Church of St. Theresa (2001).

Worth seeing

Novy Dvor (10 km): a masonry former synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; a Jewish cemetery. ♣ Shchuchyn (23 km): the Drucki-Lubecki palace complex (late 19<sup>th</sup> c.); the building of the former prayer house and yeshiva, currently shops; a Jewish cemetery with about 40 matzevot; a monument at the mass grave

Surrounding area

of Holocaust victims; Church of St. Theresa (1828); a Piarist monastery; St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church (1865); ruins of a cemetery chapel. ♣ Aziory (24 km): Christ the King Church (1992); Holy Spirit Orthodox Church; January insurgents' grave; remains of a Jewish cemetery. ♣ Vasilishki (23 km): a former synagogue, currently a community centre (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); former Jewish houses; Church of St. John the Baptist (18<sup>th</sup> c.); in the nearby village of Staryya Vasilishki there is the house of the Wydrzycki family, in which Czesław Niemen was born.

# Lunna

Pol. Lunna, Bel. Лунна, Yid. לוננא

*The town boasted for its shoemakers, tailors, homeowners, annual-fair days, market days, as well as for its fires.*

Yitzchak Eliashberg, *Memoirs from Lunna*,  
<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/lunna>

**Beginnings** ¶ The little town of Lunna was established in 1531 on the order of Queen Bona, who also gave permission for a marketplace and a tavern to be established there. The name Lunna derives from the Baltic word *lunas* (“mud”), or from the name of a marsh bird, *luń* (“harrier”). The settlement was

divided into two parts: the royal town and the land belonging to the Sapieha family. On the private estate, a settlement named Wola emerged, and the Jews moved there in 1785 after a fire in Lunna. The name Lunna-Wola is often found in the literature.

“Once there was a little shtetl named Lunna. It was situated near the southern bank of the Nieman River and was surrounded by its lush green forests. A small town populated by 300 Jewish families, which was not known for its geniuses, famous rabbis, bright disciples or by any kind of glorious history whatsoever despite the fact that it was written in the Community’s historical documents that it had been traversed by the Napoleon armies at the time of his war against Russia. Trotzky also visited the headquarters, which were temporarily situated inside one of the town’s houses, at the time of the war between the Bolsheviks [and] the Poles. ¶ Yitzchak Eliashberg, *Memoirs from Lunna*, <http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/lunna>

**The Jews of Lunna** ¶ Most likely, the Jewish community of Lunna emerged in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first written mention of the local Jews dates back to 1606: “A Jew from Lunna was carrying 40 tanned calf hides for sale.” During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Jews in the town steadily grew, and by the end of the century, it reached 965 in a total population of 1,211. The Wola suburb at that time was

inhabited by 665 people, mainly Jews; Lunna and Wola had separate synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. ¶ The Jews traditionally worked in trade and crafts. The first and the twenty-first day of each month were designated to be the market days, and annual fairs were held in April and December. Lunna was a center of the grain trade in the Grodno Province. The town had a synagogue, three Jewish prayer houses, a poorhouse,





20 little stores, three roadhouses, two inns, a bath, two windmills, an elementary state school, a distillery, a first-aid station, and a post office. In Wola there was a wooden synagogue, built towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1901, Josel Rubinovich opened a photographic studio.

**World War I** ¶ With the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, some of the town's residents were called up into the Russian army. Judel Gisser, Mendel Kaplan from Lunna, and Aaron Fridman from Wola fell into German captivity. In autumn 1915, Lunna was occupied by German forces. Friedrich Grelle, a soldier of the German army, recollected: "We moved further, to the town of Lumno-Wola (Lunna), situated directly on the Neman River. [...] there are few stone-built houses here, most of them are wooden, and the streets are not paved. All the Jews were still there, in the synagogue, at school,

and in their homes. After we entered, as a force of one regiment, the Russians began to bombard the town with grenades from the opposite bank of the river. We deployed our forces behind the synagogue, where the Russians couldn't do us any harm, but there were a few injured among the people, which caused terrible panic. Everyone started to flee from the town, wailing, cursing, and crying, with their children and possessions." ¶ The occupation authorities issued an order uniting Lunna and Wola into one town; they permitted the functioning of two synagogues in Lunna and one in Wola. ¶ Between 1916 and 1921, the post of rabbi in Lunna was held by Isser Yehuda Unterman (1886–1976). After 1921 Unterman moved to Grodno, where he was also a rabbi and director of several yeshivot. Later, he emigrated to England, where he was the rabbi of the city of Liverpool from 1924. In 1946, he became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, and in 1964–1972, he held

Moshe Yudel Arkin's house with a balcony) in the market square of Lunna, before 1939, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



[A] A brick house from 1931 in Geroev Square in Lunna. The Star of David is visible in the centre of the triangular gable wall, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The construction of the Jewish primary school in Lunna, 1927, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

replaced by Tuvia Rotberg (executed by the Nazis in 1942).

**The interwar period** ¶ After March 1921, Lunna was within the borders of Poland and had the status of a *gmina* town in the County of Grodno in Białystok Palatinate (Voivodeship). In 1921, the town had 307 houses and 1,884 residents. In 1938, 1,671 of the town's 2,522 residents were Jewish (60 percent). ¶ In 1928, the Gmilut Hesed, a free-loan society was established, headed by the most distinguished Jews in town including Rabbi Rotberg. ¶ The town's economic life depended heavily on the timber and grain trade, the construction materials trade, small crafts, and light industry. As elsewhere in Belorussia, practically all tradesmen and craftsmen were Jews. ¶ The town had three functioning synagogues, two schools, a theatre, and a fire brigade band. There were two charity associations caring for the sick and the poor, a bathhouse with a *mikveh*, and two Jewish cemeteries (a third one was in Wola).

the office of the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel. In Lunna, Unterman was

**Aaron Lieberman** (1845, Lunna – 1880, New York) – a well-known journalist and publisher. He studied the Torah in Vilna (Vilnius), worked as a *melamed* in Suwałki, and was an extra-mural student at St. Petersburg Institute of Technology. He published articles in the *Forverts* about the labor conditions of Jewish workers. In Vilnius, he became a socialist agitator, for which in 1875 he was forced to leave the country. In London, he set up the Hebrew Socialist Union, and in 1876, he started to publish a socialist magazine *Ha-Emet* (Heb.: Truth). In 1878, he was arrested in Berlin, but managed to emigrate to the USA in 1880.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ The Wehrmacht troops captured Lunna on June 28, 1941. German soldiers started to pillage Jewish houses. Already on the first day, a few Jews were shot for their alleged contacts with the

Soviet intelligence. In July 1941, the Germans organised a *Judenrat* (Jewish council) in Lunna, with Yakov Welbel as chairman. A Jewish police force was established to maintain order.

“[...] both younger sisters, Leja and Chaja, lived with their mother in Lunna. Father could take only one of them to Palestine. For this purpose, it was necessary to pay all the travel fees through a friend, so that he could go to Lunna, enter into a fictitious marriage with her, and thus obtain a permit for her to leave for Palestine, where a divorce was to be obtained later. Father decided that Leja would be the one to go. Leja arrived in Palestine at the last moment – on April 5, 1940. Her mother and sister Chaja stayed in Lunna and were killed during the Holocaust together with the town's remaining 1,549 Jews. ¶ Ruth Marcus, *Once There Was a Little Shtetl Called Lunna*, translated from <http://www.mishpoha.org>

In September 1941, before the feast of Sukkot, the occupying forces announced the establishment of a ghetto, and in October that year, they ordered the confiscation of all personal property and real estate of Lunna Jews. On the night of November 1–2, 1942, all the dwellers of the ghetto were deported to the transit camp in Kolbassino (near Grodno). On December 5, 1942, prisoners from the Kolbassino camp began to be transported by rail to the Auschwitz death camp, where 1,549 Jews from Lunna-Wola were murdered. Of the town's entire Jewish population, only 15 people survived; one of them was Eliezer Eisenschmidt, who managed to escape during transport. ¶ Zalman Gradowski, a former member of the *Judenrat* of Lunna, found himself in a special unit in Auschwitz that worked at the crematorium. He wrote down his experiences and buried his notes in the ashes near the crematorium. Gradowski was one of the leaders of the uprising of



the camp's prisoners on October 7, 1944 and was killed in a shooting. His notes were found and published in the collection entitled *Megiles Aushwitz* (Yid.: *Scrolls from Auschwitz*), ed. B. Mark, Tel Aviv 1977.

**Traces of Jewish presence** ¶ At the new Jewish cemetery on Sheremeta Street in Lunna, more than 300 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century matzevot have survived. In 2005, a group of American students from Dartmouth College under Dr. Edward Boraz's supervision carried out inventorying and restoration works at the cemetery. The site where the old cemetery used to be located, a few hundred metres away in Komsomolskaia Street, is currently a square with a memorial to the

[A] Former mikveh in Lunna, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Jewish cemetery in Lunna, 2014. Photo by Siergiej Piwowarczyk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Holocaust victims, but a fragment of the wall and three matzevot have survived. The Jewish cemetery in Wola, with about 80 surviving tombstones, is located in the forest of Zalesie, 700 metres to the left off the Grodno–Vawkavysk road.

¶ The building of Lunna's main synagogue survived the war but was totally reconstructed in the times of the USSR; it served as a bakery and currently houses a community centre. The wooden synagogue in Wola was destroyed

during World War II; no material trace of it remains. ¶ The houses formerly inhabited by several Jewish families have been preserved. The gable walls of some houses bear brick ornaments in the shape of the Star of David. ¶ A part of the exhibition in the school museum (10 Shkolna St.) tells the story of the local Jewish community. The exhibits include a preserved fragment of a Torah scroll as well as many photographs and documents.

### Surrounding area

**Skidziel** (18 km): a former yeshiva; the Chapel of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1870); the Antonowicz-Czetweryński manor park (circa 1840); the Orthodox Church of the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of Belarus; a Jewish cemetery; a memorial to the victims of World War II. ¶ **Voupa** (17 km): a former prayer house, *cheder*, and *mikveh* (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a memorial at the execution site at the Jewish cemetery; Church of St. John the Baptist (1773); Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church (20<sup>th</sup> c.); a collection of *Judaica* in the school museum. ¶ **Ros'** (24 km): a former synagogue (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the remains of a Jewish cemetery; Holy Trinity Church (1807); the Potocki manor farm; Holy Trinity Orthodox Church (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a World War I military cemetery. ¶ **Kamianka** (27 km): a Jewish cemetery, a few dozen matzevot; the Church of St. Anthony of Padua.

### Worth seeing

**Residential houses with decorations** shaped like the Star of David, Kirova St., Geroev Sq. ¶ **Three Jewish cemeteries**, Sheremet St., Komsomolskaia St., Zalesie forest. ¶ **Former synagogue**, rebuilt (currently a community centre), Geroev Sq. ¶ **Church of St. Anne** (1782). ¶ **Wooden Orthodox Church of St. John** (1889).





# Indura

Bel. Індурэ, Yid. אַמְדוּר

*Indura has lost its Jewish flavour...*

W. Karpyza

**Beginnings** ¶ The town's name is connected with the Balts, who called the local river Indrupis, which meant "reedy" – *indre* meaning "reed". Thus, a melodious word was coined: Indura. In 1413, Indura was mentioned in the resolution of the Grodno Sejm on the Union of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Crown of Poland. Under that resolution, Ashmyany, Slonim, Vawkavysk, Indura, and Grodno – all of them referred to in the document as towns – were incorporated into the Troki (Trakai) Palatinate. ¶ In the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the town of Indura belonged to the noble families of Kiszka, Radziwiłł, Pac, Wałowicz, Isakowski, and Mlecznik, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – to the Ogiński, Sałaguba, and Masalski families. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), Swedish General Meyerfeld defeated the Russian troops in a battle near Indura. ¶ With the Third Partition of Poland (1795), Indura fell within the borders of the Russian Empire. The town was situated on the Brzestowski and Kozłowski family estates. In 1915, it came under German occupation. In 1919–1920, it was seized by the Red Army and then by Polish

forces. In 1921, under the Peace Treaty of Riga, it was incorporated into the Second Polish Republic.

**The Jews of Indura** ¶ The first mention of Jews in Indura dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Indura Jewish community was administrated by the *kahal* of Grodno. In 1720, during an annual fair, the elders of Lithuanian *kahals* (the Lithuanian Vaad) convened in Indura and drew up a list of Jewish community taxes for 1721. According to the 1766 census, Indura had 505 Jewish residents.

**Hasidism** ¶ In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Indura was the second largest centre of Hasidism in north-eastern Poland after Pinsk. Although it was a small town, it had its own yeshiva. One of the figures in the local community leadership was **Haim Haykel ben Shmuel**, also known as Haim Amdurski, a disciple of the Maggid (Dov-Ber) of Mezherich and Aaron of Karlin. Haykel Amdurski was a *tzadik* in Indura in the 1770s and 1780s. At Haim Haykel's court, there was a custom of confessing to the *tzadik* or to one another. As long as Haykel lived in Indura, Hasidim



from all over Lithuania would come to see him. Other *tzadikim* of his generation – such as Pinchas of Korets and Boruch of Medzhibozh – respected him for his deep prayer and asceticism. For a long time, the manuscript of his book, *Haim ve-hesed*, was in possession of the

admons of the Karlin Hasidic dynasty; it was printed for the first time in 1891 in Warsaw. ¶ When Haim Haykel ben Shmuel died in 1787, his son Shmuel (d. after 1798) took over as head of the community, and Hasidism ceased to be a presence in Indura.

” Rabbi Aaron travelled through all of Russia, from one Jewish city to the next, in search of young people worth bringing to his teacher, the Great Maggid, as disciples, so that through them the hasidic teachings might spread through the world. Once he came to the city of Amdur. Now he had heard that, beyond the town, in a lonely wood, lived a devout and learned man, Rabbi Hayke, who kept aloof from the world and from men, and mortified his flesh. In order to bring him to the town, Rabbi Aaron preached in the House of Prayer a number of times, and his words had a powerful effect, but it took a long time for the hermit to hear of it. When the hour for the next sermon drew near, something drove him to the House of Prayer. When Rabbi Aaron heard he had come, he did not preach his sermon, but said only these words: “If a man does not grow better, he grows worse.” Like a poison which rouses the very core of life against itself, these words bit into the mind of the ascetic. He ran to the rabbi and begged him to help him out of the maze of error in which he had lost his way. “Only my teacher, the maggid of Mezherich can do that,” said Rabbi Aaron. “Then give me a letter to him,” said the man, “so that he may know who I am.” His request was granted, and he started out on his journey confident that before he spoke freely to the maggid, the famous teacher would know that he had before him one of the great men of his generation. ¶ The maggid opened the letter and – obviously with deliberate intent – read it aloud. It said that the man who was delivering it did not

have a particle of sound goodness in him. Rabbi Hayke burst into tears. “Now, now,” said the maggid. – “Does what that Litvak (a non-Hasidic Jew) writes really matter so much to you?” – “Is it true or isn’t it?” asked the other. – “Well,” said the maggid, if the Litvak says so, it is, very probably, true.” – “Then heal me, rabbi!” the ascetic begged him. ¶ For a whole year, the maggid worked over him and healed him. Later, Rabbi Hayke became one of the great men of his generation. ¶ M. Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, trans. O. Marx, New York 1991.

**Famine** ¶ The collection of the National Historical Archive of Belarus in Grodno contains documents connected with the life of Indura’s Jews, reflecting the town life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of these documents describes a famine experienced by the Jewish population in 1823–1825. A county doctor’s report reads: “having visited all the houses together with the chief of county police, I found only eight ill Jews, suffering from undernourishment. If the rumours are to be trusted, approximately 100 Jews died. They have no money for medicines, in their homes [there are] impurities and the situation [is] desperate. The kahal has no resources.”

**The shtetl in figures** ¶ In 1847, the Jewish community of Indura numbered 1,220 people. Data from the National Historical Archive of Belarus in Grodno reveal that in September 1852, a fire in the town consumed 54 Jewish and 15 Christian houses with outbuildings as well as all shops and their goods. About 150 families were left homeless. ¶ In 1881, there were 237 Jewish and four Christian houses in Indura.



The 1897 census reports 314 houses, a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, a synagogue, four Jewish prayer houses, a parish school, a post office, a first-aid station, a brewery, two distilleries, 16 workshops, a limestone processing plant, eight inns, market fairs on Sundays, and 2,674 residents, 2,194 of whom were Jewish.

**The bookshop** ¶ In 1910–1911, Shmuel Wolf Naufakh opened a bookshop in Indura. He obtained a licence to deal in “books allowed by censorship, only in Russian.” He requested permission to deal also in censored Jewish and German books, but the request was rejected after a report by the local chief of police stated: “Naufakh holds the post of the elder of the Indura Municipal Board,

[A] Former mikveh from 1883, located in Leningradskaya Street in Indura, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] The building of the former synagogue in Indura, 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Members of Hechalutz from Indura, 1927, reproduction from *Amdur, majn geboiren shtetl*, Buenos Aires 1973

and his duties do not always allow him to work at the bookshop personally. Usually, a member of his family is in charge of sales. But neither the family nor Nau-fakh himself have any idea of marketing books, and yet, they are eager to take up anything, as Jews typically are. There is no demand for Jewish or German books, and demand for the Russian ones is low.”

**The synagogue** ¶ The synagogue in Indura was built in 1885 on the site of a previous one, which probably had been wooden. It reflects an austere monumental-classical style of synagogue architecture, with only a minimum of decorative elements. The synagogue was built of brick and originally was plastered. After the war, it was used by the local kolkhoz for farm-related purposes. At present, it stands abandoned, and its condition is gradually deteriorating.

**The Jewish cemetery** ¶ Indura’s Jewish cemetery is located in the southwestern part of the town, in Gagarin Street. It occupies an irregular L-shaped plot, including an oblong hill about five metres high. Several hundred tombstones survive, most of them made

of granite. The oldest surviving tombstones date back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Along Gagarin St., the cemetery is partly fenced by a steel barrier with metal elements incorporating the Star of David. The area of the cemetery is now used for grazing.

## World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, Indura fell within the borders of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. In June 1941, it was seized by German troops. In late August and early September 1941, a ghetto was established. On November 2, 1942, the inmates of the ghetto were deported to the Kolbassino transit camp, and then sent to the Treblinka and Auschwitz death camps. However, according to the data cited by Marat Botvinnik (*Monuments to the Genocide of the Jews of Belorussia*, Minsk 2000), on November 2, 1942, Germans stationed in Indura aided by policemen shot dead 2,800 people, most of whom were women and children.

## Traces of Jewish presence

Indura was liberated on July 14, 1944. After the war, there was no Jewish community. On December 29, 1949, the town lost its municipal rights and was downgraded to a village. In 2007, it was granted the status of an agrotown. The synagogue building still dominates the local landscape and, though in deteriorating condition, is one of the best-preserved Jewish heritage sites in Belarus. On Leningradska Street, a *mikveh* building from 1883 has survived and now functions as a public bath. A source of information about the town Jewish life is the memorial book entitled *Amdur*,





The area of the former ghetto in Indura, currently Leningradskaya St., 2014. Photo by Natalia Filina, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

*mein gebijren shtetl* (Yid.: Indura, My Home Town), published in Buenos Aires in 1973. The book contains an

introduction by **Abraham Zak** (1891–1980), a Yiddish-language poet and writer born in Indura.

**Grodno** (26 km): a choral synagogue (17<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery with approx. 2,000 matzevot and the tombs of Rabbis Shimon Shkop and Alexander Zyskind (17<sup>th</sup> c.); the buildings of the former Tarbut school; the Jewish community building; a hospital; and a yeshiva; a rich collection of *Judaica* at the Grodno Museum of the History of Religion; the Castle Hill with the Old Castle (11<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> c.); the New Castle; the Orthodox Church of Sts. Boris and Gleb (12<sup>th</sup> c.); monasteries: Bernardine, Franciscan, and Jesuit, as well as convents: Bridgettine and Basilian; a monument to Eliza Orzeszkowa, a famous female Polish 19<sup>th</sup>-century writer who wrote favourably about Jews, and a museum devoted to her. ♣ **Kolbassino** (circa 30 km): a memorial to the victims at the site of the transit camp (1942–1943). ♣ **Sapotskin** (50 km): the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1789); a cemetery of Polish soldiers killed in 1919–1920 and 1939; tomb chapels of J. Dziekońska (1858) and J. Górski (1873); a Jewish cemetery with several hundred tombstones; bunkers of the 68<sup>th</sup> Grodno Fortified Region of the Molotov Line. ♣ **Mstibava** (53 km): a Jewish cemetery, Church of St. John the Baptist, and an old castle (12<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> c.). ♣ **Svislach** (56 km): a former synagogue, currently a cinema (19<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery; the building of a former Jewish inn, currently a museum; the Tyszkiewicz family manorial complex and parks (early 20<sup>th</sup> c.); the Orthodox Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (1884); the gymnasium (secondary school) building (1802–1803); the railway station (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.).

Surrounding  
area

Indura, 1930s, a 3D model prepared by Paweł Sario and Polygon Studio as part of the Shtetl Routes project, 2015. Photo by Paweł Sario, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Worth seeing

Former synagogue, Rogachevskogo St. ♪ Former mikveh (1883), Leningradskaya St. ♪ Jewish cemetery, Gagarin St. ♪ Hill fort. ♪ Holy Trinity Church (1815). ♪ Orthodox Church of St Alexander Nevsky (1881). ♪ Indura Culture and Entertainment Centre, 1 Niekra-sova St.



# Glossary

**admor** (Hebr. acronym for *adonenu, morenu, ve-rabenu*, ‘our master, our teacher, and our rebbe’) – an honorific title given to religious leaders of the Jewish community.

**aron kodesh** (Hebr. holy ark, Yid. *orn-koydesh*) – the closet in the **synagogue** wall facing Jerusalem, which is the eastern wall in Europe. The place where **Torah** scrolls are kept. It is covered with a **parochet** topped with a lambrequin (*kaporet*) symbolising the lid of the Covenant Ark.

**Ashkenazi Jews** (Ashkenazic Jews, Ashkenazim) – the term used with reference to Jews from Central and Eastern as well as Western Europe, and after the 17th c. also from America. Their language was Yiddish.

**beth midrash** (Hebr. house of learning, Yid. *bes medrish*) – a kind of synagogue with a room for religious study, prayer, and debate, with a collection of books. Any man could attend it, regardless of age. Every Jewish community, regardless of its size, had a beth midrash.

**Beth Yaakov** (Hebr. the house of Jacob, Yid. *Beis Yaakov*) – an Orthodox school organisation associated with **Aguda**, running religious schools for girls and evening courses for women, placing emphasis on religious education and practical skills. The first Beth Yaakov school was established in Cracow in 1918. Its founder was Sarah Schenirer.

**Bikur Cholim** (Hebr. visiting the sick, Yid. *Biker Khoylim*) – one of the most important commandments of **Judaism**, whose fulfilment in communities was ensured, e.g., by Bikur Cholim brotherhoods. Their members’ activities included visiting the sick and attending to their needs.

**bima** (bimah) (Hebr. elevation, Yid. *bime*) – a podium in the centre of the main hall of the **synagogue**, usually with stairs, a canopy, and a table for reading the **Torah**. It is also the place from which the congregation is addressed and prayers are conducted.

**Bund** (full name: The General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia) – the largest and the most powerful Jewish workers' party in Poland in the interwar period, founded in Vilnius in 1897. It functioned until 1949.

**cantor** (Hebr. *hazzan*) – the person leading the prayers in the **synagogue**. This must be a person with musical talent, thoroughly educated, as well as respected in the community for his moral virtues. As such, a hazzan is referred to as *shaliach tzibur* – delegate of the community.

**cheder** (Hebr. room, chamber, Yid. *cheider*) – a traditional primary religious school for boys up to the age of 13, providing instruction in the Hebrew alphabet as well as in reading the prayer book, the **Torah**, and the **Talmud**. It was often located in the teacher's (melamed's) house – hence the name.

**Chevre Kadisha** (Aram. holy brotherhood) – a fraternity of the last offices, one of the oldest and the most influential kahal fraternities, ensuring that all members of the Jewish community have a funeral in accordance with the Jewish tradition. The responsibilities of the brotherhood included keeping vigil by the dying person's side and at the body, washing the body, escorting it to the grave and burying it, prayers on the death anniversary (**yorzeit**), and sometimes taking care of the sick as well as supporting widows and orphans.

**Council of Four Lands** (Hebr. *Vaad Arba Aratzot*) – the central Jewish self-government institution, whose beginnings date back to 1580, representing the interests of all Jewish communities located in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was the highest authority in legal and judicial matters and regulated all the domains of the life of Jewish communities (for instance, it made economic decisions, engaged in charitable activity, and negotiated with the authorities). The Council was officially dissolved in 1764.

**De non tolerandis Judaeis**, (Lat. On not tolerating Jews) – a privilege granted by the sovereign to a town, a city, a land, or a larger area prohibiting Jews from settling there.

**diaspora** (Gr. dispersion, Hebr. *tfutsa*, *gola*, Yid. *golus*) – the term referring to all centres of Jewish population outside the Land of Israel.



**Gemilut Chesed** (Hebr. acts of loving-kindness, Yid. *Gmiles Chesed*) – the name of fraternities granting interest-free loans, particularly to Jewish craftsmen and merchants.

**ghetto** – a quarter of a town sectioned off for Jews. The term has been in use since 1516 r., when, in Venice, the area adjoining the foundry (It. *getto*) was proclaimed the only part of the town open to Jewish settlement. In the 20th c., the Nazis revived the idea of ghetto, isolating the Jews from the rest of society – first in German towns and cities and then in Eastern Europe.

**Gordonia** – a pioneer youth organisation, associated with the Hitachdut party, established in Galicia in 1923.

**Hanukkah** (Hebr. dedication) – also called the Festival of Lights, celebrated for eight days starting on the 25th day of the month of Kislev (November–December), in remembrance of the victory of the Maccabees in 164 BC over the forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Syrian ruler of the Seleucid dynasty, and in remembrance of the Hanukkah miracle, connected with the purification and re-consecration of the Temple of Jerusalem and with the resumption of worship there.

**hanukkiah** – an eight-light lamp or (since the 18th c.) a candlestick for eight candles and an auxiliary one. The lamps (candles) are lit on eight consecutive days of the feast of **Hanukkah**. The lighting of the lamps (candles) begins after sunset. Lighting one candle from another is not allowed: the auxiliary candle (shammes) serves this purpose. It begins with one light, and one more is added each day.

**Hasidim** – the adherents of **Hasidism**.

**Hasidism (Hasidic Judaism)** – a Jewish religious and mystical movement that originated in Podolia in the 18th c., whose aim was to revive religiosity among the followers of **Judaism**. The founder and first leader of the movement was Israel ben Eliezer of Mezbizh (1700–1760), known as Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name). Hasidism never developed a uniform doctrine: the practice and teaching differed among **tzadikim**. The common features of the movements were: the rejection of institutionalised forms of religiosity, ecstatic practices (especially in prayer, singing, and dancing), enthusiasm and spontaneity in prayer, hierarchization (based on the tzadik's authority), and blurred borders between the secular and the religious spheres of life. Until World War II, the centre of Hasidic Judaism was Eastern Europe; at present, the main Hasidic centres are located in the United States and in Israel.

**Haskalah** (Hebr. enlightenment, Yid. *haskole*) – the Jewish Enlightenment, a late 18th-century intellectual movement. It promoted integration with non-Jewish

communities, the development of secular sciences, and the use of the Hebrew language. It initiated the emancipation movement and, consequently, the assimilation movement.

**Judenrat** (Ger. Jewish Council) – the referring to the Jewish administrative bodies established by the Germans in **ghettoes** during World War II. The competence of the Judenrat was limited to organisational and administrative matters (such as population records, food provision, firewood, social services, and health care); the main decisions regulating the life in ghettos were made by the German authorities.

**Kabbalah** – an esoteric and mystical movement in **Judaism**, which originated in medieval Spain. It appeared in Poland around the 16th c.

**kaddish** (Aram. holy, Yid. *kadesh*) – a prayer said in Aramaic, expressing faith in the one and only God, submission to His will, and praise of his power. In order to say it, a **minyan** is required. One of the types of this prayer is *kaddish yatom* (orphan's kaddish) – a prayer for the dead. After parents' death, the sons say the kaddish every day for 11 months, and later once a year at **yorzeit**.

**kahal** (*kehila*) – a term referring both to a local Jewish community and to the autonomous self-government together with its leaders. The level of a kahal's autonomy used to be determined by the sovereigns.

**kiddush** (Hebr. sanctification, Yid. *kidesh*) – a blessing recited over wine on the evening that starts the Sabbath and every other holiday, immediately after returning from the synagogue, before the meal.

**kiddush cup** – a vessel for wine, used for ritual purposes on Sabbath and other holidays.

**kippa** (from Hebr.; Yid. *yarmelke*) – a round skullcap made of cloth, covering the top of the head, worn by men in accordance with Jewish religious law.

**klezmer** (from Hebr. *Kli zemer*, literally: an instrument of songs) – a Jewish musician. The violinist played a central role in a klezmer band. There were also a bassist, a clarinetist, and a trumpeter; they hardly ever knew the notes.

**kloyz** (Yid. chamber) – a small **synagogue** or **beth midrash**, usually belonging to a particular occupational or social group.

**kosher** (Hebr. *kasher* – proper, fit) – allowed by Jewish religious law. The term refers to food, religious objects, their application and use, as well as the right manner of performing actions, rituals, and ceremonies.

**kvitlech** (Yid. slips of paper) – the slips on which Jews write the prayer requests they have brought to a **tzadik**. Such slips are also left at the graves of tzadikim, among other places.

**Linat Hatzedek** (Yid. honest accommodation) – a charity brotherhood helping the poor, the weak, and the elderly as well as providing accommodation for poor wanderers.

**maskil** (Hebr. enlightened) – an adherent of the **Haskalah**.

**matzah** (Hebr. cake, Yid. *matze*) – unleavened bread, made of flour and water alone. Eaten during the holiday of **Pesach** to commemorate the Israelites' hasty departure from Egypt, when they had to eat bread that had no time to rise. Therefore, during the eight days of this holiday one must not have at home or eat articles that could sour (such as groats).

**matzeva** (Hebr. tombstone, Yid. *matzeive*) – a type of tombstone. A vertically positioned stone tablet with a rectangular, triangular, or arch-shaped top. It is covered with inscriptions and often decorated with low reliefs symbolising the descent, attributes, or name of the deceased.

**menorah** (Hebr. candlestick, Yid. *menoyre*) – a seven-branch oil lamp. One of the oldest Jewish symbols; its description can be found in Exodus 25:31–40. Initially, it was made of pure gold, kept in the Tent of Meetings at first and then in the Temple of Jerusalem, from where it was stolen by Titus' troops. It symbolises the Jewish nation ("the light of nations") and is now part of the national emblem of Israel.

**mezuzah** (Hebr. door frame, Yid. *mezuze*) – a term referring to a little box made of wood, glass, or metal, containing a scroll of parchment with handwritten quotations from the **Torah** (Deut 6:5–9; 11:13–21). A mezuzah is attached in a diagonal position to the doorcase of every Jewish house, on the right door frame (looking from the outside). When going in or out, Jews touch the mezuzah with their right hand and kiss their fingers.

**mikveh** (Hebr. tank, Yid. *mikve*) – a pool or a natural reservoir with running water, serving the purpose of ritual purification of people and objects.

**minyan** (Hebr. number, Yid. *minien*) – a group of at least ten male Jews aged over 13, which is necessary to say some prayers and perform certain religious ceremonies, such as **Torah** reading.

**mitzvah** (Hebr. commandment, good deed, Yid. *mitzve*) – a religious duty. According to the **Talmud**, an adult man (aged over 13) is obliged to keep 613

commandments: 248 orders and 365 prohibitions. A mitzvah is also a good deed, such as giving alms.

**mohel** – a man performing ritual circumcision.

**ohel** (Hebr. tent, Yid. *oyel*) – a type of tombstone in the form of a small building, sometimes in the form of a roof resting on four posts, under which there are the actual tombstones. Erected over the grave of a particularly distinguished person – a rabbi, a tzadik, or a learned Talmudist.

**parochet** (Hebr. curtain, Yid. *poroykhes*) – the curtain covering the front of the **aron kodesh**, usually richly decorated.

**Pesach** (Hebr. passed over, Yid. *Peisach*) – the holiday commemorating the Jews' exodus from Egypt. It starts on the 15th day of the month of Nisan (March–April) and lasts eight days. The celebrations begin with a ceremonial dinner (*seder*), during which the story (*haggadah*) of liberation from bondage in Egypt is read and bread made without leaven (**matzah**) is eaten. The Song of Songs is read in the synagogue and Hallel (psalms of thanksgiving) is recited.

**Purim** (Hebr. lots) – a joyful holiday celebrated on the 14th day of the month of Adar (February–March), established to commemorate the prevention of the annihilation of Persian Jews planned by Haman. That evening, as well as after morning prayers in the synagogue, the Book of Esther is read out. On this holiday, friends send one another gifts; presents are also given to the poor. Until late at night there are feasts, games, and fun; people drink alcohol; one is even expected to get drunk enough not to be able to distinguish the evil Haman from the good Mordechai.

**rabbi** (Hebr. my master) – an official, religious head, and spiritual leader of a Jewish community. He settles matters connected with the regulations of Halakha – Jewish religious law; he also supervises the teaching, approves community laws, presides over weddings, and pronounces on **kosherness**. His authority is based on knowledge: a rabbi is not anointed by God.

**Rosh Hashanah** (Hebr. the beginning of the year, Yid. *Rosheshone*) – the New Year holiday, celebrated on the 1st and 2nd days of the month of Tishrei (September–October). In Poland it is also known as the Feast of Trumpets. The holiday starts the period of atonement (the so-called Fearful Days) before **Yom Kippur**. According to tradition, it is the anniversary of the creation of the world.

**Sabbath** (Hebr. to rest, Yid. *shabes*) – the seventh day of the week, the day for rest. A weekly holiday lasting from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday, introduced in accordance with the prescription of the Torah – one should rest, just like God



rested after creating the world. In traditional Judaism it is forbidden on the Sabbath to perform 39 categories of work, whose characteristic feature is that they serve to produce a new object or to transform one object into another. These are creative actions.

**Sefer Torah** – a **Torah** scroll for liturgical use, handwritten with a quill on parchment sheets sewn together and rolled on two decorative wooden poles. A rolled Sefer Torah has a richly embroidered cover and decorations (Torah crown, rimonomim, tas); it is stored in the **aron kodesh** at the **synagogue**. Ceremonially taken out and read out during services – on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as twice during the Sabbath.

**Sephardi Jews** (also: Sephardic Jews, Sephardim; Hebr. *Spharad* – Spain and Portugal) – the term referring to the Jewish population inhabiting the Iberian Peninsula (Spain, Portugal) and using Judaeo-Romance dialects. After their expulsion from Spain and Portugal (late 15th c.), they settled in the Ottoman Empire and in several European countries (southern France, Italy, the Netherlands); they also live in the Maghreb, the Middle East, and South America. In Poland, a group of Sephardi Jews settled in Zamość, where they quickly assimilated. At present, the Sephardim are a group observing a rite somewhat different from the Ashkenazi rite and have their own rabbi in Israel. In the Hebrew language used in Israel, the Sephardic pronunciation is the standard.

**shammes** (Yid. servant, Hebr. *shamash*) – a beadle or caretaker at the kahal, synagogue, rabbinical court, or fraternity.

**Shavuot** (Hebr. weeks, Yid. *Shvues*) – the Feast of the Weeks, commemorating the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai; it is also the feast of the first crops and, like Pesach and Sukkot – one of the pilgrim holidays. It is celebrated on the 50th day after the beginning of Pesach – namely, on the 6th day of the month of Sivan (May–June) in Israel and on the 6th and 7th days of Sivan in the diaspora. Tradition associates it with God's gift of the Decalogue tablets to Moses on Mount Sinai. On that day, the Decalogue is read out in the **synagogue**, among other texts. The synagogue is decorated with flowers and tree branches. Dairy dishes are eaten at homes.

**shkolnik** see **shammes**.

**shochet** (Hebr. slaughterer, Yid. *shoichet*) – a qualified employee of the kahal, performing slaughter in accordance with the rules of kosher.

**shtetl** (Yid. small town) – a small urban settlement in Central and Eastern Europe in which the Jewish community was often the majority of the population; it developed a characteristic model of social and cultural life, both individual and communal.

**shtiebel** (Yid. chamber) – a Hasidic prayer house.

**Star of David** (Hebr. *Magen David* – the Shield of David) – a six-pointed star consisting of two equilateral triangles. In 1897, the World Zionist Organisation chose it as its emblem, which was later also placed on the flag of the state of Israel.

**sukkah, succah** (Hebr. *suka*, Yid. *suke*) – the hut (booth) built for the feast of **Sukkot**. It stands under an open sky; it has at least three walls and only a partial roof, covered with branches and leaves. During the feast, people have meals and sometimes also sleep in it. It symbolises God's protection over the people of Israel and is built in memory of the wandering in the desert.

**Sukkot, Succot** (Hebr. booths, tabernacles, Yid. *sukes*) – the Feast of Booths, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles (in Poland: *Kuczki*). It commemorates the forty-year migration of the Jews across the desert to the Promised Land. The feast is celebrated on the 15th day of the month of Tishrei (September–October) and lasts eight days. During this feast, the Jews pray, have meals, and if the climate permits they even spend nights in specially constructed huts – **sukkahs (sukkoth)**.

**synagogue** (Gr. meeting place, Hebr. *bet ha-kneset*, Yid. *beisakneses, shul*) – the place where the faithful gather, prayers are said, and teaching is delivered. The synagogue is the centre of religious and community life.

**tallit** (Yid. robe, Hebr. *talit*) – a prayer shawl, made of white cotton, wool, or silk cloth, with black or navy blue stripes and **tzitzit** (knotted tassels) attached to its four corners, worn by married men for prayer.

**Talmud** (Hebr. learning) – contains comments on the **Torah**, rabbinic discussions, moral guidelines, and parables. It consists of two parts: the Mishna (being the written record of Oral Tradition) and the Gemara (commenting on the Mishna). Two versions of the Talmud were written down: Palestinian (known as the Jerusalem Talmud, written down about AD 400) and Babylonian (written down about AD 500). They differ in terms of volume, style, language, and subject matter. The commonly accepted version today is the Babylonian Talmud.

**Talmud Torah** – a traditional religious school at the level of cheder, usually financed by the community (for poor children and orphans).

**Tarbut** (Hebr. culture), full name: Jewish Cultural and Educational Association “Tarbut” – a cultural and educational organisation, operating under the auspices of the Zionist Organisation; founded in 1917 in Russia and in 1922 in Poland.

**tefillin** – two leather boxes containing wads of parchment with quotations from the **Torah** (Deut 6:4–9, 11:13–21, Ex 13:1–10, 13:11–16), attached with black strings to the forehead and the left forearm, worn for morning prayers on weekdays, which is supposed to symbolise the devotion of one's thoughts and heart to God.

**Tisha B'Av** (Hebr. the ninth day of Av, Yid. *Tishebov*) – the 9th day of the month of Av (July–August). The anniversary of the destruction of the First and the Second Temples of Jerusalem. The day is preceded by three weeks of mourning. Tisha B'Av is a day of strict fasting. Work is allowed, but it is forbidden to indulge in pleasures, which include studying the **Torah**. Jeremiah's Lamentations are recited in the synagogue. During prayer, people sit on the ground or on low stools. The synagogue is dimly lit.

**Torah** (Hebr. instruction, teaching); – in a narrow sense, Moses' Pentateuch, the main part of the Hebrew canon of the Holy Scripture, comprising the following biblical books: Genesis (Bereshit), Exodus (Shemot), Leviticus (Vayikra), Numbers (Bemidbar), and Deuteronomy (Devarim). Tradition ascribes their authorship to Moses. The Torah scroll with the text of the Pentateuch written on it in accordance with the ancient tradition is the holiest book of **Judaism**.

**TSYSHO**, acronym for *Tsentrale Yidishe Shul-Organizatsye* (Central Jewish School Organisation) – a secular Jewish educational organisation promoting **Yiddish** culture, based on socialist ideas. It ran schools with Yiddish as the language of instruction.

**tzadik** (Hebr. the just one) – a charismatic leader of the **Hasidim**, who believed in his supernatural power of working miracles. The cult of tzadikim developed from the 1780s. The position was inherited by their descendants.

**tzitzit** (Yid. *tzytzes*, *tzyztele*) – tassels woven of threads and attached to the edges of the robe (in biblical times), to the **tallit**, or to the four corners of the tallit katan (Yid. *tales kotn*; a waistcoat sewn out of two rectangular pieces of cloth, tied at the sides, worn under the outer garment), in accordance with the biblical instruction; Num 15:38–40 and Deut 22:12). A symbol of covenant with God and the fulfilment of His commandments, they serve the purpose of fortifying a person against the danger of committing a sin.

**women's section** (Hebr. *ezrat nashim*, Yid. *ezres noshim*) – a place for women in the **synagogue**, usually located behind a mechitza (partition) in the main hall, in the adjoining annexe (except the eastern wall), above the vestibule (the western side), in the upper gallery, or on the balcony.

**yad** (Hebr. arm, hand) – a decorative pointer in the shape of a hand with the index finger extended. Made of ivory, a noble metal, or wood. It facilitates reading the **Torah** and makes it possible to avoid touching the parchment with one's hands.

**yeshiva** (Hebr. session, Yid. *jeshive*) – a higher Talmudic school for older (aged 13 and above) unmarried boys. They studied the Talmud and later rabbinic literature.

**Yiddish** – one of the Jewish languages. It was used by most **Ashkenazi** Jews until the outbreak of World War II. At present, Yiddish is used in Hasidic communities and cultivated by Yiddishists – Yiddish Studies graduates.

**Yom Kippur** (Hebr. the day of atonement) – one of the most important and oldest feasts in **Judaism**. It is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Tishrei (September–October). Yom Kippur concludes the ten-day period of mourning (Hebr. *Yamim Noraim* – Fearful Days), when people do an examination of conscience and ask forgiveness from those they have wronged. On the eve of this feast, a solemn Kol Nidre service is held. On the feast day itself, there is obligatory 24-hour fasting; it is also forbidden to work, have sexual intercourse, wash, or wear leather shoes. According to tradition, each person's fate for the next year is determined on that day.

**yorzeit** (Yid. anniversary) – death anniversary, the day when the dead are remembered, **kadish** is said, and graves are visited. **Hasidim** make pilgrimages to the graves of the **tzadikim** who died on a particular day.



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## Shtetl Routes. Travels Through the Forgotten Continent

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