THE IMMORTAL SPIRIT



The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium
Poland, 1919-1939



THE IMMORTAL SPIRIT

The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium

Poland, 1919-1939

Yaacov Samid

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org
2024

Translated from the Hebrew by Stanley Hillel
Typesetting and Printing by Traffic Publications Ltd., Haifa

1995
©
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Editorial Address: P.O.Box 5338, Haifa 31052, Israel

ISBN 965-222-656-4

Dedicated to the Memory of
Dr. Max Ratner, Cleveland, Ohio

Table of Contents

Preface - Yaacov Samid 5
A Word From Max Ratner for the Hebrew Edition 7
Bialystok - The Jewish City 9
History of the Hebrew Gymnasium and its Founders 17
The Years 1919-1921 ("Bet Ha'am"; The Building at 74, Senkiewitz Street) 27
The Year 1922 (Gymnasium Permit from the Authorities; The Building at 26 Brokowa Street) 33
The Year 1923 (The Magazine "Anachnu"; Visits by Bialik and Sokolov; Lag B'Omer Celebrations) 37
The Years 1924-1925 ("The Jubilee Gazette") 44
The Year 1926 (The First Graduation Class) 54
The Year 1927 (The Building at 79, Senkiewitz Street) 57
The Year 1928 (Tchernichovski's Visit) 60
The Year 1929 ("Kolenu" Magazine No.1) 63
The Year 1930 (Bialik's Visit; Self-Help; The JNF) 69
The Year 1931 ("Kolenu" Magazine) 75
The Year 1932 (The Gymnasium Receives State Rights) 84
The Year 1933 (The Departure of Principal Dr. Zvi Zemel; The First National Teachers Conference) 90
The Years 1934-1935 (The Laboratories) 95
The Year 1936 (Pre-Military Training) 105
The Years 1937-1938 (Change in Gymnasium Structure) 114
The Year 1939 (The Last Graduate Year; The "Le'An" Magazine) 122
Principals of the Gymnasium and its Graduation Classes 132
The Twentieth Anniversary Book Which Was Never Published 135
Naomi Nof's Article 137
Yaacov Samid's Essay 138
Under Soviet Rule (1939-1941) 141
Description of the Period 143
Rachel Kalisher's Article 144
The Holocaust (1941-1943) 147
Description of the Period 149
Hadassah Shprung's Essay 152
Chaike Grossman's Essay 155

Reflections and Memories:
Naomi Nof (Goldman) 161
Frieda Polatsek (Friedman) 162
Prof. M. Mishkinski 163
Dr. Yeshayahu Ostridan 164
Dr. M. Bayliss (Bialystotzki) 168

Dr. Ephraim Wapinski 169
Yaacov Samid 171
Chaim Shafir (Reif) 173
Dr. Baruch Kaplan 175
Daniel Poczebutzki 176
Alexander Ekar (Sitsh) 178
Gedalyahu Marmor 179
Shlomo Patt 180
Mordechai Szczupak 181
Shifra Gotlieb (Atlasowitz) 182
Eliezer Avinoam 183
Eliezer Sobotnik 184
L. Epstein 184
Mina Braun (Gelerstein) 185
Dina Freedman (Bramson) 186
Chava Sneh (Goldberg) 187

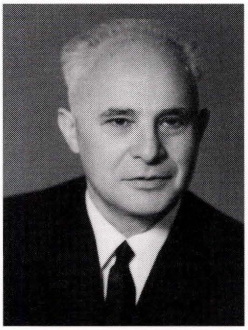
In Memoriam:
Principal Dr. Zvi Zemel 191
Teacher Moshe Adler 192
Teacher Dr. Shimon Dattner 192
Teacher Franca Horowitz 193
Teacher Pnina Berstein 194
Mordechai Samid (Semiatitzki) 195
Dov Shuval 196
Shmuel Shamir (Lapshin) 196
Professor Menachem Stern 197
Mordechai Laznik 197
Abraham Kaplanski 198
Hillel Aldag (Oldak) 198
Yitzhak Gorfin 199
Chaya Rothstein (Efron) 200

The Hebrew Gymnasium 50th Anniversary Reunion:
Description of the Reunion 203
The Mekama of Moshe Elkoni (Olkinitzki) 203

The Hebrew Gymnasium 70th Anniversary Reunion:
Description of the Reunion 207
Greetings from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir 211
The Mekama of Zvi Bodanowski 213
Poem by Max Ratner 215

Epilogue:
Dikla Golomb 216

Quotes from Readers of the Hebrew Edition 217



Yaacov Samid

Preface

It has been a great privilege to realize - albeit after a delay of more than fifty years - the dream of the principals of the Gymnasium in its latter years: to publish a book documenting the history of this Hebrew and Zionist institution which flourished in the Diaspora, without government support, and under a hostile regime.

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Gymnasium, the school principals had intended to publish a "Jubilee Book" of articles and essays contributed by the founders, teachers, graduates and students. Several of the Gymnasium's graduates who received this "rallying cry" from the School Board, answered the call and sent articles to Bialystok. That was in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War and the Holocaust. The book was never published.

The memory of the Gymnasium, which we have cherished throughout the years, inspired us to organize a reunion of ex-students which was held in Tel-Aviv in May 1990. We are publishing the "70th Anniversary Book" as a natural sequel to this reunion, and as a fulfilment of the wish of the Gymnasium's principals to record its special character and history in writing. The impressions of a nostalgic meeting, however stimulating, evaporate in the course of time and its memory fades, whilst a book containing recollections, photographs, and descriptions of incidents from the life of each graduation class remains an asset in every high school student's home, and a heritage for following generations. To quote the Latin adage: "*Verba valent, scripta manent*" - "Words fly away, writing remains".

Our book makes no claim to convey a complete and comprehensive picture of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium. That would have proved a most difficult task even for professional researchers, because the archives of the school have been destroyed. Our intention was merely to provide a vehicle to document the recollections and experiences of the students, and even this modest aim was by no means easy to accomplish. Most of the Gymnasium's students are advanced in years, and many of them found difficulty in recalling events from the distant past. It was not easy to sit down and put pen to paper. Many, whose memories of their schooldays were very close to their hearts, found difficulty in describing them because of everyday distractions, and yet in spite of this, we received written material from a sizeable number of graduates. On more than one occasion we were presented with contradictory versions of certain incidents. In trying to verify these and establish their accuracy, we

resorted to libraries and interviewed people personally and by telephone. We were helped a great deal in our research by the students' magazines "*Anachnu*", "*Koleinu*", "*Le'An*", and the booklet "*Iton Ha'Yovel*" published by the staff on the Gymnasium's fifth anniversary. In this book, we have allocated ample space to these magazines, which immortalize the spirit that then prevailed in the Gymnasium.

Many of the Gymnasium's students went on to record impressive achievements in the fields of science, medicine, engineering, law, journalism, education, politics, and public service. To mention but a few: former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Member of Parliament Chaike Grossman, and from those who are no longer with us, ex-Minister of Health Joseph Serlin, and the designer of the Atomic Reactor at Dimona, Engineer Manes Prat (Prenski). Lack of space prevents us from listing here the names of all those alumni who presently occupy key positions in their fields.

We trust that the day will come when an in-depth, scientific study will be undertaken, documenting the history of the Gymnasium and the full contribution that its graduates have made to the Jewish People, and that perhaps the researchers will find this book of some assistance.

This English edition is a translation of the original Hebrew book entitled: "The Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok (Poland)", which was published in 1992.

Many of the ex-pupils of the Gymnasium live in the Diaspora. Over the years they have forgotten the Hebrew language, and their children and grandchildren too are not conversant with the ancient tongue. These graduates have expressed a wish that the book be translated into English so that their descendants too will be able to learn of their roots and the source from which they have drawn their inspiration, and the spirit which beats in their hearts for the love of their birthplace and the Hebrew language

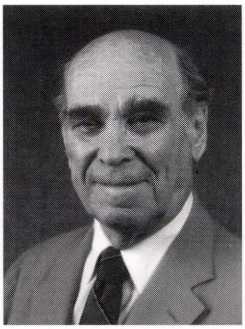
I have endeavoured to ensure that the book will be published in a de luxe edition which, both in content and character, including the many photographs, does not fall below the standard of the original book.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my dear friend, Dr. Max Ratner for his unwavering support, and personal encouragement. Also, I wish to thank Electrochemical Industries (Frutarum) Ltd., the company Max Ratner established.

Max Ratner has expressed his deeply felt wish that this book become a guide and reference for his grandchildren and their generation. I do hope his wish will materialize.

Just before going to press I heard that Dr. Max Ratner had passed away. I have lost a dear friend and have therefore decided to dedicate this book to his memory.

Yaacov Samid



A Word from Max Ratner*

This book is a testimony prepared for the future; the story of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok. These pages chronicle the short life of an institution that forged the minds and hearts of some of the finest Jewish people today.

Last year we all witnessed a remarkable event: from all corners of the globe, hundreds of students and friends of the old gymnasium, defied their age, overcame a host of difficulties, and gathered in Tel-Aviv to commemorate the heritage of the institution that built their Jewish identity for life. The years colored the event with a unique perspective. There was pride, gratitude and a sense of history in the air. The former classmates were bubbling with kinship and gaiety as if they were meeting in a break between classes. I am glad I was there.

It is about a year since Yaacov Samid announced his intent to put together this book. And here we are, the vision became a reality. This immense and compelling volume is now in front of us. And what is more important: in front of our children and grandchildren, as well as in front of future historians who would wish to explore the source of Jewish strength and endurance. This is a truly unique effort, and I applaud everyone who took part in it. Special congratulations are due to my friends Shlomo Pat and Yaacov Samid. Samid took upon himself voluntarily the formidable task of organizing, articulating, writing, editing, and inciting others to join in. Whenever so much work is invested it is clearly a labor of love, which is also evident throughout the pages of the book.

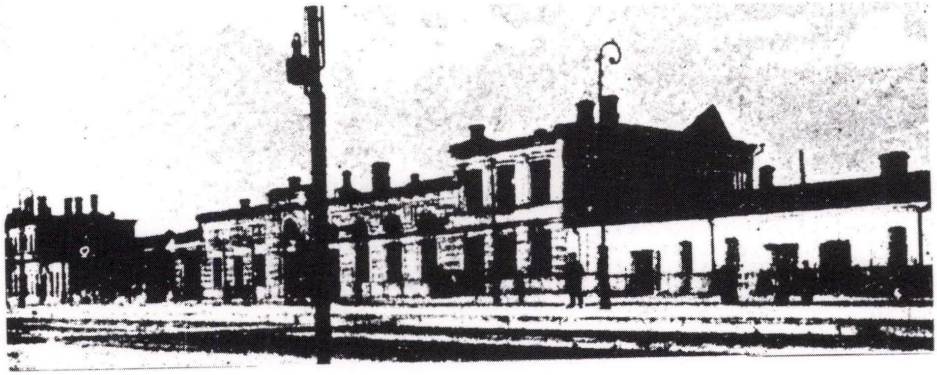
I am proud to call myself a Bialystoker. It was with a great sense of mission and consequence that I moved in to help and contribute to this project. I have always been in the front line when the call went out to help Israel. I have done my share with the industry of this fledgling country, with commerce and institutions, museums, and personal assistance. None though, with more joy and satisfaction than this one. As a passionate Zionist, I see in this effort an embodiment of the spirit we all cherish.

* for the Hebrew Edition

BIALYSTOK - THE JEWISH CITY



- The Hebrew Gymnasium at 74 Senkiewitz St.
- The Hebrew Gymnasium at 79 Senkiewitz St.



The Railway Station

Bialystok - The Jewish City

A visitor from Israel who happens to visit his birthplace, the city of Bialystok, wanders through its streets as if in a trance. Men and women pass him by, and he does not recognize a single face. In vain do his ears search for the sounds of Hebrew and Yiddish. And yet, behold, these are the same houses, the same pavements where throngs of Jews came out to watch the parade of students of the Hebrew Gymnasium and members of the youth movements, and listen to their singing on *Lag B'Omer*. Behold, these are the same streets that became silent on *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, when all the inhabitants of the city gathered in the synagogues. It is as if it had all never existed. The City, which was Jewish until Polish Jewry was cut down, exists only in the memory. Today, Bialystok is empty of Jews.

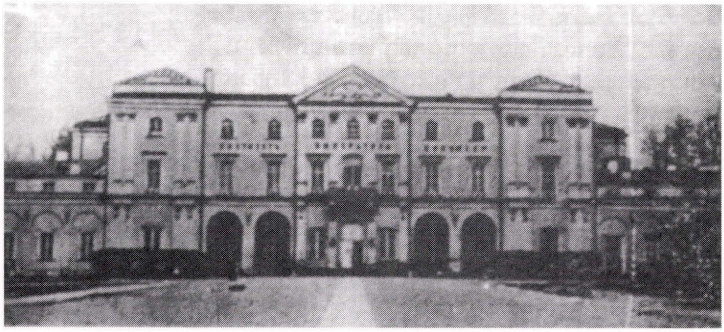
Up until the First World War, Bialystok had been predominantly Jewish (70% in 1857), but this majority gradually shrank (51% in 1932). The Bialystokers were mostly "*Litvaks*" - "*Misnagdim*" and intellectuals. They consisted of industrialists, workers, merchants, doctors, lawyers, teachers, authors, poets, community activists and party officials, artisans, butchers, porters and carters, and also beggars.

The smoke-laden skies of Bialystok always appeared grey. The river Biala which crosses the city, from which its name derives, was shallow, and polluted by industrial waste from factories. The two or three-story houses were also grey, but the newer buildings were finished in white plaster. The municipal park was situated in the heart of the forest near the city, and every Sunday festivities took place there and an orchestra played. Entry to the park was free, and on weekdays housemaids and pauper children congregated there. It was also loved by the youth. Bialystok was no holiday resort but a typical industrial town.

The foundations for Jewish settlement in the village of Bialystok were laid by ten families from Grodno who answered the invitation of the *Paritz* (Squire) Gottschald from Tiktin in the Sixteenth Century. For economic reasons, Gottschald and his successors granted benefits to the Jews who were within the boundaries of their jurisdiction; the Jews lent them money and developed the commerce in the district.

For many years (till 1745), the Bialystok community was subordinate to the Tiktin community, and when describing its whereabouts people would say: "Bialystok near Tiktin", and in letters: "Bialystok next to the Holy Community of Tiktin". In the Seventeenth Century, when the District came under the authority of the family of *Paritz* (Squire) Branitzky, the community expanded greatly, and in the Eighteenth Century the Jews of the District were granted equal rights to those of the Christians, and the village of Bialystok became a town. The leaders of the Jewish community

participated in municipal elections, and the town's Jews received permission to join the artists' guilds even though they paid no taxes to the Church. In 1745 the Bialystok and Tiktin communities separated. Jews continued to flock to Bialystok under the Prussian regime - from 1795 until the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807 - which abolished equal rights for the Jews. The migration continued during the period when Czarist Russia ruled the District (from 1809, the Peace of Vienna, until the First World War), carrying into effect the anti-Jewish edicts of its Prussian predecessor. Those flocking to the town were Jews who had been expelled from their villages by edict of the Czar, and also resourceful Jews looking for means of employment near the border.



Branitzky Palace, built in 1703, in the style of the Palace of Versailles.

In 1842 Bialystok was declared the district capital. The Christian mayor had two assistants, one of whom was a Jew. Two Christians and two Jews sat on the Town Council.

During the period of the *Haskalah* (The Enlightenment Movement) "*Reformed Heders*" were established in the town, in which the language of instruction was Russian, whilst Hebrew was just one of the subjects being taught. (*Reformed Heders - a nickname for religious elementary schools for Jewish children in various communities in the past, in which in addition to studying the holy scriptures, the foundations of the Hebrew language were taught, and elementary general subjects such as arithmetic, Jewish history, and sometimes even reading and writing in the language of the country*).

Industry came to Bialystok following the unsuccessful Polish revolt of 1830. In order to reduce imports from Poland, the Russian Government invited German entrepreneurs to the border town, and they built its first textile factories. The Jews, noting their success, set up similar factories. The number of Jewish factories grew from year to year, and the number of Jewish textile workers increased considerably. For most of this period

the majority of Bialystok's textile factories were under Jewish ownership.

On the attachment of the Bialystokers to the Hebrew language, Zeev Golan (Goldstein), one of the Gymnasium's teachers, relates: "The teacher Mr. Menachem Halevi opened a Reformed Heder in our town in which Hebrew was taught in Hebrew, and after six months, Hebrew became for us, his pupils, virtually our mother tongue. We asked our fathers, who were familiar with Hebrew from the Bible and the Talmud, to speak to us in Hebrew, and thus partly Hebrew-speaking families sprang up in the town. This was the beginning of the revival of the language".

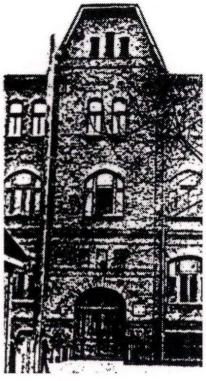
Towards the end of the last Century, dozens of families emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* and some of these were amongst the founders of the *Moshava* Petah Tikva.

At the outbreak of the First World War (1914), there were about one hundred thousand inhabitants in Bialystok, and seventy thousand of these were Jews. A year later, in August 1915, the German Army entered the town. Before retreating, the Russian soldiers burnt many of the factories, and those which were later rebuilt and supplied their products to the German Army did not prosper. Although money depreciated in value during the war and German supervision was strict and efficient, Bialystok's Jews were not sorry to part from the Czar's rule. They recalled the riots of 1906 in the town, which were the most catastrophic of the wave of disturbances which that year engulfed Jewish townships in Russia (seventy dead, and ninety severely wounded).

The Germans proved a disappointment in many ways, but from several aspects the situation of the Jews improved. One of these improvements was recognition by the authorities of the Zionist organizations and parties which had been proscribed during the period of Russian rule. The Zionists were provided with accommodation which they called "The Centre". In this building, Hebrew lessons were given, lectures took place, and a theatrical group which called itself "The Hebrew Stage" mounted plays in the ancient tongue. The townsfolk exchanged books in the Centre's library, and many of them attended the celebrations which were held there.

In 1917 the authorities requisitioned this residence, and Zionist activity then wandered from apartment to apartment until it finally settled down (in 1919) in the "*Bet Ha'Am*" ("House of the People").

1917 – the last year of the war – was a stormy one in Bialystok, as it was throughout Russia. Young people, who were bewitched by the slogans of the Revolution, argued with their Zionist friends in the street, in public places, and in their homes, and on more than one occasion words developed into fisticuffs. The "Young Zion" movement opened Hebrew courses for adults (one of the teachers in these courses was Shimon



The Handicrafts School

Ravidowitz, later professor, an historian of Hebrew literature and Jewish philosophy, and the founder of the "World Hebrew Union").

The 2nd November 1917 was a holiday in Bialystok. When news of the Balfour Declaration became known, a large audience gathered in the courtyard of the Crafts School and listened, with tears in their eyes, to speeches promising that a *National Home* for the Jewish People would be built in the land of their forefathers. One can assume that only a minority of the listeners intended to be amongst the builders of the Home, but the aspiration to emigrate to Israel certainly germinated then in the hearts of many young people.

With the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, Bialystok was included within the borders of a reborn Poland. The rumours of disturbances perpetrated by the "*Hallerchiks*" against the Jews of Poznan (by order of the anti-Semitic Polish General Haller) alarmed the inhabitants of the town, and a little while later rumours of the disturbances in the Ukraine during the civil war reached their ears. The rioters did not reach Bialystok that year, life in the city returned to normal, and the name of a newspaper which was published then - "*Dos Naaye Leiben*" ("The New Life") - bears witness to the hopes of its editors.



The following article was written by Yitzhak Dzivak, father of Naomi Shahar, a graduate of the Gymnasium. **It helps to explain to some degree the phenomenon of Zionist Bialystok, and answers the question as to why the majority of the city's Jews were Zionists, and sent their children to Hebrew educational institutions.**

Personalities from the Past



Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever

Bialystok produced many personalities whose names became famous throughout the Jewish world. First and foremost, I will mention Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, who officiated as the city's Rabbi for many years - from 1883 until his death. He was amongst the first "*Hovevei Zion*" (Lovers of Zion), and was influential in causing many fellow townsmen to join this movement. After his death in 1898, an *etrog* grove was planted in his name in *Eretz Yisrael*, and its place is occupied today by the Kibbutz, Gan Shmuel. His grandson, Joseph Mohilever, who was also the city's Rabbi until the First World War, was an ardent Zionist and a brilliant orator. Joseph Mohilever emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* and was one of the founders of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jerusalem.

Dr. Eliezer Zamenhof - the creator of Esperanto - was also a native of Bialystok. On the front of the house where he was born, a delegation from Japan has attached a copper memorial plaque, and the street in which the house stands is called Zamenhof Street to this very day.

An unusual person was the celebrated Dr. Joseph Chazanowitz, an eminent doctor and collector of books. When he used to visit the house of a sick person, he would not only examine the patient, but also his bookcase, and when he found what he was looking for - a book of historic value, an old *Haggadah* etc. - would gently persuade the owner to allow him to buy the discovery, and would send it to the library that he had founded in Tel-Aviv. Over the years, many books and documents accumulated in his library. It became the basis for the National Library in Jerusalem.



Dr. Eliezer Zamenhof



Dr. Joseph Chazanowitz



Dr. Pines

Dr. Pines was a celebrated ophthalmic physician, and thanks to him, our city became a way station for Jews suffering from trachoma who were *en route* to America. This disease was common in Russia, whereas the United States government did not permit the entry of trachoma sufferers. They would come to Dr. Pines in Bialystok, and would remain in the city for a few weeks until they were cured.

There were other personalities in Bialystok: The writer and historian A.S. Hershberg, the Yiddish writer and song composer Pesach Kaplan, and the "*Hibbat Zion*" poet Menahem Mendel Dolitzky, whose works express longing for *Eretz Yisrael*, and who emigrated eventually to the United States. Also Nahum Zemach, the founder of "*Habimah*", lived in Bialystok for a while before moving to Moscow. Professor Lipa Sukenik, who emigrated to Eretz Yisrael and was the purchaser of the Dead Sea Scrolls, was a Bialystoker, as was his wife, Hassia, founder of the first kindergarten in Jerusalem. Lipa and Hassia Sukenik were the parents of Professor Yigal Yadin and actor Yossi Yadin. The author Chaim Grada studied in the "Bet Yosef Yeshiva" in Bialystok, and this Yeshiva is mentioned in his trilogy "*Zemach Atlas*".



A.S. Hershberg



Pesach Kaplan



Nahum Zemach



Prof. Eliezer Lipa Sukenik



Ze'ev Wolf Hefner



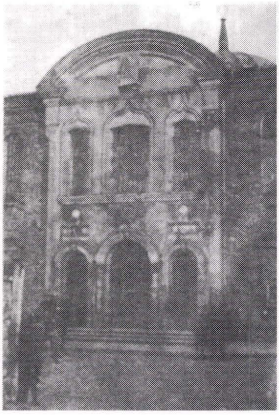
Dr. Rosenman



Rabbi David Fayans



The Clock Tower



The Great Synagogue

HISTORY OF THE HEBREW GYMNASIUM AND ITS FOUNDERS



"The Hebrew Gymnasium is the jewel in the crown of elementary and secondary education in Bialystok. It contains all the foundations of Jewish education", wrote historian and Gymnasium Inspector of Education **A.S.Hershberg** in his book "A Bialystok Notebook". "Its aim is to produce a proud Jew, a modern man, conscious of nationality and humanity".

Hershberg wrote that the first Jewish schools in Bialystok arose "in the period of twilight, when Russian authority temporarily retreated, and German rule conquered the city", i.e. during the First World War. This authority which "introduced order" in the city without taking into account the desires of its inhabitants, made them send their children to the elementary schools which it established, the "*Volksschule*" (compulsory schools). "The minorities in Bialystok remained without language and national culture", wrote Hershberg, "and it was then that the Jews became aware of the need for schools whose teaching language would be their native tongue. The Zionists, who were of the opinion that Hebrew should be the national language, founded afternoon schools, because the German authorities did not permit the establishment of Hebrew schools that were open in the mornings. Leftist circles, who maintained that Yiddish is our national language, founded Yiddish schools". These schools belonged to the "*Tziysho*" (*Tzentrale Yiddisher Organizatsia* - Central Yiddish Organization).

The pupils of the unofficial "afternoon schools" spent most of the day at school, as they had to attend the official "*Zwangs Schule*" in the morning throughout the period of German rule. It was a relief for these children when the Bialystok district was included within the borders of the State of Poland after the First World War. Hershberg wrote: "In the intervening period, before the Polish authorities were able to set up their educational system, the Zionists succeeded in turning the "afternoon schools" into regular schools, and then the need to found a Hebrew gymnasium also became apparent".



The Founders

The Gymnasium was founded at the private initiative and on the personal responsibility of five active members of the community, with well-lined pockets: Menahem Mendel Kaplan, who was a Member of the Jewish Community Council, Judge in the Municipal Court, Chairman of the "Hevra Kadisha" and the Board of the Orphanage; Dr. Moshe Katznelson - physician, Director of the Charitable Fund and Member of the Municipal Council; Dr. Moshe Zieman - physician, dedicated community activist, and Director of the Jewish Hospital; Lipa Patt - one of the founders of the "Mizrahi" in Poland and founder of the "Tachkemoni" Jewish religious schools network in the Bialystok region; Eliezer Kahana - Member of the Board of the Jewish Hospital.



Menahem Mendel Kaplan

My father, M.Mendel Kaplan, was a Member of the Jewish Community Council, and represented the Jews before the Authorities.

Immediately after the establishment of the State of Poland, when Polish Jews were granted rights, my father organized a group of Zionists in order to establish the Hebrew Gymnasium. The founders were blessed with good fortune and they recruited three teachers from Galicia, university graduates with academic degrees, and a school principal. The teaching language in the school was Hebrew with *Sephardi* pronunciation (up until that time, in the Hebrew elementary schools, we had studied Hebrew with an *Ashkenazi* pronunciation). The Gymnasium School Board rented a large plot of land, and our teachers taught us everything about gardening, in keeping with the trends which reigned in the Zionist Movement in the Twenties, according to which *Eretz Yisrael* would be built by manual labour, especially by work on the land.

The founders of the Gymnasium would meet frequently to discuss steps to be taken for the opening. The educational programme was planned by the teaching staff and the Board of Education, headed by the scholar A.S. Hershberg.

Father's five sons emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*. At the end of the Twenties, he sent three of them to the agricultural school at Mikve Yisrael. I was the last of my brothers to emigrate in 1935. To my regret, we were unable to bring our parents and sisters to Israel. It was a long time before we received the necessary "Certificates", and by the time that they reached our parents, it was too late.

According to evidence that we received after the Holocaust, in September 1943, one week before *Rosh Hashana*, my father died of a heart attack at his desk in the office of the Jewish Community Council, which was the office of the *Judenrat*. His heart could not stand the strain when, as a member of the *Judenrat*, he was burdened with the task of helping to send the "Transports" to the death camps.

My mother, two sisters, and their families, were sent to the camps in August and October that same year. Blessed be their memories.

Yona Kaplan

Graduate of the First Graduation Class.



Dr. Moshe Katznelson

My father was active in many institutions in Bialystok, but the Hebrew Gymnasium was the apple of his eye. He was born in the township of Slutzk in White Russia, and studied at a *Yeshiva* where he was considered to be a genius. At the age of 16, he was ordinated as a Rabbi, but did not practice as such in the community. His father wanted him to be recognized as a Rabbi by the authorities, and for this purpose he was obliged to study secular subjects and Russian. His teacher was I.D.Berkovitch, Shalom Aleichem's son-in-law and Hebrew translator. My father liked the "*Goyish*" (non-Jewish) studies. He passed the matriculation examination with distinction and became an agnostic. In spite of this, he found time to study the *Mishna* and *Gemara* and was enthused by the Bible, especially by the Books of the Prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah.

After receiving the matriculation certificate, he studied medicine at Dorphat University in Estonia. In 1911 he completed his studies and received a medal which he wore on his chest with great pride.

He devoted most of his spare time to the Hebrew Gymnasium. As Chairman of the Board of the Gymnasium he would visit it frequently. I was not pleased by his continuous presence, and was jealous of friends who could absent themselves from lessons. Once, summoning up courage, I was absent for a whole day, and my friends informed the teacher that I was ill. And lo and behold, on that very day, my father appeared at the Gymnasium and one of the teachers inquired after my health. He realized immediately what was going on, and replied that my condition had improved and that I would be returning to school the following day. I would rather not go into details about the conversation which took place between us later at home.

At the end of December 1939, I crossed the border into Lithuania, so as to emigrate from there to *Eretz Yisrael*. Zionist activists were congregating in Vilna and waiting for certificates. In February 1941 my turn came, and my father came to bid farewell. Before I boarded the train, he hugged me and began to cry. It was the first time in my life that I had seen him cry. It seems as though his heart told him that we would not see one another again. When I was in the British Army, I was told that my father had been placed in charge of the Health Department in the Bialystok Ghetto, and later, as a doctor, was sent with a group of Jewish children to the Teresienstadt camp, and from there to Auschwitz. I heard different accounts regarding his death. According to one version, he died of exhaustion after Auschwitz was liberated.

Blessed be his memory.

Dr. Zeev Negbi (Walodia Katznelson)

Graduate of the Eighth Graduation Class.



Dr. Moshe Zieman

Dr. Moshe Zieman was born in the late Seventies of the last Century in the small township of Semiatich, at the crossroads between Bialystok and Brisk Delita. Most of the township's inhabitants were Jews. The Jewish youth received their education in the *Heder* or the *Yeshiva*. At that time, Dr. Zieman was already influenced by the Jewish Enlightenment and took the External Examinations even though he did not know Russian. He received high grades on his matriculation certificate and was accepted into the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Dorphat. There, he was active in the Zionist movement: first in the circle of *Hovevei Zion* and later in the Zionist Students Union. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine with honours.

On completing his studies, he returned to the place of his birth, but the spiritual-cultural-social situation in the town was not to his liking, and he moved to Bialystok. There he joined the centre of *Hovevei Zion*, which had been founded by Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, and devoted much of his time to public affairs. In 1913, together with A.S. Hershberg and others, he founded the daily newspaper "*Bialystoker Tageblat*" (the newspaper closed in 1919). During the period of the First World War, infectious diseases spread in the city. Dr. Zieman opened departments for infectious diseases in the Jewish Hospital. He obtained financial grants from the Jewish community and the Municipality, and also from several acquaintances (Sammy Groniman, Arnold Zweig, and others). He became friendly with Dr. Minkovsky, one of the discoverers of insulin.

In 1919, when the Germans left Bialystok, Dr. Zieman set up the Hebrew Gymnasium together with Mendel Kaplan, Eliezer Kahana, Dr. Moshe Katznelson, and Lipa Patt. The Gymnasium opened on 16 *Marcheshvan* 5680 (the end of 1919). Because of his medical responsibilities as Director of the Jewish Hospital, he was unable to devote much time to the Gymnasium, and therefore asked that his name not appear amongst those of the founders. It was only some years later, when Lipa Patt left, that his name was added to the list of founders of the Gymnasium. Dr. Zieman contributed greatly to the material needs of the Gymnasium; he rented the building at 74, Senkiewitz Street and purchased furniture and teaching aids. A detail which illustrates his love of the Hebrew language: On the door of his clinic in Bialystok was a sign in Hebrew - "Dr. Zieman receives patients in the morning before 10 a.m. and in the afternoon after 5 p.m." Of all the signs on the doors of clinics and doctor's surgeries in Bialystok, this was the only one written in Hebrew.

May this article be a monument to his memory.

Dr. Tuvia Zitron



Lipa Patt

Lipa Patt studied in the Eishishok Yeshiva, and in addition to *Mishna* and Commentaries, also studied the Bible and Hebrew. After he was married, he became a ritual slaughterer in order to earn a living, but continued with his studies, prepared himself for university, and joined the "Friends of *Mishna* Study". In 1911 he set up the *Mishna* Study *Heders*, which were the nucleus of the National-Religious School. The Czarist Government refused to give permits to these schools so they were registered as private *Heders*, and the general studies were camouflaged as the evening classes of a Russian school. After much struggle and effort, the authorities recognized the Hebrew School and it was named *Torah V'Daat*. During the First World War the German authorities initially wanted to close it, but did not do so thanks to Patt's efforts. The German authorities suggested that Patt join the Jewish Community Council, but he refused because it was an appointed council which was not elected by democratic vote.

When the Bialystok District was incorporated into independent Poland after the First World War, Patt set up the *Tachkemoni* network, which included within it elementary schools and a secondary school with natural science, and in 1921 set up a *Tachkemoni* Religious High School, which was the first Yeshiva High School in the world. In all these institutions the teaching language was Hebrew. In 1919 he was one of the founders of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok.

He died at the age of fifty-five. Most of the inhabitants of Bialystok followed his funeral cortege.

Blessed be his memory.

Dov Aharoni

Lipa Patt's son-in-law.



Eliezer Kahana

My uncle, Eliezer Kahana, came from an intellectual, Zionist family. After he was married, he devoted his time to Zionist activity and communal work.

He was one of the founders of the Gymnasium, and during the whole period of its existence he recruited first class teaching staff. It became his special mission, and all of us, students and graduates of the Gymnasium, can bear witness to the fact that he fulfilled it to the best of his ability.

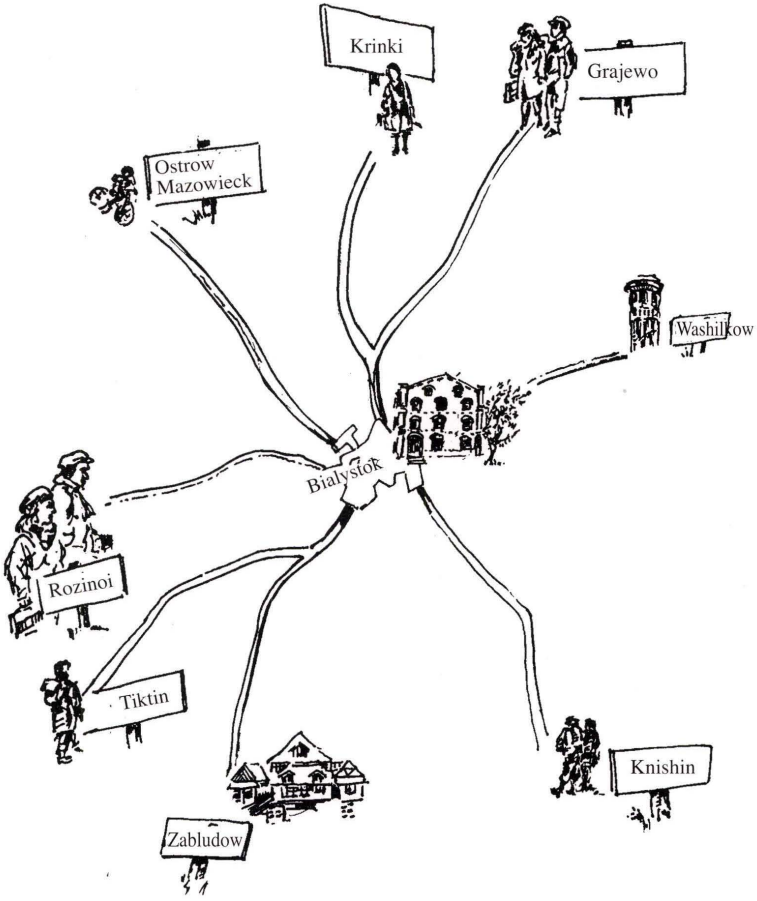
And as if this were not enough: Eliezer Kahana was one of the Directors of the Jewish Hospital in Bialystok, and amongst the most active, until his last day in the Ghetto. He perished together with the medical staff of the hospital immediately following its liquidation.

Blessed be his memory.

M.Shmuel Pleban

(Graduate of the Thirteenth Graduation Class)

ANNALS OF THE GYMNASIUM



THE YEARS 1919-1921

The Hebrew Gymnasium, whose earlier name was "Tarbut College", opened on 9 November 1919, 16 *Marcheshvan* 5680, in the "Zion People's House". (The *Tarbut* network, founded by the "Association of Lovers of the Ancient Language", was set up in Russia in 1917, and moved to Poland after the Soviet government changed the language of instruction of its institutions to Yiddish. For some time, its schools were under the patronage of the Board of Educators of the Zionist Centre in Warsaw, and in 1919 it came under the patronage of the Bureau of Education and Culture of the Zionist Organisation in Poland. The Hebrew schools of Vilna, Bialystok and Rovno were under the patronage of district committees).

In the *Jubilee Gazette*, which was published in 1924 to commemorate the founding of the Gymnasium five years earlier, the introductory article, signed by "The School Board", contains the following passage: "The School must give our children a complete and full education to change the painful situation where our sons have either heard nothing about our own history, or have heard things they had better not hear at all...our School has to be, and is bound to be, humanist, and the content of its programme



Class 2, 1920

of studies must be Hebraic. The schools our children have attended have changed their language of instruction several times. The conclusion we have drawn from this is that the language of instruction of our school need not be dependent on the current political situation. The language of the New Jewish School, which allots so important a place to the works created by Hebrew culture, cannot be anything but the Eternal Language of Jewish Culture, which is, moreover, the language of our new life".



Class 3, 1920

Yaacov, son of Lipa Patt, testifies: "Founding the Gymnasium was part of Eastern European Jewry's struggle for cultural autonomy. It was a twofold struggle, externally against the oppressive policy of the hostile Polish regime, and internally, in the Jewish population centers, against the trend which attempted to impose Yiddish on the Jewish populace and its institutions of learning. Poland, which at that time had regained its independence, had officially undertaken to preserve the rights of the Jews, and the need was felt to confront her with a fait accompli, the establishment of a network of Hebrew schools. At that time Hebrew education and Yiddish education were in competition".

To Joseph Serlin, who was then a thirteen year old boy, the founding of the Gymnasium was a kind of personal message of redemption. He was a student of a Hebrew elementary school, "The Second Common People's

School" on Lipova Street, and one day the principal of his school announced: "From today, our language of instruction will be Yiddish". "We don't agree," declared Joseph, and he spoke to his friends and organized a strike. The strikers held out and were absent from class for no more than three days and then they all caved in, except for two students. One of them was the boy Joseph. The principal expelled him from school for being a troublemaker.

"I left, and didn't know what to tell my father", said former Israeli Minister of Health **Joseph Serlin** fifty years later. "As I was walking home I noticed advertisements: 'A Hebrew Gymnasium has been founded. Students are invited to register'. Without asking my father, I went to the 'People's House' and registered. When I told my father everything, he did not reprimand me, but gave me a kiss". The advertisements said that students who wished to be accepted first had to pass entrance examinations. **Yona Kaplan**, the son of one of the founders, related: "I failed the examination in Russian. Fortunately, I successfully passed the examinations in the other subjects, and was accepted".

The parents of **Eliezer Avinoam** (Lipkind), aged thirteen, intended to enrol him in the Polish Gymnasium, so that he would "become a decent human being", that is to say, holder of a certificate of matriculation issued by the State. "My brother Reuben did not agree", related Eliezer Avinoam many years later. Reuben, who attended a Polish Gymnasium, was born too early, and in the new Gymnasium there was no class for seventeen year old students; he did not want his brother to suffer the way he had suffered, and so "he did not rest until he had convinced our parents that my place was in the Hebrew Gymnasium. I received a Hebrew education, was a member of the Zionist Youth Movement, worked at a Training Farm (*Hachsharah*), emigrated to Israel, and stayed alive thanks to him. Blessed be his memory", wrote Avinoam. His brother Reuben remained in Poland and died in the Holocaust.

The financial difficulties were not too numerous, testified **Rachel Kreisman**, the daughter of Eliezer Kahana. The Board of Directors took care of the initial expenses themselves.

For several months, the Gymnasium was housed in the "People's House", afterwards it became necessary to move. A.S.Hershberg wrote: "The Authorities would not allow any teaching activities to take place on the premises of a political party. Having no other choice, the school rented an apartment at 74, Senkiewitz Street, which had earlier been used by the Hebrew Elementary School". In the first year, the Gymnasium had 174 students, a hundred boys and seventy-four girls. They studied in three preparatory classes and three ordinary classes.

The first teachers came from Galicia. The first principal of the school,

Eliezer Furman (Karari) relates: "My teacher, Rabbi Prof. Moshe Shor, persuaded me to travel from Lvov to Bialystok, and to set up the Hebrew Gymnasium there. I went there, studied the conditions, met the people, and returned to Lvov. I hired teachers, and together we came to Bialystok and opened the Gymnasium in 1919". The teacher **Aharonowitz** (whom the students nicknamed "Kaykele") wrote in the Jubilee Gazette commemorating the fifth anniversary of the founding of the school: "In that difficult period when the Hebrew school was being created, the cultural activists realized that without a full complement of teachers having both a Jewish and a European education, a Hebrew school could not exist and had no future. Such people could only be found in Galicia, because early in the Enlightenment period in Russia our brethren did not have access to higher general and Hebrew education. Galicia supplied a group of young, nationalist minded enthusiasts who set up, developed, and perfected Hebrew schools from top to bottom".



The Teachers of the Hebrew Gymnasium and Secretary Zeitlin, 1920.

The complement of teachers who came from Galicia to Bialystok included Chaim Zweigel, Milgrom, Issachar Reiss and I. Krulik.

In the early years teachers changed at frequent intervals, because not all of them had teaching skills, or were deserving of the task they had to perform. **Yaacov Samid (Semiatitzky)**, who entered Class 1 in 1921, remembers the English teacher who taught Class 2. He was a businessman who had a good command of the English language, but knew nothing about educational theory and the methodology of

instruction. During English lessons, he used to walk about in the classroom muttering to himself and doing calculations of profit and loss... After some years, the staff stabilized and consolidated, and the good teachers remained.

"The principal, Dr. Furman, taught us Physics", relates former student **Dr. Eliezer Remen**. "There were no textbooks, and we would write down what he said in our exercise books. I have kept the exercise books to this very day". Similarly, **Nathanel Katz** remembers: "We were continually hunched over our desks, and our pens, which were not of the best quality, would dry up from time to time. Using hard pencils, we kept filling our exercise books with notes, notes, and more notes.... We wrote down the whole of world history, starting from the Middle Ages through to the Modern Age. We were very busy". Katz testified, moreover, that the teachers spoke "excellent Polish and the Hebrew of Abba Eban". The first principal of the Bialystok Gymnasium was not able to keep his job for more than a year.

Late in July, 1920, the Red Army invaded the Bialystok district, and held it for less than a month. Within this short period of time, the "Workers' Representatives" managed to confiscate all goods manufactured in the town, the supplies stocked in the shops, and the assets of the Jewish community. On August 22, the Polish Army reconquered the area, but they certainly did not come to the rescue of the Jewish population: General Haller's men attacked the Jews and ransacked their homes. "The



Class 3, 1921

Bolshevik rule in the town would have destroyed the Gymnasium if the members of the Jewish community and our students had not risked their lives to save the property of the school," reported **David Braver** in the Jubilee Gazette four years later.

As soon as the Bolveshiks pulled out, the school re-opened. Though the number of new students was small, virtually all the students from the previous year returned.

Furman-Karari was succeeded by **Chaim Zweigel**, who later changed his name to Zalzali, and then to Sarig. He, too, was unable to hold the job for more than a year, and later left Bialystok to take up a new post as principal at the Teachers Seminary in Vilna, but he kept in touch with the students and the teachers of the Gymnasium. This is evidenced by his letters, which were published in the magazine "*Anachnu*" ("We") in 1923. Zweigel went to Israel, and became the principal of the Teachers Seminary at Givat Ha'Shloshah. Two other principals served for short periods: Dr. **Eliyahu Rosenbaum** (1921-1922), who hebraized his name to Meroz and served as Director of the Department of Education of the Tel-Aviv Municipality, and Dr. David Rosenman (1922-1923).



The Gymnasium teachers, 1921

THE YEAR 1922

"When the second academic year ended and the third was about to start, we found that we lacked space", wrote **David Braver**. "The number of students had suddenly increased from 280 to 437 and we had to open four parallel classes. As there was no room at 74, Senkiewitz Street, we rented additional premises at 26, Brokowa Street, where classes could be temporarily housed until a suitable building was found". These premises, which were located in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood called Chanajkes were to be used by the older students, starting from the third class upwards.



Class 3, 1922



Class 1, 1922

That same year, 1922, the Gymnasium obtained a permit (called "Concession" in Poland). During the first years, the "Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture" - the Polish Ministry of Education - did not insist on bureaucratic formalities for Hebrew schools; later on, and following a change of staff, the new officials at the Ministry would not allow Polish schools whose language of instruction was Hebrew, to operate without a special permit. Active leading members of the Jewish community therefore started lobbying, and finally the permit was issued. Now the Gymnasium was given an official name - a rather long one: "**The Dr. M. Katznelson, M. Kaplan, L. Patt, Co-educational Gymnasium in the Hebrew Teaching Language at Bialystok**". The permit was issued by the "Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture"; it was dated 4.3.1922 and its Serial Number was 3122/DII.

Dr. Moshe Zieman did not wish his name to appear on the permit, but it was later added to the list of names of the Founders after Lipa Patt resigned.

The permit issued by the State of Poland conferred no "State Rights" to the Gymnasium. Only the graduates of gymnasiums that had "Rights" could go to universities in Poland, by virtue of their certificates of matriculation, and the graduates of Hebrew Gymnasiums were not included amongst those happy few.

Braver, who published an article on the history of the Gymnasium, wrote that the Founders "accepted full responsibility". Indeed, they were not only members of the Gymnasium committee, but also looked after its finance. Thanks to them, the Gymnasium was financially secure - more so than the other *Tarbut* institutions. In spite of this, it was run like a public school, and was therefore supervised by the *Tarbut* network, which was answerable for the school's pedagogic and academic performance. In that same year (1922), *Tarbut* held its first Conference in Poland at which the aim of the Gymnasium was stated: "The Hebrew language must become the language of education, culture, spiritual and daily life".

The teachers from Galicia arrived with new ideas and an innovative approach to teaching. Some of their colleagues welcomed the change; others found it hard to come to terms with the new ways of thinking. Fifty years have gone by; the Gymnasium was liquidated thirty years ago. As graduates look back, they dwell particularly on memories of friendship with their teachers, the absence of "aloofness", and the mutual good feeling.

They also remember some teachers' nicknames: "Kaykele" was Fatty Aharonowitz, "Moshele Ganef" was Clever Moshe Zabludowski who had eyes in the back of his head, "Lisak" (baldy) was D. Rakowitzki, "Osh" (pencil point) was the drawing teacher, "Photograftzik" (photographer) was Zeev Goldstein (Golan), who used to halt at the door of the classroom and survey his students like a photographer.

The young teachers who had just graduated from university treated students as equals, sharing their knowledge and their ideological uncertainties, and opening their spiritual world to them. For many years, the graduates remembered longingly the in-depth discussions of Schiller's dramas in the literature lessons with Issachar Reiss. **Eliezer Remen** recalled the title of his presentation in class, it was "Life and Morality". At the time he was thirteen years old. Reiss said: "Actually, we were the Hippies, the authentic Hippies". His friend, **Dr. Zifroni (Gimpelewitz)** added: "We were militant, we levelled criticism at our friends, and we were not afraid even to talk about sex problems. We criticized friends who had overstepped the boundaries - according to the notions of those days. The Berdichevsky - Achad-Ha'am controversy was a subject of heated debate - almost on a personal level - between the followers of Berdichevsky and those who sided with Achad-Ha'am.

Awareness of values, a critical approach to ideologies, the wish to gain hands-on experience, and rebelliousness, were the distinguishing marks of the Gymnasium students. The Zionist Youth Movements, which most students joined, supported and encouraged these qualities. Students also expressed their opinion of the programme of studies. They wanted to know, for instance, why they should study Latin, and they argued that Latin "contributed to calcification of the brain". They even asked to be consulted when new teachers were being hired.

The periodical "***Anachnu***" ("We") reflects these refreshing attitudes. "*Anachnu*" was the organ of the students and the teachers, but it was also the organ of the "Community" - an egalitarian body whose membership was the students and teachers of the two senior classes. In order to be egalitarian, students and teachers were referred to equally as "persons", or "members of the Community". The first section of each issue of the periodical carried a declaration of aims by the editors: "The purpose of this periodical is to give each and everyone of us a chance to express his thoughts publicly, and to deal with life's problems as they arise in the world of young people".

Unfortunately, only the March, 1923 issue has been preserved; we do not have copies of the first four issues. Dr. Zifroni (Gimpelewitz) remembered that author **Eliezer Steinman** mentioned the periodical "Anachnu" at a writers' conference, when he said: "The youth of Bialystok found a way of freely expressing their independent opinions".

„ANACHNU" המחיר 1000 מרק. Rok II

№ 5. שנה שניה

אנחנו

עדת המחלקות VI, V בגמנסיה העברית

ביאליסטוק

BIAŁYSTOK, Marzec 1923 ביליסטוק, אדר תרפ"ג.

מטרתנו בעתון זה לתת את היכלת לכל אחד ואחד מאתנו להביע את מחשבותיו בגלוי ולהעסיקו בשאלות החיים הבתעוררות בעולם הצעיר

בית הספרים הלאומי והאוניברסיטאי ירושלים

תכן העניניס:

א) הכפיה והרצון בלמודים—אחד העם
ב) מכתב אל החברים—ח. צויגל
ג) עבודה עצמית—אחד
ד) תנו לנו חפש (שירי)—Z-w.G.
ה) מחיי תלמיד—יוסף
ו) בלבב שלם—ואכ
ז) להן (שיר)—אני
ח) משירי—א. ליבצייקי
ט) האוח—ז. צישלה
י) מארצנו—חדש
יא) אנשים, ספרים ועתונים
יב) סלים זרות שבחוץ
יג) מעולמנו
יד) המעים
טו) מאמרים מקוצרים
טז) הומור וסטירה
יז) אסקלריה

The front page of "*Anachnu*"

THE YEAR 1923

In 1923, **David Braver** was appointed as principal of the Gymnasium in place of Dr. Rosenman. He also taught Latin. Yaacov Samid related that Braver expected a great deal from his students: "To demonstrate to the students that Latin was not a dead language, he told them a story in Latin, without providing them with a Hebrew translation. The students sat there for half an hour, gaping at the teacher, of whose story they could only figure out a few words".

Braver did not share the approach of the teachers from Galicia. He was of the opinion that new ideas might be dangerous.

In the No. 5 issue of "*Anachnu*", which came out in March of that year, some brave students expressed their views and ideas, but (to be on the safe side) they preferred to use a pseudonym when signing their work. Thus an article entitled "Coercion and the Will to Learn" (the title is self-explanatory) was written by "Someone", and a poem called "Give us Freedom" was signed Z.W.G. I quote the following lines from the poem: "You, the great and mighty, what do you want from us?/ You old men, you lack drive! We shall build our lives, ourselves, on (a foundation of) freedom and justice/ We set our sights on a land of brotherhood and friendship".

A great deal has been written concerning confrontations between students and teachers. "Joseph" (apparently Serlin) described an amusing incident: The students broke into cheers when the bell rang and class was over; but the teacher did not approve, and said: "I have not left the classroom yet, and the bell rings for me". The students decided they would take this literally, and when the bell rang for them to return to class they stayed in the playground. This mini-revolt ended when the principal appeared. When the teacher asked the rebellious students why they had refused to return to class they replied, using Gymnasium-style Hebrew: "We have been taught that the bell does not ring for us, but for the teachers. Therefore it is the teacher who should return to class, and not us". The story ended as follows: "Well, the students were fooling around, and the teachers followed suit. End of story".

Joseph reported that some confrontations did not end well. He described clashes between unruly students and helpless teachers:-

"The teacher entered the classroom. I don't know what came over us, it was like a fit - and the next moment the benches were moving about in the classroom, like boats tossed this way and that in a stormy sea. The teacher shouted, but her shouts did not stop us. When the bench in front was

pushed back, the teacher lost her balance and almost fell. This happened several times, and each time the pitiless students laughed out loud. They started telling jokes and poked fun at her, they mocked her speech. The teacher blushed, her eyes shone with fear and pain, she became angry, tried to look friendly - it didn't help. The students did not know what she was going through, nor did they care".

Joseph concluded: "Now I know that there are other people in the world too - apart from students. And if these people are teachers, we must be compassionate, we must watch over them, and we must try to make them happy".



1923

Chaim Zweigel's "Letter to Friends" written when he was living in Krinki, bears witness to his involvement in the lives of his former students, his stormy temperament, his liberal views, and the style of the Hebrew teachers of his day. The Letter, which was published in "*Anachnu*", is quoted below:

"When I talked to my friends, the students, I realized that they had become reconciled to the impoverished, degrading reality of their environment, and had come to terms with it. But our Hebrew youths are

different, they are different in spirit. Their lives are an energetic protest against the mean, low, spiritually impoverished way of life of the Jews, their occupations. There is no revolt, no struggle, no ideals, no life! Death overshadows their lives. If there is no progress, there is regression. There is no standing still in life!"

In the same issue of "**Anachnu**" Zweigel published another short article (Remarks on the Question of Language) in which he rejected the views of some youths who argued: "We think our thoughts, and they take shape in their own way. You grown-ups should not impose your ways of expression on us. We speak a language of our own".

With regard to the Hebrew language - a subject he felt strongly about - this teacher and innovator did not call for a revolution, but suggested development: "Like all other living things, language develops, and as it grows, it is enriched. The development of the new Hebrew style is a case in point". When some people argued that "It is not the form but the content, the purpose, that matters", he replied: "Language is one of the factors by which we may judge a person's level of development. The language of the masses is very different from the language of an educated person, simply because his thought processes force him to improve and refine the tool of expression. It is a basic assumption in literature that the author is the style, and again, that the style is the man. We do not fence-in the language, we do not prescribe a limited number of forms and narrow boundaries for the language and its style. But strange, inappropriate expressions are easily spotted by all those who know the requirements and demands of the language instinctively. The more the language of a young person improves and his style becomes more polished, the more refined will his life become, and his thought will be enriched".

Contempt for style and form worried Zweigel: "Jewish youths tend to ignore form - more so than other young people. However, what was taken for granted in a student at the old-fashioned *Bet-Midrash* is strange in a modern youth, the kind of youth we want to turn out in our schools".

Lyricism was not absent from "*Anachnu*". A young poet, who preferred to use the pseudonym "Me" - apparently for reasons of privacy - wrote an anguished non-love poem: "What is going on in your naked heart, you loose woman!/ What your contemptible soul voices is not love/ But mean, physical, lust/ You are beautiful - but what is beauty for? Are you thinking of seducing me too?" etc. The title of the poem is "To Them", and the last line "Stay away from me" indicates that the author ("Me") did not just have one girl in mind who disappointed him, but the fair sex in general.

The Gymnasium was co-educational, and other, happier love affairs are on record as well. I quote from a poem by Arieh Lanzewitzki, who signed his work with his full name. The subject of the poem is a wall that is "damp and wet, and has been there for many years". The wall "has seen

many secrets, its naked bricks have witnessed (secrets)/here a boy embraced a girl, it (the wall) has watched happiness/it has heard the sound of kisses/has seen fiery looks".

Presumably, the other issues of "Anachnu" which have not been preserved, contained similar reviews, love poems and other verse, opinions, letters, attempts at literary writing, humorous pieces and articles about the teachers written in a spirit of defiance.

Two visitors to the Gymnasium made an impression on the students. When **Chaim Nachman Bialik** turned fifty, the *Tarbut* Federation invited him to Poland, and when he came to the Gymnasium in Bialystok, the students of the third class took turns reciting his poems, which they had previously memorized - thus providing a highly original welcome. Each student recited one poem starting from "To the Bird", to "Hamatmid" (The Yeshiva Student who Persevered). The young boys and girls took turns and came forward to recite the guest's poems.

In March (the month of *Adar*) the Chairman of the Zionist Board of Directors, **Nachum Sokolov**, visited Bialystok, and had his photograph taken together with the teachers.



Nachum Sokolov's visit to the Gymnasium, 1923

Celebrating Lag B'Omer

The Gymnasium was proud of its "orchestra", a brass band. In a section called "*Aspaklaria*", "*Anachnu*" reports that the "orchestra" played at a *Hanukka* party late in 1922. The orchestra always played when the school was giving a party or celebrating, and also when the students performed elsewhere.



Members of the Gymnasium Orchestra

The "orchestra's" crowning achievement was the traditional *Lag B'Omer* procession. Thanks to the Gymnasium, *Lag B'Omer* was the People's Holiday at Bialystok. As soon as the Passover holidays were over, Secretary **Moshe Goldberg** and the German-born teacher of gymnastics **Bendorf** got busy preparing the procession. On the 18th of *Iyyar*, the students would assemble in the playground, wearing their best clothes, each carrying a flag, waiting for the signal. The music teacher, **G. Shkolnikow**, who was a fine musician but did not know Hebrew too well, would call (making a dreadful mistake in Hebrew): Forward march! And the students would set out on their march, led by teacher Bendorf. At the head of the procession was the "orchestra" and a student carrying the blue and white flag, followed by the rest of the students, class after class,

singing Hebrew songs, "*Se'u Ziona Nes Hadegel*", "*Gilu Hagalilim*", and "*Hayara, Hayara, Hayara, Bekeshet Vachetz*". Members of the Youth Movements would also march, as well as the children from Hebrew Primary Schools and Kindergartens. Throngs of Jews in festive dress would close their stores, crowd the sidewalks and applaud. Students from other high schools were full of envy as they watched the procession, reported a former student of the Tachkemoni School, **Dr. Zevulun Ravid**. The procession of musicians and students singing their songs marched through the main streets of the town, passed by the synagogue, and turned in the direction of the forest, which was four or five kilometers away. In an open space in the forest a platform had been constructed. Hava Sneh, the daughter of Secretary Goldberg, reported that each year her father used to invite the Founders of the Gymnasium and leading citizens, who would stand on the platform and greet the marchers, wishing them a happy holiday.

After a picnic on the grass in the shade of the trees the flags were put up and then came the Gymnasium sports which were accompanied by music played by the band conducted by Shkolnikow.

Quite a few boys and girls became interested in each other on this day, and quite a few hearts started beating faster. Fifty years later, a girl student reported: "I used to sit in class and ask myself 'Who am I going to



Members of the Gymnasium Orchestra

fall in love with?', and I would pick the most mischievous boy in our class - love to order. The *Lag B'Omer* picnic and the hikes were an opportunity for secrets to come out into the open, and for love to be returned". In the afternoon, the guests arrived, parents, friends, family, and many Jewish people, mothers with babies in their arms, fathers carrying children on their shoulders. The road leading to the forest was crowded with carriages and pedestrians.



The Gymnasium Orchestra

In the evening, the winners were announced, once more the marchers would get ready, and when the teacher (whose Hebrew had not improved in the meanwhile) gave the order "Forward march!" they would set out on the march back to town. There were not only Jewish spectators. In the suburbs, young gentile lads, Polish youths who were supporters of the Endek anti-Semitic party, received them with a hail of stones. On quite a few occasions, the ruffians would attack the marchers and beat them, strong Gymnasium students and members of the Youth Movements would hit back, and children and teen-agers would be injured in the fray. Every year the students looked forward to *Lag B'Omer*, and every year parents feared for their children.

THE YEARS 1924-1925

At the Fiftieth Anniversary Reunion of the Gymnasium, **Dr. Avraham Zifroni** quoted a poem which a student, "X", published in one of the copies of the "*Anachnu*" magazines of 1924: "And so, Brothers, do not despair, hope is the mother of victory/ Gather flowers which will never wither, and the victor's laurels we shall plait ourselves/ Dear ones, do not doubt, we shall bring down the Garden of Eden to us/ Friends, confidence is also the father of victory, permit me to say, perform your work faithfully and be assured of your victory/ Friends of beauty, we have all the graces, all God's infinite expanse/ Gather flowers which will never wither, and the victor's laurels we shall plait ourselves/ We shall bind them to our head and announce the millennium".

Members of the School Board and many of the teachers did not approve of the bellicose spirit which permeated the pages of "*Anachnu*", and the juvenile outbursts which, to their way of thinking, exceeded the bounds of propriety. The atmosphere was charged, and the "explosion" was not long in coming.

Three of the editors of "Anachnu", from the seventh class, were expelled from the Gymnasium because of a "scandal". The three visited, woe to the ears which will hear this, a brothel in the Chanajkes neighbourhood. It is true that this was a transgression in the performance of a good deed, as the trio's intention was to publish a research article on what went on inside the aforementioned institution; their evil inclination was therefore solely journalistic. Whichever way one looks at it, they paid dearly for their audacity. The future proved that not one of them descended to crime or sank into the underworld. ***Joseph Serlin*** *became a cabinet minister in Israel,* ***Eliezer Remen*** *was a famous Israeli doctor, and* ***Ben-Zion Luria****, was a renowned historian and Bible scholar who worked for the Ministry of Education. But in 1924 the members of the Gymnasium School Board thought that they could not let this terrible deed pass in silence, and the sentence of the transgressors was decided upon - expulsion.*

The scandal and its consequences shocked the students of Class 7, and almost all of them left the Gymnasium. Some emigrated to Israel, others moved to other gymnasiums, only three stayed: Gimpelewitz, Kaner, and Richter. The eighth class was opened for them in 1925, but its life expectancy was very short. At the School Board's initiative, the three who remained moved to the Hebrew Gymnasium in Vilna. After many years

Dr. Zifroni said: "We were the first class that did not have a first graduation class. We graduated from the Vilna Gymnasium, but we are members of the first class of the Bilalystok Hebrew Gymnasium which was established in 1919".

And here, permit us to digress: In 1929, when the Gymnasium was celebrating its tenth anniversary, Mendel Kaplan sent an invitation to one of the expelled three who was then living in Warsaw. "I immediately sat down in the train and came to Bialystok", relates Joseph Serlin. "I came to 79, Senkiewitz Street, and Mendel Kaplan said to me: 'We have decided that you will offer greetings on behalf of the students.' And this was the same Kaplan who had expelled me! I made a welcoming speech, and the following day Kaplan received complaints from some Gymnasium graduates: 'Why Serlin? Look, he didn't even graduate from the Gymnasium! What right has he!' To which Kaplan replied: 'He has the right of being the first. You see, he was the first to be expelled from the Gymnasium'..."

In the publication which the teachers and principal of the Gymnasium brought out at the end of 1924, there is no mention of the scandal and crisis of "the class that never was". This publication was produced to commemorate five years since the founding of the Gymnasium, and its editors gave it the name "Jubilee Gazette". Five years and already a jubilee? It was as though they had a premonition that the Gymnasium would not be granted a fiftieth anniversary, and as if the writers of the pamphlet realized how short the life-expectancy of the Gymnasium, Jewish Bialystok, and the Jews of Poland, would be.



Prep. Class 2, 1924

In "*Teudatenu*" ("Our Mission"), the opening article of the "Jubilee Gazette", which appears under the signature of "The School Board", there are echoes of the controversy between supporters of the Gymnasium and those Jews who preferred to send their children to Polish gymnasiums. "What will our children do with Hebrew?', we would frequently hear,



ITON HAJOWEJL. המחיר 30 גרוש. JEDNODNIOWKA.

Gazeta Jubileuszowa Gimnazjum Hebrajskiego w Białymstoku.

עתון היובל

של הגימנסיון העברי בביליסטוק.

Białystok, 22.XII. 1924 ביליסטוק, כ"ה כסלו, תרפ"ה

תעודתנו.

חנוך הדור הצעיר תופס בחיי כל העכים את המקום החשוב ביותר, החנוך הלאומי נחשב אצלם לאחד העיקרים, שקיום העם תלוי בהם.

ואם עמים הושבים איתן על אדמתם ושיצרו להם הסתדרויות—מסקלה אדירות מחיסים ככה לשאלת החנוך—אנחנו היהודים, שלע"ע אין לנו אלא ארצות גרידה לקרקע שלנו, אנחנו המפוזרים והמפורדים בין אומות והרבויות שונות ומשונות, על אחת כמה וכמה צריכים להחיסס ברציעות לשאלת החנוך אנחנו, שבשבילנו שאלה זו היא שאלת-הסלס "להיות או להדלז".

אכן ידלה ביידיעלז יצוי את השלום "היחיד" והמיוחד של בית"ס העברי, שיקום לנו דור שמנו רוח אוצרות—תרבותנו וכתבאה בהם—אז תוסמנה תוליות חדשות בשלשלת הזהב של היצירה היהודית ואז קיום עמנו בתנאים האינורמליים שבטה זו וגם מובטח הוא שייצור לו את התנאים הנורמליים הדרושים לשם התפתחות הרבותו הלאומית באין מפריע.

על העיקרים האלה נקרו במותנו ובהכרתנו, אולם עד זה מקריב לא היה ולא יכל להיות לנו אותו בית"ס העברי, שבו תלינו קיומנו בניינו, בני הנעורים שלנו, המאשרים שבהם, שמצאו להם דריסת הרגל בבית"ס בכלל, קבלו שם, בבית"ס הזה, חנוך, שלא רק הרחיק אותם ממעיונותיה המפסנים של התרבות היהודית, שלא רק נפר אותם לעמם ולאידיאלים שלו—אלא גם השקה אותם רעל השנאה והבוז לעמם ולכל קיומו.

הנעוו עד מסבר. מספר הרעגשים הלך ורב בקרב בני הנעורים. אבל את מחשבת יסוד בי"ס שלנו כאן, לא יכלנו גם להכלות על דעתנו ורק באי" דרך כוכב—אור על שמי—תנוכנו הקודרים. נוסדה הנמנסיה ביסו, ובכשך זמן קצר גדלה והיתה למוסד תנוכי בעל 800 תלמידים (פני הכלחמה) שחצים היו מקבצים מ.ארבע גבולות הארץ".

אך כשרק נוצרו כאן התנאים האובייקטיביים החלטנו לפתר את שאלת החנוך הלאומי גם בזירנו.

מה הן דריסותינו מבית"ס? איזה מסוס של בית"ס רצוי לנו ביותר? אלה היו השאלות שחבקו את פתרונן מאתנו בנשתנו לבצר את העבר שכל כבד אחריותו המרובה היתה מוטנת לנו היסב.

ותשובתנו היתה:

ראשית כל על בית"ס לפלא אותו התפקיד שאין ביכלת שום בי"ס אחר למלאתו: עליו לתת לילדינו השכלה יהודית שלמה ומלאה. התרבות העברית רבת האוצרות והנניט, תולדותינו בשנות אלפים—אלה הם ה ל כ ו ד י ם שעל בית"ס להעסיק בהם את בני הנעורים שלנו: הן הפה קרובים אליהם יותר מכל תרבות האסתורית של איזה עם אחר!

סוף סוף עלינו לשנות את המצב המכאיב שבניט היו לזמתם הכל ועל הכל, על תרבויות קיבות ועל אלה שבבר עברו ובטק מן העולם, יודעים לספר בפרטי-הפרטים תולדות עם—נבר ועל-תולדותינו אנו או שלא שמעו כלום או שמעו דברים שכופב היה לנו ולהם לולא שמעון אותם.

בני הנעורים שלנו חיבים להכיר ולדעת את יצירות הרוח הבבדי, שנתן לכל העולם את תקי—המוסר הנצחיים, השואף תמיד להושיים תקים אלו בחייהם; דברי ימינו צריכים להיות להם בשגב שמפגר ישאבו אהבה רבה לעמנו הענוה, הבוז לעול, אכן רוח ואמונה בעתידנו.

התנ"ך, זה ספר הספרים, הנפוץ ביותר בכל העולם, פרי יצירתנו הלאומית, שבניה"ס הנכרי התרפקו סליו בני הנעורים שלנו לגמרי, צריך להיות הספר החביב ביותר על בינינו; תקופת המשנה והאמוראים, ספרות הגאונים ומור הזהב בספרד, דור ההשכלה והקופת החתיה, שבה אנו חיים כעת, הספרות העברית החדשה—התחנה האחרונה בסקלת יצירתנו—לכל אלה צריכים בני הנעורים שלנו לחדר ולטעל בהם מתוך חבה יתרה.

גאחת: ביה"ס שלנו צריך ומחויב להיות בי"ס הומניסטי בעל חכן עברי, או יקום לנו דור יהודים, שלא שנאה ובוז ירחש לבם לעמם, אלא כבוד ויקר לכחו התרבותי האדיר ולמלחמת קיומו הנמרצת שאין כדוגמתה; או לא יגידו עוד למוצאם היהודי הנותן לפניהם מכשולים בחיים ולא יהיו מוכנים ומוכנים בהזדמנות הראשונה לעשות את המקשה הנהונה של קפיצה מכחנה הנרדפים למחנה הרודפים.

ושפת בית"ס?

שמנו לב ללקח ההיסטוריה, שקבלנו בשנים האחרונות בשעה שבתי"ס שלמדו בהם ילדינו החליפו פעמים אחדות את שפת הלמוד שלהם והמסקנא שהסקנו מזה היתה: שפת בי"ס שלנו אינה צריכה להיות תלויה במצב הפוליטי הזמני. שפתנו אנו צריכה להיות גם שפת ההוראה בבית"ס שלנו, שלא יהכן להשלים בבית"ס שחי שפות למוד לילדים העברים הן לא בשחר בשפה אחרת בלבד עברית? גם מנקודת ההשקפה הלאומית—היה הדבר ברור בינינו, כי שפת בית"ס היהודי התדש, המקנה מקום כל כך חשוב ליצירות התרבות העברית, לא תיכל להיות אחרת בלבד קשתה הנצחית של התרבות היהודית, שהיא גם שפת חיינו התדשים.

הרעיון ע"ד בי"ס הומניסטי זה נפל זה כבר בקרבנו ונשמת הכשר הראשונה עשינו את ההתחלה הוצירה ונוצר הגמנסיון העברי ההומניסטי בביליסטוק.

Front Page of "The Jubilee Gazette"

'A dead language, that has no value in everyday life. Yes, you are cutting off the children from the mass of the people! You are grievously sinning against education!' And yet, the Gymnasium's students are a living reply to all these arguments. Reared in the bosom of our Hebrew culture, their development does not fall below that of students of other schools, they know the language of the country sufficient for their needs in life, and the 'dead language' certainly helps the Hebrew scholar a great deal in his path which is strewn with thorns. There will soon be an end to the wanderings of the Hebrew student. The edifice of the Hebrew University has already been built, and the Hebrew Gymnasium is undoubtedly the one that leads the Jewish student directly to the Hebrew University. We can say without hesitation that we have achieved our aim. The school has earned the trust of that same Jewish population that wishes to give their children a thorough Jewish schooling and a complete Hebrew education".



Class 1, 1924

The principal, David Braver, summed up the five years of the Gymnasium in an article headed "In Total", and devoted a number of lines to the economic situation of the institution during this period: "The school has grown and developed despite the difficult conditions. The value of the country's currency began to decline, it became difficult to arrange any sort of budget as it would lose its value overnight, and yet the expenses of the school could not be postponed. However, this danger, which has caused the downfall of many public and private institutions, has passed, and our school remains as strong as before. From the day that it was founded, it subsists, supports itself, and never extends its hand to ask for assistance

from the public. Some 60% of the pupils enjoy various reductions in fees, and the amount of these reductions reaches 25%-30% of the overall budget of the school".

And indeed, not only well-to-do people sent their children to the Gymnasium. It is true that the school fees that were paid by its pupils were relatively high, but children of teachers paid only 50%; the children of parents of inadequate means, and outstanding pupils, received discounts, and some of them enjoyed complete exemption; a reduction was also granted to the children of Bialystok's nearby townships who came to study at the Gymnasium. However, the authorities did not recognize the Gymnasium proprietors' generosity and demanded a high rate of income tax, as if full school fees had been paid by all the pupils.



Class 2, 1925

Here it is appropriate to introduce an excerpt from the memoirs of Tel-Aviv architect **David Gendler**: "I was a disabled youngster who came to Bialystok from the small township of Krinki, imbued with the ambition to learn, to succeed, and to become a man and be independent like the rest of them. My father's business was at a low ebb and he was unable to pay my school fees when these became due. I found myself outside the precincts of the school. Whilst I was standing there, on the verge of tears, my friend approached, and persuaded me to go to Mr. Mendel Kaplan. He described him as a firm but kind-hearted person. To this very day I remember the words of this austere man: 'My boy, they are not going to expell you'. I had only come to ask for a reduction, but he exempted me from paying school fees for the whole of the four years".

"In the top classes of our school, the proportion of children from the

provinces reaches 35%", wrote Braver in the "Jubilee Gazette". This phenomenon stems from both the power of attraction and the power of rejection: the attraction of the Hebrew Gymnasium, and the rejection of the children of Jews by the Polish State Gymnasiums. In the region's townships there were only state gymnasiums, and their principals preferred to preserve their large Christian majority.



Class 5, 1925

Literature teacher **P. Shiffman**, who joined the Gymnasium that same year, wrote in the "Jubilee Gazette" describing the first Hebrew educators - "Heroes of the Spirit", in his words. "These heroes, out of the need to create, come to the work of building, and there are no materials, no bricks, no plan, and no workers. After all, before the war there were only *Heders*, and schools had been built by the government - by others. It is true that Hebrew schools already existed in *Eretz Yisrael*, but in the Diaspora this thing had never been done. It was a novelty bordering on impudence. The first builders took a great risk, and parents too, in daring to make this great experiment, and place their children in the hands of an education whose nature was completely unknown. Nevertheless, the small children passed the test. Out of love and faith, they devoted themselves to this Hebrew experiment. How great was the enthusiasm of the children! They are the true creators of the Hebrew School. It has yet to be revealed how much the Hebrew teacher suffered at the start of his journey. This teacher recognized, and knew how great was his responsibility towards the children and to the Hebrew nation. He had not

a moment's peace of mind, and, groping in the dark, he succeeded in creating something out of nothing".

Moshe Zabludowski wrote about the purpose of the Hebrew school: "Its mission is to address the question of our national culture, it must blaze a trail for the new Jew, in whose spirit there will be no defect, and who will be wholehearted and without ideological conflicts. If we will have schools like these then the issue of our national culture is solved. And the Gymnasium in question? We can say definitely, and with a cheerful heart, that it has set out on a path which will lead it to that same ideal type of school which I have indicated. It is true that it is still young and delicate, and its teachers and public figures have experienced, and will experience, much disorientation and soul-searching, but one thing is clear; here, Hebrew is not just the language of instruction. There is no subject in all our ancient or modern literature which does not have an honoured place in the school. These studies are now being rejuvenated in the mouths of those that study them, and they, the ones that study, live according to these precepts. On this festive occasion I offer my blessings to the Gymnasium. Would that there were more like it throughout the Diaspora. And if these younger gymnasiums will learn something from it, then that will be its reward. One more blessing. May we live to see its pupils amongst our teachers and active members of the community in the near future".

M. Chazanowitz expressed his regret at the meagre extent of Hebrew education: "From feelings of happiness, there are also sounds of sadness and sorrow bursting forth. Five hundred children receive a complete Hebrew education. And what of the rest of the children? What will become of *them*? The Hebrew Gymnasium stands out like an oasis in a great barren wilderness, it is supplying Hebrew national education to a small group of children whose parents are more or less well-to-do. The majority of our children, against their will, must go to all types of other schools".

Y. Zineman, who joined the Gymnasium that year, wrote of the difficulties of being a History teacher in the Hebrew school, and on the mutual relationship that exists between General History and National History. "The History teacher", wrote Zineman, "tries to introduce complete harmony between Judaism and Humanity. And what is universal history? Mainly the history of political development. And yet it is two thousand years since we ceased to be an independent state. General history is taught as the process of political, economic, and cultural development of peoples and races for many generations. We were not in the centre of this process. On the other hand, we occupy an important position in the history of world culture and human morality. Won't the separate study of General History and the History of Israel interfere with

the complete blending of Judaism and Humanity? No, there will be no conflict between the two studies, they will complement each other. We have great hopes that in the near future, when our political existence in *Eretz Yisrael* has been established, General History will at the same time come to be taught more and more as the history of culture and of the spirit. Then, in the temple of history of the human race, we will have our place of honour.



A Scout Group of students at the Gymnasium, 1925



1925

The art and handicrafts teacher **Jakobowski** wrote on the value of inculcating a love of work and proficiency in craftsmanship in the development of every child:

"As accuracy in forming shapes increases, so the eye of the craftsman develops and improves. Overcoming obstacles encountered during work helps to develop the child's will-power and strength of character. Systematic study of handicraft and drawing in school can cure our sick people".

In the final pages of the magazine there are tables which illustrate the development of the Gymnasium. One of them indicates the numbers of pupils during the six years of the Gymnasium, including the beginning of academic year 1924-1925.

Number of Pupils at the Beginning of the Academic Year

Academic	Prep. Classes			Classes							Total
Year	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1919/20	30	25	36	31	30	22	-	-	-	-	174
1920/21	38	44	36	46	48	39	29	-	-	-	280
1921/22	36	44	72	74	69	67	40	35	-	-	437
1922/23	30	51	83	97	63	79	53	35	29	-	520
1923/24	18	36	49	91	82	62	84	39	32	17	510
1924/25	22	27	80	53	78	86	66	49	37	28	526

The pupils of the Gymnasium commemorated the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in April 1925 with a procession through the streets of the city, accompanied by a brass band and the blue-and-white flag. "What's this?" asked the surprised Bialystokers, "After all, its not *Lag B'Omer* today, is it?"

It was not only a holiday for the students of the Hebrew Gymnasium but also for their Jewish counterparts in the city and the region who had not succeeded in studying at a Hebrew school. **Rubinstein**, a student at a Polish gymnasium in a township near Bialystok, and the only Jewess in her class, was clubbed on the head by a Polish boy because she had the temerity to express her joy on the day that the University was opened. She decided to leave her school, but was not accepted immediately at the Hebrew Gymnasium. For a whole year she sat at home and taught herself Hebrew, and only after this left the township of her birth and travelled to Bialystok. The examiner was not satisfied with her achievements in Hebrew, but gave her another chance. After two months, she passed the exam, and two years later when she graduated from the Gymnasium,

received a certificate full of "excellents". She subsequently studied Law at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was appointed as Lawyer to the *Keren Hakayemet Le'Israel* (Jewish National Fund).



Lord Balfour speaking at the opening ceremony of the Hebrew University on the Mount Scopus in 1925

THE YEAR 1926

In 1926, the first class graduated from the Gymnasium. The students of this graduation class, and those of the six classes which followed, did not receive government matriculation certificates because the Hebrew Gymnasium did not have "State Rights" (the "*Conzessia*", or permit, which it received in 1922 only bestowed the right to exist), and so its pupils did not sit for the official matriculation examinations.

An examination committee, whose names were appended to the Final Certificate, supervised the internal matriculation examinations of students of the Hebrew Gymnasium. The members of the committee included the school principal, several teachers, a representative of the Central Committee of *Tarbut* (two of these representatives were **Prof. Moshe Shor** and **Prof. Meir Balaban**, teachers at the Institute for Jewish Sciences in Warsaw) and the school inspector **Abraham-Samuel Hershberg**. The certificates state that the students were examined "by examiners from the Central Committee of the Cultural Organisation in Poland", and at the top is stamped prominently: "Hebrew Gymnasium, Approved by Order of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Culture, dated 4/III/1922, No. 3122DII".

These Final Certificates paved the way for their recipients to go on to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Technion in Haifa, which at that time did not have many faculties; the Hebrew Final Certificates did not bestow the right to enter Polish universities. However, some institutions



Preparatory class pupils, 1926

of higher learning in European cities did not bar their doors to the Gymnasium's graduates, and quite a few succeeded in going on to them in order to continue their studies.

The University of Nancy in France published an announcement worded thus: "The University of Nancy will accept from Poland only those owning Government Matriculation Certificates or Final Certificates of the *Tarbut* Gymnasium, which have the approval of the Central Committee of *Tarbut*." Not all the European universities were magnanimous to the same degree.

Some of the class graduates, who could not afford to further their studies abroad, studied for an additional year in Class 8 at gymnasiums in which the language of instruction was Polish (the "Gutman", "Droskin", "Zeligman" Gymnasiums, and others), received the "Matura" (Matriculation Certificate) and then tried to enter a Polish university. Not all of them were lucky. The "*numerus clausus*" barred the way for many. A government regulation obliged institutions of higher learning to limit the number of their Jewish students according to their percentage in the population - at the most 10%. In some faculties the percentage of Jews was only one percent, and in certain faculties there was, in fact, "*numerus nullus*", that is to say, no Jews.



1926





Class 2, 1926

The young Jews who passed the barrier of the numerus clausus did not have an easy time within the portals of the universities. Anti-Semitic lecturers and undergraduates conspired against them. In the lecture halls they were allocated a special place on the left hand side, a sort of ghetto. Jews who refused to move to the left were beaten by students belonging to the *Endek* anti-Semitic party, and young Poles who moved over to the same side as a sign of solidarity with their Jewish friends were also beaten. In November 1931, for example, anti-Semitic students in the University of Vilna threw their Jewish colleagues out of the windows of the institution, in full view of the police, who declined to intervene in the "quarrel".

In 1926, David Braver left the Gymnasium. **Chaya Chazan (Shlepski)** recalls that "Braver was forced to leave because he did not have the degree of Doctor". He moved to Grodno and administered the Hebrew Gymnasium and Hebrew Teachers College there. **Dr. Zvi Lilien** was appointed as principal of the Gymnasium in Bialystok. He taught Latin.



Class 3, 1926



Class 4, 1926

THE YEAR 1927

During Passover 1927, the three-storey house at **79, Senkiewitz Street** was purchased, opposite No.74, and the Gymnasium students were freed from the need to trek to Brokowa Street. "**Hebrew Gymnasium**" declared large white letters on the face of the building, in Hebrew and Polish.

"In the depths of a courtyard, cut-off from the noise of the street, surrounded by gardens with flowers and fruit trees, stands the main building of the Hebrew Gymnasium, three-storeys high, basking in the sunlight and fresh air which encompass it on all sides". This description appears in the booklet "The Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok - Pictures and Statistics", which was published in 1936/37 - some ten years after the house was acquired - evidence that the joy of its purchase had not diminished during the decade. The Gymnasium's students loved, and were proud of their new quarters. By all accounts, the Gymnasium was kept clean at all times. Wall-to-wall carpets covered the floors in the corridors, and the stairs too were covered with carpet secured with polished copper rods. The students used to remove their shoes in the cloakroom and put on slippers, so as not to dirty the floor. Ancillary buildings stood in the schoolyard: a changing room and gym which were joined by corridors to the main building, as was the chemical laboratory. Six rooms in the building were set aside for Preparatory Classes ("Elementary School Classrooms") and ten for the Gymnasium Classes (there were prep. classes and regular classes in parallel), and there were rooms for use by the teachers, the doctor, and the Board of Education). On the top floor there was an assembly hall with a stage, for meetings, lectures, celebrations and concerts. The takings from these events were dedicated to the Jewish National Fund.



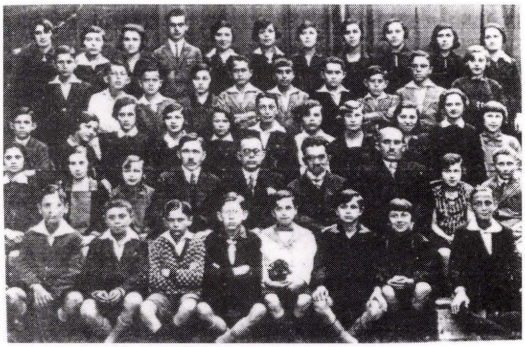
Class 2, 1927

The school day was overburdened. Gymnasium students learnt all that their contemporaries learnt in Polish educational institutions, and all that their contemporaries learnt in *Eretz Yisrael*, and more. The Bible and *Talmud*, Ancient and Modern Hebrew Literature, the History of the Jewish People and of Zionism, and the Geography of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Lessons continued from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon, and at four or six o'clock in the afternoon, group activities commenced: literature, languages, sport, history, Zionism, art, poetry, drama, handicrafts, you name it. And there were also so-called "spontaneous groups" or *ad hoc* gatherings for discussions and debates on political and literary subjects. In fact, not all students participated in the afternoon activities. Many devoted all their free time from lessons to their youth movements.

The hours of work in their classes did not suffice for the teachers either. They were on duty, according to rota, in the school playground during breaks, and in the club during the afternoon. **Daniel Albeck**, who now lives in Australia, wrote: "The Gymnasium was the place where I loved to spend time after lessons with my friends, in group activities, games, and discussions on every subject under the sun, from politics to sport". The teachers approved of these discussions which took place in Hebrew. Students who kept "political diaries" sometimes received permission to absent themselves from lessons in order to complete writing up the diary, and in this way improve and practise the language. And so it was that not only within the precincts of the Gymnasium, but also after school hours, many of the students used Hebrew and spoke it with a *Sephardi* pronunciation.

Students who came to the Gymnasium from elementary schools were used to speaking Hebrew with an *Ashkenazi* pronunciation, but according to the testimony of **Yaacov Samid**, he and his friends became used to



1927

the innovation very quickly, and after a few months spoke fluently in the *Sephardi* pronunciation. The change was more difficult for the older Jews of Bialystok, and some continued to speak in the old style.

Samid also tells of an incident which happened to him on the town promenade. As he was innocently talking to his friend, they were approached by an angry Jew who spoke to them brusquely in Yiddish: "The holy tongue on a weekday?! It is forbidden to speak the holy tongue on a weekday!! One is allowed to speak Hebrew only on the Sabbath and Holidays!"



At the reunion which took place in Tel-Aviv commemorating the Seventieth Anniversary of the founding of the Gymnasium, **A. Weintrob**, a graduate of the first graduation class, at present living in France, said: "The uniqueness of the Gymnasium was the rebirth of the Hebrew language, and its transition from being the language of the Bible to that of a living language".

The jealousy regarding Hebrew in the *Tarbut* instututions is evidenced by the decision of the committee of this organization which met in 1927, which stated: "Only schools where all subjects are taught in Hebrew are the ones which belong to the Zionist Movement". Dual-language schools, not a few of which had Zionist leanings, were thus placed outside this field.

THE YEAR 1928



Class 8, the Third Graduation Class, 1928

The love of *Tarbut* students for their national tongue is also evidenced by the strike on behalf of Hebrew which took place in 1928. The authorities, who had demanded throughout the years that the network introduce Polish as the teaching language for certain subjects, in that year resorted not only to means of coercion, but also inducement. They promised to grant partial rights to Gymnasiums which would concede to teach not only the subjects of Polish Literature and Polish History in the Polish language, but also General History, Geography, and Nature Study. The students of Class 8 feared that this proposal would appeal to the principals and they therefore recruited the students of the other classes and declared a strike in Hebrew Gymnasiums throughout the country as a warning to the school administrators: we will not agree to a compromise at the expense of our national language.

During the strike, a nation-wide assembly was held in Bialystok, with the participation of representatives from Classes 7 and 8 from all the *Tarbut*

institutions. Political gatherings were forbidden at that time, and fearing the evil eye, the participants were not invited to the Gymnasium building, but to the Handicrafts School which was located deep inside a courtyard, remote from the street. In spite of this, the police became aware of it.

> *Yaacov Samid was then a student in Class 7. Here is his story: The methods of our struggle were debated at the meeting. If the police would hear what we were discussing, the gathering could expect a bitter fate. The police approached the door, and then Rubinstein, a student in Class 8, climbed onto the stage and, off the cuff, launched into a riveting lecture in fluent Polish on the author Adam Mitzkewitz (she had acquired her command of the Polish language during the years when she had studied at a Polish Gymnasium in the township of her birth).*
>
> *"What are you doing here?" asked the police, and we replied "We are members of the Polish Literature Society and are listening to a lecture". The police enriched their knowledge of their nation's literature for a quarter of an hour, and then went on their way. The members of the "Society" continued with their previous discussion.*

The students' strike ended when it became clear that the School Board would not surrender to the government's demands.



Class 7, 1928. Visit to Vashilkowo



Class 7, 1928. An outing in the forest with A.S.Hershberg



The "*B'Maaleh*" Troupe, 1928



Class 4, 1928

In January 1928, the poet **Saul Tchernichovski** visited Bialystok, was photographed with the students of the Gymnasium, and wrote in the visitor's book: "If only there were more Gymnasiums like this excellent one! I will remember these few hours that I spent in this house so faithful to Israel with great pleasure".



Tchernichovski's visit to the Gymnasium, with students of Class 7, 1928



Tchernichovski's visit to the Gymnasium, with students of Class 7, 1928

THE YEAR 1929

In 1929 Dr. Lilien left the Gymnasium and **Dr. Zvi Zemel** was appointed as principal.

Thanks to the large amount of academic material which had been crammed into the brains of the youngsters, and perhaps thanks to the "*esprit de corps*" of those who had digested this material, the Hebrew Gymnasium acquired a reputation as being an educational institution of very high standard. Teacher **Zeev Goldstein (Golan)**, who joined the Gymnasium at that time, related forty years later: "The unique high standard of the Bialystok Gymnasium was recognized throughout Poland. In Bialystok they used to say; if you want a state matriculation certificate as a way of getting to university - go to a Polish Gymnasium, but if you want to be educated and acquire knowledge, go to the Hebrew Gymnasium. There were thirty *Tarbut* Gymnasiums in Poland, and the Bialystok Gymnasium was considered to be the best of them."



1929

In his memoirs, Daniel Albeck wrote: My father was not a Zionist, but an active member of the 'Bund'. Nevertheless he sent me to the Hebrew Gymnasium. Years later, when I asked him why he had done so, he replied: "I didn't want you to study in a matriculation certificate factory, I wanted you to be educated to be not only a human being, but also a Jew".

At the Gymnasium alumni reunion held in Tel-Aviv in 1969, **Dr. Amalia Klocznik** said: "It is true that the Gymnasium had a high standard, but its uniqueness was in the absence of Diaspora complexes. We existed in the Gymnasium as in a hothouse, and the teachers awakened and encouraged our pride".

The *Eretz Yisrael* educational institutions also recognized the high standard of the Bialystok Gymnasium. The administrators of the Haifa Technion, for example, used to say: "We will accept students from that Gymnasium without hesitation".

The Gymnasium was not strike-free in 1929, but this time it was the teachers who went on strike. They demanded economic benefits, and also claimed that they were entitled to part-ownership rights in the Gymnasium. **Zeev Negbi** relates that this wish was granted, but not in that same year: In 1932 or 1933 the teachers formed a cooperative association and acquired partial ownership of the school.


Miesięcznik „KOLENU". המחיר 50 שר. Rok I.

№ 1 שנה ראשונה.

קולנו

עתון תלמידי הגמנסיה העברית

בביליסטוק.

Białystok, Kwiecień 1929. ביליסטוק, ניסן תרפ"ט.

מטרתנו בעתון זה לתת את הזכות לכל אחד ואחד מאתנו להביע את מחשבותיו בגלוי ולהעסיקו בשאלות החיים המתעוררות בעולם הצעיר.

תכן העניינים:

א) ציון
ב) קולנו—המערכת
ג) על חלוציים, תרבותיים וחלוצניים—י. לוין
ד) בין תרשויות—י. ו—ב.
ה) י. אוסשפולסקי—ס. לב
ו) LASKI—שאי
ז) אחר—יורקה
ח) מתוך שעמוס—ג. דרושקופסקי
ט) קק"ל בכיתה תעבי—ב. ס.
י) לבונה ארצי (שיר)—שמואל
יא) פרורים:
1) על חשא—בר-אלפין
2) מכבי—אליעזר כהן
3) על מחולות
4) נואלים—ס. סוכנקה
5) התלהבות—L.
יב) בוגרינו כהוין לארץ
יג) מחיי הגמנסיון.

On 1 *Nissan*, 5689, after a long interval, the Gymnasium students' magazine was published again, this time under the name "*Koleinu*" ("Our Voice"). The previous slogan remained: "Our aim is to enable each and every one of us to express his thoughts openly and to engage in questions which arise in adolescent life", whereas the sub-heading had been changed, no longer: "The Group of Classes in the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium", but "The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium Students' Newspaper".

The influence of the youth movement way of life is recognizable in the newspaper. In the editorial, each student is invited, whatever his place in a youth organization might be, to come and make his voice heard in "*Koleinu*". In the opening article Y. Levin argues with the *Hashomer Hazair* movement that forbade its members to go on to universities, and demanded that they go out and fulfil themselves (in other words, join a kibbutz in *Eretz Yisrael*) immediately after they finish their studies at the Gymnasium. "Are those who go abroad to

complete their studies really such despicable, narrow-minded, cowardly careerists? Or perhaps there is hope in their activity also, and they also have a place amongst the ranks of those who fulfil the idea of rebirth?" asked Levin, and replied: "The nation needs both the pioneer builder of The Land and the pioneer of Hebrew culture".

Another opinion was expressed by the bearer of pseudonym **Y.V-RN**: "Amongst Hebrew youth who study, the *Halutz* (pioneer), the actual builder of our Land, disputes with the studious traditionalist who finds satisfaction in spiritual nourishment". The reader is left in no doubt which of the two has the writer's sympathy, but his anger is directed neither against the one nor the other, but at the hypocrite; "Sometimes he is seen to be enthusiastic, excited, young, a pioneer who yearns to emigrate to Israel, then suddenly, how pale he appears, how weak he becomes. Perhaps one should just complete one's studies? Perhaps the essential thing is the brain and not the hands?" And after he has rebuked this inconsistent individual "who hasn't an ounce of integrity", as a positive antithesis he describes the ideal type, "of solid character", the only one to whom "we can entrust the responsible tasks of youth, and through him we shall flourish anew".

There can be no doubt that the preference of the student **Shmuel**, who wrote poetry, was for the person who realized Zionism physically. The poem is dedicated to the "Builder of My Land". This builder "dedicates heart and blood to the desolate furrows of the Homeland", his reward is a "bronzed face, dreamy eyes, and a yearning heart", and in addition to all these, also "rocks in the Galilee, golden wheat fields in Judah, malaria in the bones, and a hungry stomach".



Seventh Class, 1929. Physical Education lesson

L. tells of a moment of exaltation. The teacher read to the class the words of Achad-Ha'Am: "If I have no rights, I did not give my soul for them. And I will not barter or exchange this spiritual freedom for all the rights in the world". The listeners felt that these words applied to them. "The boys sat open-mouthed and did not know how to express the feelings which filled their hearts. Whether to rise and shout in a loud, wild voice, 'No! Definitely not! I will not sell my soul for rights!' - or to remain silent. Suddenly, loud applause broke out from one corner, which was followed by the whole class. That was their way of expression. The teacher stood

on the dais, old book in hand, and wept. Yes, he wept. I saw tears of joy well up from the depths of his heart".

N. Radushkenski gave "cosmic" expression to erotic longing in a short poetic article - "A Fantasy, Out of Boredom": Students fall asleep during the lesson, and in their common fantasy "the lustful sun embraced his beloved, the earth, in his loving arms". When the above act is completed, the students awake. "Tired heads slowly rise, dreamy eyes open, and silently recall the shared vision".



Prep. Class 3, 1929



Class 1, 1929

In the section "Crumbs", **M. Subranka** complains about the prohibition that the puritanical Gymnasium School Board placed against dancing, fearing that "for you, Hebrew Youth, dancing is the destruction of morality, and a negative influence". The writer argues with the holders of this view: "Dancing principally satisfies aesthetic needs, dance is art, and one doesn't examine degrees of modesty in artistic matters!" An additional argument: "It is commonplace in many gymnasiums, in *Eretz Yisrael* it is very popular, *Hassidism* has sanctified it and raised it to the level of worship, and it is only in the Hebrew schools that it is forbidden in public". A warning accompanies these arguments: "Prohibitions sometimes bring about opposite results, because the nature of youth is to pursue the prohibited, and forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest". The conclusion: "It is a *mitzva* (good deed) to dance, to increase the joy of life in our midst".

In the same section, the bearer of pseudonym **Bar-Alpin** expressed regrets for a mistake, and the mistake is the neglect and disregard for the *mitzva* (command) of speaking Hebrew: "Speaking Hebrew is one of the decisive elements of national education, and it is the only thing that will put an end to our linguistic rootlessness. Hebrew-speaking will never spread amongst the masses without Hebrew fanaticism, without holy enthusiasm. Living, spoken Hebrew in the mouths of students is likely to serve as a demonstration of national culture, to cause the dew of life to drop on our hearts. We place the responsibility on others, 'The guilty go free and the innocent suffer. Catch the thief!' This attitude is immoral. There were boys and girls who were a source of inspiration to their parents and teachers, who were a model for their generation. Let us not deceive ourselves. Let us confess and, at the very least, admit that we are mistaken".

The "Our Graduates Abroad" section, featured letters from graduates who had been accepted at universities in European cities, and had founded Zionist student associations in them. The section "From the Life of the Gymnasium" reports on a branch of the Zionist student organization, "Herzlia", that had just opened in the city, and of reinforcements for the Gymnasium brass band: "Young blood has been added, the band is developing nicely and maintains a suitable artistic level. Recently songs were received from *Eretz Yisrael* which are circulating amongst our students". The section also contains a report on the Gymnasium students' "Self-Help" Organization, which elected its representatives in a general assembly: "The students took the meeting seriously, and the important thing is that each one of them intends to breathe life into this organization, which up to now has shown few signs of activity. Future work was discussed without any criticism of past shortcomings".

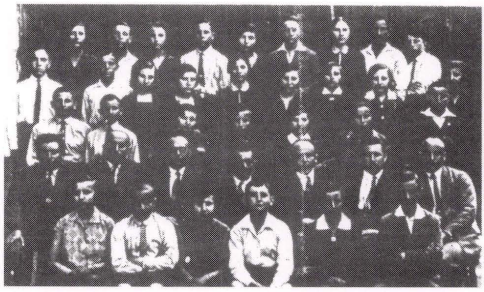
In "Sport in our School", there is a report on the purchase of gymnastics

and athletics equipment, and that "rumours have reached us that the School Board also intends to purchase a sports field for the school. This matter needs to be dealt with urgently; the summer season is approaching and physical education in the hall is becoming impossible". And indeed, after a short while, a 900 sq.m. sports field was acquired, which was also used for skating during the winter, and was nicknamed the "skating rink" by the Gymnasium teachers and students. Physical education classes took place according to the practice of the German "school", as Bendorf the gym teacher was German.

A mourning notice appears on the front page of the "*Koleinu*" magazine of 1929. Lipa Patt died that same year, the only one of the four founders of the Gymnasium who died a natural death, and he was transferred to Israel for burial. Most of the population of the city attended his funeral.



Class 5, 1929



Year of 1929



Class 6, 1929

THE YEAR 1930

Bialik's Visit To Our School



Late in November, 1930, on a cold, wintry day, the students and teachers were standing in the square in front of the Gymnasium, wrapped in overcoats and scarves, waiting for a guest from *Eretz Yisrael* to arrive: **Chaim Nachman Bialik**.

This was his second visit (after seven years), and this time the brass band, the pride of the school, would receive him. When the band finished playing, it was time to welcome the visitor. An excited student stepped onto the stage and commenced: "I was choosed..." (*bacharu oti*), but the visitor immediately corrected him: "I was chosen" (*bacharu bi*), pointing out the mistake the embarrassed young man had made. After the welcoming speech, students recited poems by Bialik which they had learned by heart for the occasion. Milka Rabinowitz (the daughter of literature teacher Urinowski) and Dr. Amalia (Vishnitzki) Klocznik remember to this very day how excited they were when they stood before the national poet, and recited his poems.

Bialik replied, speaking beautiful Hebrew, but using the *Ashkenazi* (European) pronunciation, which grieved some of the students who were eager to hear the *Sephardi* (Eastern) pronunciation of Hebrew used in *Eretz Yisrael*. The Gymnasium alumni still remember Bialik's address: one former student reported that the address centered on the miracle of the



In the gymnastics hall.
Waiting for Bialik to arrive
(29 November, 1930)

revival of Hebrew; another thought it was about growing-up, and quoted a passage from Bialik's address: "Fruit grows on trees, but when it ripens it must break free". The encounter with the poet made a powerful impression on student Jezernitzki (Shamir). He was already Prime Minister of Israel when he attended a meeting of former Gymnasium students to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Gymnasium. Addressing that gathering, he said: "What a festive day it was! We were elated! Our Poet had come from Tel-Aviv, and I think that he felt at home in our midst".



Class 8, Fifth Graduation Class, 1930

Self-Help

The Self-Help Organisation became very active in 1930, its crowning achievement being the low-priced cafeteria. I quote the publication "*Koleinu*" (Our Voice) of 1931: "The school has over a hundred poor students from small provincial towns. Out of these, sixty students get a

decent, nourishing hot meal for 80 pence (a nominal sum), and the most needy pay nothing. The cafeteria was set up thanks to the Headmaster, Dr. Zemel, and Dr. Welger, who was in charge of 'Self-Help' and worked very hard to get the cafeteria started; these two were able to raise the necessary funds. The Gymnasium Committee built a special wing to house the cafeteria, obtained cooking utensils, and provided coal to keep the place warm in winter. To raise money in order to launch the project, the school orchestra (brass band) under conductor Shkolnikow was asked to perform: their two concerts were well attended, especially by the parents of students. The 'Self-Help' also ran a small store where stationery was sold, students could obtain loans or receive help in an emergency, and most importantly, additional coaching to help them with their studies".



Prep. School Class 2, 1930



Class 2, 1930

The Jewish National Fund
(*Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*)



It was exceptional that the money from the sale of tickets for the two concerts be used for a restaurant. Generally, money raised at school parties, dances, and concerts would go to the Jewish National Fund. Gymnasium graduates remember that students who failed to speak Hebrew in the school breaks were fined; the money would be put into the blue box of the JNF. There is an article in the publication "*Koleinu*" of 1929 entitled "The Jewish National Fund in Hebrew Schools". I quote:-

"Recently, JNF (*Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael*) fund-raising committees have started asking Hebrew students to contribute. This innovative approach has yielded good results. Fund-raising in Hebrew schools is gaining momentum on two fronts - educational and organizational. For a long time, books were the decisive factor in institutions of learning, and together with books the other governing factor was the past. For it is books which are the legacy of the past. The graduates of those institutions had not been trained to deal with reality, with life, and when they left school they were lost. This is where the JNF comes in. The JNF is important to education, because the educational imperative of the present says: The Hebrew school must make room for real life - life in *Eretz Yisrael*.

A publication which came out two years later in 1931, contains the following passage: "The most important source of income of the JNF is from stamps in the donation booklets. The JNF educates the young, teaching them to abide by their commitment to the Jewish people and to make a significant contribution to the development of *Eretz Yisrael*. Small sums of money saved at regular intervals add up to larger sums which will be used towards the purchase of land in the Jewish Homeland. The JNF Committee also arranges get-togethers and lotteries, and sells the series of books "For Our Youth", etc. The Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok was inscribed in the JNF "Golden Book" for the year 5689-5690, together with the Committee of the Hebrew Gymnasium, Prof. Dr. Shor, Principal Dr. Lilien, Principal Dr. Zemel, and Teachers A. Urinowski and D. Rakovitzky".

There was a custom at the school for lessons on Fridays to be devoted to current affairs. During these lessons the JNF collection box was taken round and the students would contribute towards the purchase of land for the Nation in Eretz Israel. In each class two students were appointed who

were responsible for the blue box (The "Authorized Fund Raisers"), and one student from Class 8 was responsible for the "Authorized Fund Raisers" from all the other classes. Teacher Naomi Nof wrote: "At that time, I believed whole-heartedly that those sums of money raised in our school would buy land (in *Eretz Yisrael*), a small plot of land here, and a small plot of land there". Competition between Gymnasium classes spread - which class would succeed in raising more money. On fund-raising days, when the students went around to the homes of the Jews, the streets were rated according to the generosity of the householders, and the students tried to get "a good street".

B. M. wrote in the publication "*Koleinu*" of 1929: "It was the dream of many people that the school be integrated into the community. Their wish came partly true in several ways, for instance in the work done by 'Self-Help', in community work, etc.; but where it really found expression was in JNF work. When students contribute their pennies to the blue box, they have a share in the building of *Eretz Israel*". In conclusion, B. M. praised "the dedicated work of teacher D. Rakowitzky. With authorisation from the Pedagogic Council, Mr. Rakowitzky devoted all his energies to making the school a model of JNF fund-raising". Mr. Rakowitzky also served as the representative of the Gymnasium on the Board of Directors of the JNF in Bialystok.

Examination Ruses

Students crib answers from other students, even at prestigious schools. The Hebrew Gymnasium was no exception to this rule, but some students were caught when they tried to cheat. Mordechai Szcupak reports: "Before a math test, we passed a long piece of string through the window of the classroom into the playground, and we told our classmate Shlomo Patt that we expected him to do something for the common good. Patt, who was a top student, solved the examination problems quickly, went into the playground, and tied the answers to the length of string. A student who was sitting next to the window pulled the string, but he was unlucky: the window pane broke, the teacher walked to the window, saw what was going on, and called off the test".

Szcupak mentioned another ruse which was more successful: They had not studied for a certain examination, but the teacher refused to postpone it. The students knew that a sewage pipe passed through a wall of the classroom, and they decided to apply their knowledge of chemistry. One student stepped out of the classroom and poured a compound, H_2S, into the lower end of the pipe. A horrible stench filled the classroom, the students panicked and made their escape, deserting the battlefield. Needless to say, there was no examination.



Class 3, 1930



Year of 1930



Class 8. 1930. The raised platform in Bialystok Municipal Park



School playground in winter

THE YEAR 1931



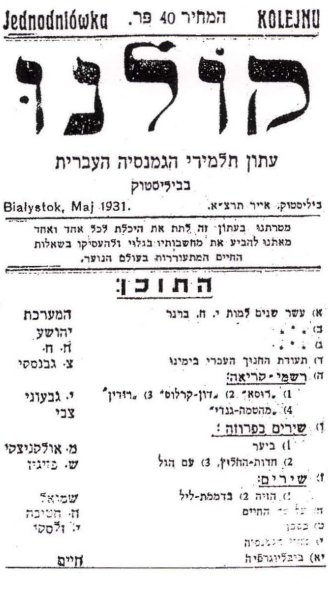
Sixth Graduation Class, 1931

Before a census was taken in Bialystok in 1931, the teachers met to discuss a problem arising in connection with the form we all had to complete. One of the questions to be answered was "What is your mother-tongue?". Some teachers argued: Our true mother-tongue is Yiddish. But the question was put to the vote, and the majority decided in favour of Hebrew, the language which in fact was not their mother-tongue, but which they wanted to become their language and the language of their students.

In that year, gym teacher Bendorf left the Gymnasium, and a new teacher, **Dr. Shimon Dattner**, took his place. Bendorf did not sever his connection with the teachers of the Gymnasium. He was a German who proved later on that he was a true friend of the Jewish teachers.

By that time, the school had 594 students, and some overcrowded classes had to be sub-divided. The students of one class felt deprived; their former classmates had a spacious, well-aired classroom whilst they were crowded into a small, dark room which was also, unfortunately, right next to the teachers' room. **Moshe Porat (Porozowski)** relates:

"In winter, when a patch of damp was discovered on one of the walls, the disgruntled students could no longer contain their wrath, and went on strike. 'The classroom endangers our health, we are going to catch pneumonia', said the students to their parents as they were preparing for the strike. When they had won-over their parents, the students informed the principal and their class teacher that they refused to enter the classroom and catch cold; then they went off to the forest and had a good time. Three days later the strike was over; the students had won a victory: the spacious teachers' room was converted into a classroom, and the teachers were allocated a room on another floor".



Jednodniówka המחיר 40 פר. KOLEJNU

קולנו

עתון תלמידי הגמנסיה העברית

בביליסטוק

Białystok, Maj 1931. בילסטוק, אייר תרצ"א.

מטרתנו בעתון זה לתת את היכלת לכל אחד ואחר מאתנו להביע את מחשבותיו בגלוי ולהעסיקו בשאלות החיים המתעוררות בעולם הנוער.

התוכן:

א) עשר שנים למות י. ח. ברנר	המערכת
ב) [illegible]	יהושע
ג) [illegible]	ח. ח.
ד) העבודה החנוך העברי בימינו	צ. גבנסקי
ה) רשמי ארץ־ישראל:	
1) „דוסא", 2) „צון־קרלוס", 3) „רזרין", 4) „מהטמה־גנדי"	י. גבעוני צבי
ו) שירים בפרוזה:	
1) ביער	מ. אולקניצקי
2) חדות־ההלוין, 3) עם הגל	ש. ניזגין
ז) שירים:	
1) הזיה 2) בדממת־לילי	שמואל
ח) [illegible] החיים	ז. הטרטה
ט) בסבך	י. וולפסי
י) [illegible]	
יא) ביבליוגרפיה	חיים

The first page of "***Koleinu***", which appeared in May of that year, was dedicated to the memory of Joseph Chaim Brenner, who had passed away ten years earlier. This issue of "*Koleinu*" highlights the link between the students of the Gymnasium and the Jewish settlers in *Eretz Yisrael*. Those were the days of the Passfield "White Paper", and the youth of Bialystok shared the pain of betrayal with the citizens of Tel-Aviv and Haifa. Perhaps the only indication that the authors were not living in *Eretz Yisrael* was the slightly rhetorical, flowery Hebrew. Referring to the White Paper, student **Joshua** wrote how Jews felt "fermenting, pervasive pain, as though a dagger had penetrated the heart. Tens of thousands of young people have burnt their bridges connecting them to (earlier) generations of submission and lowness, of torture and shame, and have bound their lives with myriads of ties to the Love of Zion. And now - what should these young people be told? Their energies want an outlet, and there is none. They have enthusiasm and they are young, and they have a tremendous will to act and to put their ideals into practice. Will they be prepared to retreat? And in general, has the vision been blotted out?"

The answer given by the author is of course optimistic. "The heroism of the despondent has not ended, there are many obstacles, but Zionism

remains the only way. It is the young who are now required to double their efforts, who must bear the flag of liberation until victory comes - must come. It is from the young that we now ask for blood, ask for a sacrifice on the altar of deliverance".

H. H., who seems to have been a socialist, had this to say about the British Labour Party: "What grieves us is that it is the Labour Government which sacrifices on the altar of their own British interests, the dispossessed and those devoid of rights who wanted to create a healthy class of workers".

I. Zelsky dispatched a few picturesque terms of abuse to the British Empire ("a wounded lion, its claws are no longer sharp, its teeth decaying, its nostrils filled with flies") and at Lord Passfield ("I cannot visualize a more ugly face") and accused the Labour leaders, the Lord Chancellor, and Ramsay MacDonald, of betraying the Jewish people.

The column "From the Life of the Gymnasium" carried a follow-up of the graduates: "We have had five graduation classes. There are 133 graduates - 91 male and 42 female. The first graduation class, which graduated in the year 1926, had 15 students, the second 16, the third 33, the fourth 33, and the fifth 36.

Sixty-one graduates are continuing their studies at institutions of higher learning, three students from the first graduation class have graduated from colleges, six are attending a Hebrew teachers' seminar, one is attending a school for nurses, six follow the trade of their parents, two work for the Army, five work in offices of the State or private offices, four teach in elementary schools, six went to *Eretz Yisrael*, five of whom are pioneers, three emigrated to America, one to France, and five attend the graduating class of a Polish gymnasium. Out of the last graduation class, seven male and seven female graduates have no occupation. Out of the 97 students who graduated over the past four years, only nine female and five male graduates do not have steady employment. Some of them attend pioneering agricultural training centres and are about to emigrate to *Eretz Israel*.

Only 10% of our students attend Polish universities. The others had no wish to take the government examinations which would involve another year of studies (because of the requirement to study for an additional year at a Polish gymnasium) without adding to the store of knowledge required for university studies, and they went abroad. (*It must be remembered that the Hebrew Gymnasium did not have State Rights at that time, and therefore its graduates could not be accepted at Polish universities.*)

Twelve students study in Czechoslovakia, twelve in France, ten in Belgium, four in Switzerland, four in Germany, three in America, one in England, six in Poland, and one in Eretz Yisrael".



Class 3, 1931



Class 7, 1931

A paragraph entitled "Visits" in the same column, quotes entries from the Visitors' Book. ***Shaul Tchernichowski*** *(in 1928),* ***Rabbi Yitzhak Rubinstein*** *("I served as an examiner at the Hebrew Gymnasium, and I was very pleased with the answers of the graduates. The students have a full command of the treasures of Hebrew, and they have a good grounding in Jewish and general sciences"),* ***Prof. Moshe Shor*** *(I hope we will have schools such as yours in our land; this will ensure a glorious future for our culture"),* ***Dr. Zwi Wieslawski*** *("Had Polish Jewry set up just this one school only, the Jewish people would have adjudged it as deserving. I wish there were many schools like it; then the New Jewish Nation would be able to overcome the enemies of its culture"), and* ***Z. S. Weinberg*** *("This school obligates the whole of Jewry in Exile. I am very*

upset about those who abandon this fountain of living water and construct wells which have cracks in them").

***Daniel Perski** wrote: "A miniature Eretz Yisrael in the Diaspora - that is what this great Hebrew Gymnasium is! May this spiritual centre go from strength to strength".*

(Daniel Perski, who was writing in Hebrew, used two verbs to express 'to go from strength to strength': the verbs occur in the Kaddish prayer, which is recited to commemorate the dead; it would seem that Perski, who was a dedicated Hebrew scholar and fond of rhetoric, was unconsciously using these verbs - ten years before all Jewish spiritual centres were destroyed in Poland. Perski did not foresee the catastrophe).

"A dream has come true", wrote Perski joyfully, "this is what we have been waiting for - and it has materialized! Starting from little children learning how to read, and to lectures on general and Jewish philosophy in the topmost class, this is a place of study and learning, and it is filled with the spirit of love of the Jewish people".

When Perski returned to Eretz Yisrael, he did not forget the Gymnasium. In an issue of the periodical "*Ofakim*" (an educational magazine) which came out in 1933, teacher Moshe Zabludowski reports that Perski dispatched "printed matter" from Eretz Yisrael to the Gymnasium: proclamations, bank regulations, reports, advertisements, movie and theatre programs ("all in excellent, precise Hebrew"), and even bus tickets. "All the material is of great interest to teachers, who should use it in the classroom". Again, the "*Koleinu*" of 1931 is astounded by "the



Year 1931

kind of Hebrew education available today". The author of the article, student **Z. Gawenski**, complains: "The Hebrew school has not developed with the changes in our lives, and now there is a gap separating it from our new way of life in *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, it is imperative for Hebrew schools to adjust to the needs arising from our new way of life. Our goal must be a rising generation equipped to deal with the needs of the nation. If our hopes of the rebirth of the Jewish Nation are to materialize, we must fully apply the teachings of Zionism, we must do real, practical, creative national pioneering work". To most of the students, "reality" meant leaving the country and going to *Eretz Yisrael*. The reality in Poland is described in one passage only - a heart-rending passage:

H. Hativa describes the plight of Jewish children; the title of his article is "On the threshold of life". "I do not have a penny to my name. I have many debts. I have to buy gym shorts, I missed two gym lessons and was reprimanded, but what can I do? The main thing is hunger. My brothers and sisters are all over the world. One is in North America, another in South America, and the rest in *Eretz Yisrael*. I am the only one left in this country, I stay with my ageing parents, I am a burden to them. They pin all their hopes on me, and I do not want to disappoint them". As he contemplates a bleak future, the author moves from the personal to the general level: "All over the Diaspora, there are thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of abandoned young people who have graduated from high school, who do not have a chance in life, have nowhere to go, nobody to take care of them. They lack the stamina needed for survival, they have no land to cultivate with which to support themselves. We are back to the uprooted intellectual, the philosophising idler, the characters in the writings of Brenner, Gnessin, Nomberg. *Quo Vadis*, young man?"



A meal in the "Self-Help" restaurant, 1931



Year 1931



Year 1931



Students' Meeting, 1931



Year 1931



Year 1931



Year 1931



In the Forest, *Lag B'Omer*, 1931



Class 8, 1931



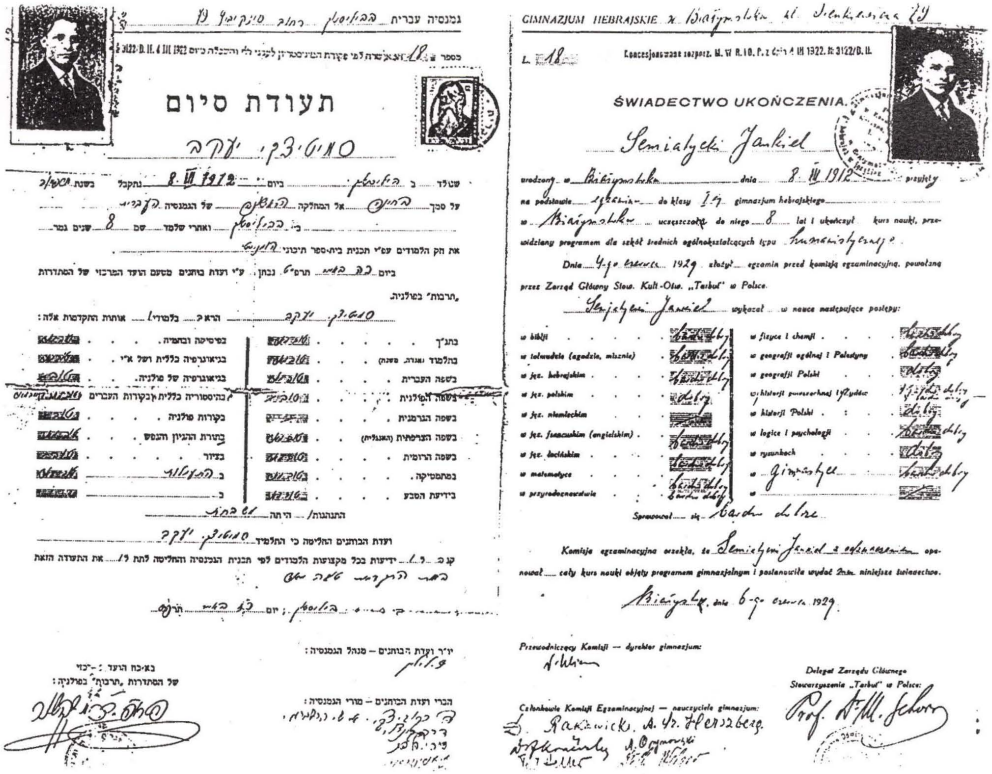
Visit to the Old Synagogue in the Town of Zabludow

THE YEAR 1932



The Seventh Graduation Class, 1932

Until the year 1932 the Gymnasium was engaged in a struggle with the Polish Ministry of Education and had to lobby in the "*Sejm*" and elsewhere to earn official recognition and "State Rights". An Inspector serving in that Ministry, Gdonski, would visit the Gymnasium to justify refusing the school these "rights". Teacher **Ben-Or (Urinowski)** related how the Inspector came and pried, and said: "We cannot grant a school "rights" if it has no toilets". Urinowski immediately conducted the Inspector to the accommodations he had been unable to spot. "Look," he said, "here is the '00' sign". The Inspector was unimpressed. "No", he said, "you have no toilets for girls". Urinowski at once conducted the


תעודת סיום

GIMNAZJUM HEBRAJSKIE w Białymstoku ul. Sienkiewicza 29

ŚWIADECTWO UKOŃCZENIA

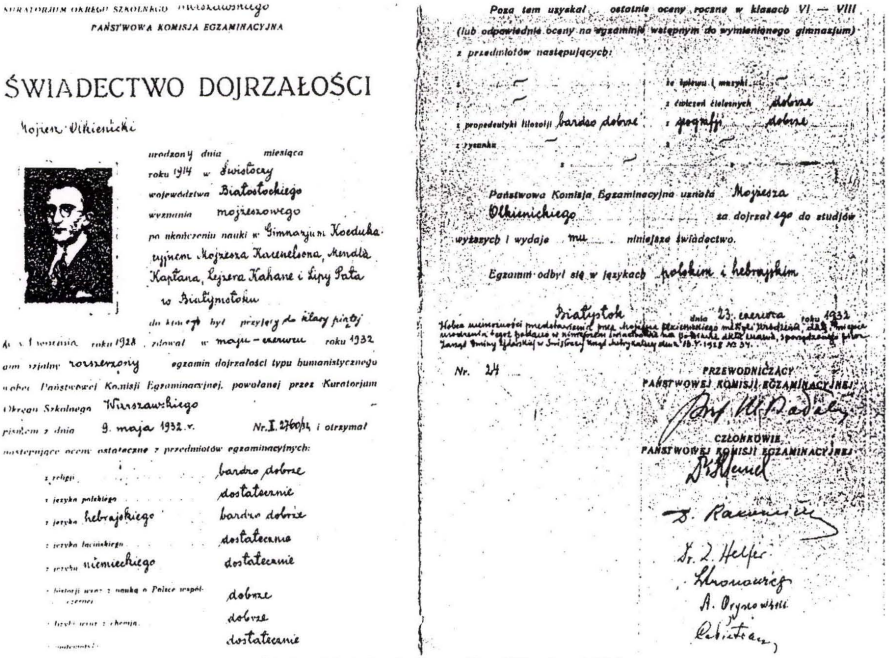
Śmiałycki Jakiel

Graduation Certificate from the year 1929, before the Gymnasium was awarded "State Rights"

Inspector to the place in question, but when the Inspector submitted his report he wrote that the Hebrew Gymnasium had no toilets. It transpired that the Polish Authorities cared more about the language of instruction than the sanitation. Elhanan Edelman wrote as follows: "The Authorities pressured the Hebrew Gymnasiums to adopt Polish as the language of instruction in a number of subjects. In some cases, a gymnasium was promised "rights" when it agreed to fulfil this demand; however, the Education Authorities were devious, and when they had achieved their goal, they did not grant the promised "rights".

The Bialystok Gymnasium did not surrender to this pressure, and finally the Authorities could no longer ignore its excellent reputation; in 1932, two "*Tarbut*" Gymnasiums were awarded "rights", the Bialystok Gymnasium and the Gymnasium at Brisk. The anti-Semitic *Endek* party representatives in the Polish Sejm condemned this decision. Dobrotzki,

the Minister of Religion and Culture, answered as follows when they attacked him: "Why are you making a fuss? Don't you always chant the slogan 'Jews, go to Palestine!'? Well, the graduates of these Gymnasiums are going to Palestine".



PAŃSTWOWA KOMISJA EGZAMINACYJNA

ŚWIADECTWO DOJRZAŁOŚCI

Hojem Olkienicki

urodzony dnia miesiąca
roku 1914 w Świsłoczy
województwa Białostockiego
wyznania mojżeszowego
po ukończeniu nauki w Gimnazjum Koeduka-
cyjnem Mojżesza Karmelsona, Kawalla
Kapitana, Lejzera Kahane i Łupy Pata
w Białymstoku

do którego był przyjęty do klasy pierwszej
dn. 1 września roku 1928, zdawał w maju — czerwcu roku 1932
ogólny rozszerzony egzamin dojrzałości typu humanistycznego
przed Państwową Komisją Egzaminacyjną, powołaną przez Kuratorjum
Okręgu Szkolnego Warszawskiego
pismem z dnia 9. maja 1932 r. Nr. I 2600/32 i otrzymał
następujące oceny ostateczne z przedmiotów egzaminacyjnych:

z religji bardzo dobrze
z języka polskiego dostatecznie
z języka hebrajskiego bardzo dobrze
z języka łacińskiego dostatecznie
z języka niemieckiego dostatecznie
z historji oraz z nauki o Polsce współ-
czesnej dobrze
z fizyki oraz z chemji dobrze
z matematyki dostatecznie

Poza tem uzyskał ostatnie oceny roczne w klasach VI — VIII
(lub odpowiednie oceny na wyższym wstępnym do wymienionego gimnazjum)
z przedmiotów następujących:

ze śpiewu (muzyki) ...
z robót ręcznych dobrze
z propedeutyki filozofji bardzo dobrze z geografji dobrze
z rysunku ...

Państwowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna uznała Mojżesza
Olkienickiego za dojrzałego do studjów
wyższych i wydaje mu niniejsze świadectwo.

Egzamin odbył się w językach polskim i hebrajskim.

Białystok dnia 23. czerwca roku 1932

Nr. 24

PRZEWODNICZĄCY
PAŃSTWOWEJ KOMISJI EGZAMINACYJNEJ:

CZŁONKOWIE
PAŃSTWOWEJ KOMISJI EGZAMINACYJNEJ:

State Matriculation Certificate, 1932



8-io kl. GIMNAZJUM KOEDUKACYJNE
(z hebr. jęz. wykł.)
z prawami Gimnazjum Państwowego
Białystok, ul. Sienkiewicza 79.

גמנסיה קואדוקציונית עברית
בעלת זכויות ממשלתיות
בילסטוק, רחוב שנקביץ 79.

LEGITYMACJA לגיטימצ'ה
ważna do 1. IX 1932 כתה יפה עד
№ מספר 359
Rok szkol. 1931/32 שנת הלמודים תרצ"א-צב

jest ucz. V kl. V תלמיד המחלקה
wyżej wymienionego gimnazjum. במוסד הנ"ל

Dyrektor המנהל

קצור התקנון לתלמידים.

א) כל תלמיד וחיב לבא בי"ח 15 רבע לפני 8 בבקר.
המאחר צריך להשתדל ע"י תורים או פתקי-סיפור.

ב) פתרי המסקת פלמודים מפאת מחלה חיב התלמיד להביא אשרה מאת ורופא ראשור מחוריו.

ג) התלמיד חיב להכין את שעוריו בשקידה ובאמונה ועליו להודיע למחנך או למורה המקצע על כל שעור שלא הכין.

ד) התלמיד חיב להביא תמיד לבי"ח את כל הספרים והמכשירים הדרושים ללמודים.

ה) התלמיד חיב להקדים תמיד בשלום כל מורי המוסד ועליו לקום לכבוד הבורי שלשון בי"ח בבאם למחלקה ובצאתם ממנה.

ו) התלמיד המחנך יפה נכר תמיד במעשיו חטובים, בצניעותו ובנקיון והוא משמש מופת למסיריותו בשאטנה לפנו, שתהו, פרצו וכל קניניו הלאומיים.

ז) אסור להלמידים להחסף לאיזו התארגנות שהיא בלי רשיון מפרש מאת התנהלה.

ח) אסור להלמידים לבקר תעטרון ותגיגות סוטגיות בלי רשיון מפרש מהנהלה. כמו כן אסור לבקר בבתי-קפה, אם הסרס לא יותר לבני הנעורים.

ט) הלגיטימצית של בי"ח צריכה להמצא תמיד בידי התלמיד.

י) אסור להלמיד להמצא ברחוב אחרי 9 בערב.

הנהלת הגמנסיה.

Student's Certificate, 1932. (the year that State Rights were received)

The "rights" were a mixed blessing. Now the students and the teachers had to put up with visits by hostile Polish inspectors, who were unhappy with the achievements of the Jews. Many members of the pioneering youth movements boycotted the State Examinations; they did not care about Polish certificates of matriculation which would be useless in *Eretz Israel*. On the other hand, the principal and the teachers wanted their best students, many of whom had joined the youth movements, to sit for the State Examination. Some students were persuaded into taking the examinations, others were not.

"When the Gymnasium was granted 'rights', the School Board invited many people to participate in a festive dinner to celebrate the event," wrote teacher Naomi Goldman.

The first State Examinations were held on the premises of the Gymnasium. The invigilator appointed by the State Committee for Matriculation Examinations was Morawski ("the anti-Semite", as Moshe Elkoni referred to him), and the invigilator appointed by the *Tarbut* network was Prof. Meir Balaban from the Warsaw Institute of Jewish Studies. Morawski supervised both the written and oral examinations, including those which were conducted in Hebrew; Prof. Balaban supervised the examinations in Hebrew subjects. In 1932, 43 students took the examinations, and 22 were awarded the coveted "*Matura*" matriculation certificate. - The Certificate awarded in 1932 was different from that which their predecessors received. Previously, this had been a "Graduation Certificate"; when the "rights" were awarded it became a "Matriculation Certificate".

The two certificates differed from one another in that the heading of the "Graduation Certificate" was "The Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok, approved by Order of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture", whilst the heading of the "Matriculation Certificate" was "The State



Class 8, 1932. In front of the Tlomatzki Synagogue in Warsaw, with Professor Shor

Committee for Matriculation Examinations on behalf of the District Board of Education, Warsaw" (after 1934 the Gymnasium passed under the supervision of the District Board of Education, Brisk), and moreover the new certificate confirmed that the student "has completed his studies at the Co-educational Gymnasium of Moshe Katznelson, Mendel Kaplan, Lazer Kahana and M. Zieman, in Bialystok".

The subjects *Tanach* and *Talmud* appeared as *Bible* and *Talmud* and *Agadah* in the Polish version of the "Graduation Certificate" (till 1932), whereas in the "Matriculation Certificate" these subjects were combined under the name *Religion*.



Class 1A, 1932



Class 2, 1932

The matriculation grades were divided into two groups: the ones which the student earned in subjects in which he was examined by the State Committee, and the ones in subjects not included in the matriculation examinations; (these last grades were worked out as an average of grades achieved over the past few years). In the following years too, the examinations were supervised by a Polish inspector appointed by "The State Committee" and an inpsector appointed by the *Tarbut* network. There were some years when, for supervision of the examinations in Hebrew subjects, they were joined by a representative of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.



Class 4B, 1932



Class 8, 1932. An excursion to Warsaw

THE YEAR 1933

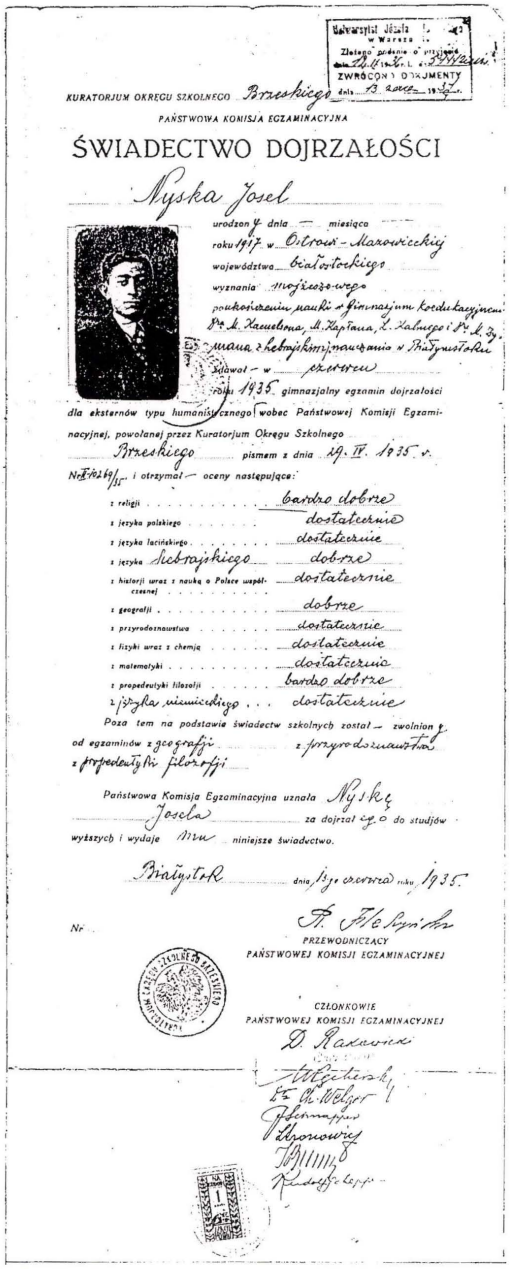
In 1933, the oral matriculation examinations were held in the Gymnasium building, whilst the written examinations were transferred to the State School for Girls and supervised by the principal of that institution.

In all subjects apart from Polish, the examiners were teachers from the Gymnasium, and the language used for the examinations was Hebrew; for Polish, the external examiner was a non-Jewish teacher who made every effort to help the examinees. Ze'ev Katznelson (Negbi) recalls that after the examinations, the students sent her a bouquet of flowers as a token of appreciation.

During the examination in Polish, it appeared to the invigilator that a student was copying the answers from one of his classmates. He ordered the suspect, Yerachmiel Orlovski, to leave the examination room and not to take the following examinations. Orlovski claimed: "I was not copying, I was just asking my friend for a ruler". The invigilator did not believe him, and the following day when Orlovski came to the girls school and tried to enter the hall in order to take the Latin examination, the invigilator stopped him by the open door. Once more Orlovski protested his innocence, but the invigilator was insistent. The argument became heated, and Orlovski lost his temper and slapped the invigilator's face. This is recounted by **Zeev Katznelson** who was sitting in the examination room and was an eye-witness to the incident.

The results of this affair were unfortunate. The invigilator sued Orlovski in court. The lad was sentenced to three months imprisonment, and eventually served one month of his sentence. The judges were more severe in the case of the principal of the Gymnasium, Dr. Zvi Zemel. According to Naomi Nof, the judgement stated that Dr. Zemel, as principal of the Gymnasium, must be held responsible for the conduct of his students; he was therefore unfit to continue in his present position and must resign. Dr. Zemel did not appeal against the verdict. He resigned, left Poland, and emigrated to Palestine. **David Rakowitzki**, the physics and mathematics teacher who was appointed in his stead, was not brought in from outside, but was chosen from within the teaching body (he was a senior teacher who had joined the Gymnasium in 1924).

In 1933 forty-two students sat the examinations and thirty-six of them received state matriculation certificates.



Uniwersytet Józefa [illegible] w Warszawie
Złożono podanie o przyjęcie dnia [illegible]
ZWRÓCONO DOKUMENTY dnia 13 czer. 1935 r.

KURATORJUM OKRĘGU SZKOLNEGO Brzeskiego

PAŃSTWOWA KOMISJA EGZAMINACYJNA

ŚWIADECTWO DOJRZAŁOŚCI

Myska Josel

urodzon[y] dnia — miesiąca — roku 1917 w Ostrowi-Mazowieckiej województwa białostockiego wyznania mojżeszowego pouczon[y] nauki w Gimnazjum koedukacyjnem Pr. L. Zamenhofa, ul. Kapitana Z. Zaluskiego 1, Pr. L. Zg. miana z hebrajskiego nauczania w Białymstoku zdawał — w czerwcu roku 1935 gimnazjalny egzamin dojrzałości dla eksternów typu humanistycznego wobec Państwowej Komisji Egzaminacyjnej, powołanej przez Kuratorjum Okręgu Szkolnego Brzeskiego pismem z dnia 19. IV. 1935 r. Nr IX/2249/35 i otrzymał — oceny następujące:

z religji	bardzo dobrze
z języka polskiego	dostatecznie
z języka łacińskiego	dostatecznie
z języka hebrajskiego	dobrze
z historji wraz z nauką o Polsce współczesnej	dostatecznie
z geografji	dobrze
z przyrodoznawstwa	dostatecznie
z fizyki wraz z chemją	dostatecznie
z matematyki	dostatecznie
z propedeutyki filozofji	bardzo dobrze
z języka niemieckiego	dostatecznie

Poza tem na podstawie świadectw szkolnych został — zwolniony od egzaminów z geografji z przyrodoznawstwa z propedeutyki filozofji

Państwowa Komisja Egzaminacyjna uznała Myskę Josela za dojrzał[ego] do studjów wyższych i wydaje mu niniejsze świadectwo.

Białystok dnia 13 czerwca roku 1935.

Nr

PRZEWODNICZĄCY PAŃSTWOWEJ KOMISJI EGZAMINACYJNEJ

CZŁONKOWIE PAŃSTWOWEJ KOMISJI EGZAMINACYJNEJ

D. Rakowicz

External State Matriculation Certificate, 1935

After the Orlovski incident, the Polish inspectors were more strict towards the students of the Hebrew Gymnasium, its privileges were reduced, and the number of examination subjects increased.

From 1934 onwards, students of the Gymnasium were examined as **external students** within the precincts of their school, under the supervision of the Polish Board of Education in Brisk. At the end of their studies, the students received two certificates: an "External State Matriculation Certificate" in Polish, signed by a representative of the Board of Education in Brisk and the teaching body, and a "School Certificate" in Hebrew, signed by the principal of the Gymnasium and the teaching staff.

In 1933, the Polish Ministry of Education decided to reorganize the education system. There would be no more separate Preparatory and Gymnasium classes, but a unified school: six elementary classes (with a seventh class for those completing elementary education only), four Gymnasium classes (corresponding to the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth Gymnasium classes of the old type) and two Lycee Classes (corresponding to the seventh and eighth of the old type in the Gymnasium), and in addition a Pedagogic Lycee with three classes. It is true that in the *Tarbut* network institutions this organizational change took place only in the 1937-1938 school year, however by 1933 preparations were already being made for its adoption. In that year, the first national conference for Jewish studies teachers in these institutions took place in Bialystok and a unified education programme was prepared for the reform. In the "*Ofakim*" booklet - a platform for educational matters, which was published in that same year in *Eretz Yisrael*, we find: "From 22 until 25 April 1933, the First National Conference of Hebrew Studies Teachers in *Tarbut* Gymnasiums in Poland took place in the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok. In the course of three days of continuous work, the main foundations of Hebrew studies in Hebrew high schools in the Diaspora were examined, in accordance with the needs of the time, Zionist education, the reality in the Jewish environment, and the requirements of state-civic education. Demonstration lessons in Hebrew studies were also held, and based on these, a number of decisive methodological questions in these studies were examined".



Amongst the lecturers at this conference were teachers of the Bialystok Gymnasium A. Orinowski, H. Welger, M. Chazanowitz, and D. Rakowitzki, and also D. Braver, principal of the Grodno Gymnasium and ex-principal of the Bialystok Gymnasium. At the end of the conference a detailed programme was adopted for all the *Tarbut* gymnasiums in Poland.



Class 6, 1933.
On the sports field

It should be mentioned that the first teaching programme for the gymnasium had been prepared in 1924. In the "Bialystok Notebook" A.S. Hershberg wrote: "During the 1923-24 school year the teaching programme was published, which was authored by the teaching body led by the then principal of the institution, D. Braver. The programme encompassed all the main study subjects and a rich variety of past and present-day Hebrew culture and literature". In 1932 the teachers, headed



Class 6, 1933.
In the schoolyard

by the principal Dr. Zemel, suggested alterations and amendments to the programme, with particular regard to the Hebrew study subjects. Now, with the change in the structure of high schools, the time had arrived for a more basic reform of the teaching programme. In his book, Hershberg mentioned the names of 21 gymnasium teachers in 1933. The incumbent principal Dr. Zemel; Adler (Polish); Aharonowitz (Latin, Nature Study); Orinowski (Literature, and Jewish Studies); Miss Gutman-Garfel (Prep. Classes 3 co-ordinator); Miss N. Goldman (Nature Study and Geography); Dr. Horowitz (Polish); Miss Wilenska-Kantor (Prep. Classes 1 co-ordinator); Goldstein (Mathematics); Dr. Dattner (Physical Education and Singing); Dr. Helfer (German and English); Messrs, Zabludowski, Chazan, and Chazonowitz (Jewish Studies); Dr. Welger (History); Jakobowski (Drawing and Handicraft); Polaczek (Polish); Miss Rubin-Salman (Prep. Class 2 co-ordinator); Rakowitzki (Mathematics, Physics); Shefer (Polish and History); Shkolnikow (Music); Dr. Finkelstein, the school doctor.



Class 8, 1933.
The "100 Days" party before Matriculation Exams



Class 4, 1933

THE YEARS 1934-1935

A gloomy atmosphere prevailed during most of the Current Affairs lessons in 1934-1935. The students followed the news and reports appearing in the press during the week, and the "*Toranim*" (duty monitors) brought a review of what was going on in the world to the Current Affairs lesson, and led the discussions. The main subject of conversation was the Nazi regime in Germany and Hitler's racial theories. The atmosphere in these lessons became electric after the murder of Chaim Arlozoroff in *Eretz Yisrael*, and the teachers tried to calm things down. "*Betar*" members were convinced immediately that the murder suspect, Avraham Stavski, was innocent; members of "*Hashomer Hatzair*" and "*Gordonia*" were positive that he was the murderer.

On *Lag B'Omer* 1934, as the Gymnasium procession was returning from the forest, Polish youths from the suburbs fell upon it as expected. The young Jews who fought back moved from defence to offence, and a policeman who was called to the scene of the fray found the guilty party: a young Jew. "A pupil of the Hebrew Gymnasium, Magid, set upon the Christian youths and attacked them", the policeman wrote in his report.



Class 4, 1934

Naomi Nof records in her memoirs that the principal David Rakowitzki wanted to expel Magid from the Gymnasium, but the teachers objected to this sentence and the expulsion did not take place. Two years later, the authorities forced the marchers to use side streets only, "so as to prevent disturbances", and in 1937 they banned the procession altogether, and the *Lag B'Omer* celebrations were terminated.

One can learn something of the high standard of the Gymnasium students at that time from what happened to Akiva, son of Lipa Patt, in the Tenth Graduation Class matriculation examinations. Patt - a brilliant mathematics student - saw on the page in front of him a mistake in the figures in one of the questions, an error which made its solution impossible. He raised his hand, and when the Polish invigilator approached, he showed him the error. Luckily, this invigilator knew his mathematics. He immediately cancelled the examination in all the gymnasiums in the city that day, and remarked that Patt deserved a prize. Patt immediately took advantage of this offer and asked to be released from the Polish exam, the subject in which he was weakest. His request was granted, and the story became the talk of the town.



Class 6, 1934. Gym lesson



Class 6A, 1934



Class 6, 1934



Class 7, 1934



Class 4, 1935.
Outing on River Wilsuka



Class 2B, 1935



Class 4, 1935. Gym lesson



Class 4, 1935



The teaching staff, 1935



Class 6A, 1935



Class 7, 1935



Class 7, 1935



In the Gymnasium garden , 1935



Class 8, 1935



Meeting of Gymnasium graduates to mark the 15th Anniversary of its foundation, 1935

The Laboratories

In his second year in office, David Rakowitzki set up a **Physics Laboratory**. In the Gymnasium school yard, a small building was constructed containing four rooms which were used for this laboratory, one for Chemistry, which up to then had been rather modest, a Photographic Laboratory, and a Preparation Room for teachers. An ample collection of materials and sophisticated instruments for experiments was placed at the disposal of the students and teachers.

D. Rakowitzki recalls: "When I joined the Gymnasium in 1924, independent work in physics and chemistry was unusual. I used to invite the students to the Gymnasium after school hours and we used to carry out experiments using the meagre equipment that was available. At that time, I approached members of the Gymnasium Committee and found a sympathetic ear. We opened the Chemistry Laboratory in 1925 and the students used to come to it in the afternoons. After being appointed to the School Board in 1933, I tried to expand the laboratories. The existing Chemistry Laboratory was transferred to the building at 79, Senkiewitz Street in 1929".

For the **Biology Laboratory**, Rakowitzki built a hut in the Gymnasium school yard. Naomi Nof, who taught Nature Study and Geography, relates that up until then, the spacious doctor's room had served her as a laboratory. "When I arrived at the Gymnasium in 1930, I found only microscopes, one skeleton, stuffed birds, preparations, burners, test tubes, and maps". The new laboratory, which was equipped with the most modern equipment, was nicknamed "Chenstochowa" by the gymnasium students, a reference to the famous pilgrimage, because of its great popularity. In breaks between lessons, and after school, the boys and girls would come to the hut and admire the displays. There was a 400 sq.m. botanical garden, a vegetable garden, and an animal corner nearby. Each student had a flower bed which he tended in the afternoons.



Class 7, 1935. In the Physics Laboratory



By the Physics and Chemistry Laboratories, 1937

The **Geography Laboratory**, established a year later in 1935/6, was housed in one of the rooms of the Gymnasium. Its collection included more than 40 wall maps of countries of the world and of *Eretz Yisrael*, and more than 40 historical maps, pictures, and an "illuminated moving and still pictures device" (as it was called in the booklet, "The Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok - Pictures and Statistics").

During this period, the **Girls' Handiwork** laboratory, which occupied one of the rooms in the Gymnasium, was also created, and the **Handicraft Laboratory for Boys**, for which a four-room apartment had been set aside.

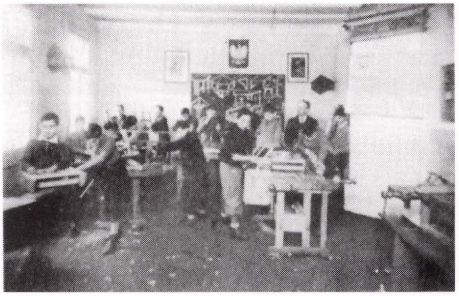
At the fiftieth anniversary reunion of the founding of the Gymnasium, David Rakowitzki recalled: Members of the Polish Ministry of Education were amazed at the standard of our laboratories and asked us to conduct demonstration lessons for the benefit of nature study, chemistry, and physics teachers from the whole district. The Polish teachers, not a few of whom were priests, listened to the questions and answers in Hebrew and, in many instances, looked on enviously at the Jewish students who were demonstrating and interpreting the experiments in fluent Hebrew.



Class 6, 1934.
In the Physics Laboratory



Class 6, 1937. By the Laboratories



The Woodwork Shop

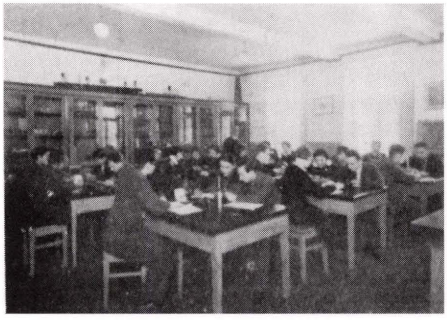
Playing Pranks on Teachers

Not only lessons occupied gymnasium students minds. "Playing pranks" on teachers, that eternal occupation of students worldwide, was also on the menu. Akiva Patt relates: "The name of the game was pretending innocence, and the victims were those teachers who had difficulty in remembering our names. When one of these teachers would address an unruly student, 'You there. Be quiet!', the culprit would turn his head to the rear, with a puzzled, reproachful glare, as if the words had been directed at the person sitting behind him, and this person too would turn his head to the rear, and so on, in a chain, until the last in the row, who would then turn his head accusingly at the wall".

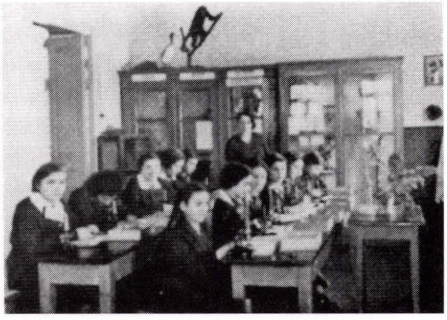
Patt also told of a Latin examination which was cancelled thanks to the resourcefulness of himself and his friends. "The Latin teacher was fond of telling stories about his experiences in the First World War. Shortly before the end of the school year, he announced to us: 'During the next two weeks we shall prepare for an oral examination, according to whose results I shall award you your annual grades'. We had no appetite for intensive studying during the heat of the summer, and so, in every one of this teacher's lessons, one of us would ask him to explain a particular detail of the history of the war, under the pretext that it was necessary for his next history lesson. The teacher could not resist the temptation, and was drawn into a story of his personal heroic deeds. When he had concluded, another student would raise his hand and ask another innocent question of a similar type, and once again we would acquire knowledge of our teacher's autobiography. The two weeks passed. We had learnt almost everything that had happened to the teacher during the war, and the exam never took place".



The Nature Study Laboratory, 1935



The Physics Laboratory



The Biology Laboratory



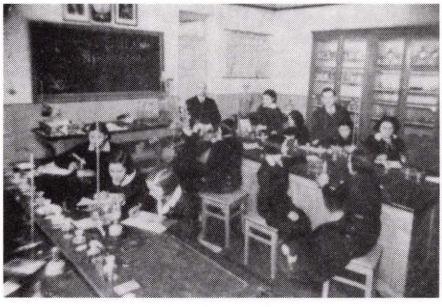
Class 6, 1924. In the Laboratory



In the Metalwork Shop



Class 7, 1924. In the Chemistry Laboratory



The Chemistry Laboratory



The Handiwork Laboratory

THE YEAR 1936

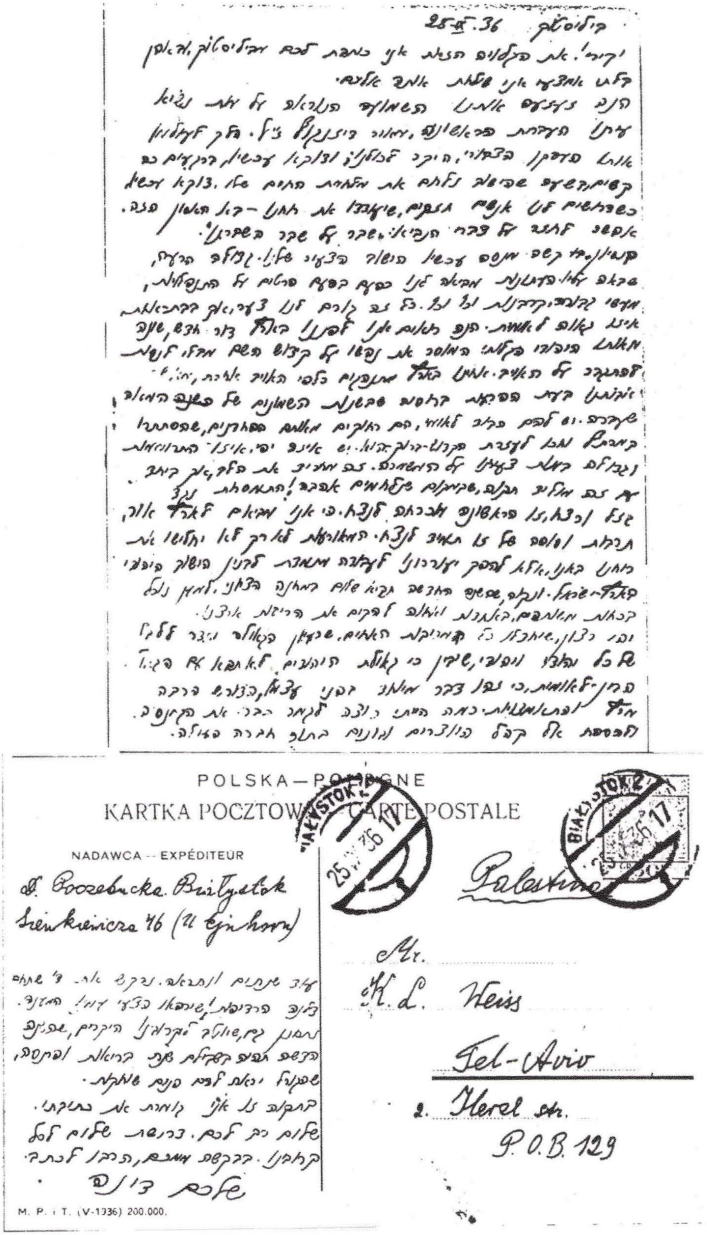
Many gymnasium students felt that "real life" was happening, not near them, but accross the Mediterranean Sea. In 1936, the persecution and hatred of the Jews in Poland disturbed their tranquillity far less than did the "disturbances" in *Eretz Yisrael*. Their attachment to Zion was not just an ideological one; many of them had relatives, friends, or acquaintances in *Eretz Yisrael*. "Our fledgling *Yishuv* is now going through a difficult experience. The Press brings us details of attacks, courageous deeds, sacrifices. It causes us sadness, but at the same time a certain pride. Our brothers in *Eretz* are far from being those cowards who hide themselves in cellars. How I would love to finish the Gymnasium and join the community of creators and builders", wrote Class 6 student **Dina Poczebutzki** to her cousin Ahuza, daughter of one of the founders of Tel-Aviv, Akiva Arieh Weiss. On a postcard (see photograph) Dina expressed the wish: "We shall meet in a couple of years". The wish was not to be fulfilled. In a postcard sent a year later (see photograph) this aspiration was already accompanied by a recognition of the constraints: "Father and Mother, how they suffer. Bringing them to *Eretz* is a lofty aim, but what an effort it requires, how many years will elapse until that time arrives".



Dina Poczebutski-Perl, 1937

That time never arrived. Dina and her husband Moshe Perl, also a Gymnasium student, perished in Treblinka.





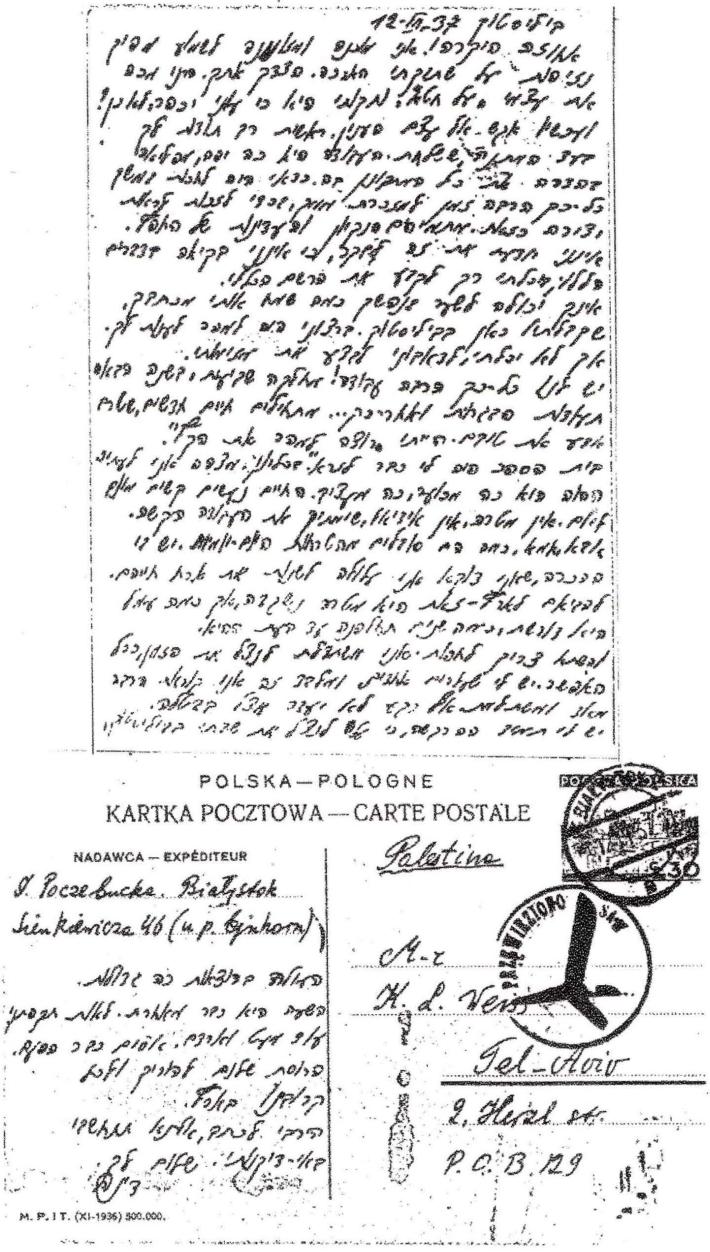
POLSKA — POLOGNE

KARTKA POCZTOWA — CARTE POSTALE

NADAWCA — EXPÉDITEUR

M. P. i T. (V-1936) 200.000.

106



POLSKA—POLOGNE

KARTKA POCZTOWA — CARTE POSTALE

NADAWCA — EXPÉDITEUR

I. Poczebucka. Białystok

Sienkiewicza 46 (u.p. Bojnhorn)

Palestine

M-r

H. L. Vess

Tel-Aviv

2, Herzl str.

P.O.B. 129

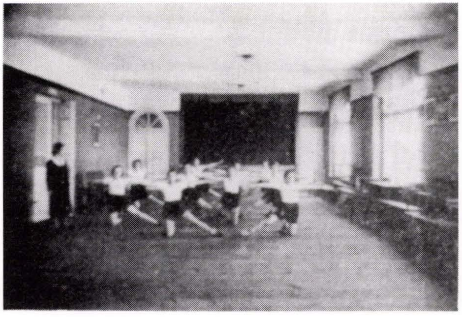
M. P. I T. (XI-1936) 500.000.



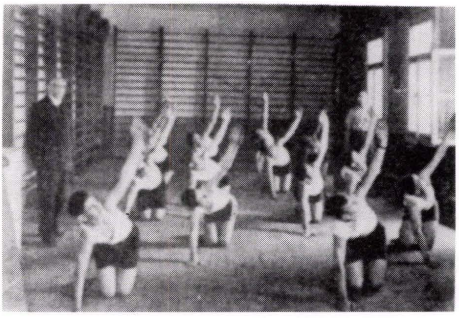
Class 5A, 1936



Class 5A, 1936. Excursion to Warsaw



Girls gymnastics lesson



Boys gymnastics lesson

Pre-Military Training

During the thirties, pre-military training - a sort of "*Gadna*" (*School Cadets or Youth Battalions in Israel*) - was introduced in high schools in Poland for members of Classes 6 and 7, and in 1934 this training was combined with army manoeuvres. Military training lessons at the Hebrew Gymnasium were conducted by teacher Shimon Dattner. **Dov Margalit** wrote: "We, who dreamt of a Jewish army, fighting for the Homeland, and so on, approached the study of the above profession with appropriate seriousness. The gym teacher briefly explained the importance of the study of defence for the young Jew in our time, asked us to behave well during our service, and demonstrate that we had already liberated ourselves from Diaspora characteristics such as lack of order and discipline. We promised to do so, and waited impatiently for the Polish officer of the battalion to appear. We arrived at the firing range where the sergeant in charge explained the practice conditions, whilst cursing angrily in several languages. There were nine firing positions. I was amongst the first group of nine who lay down on their stomachs to fire. We had been issued rifles and - Good heavens! They are cannons, not rifles. They are not sporting rifles, but real ones like those used by the British Army in Australia, Singapore, and in *Eretz Yisrael*. Each of us inclined his head, took aim, and then, Boom! One of the nine fired prematurely, and we were all struck dumb, and deafened by the sound of the explosion. I inclined my head once more and completed firing the five rounds, but the others hadn't finished yet so I stayed where I was and looked around me. My friend was sweating and couldn't aim properly. When he finds the notch, he doesn't have the sight, when he finds both of them, he loses the target. Depressed, he quickly pulls the trigger. Crack! ... Ow!!, he screams. He has forgotten Newton's Third Law, that to every action there is a reaction, that a rifle has the tendency to recoil just a wee bit when it discharges the bullet, and at the moment of recoil it doesn't consider if it will hit one's cheek or thin air, and doesn't care anyway.

On 22 March 1938, we were entering the second year of our military training studies, and at 11 o'clock in the morning we set out for a field exercise. The snow lay more than 30 cms deep. The exercise was led by an instructor, a young lad of rather low military rank, who wanted to demonstrate who was in charge, and to enable us to get used to him and at the same time to warm us up. He commanded us to run for a few minutes in the snow and every so often to 'Drop down! Crawl forward! Get up! Run, run!'

If these games were only a sort of prelude, try and imagine the actual exercises. But we knew that we were soldiers, and we also remembered

that at the end of the school year we would have to spend eighteen days at an army camp, so we suffered in silence.

The way back was particularly difficult. The instructor pretended that every flying crow was an aircraft, we were ordered to take cover under a tree or a bush, and if these were not at hand, a muddy ditch could also serve as a refuge. Well, what could one do? In *Eretz Yisrael* the British police are firing in the air and disturbing the birds' rest, and here the birds' brothers are fighting us".

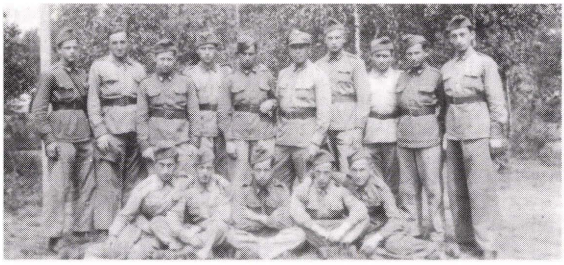
The manoeuvres provided an opportunity for Polish boys to gang-up against the small number of Jews. **Dov Grad (Sinai)** described the train journey to the training site: "Our brothers, the Children of Israel, sit apart, away from the others. In spite of the fact that they protest against the







Military training



ghetto, it is more pleasant to sit with our own rather than amongst strangers. The atmosphere is not very pleasant. Everyone is nervously contemplating the future. What will it be like there? Others console themselves with the thought that after all the whole thing will only last for eighteen days. All of us decide to stick together and stoically take what comes."

Grad described a day in the life of a Jewish cadet. "It was a company manoeuvre, the defence of a hill against an attacking force. We crawled up the hill. I found an excellent spot, a pit for potatoes, concealed by a bush which hid me from the enemy. I entered the pit, removed my burdensome pack, took some bread and a flask of coffee out of my knapsack, and started to eat. Suddenly, I hear a voice: '*Bon appetit*, my General!' It was the voice of the officer. I could make no excuses to him, for one thing my



Military training, 1934



Class 7, 1934.
In the municipal park after training

mouth was full, and secondly I had no excuse to offer. Thanks to his good mood, I avoided serious punishment and was only ordered to occupy the worst position at the top of the hill. So be it, what could I do? I started to crawl upwards. Walking was forbidden so as not to betray our position to the enemy. I crawl and crawl, and the top of the hill is still thirty metres ahead of me. I had no wish to tear my trousers and so I tried to cover this distance at the run, whilst bent double, when, without warning, that awful voice again: 'Slowly, my General. Crawl. Crawl, please. Crawling is good for your health'. After much effort, I reached the top of the hill. Suddenly, a whisper goes round; the enemy is approaching. The sergeant issues ammunition. I load the rifle. In the distance, figures are moving amongst the bushes. An order: 'Range 300 metres. Fire!' I aim and fire. Firing from all sides. The noise is terrible, really hell. The enemy rise from the ground and with a great shout of 'Hurrah!' run towards us. I spot my friend X amongst the attackers. I have a score to settle with him, I shoot and kill him! We are firing, and the attackers are running and yelling in loud voices: 'Hurrah! Bravo!' A thought flashes through my mind. Just like *Eretz Yisrael*, they are doing the attacking and we are defending".

"There was an inclination to avoid this training", relates Moshe Porat (Porozowski), "but Shimon Dattner made us participate, and encouraged us: 'Show the gentiles that you are not afraid of them. We will appear at full strength. You are not training for Poland but are preparing for Eretz Yisrael'. He persuaded us, and we all used to attend the exercises".

Joseph Niska recalls that Dattner also encouraged the hesitant and the weak-kneed with juicy epithets such as: "Gutless wonder!", "Lily-livered coward!", and "You flea on a horse's backside!"

In the booklet "The Hebrew Gymnasium, Pictures and Statistics" we find: "The Military Training Battalion participates in all training and exercises, sailing, and competitions, which are held by the local army command. Dr. Dattner has been placed in charge of the Battalion by the Pedagogic Council". The military course included not only exercises but also theoretical studies.

Military training, it goes without saying, was a strictly masculine activity. **Zvia Ojitzki (Efrati)** tells: "When we were in Class 7, the boys were called for military activities, and we, the girls, were supposed to sit in the classroom and study. Indeed we did come to the gymnasium, but just before the bell, a mischievous, puerile urge came over me, and I suggested to my friends that we go into town. We took with us a camera

and a ball and, after running a few risks, succeeded in meeting outside the school and set off to have fun. The following day, the School Board sent a letter to our parents asking why their daughters had been absent from lessons. I was not living at home and so didn't receive one of these letters. The parents, of course, could offer no reasonable explanation, but the Board dealt with us lightly and we were not reprimanded".



Class 7, 1933





Girls of Class 7,1935. Playing truant from school in the nearby forest

THE YEARS 1937-1938

On 1st *Nissan* 5697, 1937, the Gymnasium School Board published "In Pictures and Statistics", a summary of the eighteen years during which the institution had produced twelve graduation classes.



Front page of "In Pictures and Statistics"

In 1937, the reform of the *Tarbut* gymnasiums took place, and the Hebrew Gymnasium introduced the new arrangement: six elementary classes, four high school classes, and two lyceum classes, in two streams - Humanities and Science.

By that year, at the end of the fourth class (Class 6 before the reform), the Ministry of Education held matriculation examinations in ten subjects, and those who passed these exams received a certificate which the

students called "The Minor Matura". David Rakowitzki (at the reunion meeting in 1969): "I was not alarmed. I knew that our sixth year students would successfully pass these examinations. Indeed, students from other gymnasiums did not even dare to sit the Minor Matriculation exams, whilst our students sat them and succeeded".

On the one hand a high standard, and on the other the attitude of the authorities. "During those last years, we certainly felt the strong arm of the Polish Government", Rakowitzki recalled. "There was no connection between its intolerance and the general recognition of the high standard.



Members of the Pedagogic Council 1936/37

Sitting from right to left:
1) A. Aharonowitz, 2) M. Chazanowitz, 3) P. Sheinbron, 4) M. Zabludowski, 5) Principal D. Rakowitzki, 6) Dr. P. Horowitz, 7) H. Sheffer, 8) M. Adler, 9) Dr. H. Welger.

Standing in first row (from right to left):
1) R. Salomon, 2) Magister N. Kaplan, 3) Magister Y. Toyman, 4) L. Einstein, 5) G. Shkolnikow, 6) D. Patziner, 7) A. Bomchil, 8) Magister Shnapper.

Standing in second row (from right to left):
1) Dr. S. Dattner, 2) Y. Rotenburg, 3) P. Friedman, 4) Magister P. Berstein, 5) G. Gripfel, 6) S. Yakobowski, 7) Magister H. Sprung, 8) P. Schwartz.

All the heads of the examination committees mentioned the wonderful achievements of our students in their reports".

In the late thirties - the years before the end - the Gymnasium expanded, the number of students increased greatly, and it opened many parallel classes. **Ziva Shalev** recalls that there were one thousand students in the Gymnasium, and that there were on average 54 students in each class. It appeared as if the institution could look forward to good times, in spite of the restrictions that the hostile authorities imposed on it.

The authorities exerted pressure on all the Tarbut institutions to ensure that not only the History and Geography of Poland, but also the subjects of General History and Geography, be taught in the Polish language. "Some gymnasiums yielded to these demands", recounts Rakowitzki, "The Polish Supervisor complained to me: Why do other gymnasiums agree and only you are stubborn? And I was stubborn. During the last two years, our gymnasium was the only one in the whole of Poland where all subjects continued to be taught in Hebrew".



In front of the school, 1937

Number of students in the Gymnasium and the nearby Elementary School.

School Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1919-20	100	74	174
1920-21	160	120	280
1921-22	257	180	437
1922-23	320	200	520
1923-24	290	220	510
1924-25	310	216	526
1925-26	336	220	556
1926-27	315	225	540
1927-28	360	221	581
1928-29	405	247	632
1929-30	415	261	676
1930-31	368	226	594
1931-32	365	209	574
1932-33	369	217	586
1933-34	339	231	570
1934-35	347	235	582
1935-36	371	248	619
1936-37	373	273	646

The overall number of Gymnasium graduates in its eleven graduation years from 1926-1936 was: 367

Those in *Eretz Yisrael* from the above: 144

Completed higher institutions of learning in Poland and abroad: 41

Studying in higher institutions of learning in Eretz Yisrael: 26

Studying in higher institutions of learning in Poland: 18

Studying in higher institutions of learning in other countries: 16

From the 1931/32 school year onwards, there was a State Committee for the Gymnasium Matriculation Examinations. Up until the 1936/37 school year, 104 graduates received a matriculation certificate which conveyed the right to attend institutions of higher learning in Poland and abroad.

Statistical Chart of Matriculation Examinations

School Year	Entered Exam	Received Matriculation Certificate
1931-32	43	22
1932-33	42	36
1933-34	22	17
1934-35	16	13
1935-36	18	16



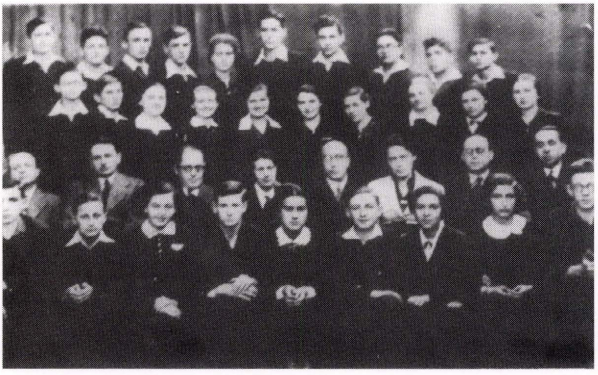
Class 6, 1937



Prep. Class 4, 1937



Class 6, 1937



Class 7B, 1937



Twelfth Graduation Class, 1937



Class 8, 1937



Class 4, 1938



Geography lesson, 1938

In the photograph of Class 8 in 1938 (see following page), we see amongst the examiners Prof. Roznik from the Hebrew University, but only a few from this graduation class managed to get out of Poland in time, and succeeded in studying in Jerusalem and Haifa. Some students who had registered at the Hebrew University and the Technion and had received immigration certificates, were no longer able to use them. Many graduates from the previous graduation class of 1937 emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, despite the fact that some of their parents tried to convince them otherwise because of "the disturbances" then taking place in that country.



Thirteenth Graduation Class, 1938



Class 8, 1938

THE YEAR 1939

There was a custom in the Gymnasium: One hundred days before the end of the school year, the students of Class 8 would hold a party - "The Hundred Days Celebration" - together with their parents and teachers. "We all came, students, teachers, and parents", wrote Daniel Albeck of the 1939 party. "My friend Dov Grad (Sinai) and I were in charge of the arrangements. Dov wrote and composed a song for the


לע"נ

תרפ"ט תרצ"ט

אלמנך, הוצאת המחלקה השניה של הליציאון העברי בביאליסטוק.

לסיום המחזור תרפ"ח—תרצ"ט. 1939—1928.

מחזור י"ד לגמנסיה. — א' לליציאון

המערכת:

מטעם המועצה המדגוגית:
מר משה זבלודובסקי, המורה לעברית.

מטעם התלמידים:
חיים קרופניצקי — יו"ר

דב גרד
ברוך קפלן
} עורכים

דב מרגלית מנהל שכני

אלכסנדר ויינשטיין מזכיר

ביאליסטוק א"י תרצ"ט.

Front page of the "Le'An" magazine

occasion, and I remember a line from it: 'The class, like a mother, is teaching her children the way of life'. It was an unforgettable evening, but the joy was mixed with gloom, we all felt that something was about to happen, we had all heard Hitler's speeches on the radio".

The Magazine "*Le'An*" ("Whither") was published in the year 1939, only a short while before Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland.

> *David Rakowitzki, who was the last principal of the Gymnasium, said of "Le'An" thirty years later: "This magazine correctly reflects the spirit which we had instilled in the students, their attitude to Eretz Yisrael, to the Zionist movement, and to Jewish values. If one day someone writes the history of Bialystok and devotes a chapter to the Hebrew Gymnasium, this magazine will certainly find its rightful place in it".*

We are happy to fulfil this wish, and give here a detailed description of the articles published in this 'Almanac' (as the students called it).

It is apparent that none of the teachers and students who contributed to this magazine guessed what was shortly about to happen, and did not imagine that this would be the last witness to the life of the Gymnasium, at the threshold of extinction. The replies of the writers to the question "*Le'An*" ("Whither?") were quite optimistic, even though there is an appreciable awareness in their writings of the gloomy reality. They still thought that those exposed to danger were the brave individuals who emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* during the "disturbances", and not those who remained in Poland.

A letter was published in the magazine from teacher **Zeev Goldstein (Golan)** who was at that time a relatively new immigrant (four years in *Eretz*). "Difficult times, casualties every day, and we are shocked to the very depths of our soul", wrote Goldstein, and in spite of this added: "Come, friends, the homeland awaits you. Life is not easy in *Eretz*, one's teeth also hurt in *Eretz Yisrael*, to be occasionally unemployed is also unpleasant in Eretz Yisrael, and the work is difficult, and there are many obligations, but he who builds will also be built".

For at least one of his past pupils, who was debating the question whether to go to England or to Eretz Yisrael, Golan's letter helped to tip the scales. **Zalman Bialystotzki** wrote in the same magazine "Right now I receive letters from my brother who is studying at university in London. My brother invites me to join him there after I receive the matriculation certificate. But at the same time, we have received a letter from our class teacher who is now in *Eretz Yisrael*, and he invites us to *Eretz*. The letter

from our teacher seems closer to my heart. If I am not delayed by unforeseen circumstances, I shall soon meet my teacher in my land".

In the literary section, Golan described his meeting in Haifa in *Eretz* with a former Gymnasium pupil. The hero of his article, "A Bialystoker in *Eretz Yisrael*", performs every national commandment: He worked in the building trade "and was not ashamed of his labourer's clothes and the cement dust on his face", and at the same time also studied at the Technion. He suffered at times of lack of employment which followed the "prosperity", brought his sister to *Eretz*, and was active in the *Haganah* during the "disturbances". Later, he abandoned all his activities, enlisted in the Jewish Settlement Police force, and as a *Ghaffir* (special constable) in an isolated settlement, took part in skirmishes, and was once severely wounded, "but when he recovered, returned quickly to his post".

In an article, entitled "He Returned to Zion", **Chaim Bordo** told of a Gymnasium graduate who had betrayed the Zionist idea, and for a while "was enticed into following those who go astray and mislead, forgetting his crushed and oppressed people". Afterwards "he became sober, the seed which was implanted in his heart at the school where he was educated had produced the desired fruit, albeit ripening somewhat late". Bordo's hero emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* and "found his place amongst his people and his country's freedom fighters", but Bordo was not satisfied with his return to the fold, and had a bloody atonement in store for him, a wound in battle against an Arab gang. The doctor tells the wounded man that he will recover. "I have already recovered", the wounded man muses. "I am cured, I have expunged my sins and my trespasses will be forgiven".

In "Go in peace", the **Principal David Rakowitzki** congratulated the members of the 1939 graduation class. He wrote: "You, the first graduates of the Hebrew Lyceum, are dear to us", and he certainly did not imagine that he was then congratulating the last graduates of the Hebrew Gymnasium. "When you came to us, you did not ask or demand, and neither did your parents ask or demand if, when you had completed your studies, we would be able to give you an official certificate like the other schools. You were attracted to the Hebrew school in the same way that you are drawn to your parents home from strange surroundings, as you are drawn to the homeland from a foreign country. You are dear to me because you have been educated by the sparkling light of love for our nation, its land and its culture, which flows from our hearts. You are dear to me because we have invested in you part of our being, our soul. You were the daring ones among the body of students of the Hebrew Gymnasiums in demonstrating to the educational authorities the excellent results of work in the Hebrew School. You are now leaving us equipped with a high school education, with a knowledge of your language and

past, and your book of lineage, and you will bear no resemblance to those unfortunate young people who were made to forget their language and origins, and do not understand the meaning of their suffering. You have acquired knowledge, but you have also acquired an outlook on life and will know how to answer the question: Whither? Your aspiration is to link your future with the future of the Nation in its Land. There are those who speak of this loudly, and there are those who hide their life's vision deep down, but it is clear to me, that in whatever place you may find yourselves, you will know how to preserve the honour of a graduate of the Hebrew school. And whether you will sanctify the name of the Hebrew graduate, and also the institution which nurtured and educated him, in defending the honour of our nation, or plough the rocky ground of obstinate earth in our ancient homeland, or spread the light of Hebrew culture in the darkness of the Diaspora, may you all be blessed, and be strong and of good courage".

The class teacher **Chaim Sheffer**, described the sufferings of his childhood when he was forced to learn in non-Hebrew schools, and his few years of happiness in the Hebrew afternoon school. "My father founded a Hebrew school in which students from Polish schools studied in the afternoons. For this purpose, he invited young teachers from Russia who were inspired with enthusiasm for the national idea, and amongst them was Zvi Sharfstein".

Before the First World War, Russian Hebrew teachers were invited to come to Galicia; In the twenties this situation was reversed, and the Hebrew Gymnasium obtained its first teachers from Galicia.

Sheffer: "The day is still fresh in my memory when I declaimed a Hebrew poem in front of the author Reuven Brainin, who honoured the town of my birth by paying us a visit. To my great regret, a suitable atmosphere did not then exist for maintaining a Zionist school, and it was closed. When I was a student in the first class of the State Gymnasium, we were forbidden to belong to any association, but we secretly founded the *Bnei Zion Society*, and through it we conducted Hebrew courses. Secretly and clandestinely, we would study and teach Hebrew, the History of Israel, Palestinography, and the History of Zionism. Our knowledge of Hebrew did not reach the level of fluent speech, and it goes without saying that we obtained our knowledge of *Eretz Yisrael*, Zionism, etc. from Polish books. When I stand today with my children and my students at the threshold of their new life, it would not be inappropriate to mention how happy they are in their complete and perfect education. This recognition will help them to face their destiny with pride".

He most certainly was not aware of the destiny which they and he himself would have to face.

Moshe Zabludowski, who read all the reports and articles in "*Le'An*" before printing, put his impressions in writing: "It seems to me that I have seen your pure and innocent spirits trying to flutter their tender wings and fly far away, to carry you into this beautiful and glorious world, and you encounter obstacles and stumbling blocks. Your modest voices form a choir singing sweetly of the new future, clear and fresh, bringing the tidings of a clean and pure dawn, which you welcome with cries of joy. In the furrows of your hearts we have sown a healthy and fruitful seed, the seed of faith in the future. From all your works bursts forth the tremendous confidence that evil will pass from the earth, and a new light will illuminate the lives of your people. Never remove this faith and this confidence from your hearts".

This is what Moshe Zabludowski wrote three years before he was shot in a mass execution in the forest, together with four thousand other Jews.

Student **Chaim Krupnitzki** (who, in an additional article, was most enthusiastic about the "Songs of Denunciation and Faith" of Uri Zvi Greenberg), raised in this magazine the question which repeated itself in most of the Gymnasium pamphlets, "What is the Hebrew School?", and in the final part of his article, which was entitled "We shall overthrow and be victorious", wrote: "Whatever we may be in the future, whether in the polytechnic, at the university, whether in the Diaspora or in *Eretz*, whether with the Book, with the sword, or with the plough, our way is one alone, through the Nation and for the sake of the Nation, for its total independence in our entire Land".

Abraham Gershoni wrote: "Life is like a dark forge: one strikes with a hammer, and another is thrown on the anvil, but in this darkness a flame flickers, new creative forces are being forged and are strengthening themselves. The day will surely come, we shall go out towards life, we shall work, we shall act, we shall accomplish". The title of this article is "The Bitter Reality and the Shining Hope".

Chana Gelbert wrote of the hope which stirred the first pioneers to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*, and of the *Hatikvah* - the Zionist anthem. In her article "The Power of an Anthem", she wrote: "The homeland calls out. The many who leave their work, the students who interrupt their studies, the many Ghaffirs (policemen), they will not remain quiet whilst the noise of Arab explosions can still be heard, and if they die, their death will be that of heroes of the homeland. The Jews will not despair, and will come to the aid of their brethren in the homeland".

Bracha Rubinstein, in her article "On the Threshold of Life", expressed her fear that "I must begin my journey into the world at a time when darkness extends over it. Within the walls of the school I dreamt of joy, and I must set out on the threshold of life in dark days", but she ended her article with self-encouragement: "I raise my eyes to the new light. Fine people still exist, and good must prevail".

"From whence and to where?" asked **Baruch Kaplan**, as "the cruel hand of fate", in his words, hurled him from the delusion of childhood security down to the ground of reality. "God of my salvation. How, in what way, can I be a building block in the edifice of the Hebrew state?" wrote Kaplan. "How terrible, how cruel is the ability which limits the will". Kaplan, who already possessed an immigration certificate, did not succeed in emigrating to *Eretz*. It was fifty-one years before Professor B. Kaplan, Chairman of the Scientific Committee for Analytical Chemistry at the Academy of Science in the Soviet Union, could visit Israel. "I believe that in the near future we will be able to emigrate to Israel", he wrote after his visit. The ability, indeed, was not compatible with the will.

Dov Margalit wrote in praise of militarism, and proposed a "change of values" in the Zionist concept. "The days when the basis of existence of each and every nation was only land has gone and vanished without trace. Today, conquest of the air and the sea is the order of the day. Without an army one cannot dream of peace, and who is more qualified for this role than the graduate of the Hebrew school?".

In his article "Our way is *Eretz Yisrael*", **Raphael Walek** argued with the assimilationists and explained how mistaken they were: "The nation he is trying to assimilate with does not wish to receive him. And with cries of scorn on their lips the people call out, "Go away, despicable Jew, you have no place here. Even if you forsake your God you cannot be one of us". Walek continued, "In the new Society" too, (socialist apparently) "the Jew will be redundant, then too they will hate the landless people, then too he will find no rest and will be forced to wander from place to place".

In an article entitled "Perhaps", **Alexander Weinstein (Gafni)** reacted, not with reproof but with astonishment, to the Gymnasium's tendency to compromise. He wrote that amongst his friends, for most of whom "their path leads *there*", i.e. *Eretz Yisrael*, there were a few who had joined the "apathetic camp", and he therefore asked: "Perhaps the school's education, despite the best of intentions, cannot give that strong impetus necessary for the realization of ideas, for action, so that the Nation can be reborn and built in *Eretz Yisrael*?"

Dov Grad (Sinai) predicted a bright, secure future for himself and his friends in an article, typical of a student in the Eighth Class, which is laced with schoolboy humour. In comic vein he describes a meeting in

Bialystok twenty years later, in 1959, in the Assembly Hall of the Gymnasium. In this article entitled "The Meeting", Grad predicted the future for his classmates - "the window-breaking and inkwell-throwing pranksters" - as successful adults in *Eretz Yisrael*, Poland, and other parts of the Diaspora. One would come to the meeting as "a tall, strong man in an *Eretz Yisrael* police officer's uniform", and others would be a judge in Tel-Aviv, the head of the labour union in Nes Ziona, a professor in Haifa, and captain of the ship "Zion", whose friends say of him that, even then, when he was a Lyceum student, he would "adorn" all his notebooks with drawings of soldiers and sailors with rifles. For one of the girls, Grad prophesied feminist activity ("emancipationist" in his words) in the "Hebrew Womens Association". According to Grad's prediction, remaining in Bialystok would be someone who would become a sports organizer, a deputy chairman of "Maccabi". He sent a future artist and a girl who would become a musician to Paris. Two bankers from London and a politician from *Eretz Yisrael*, who all attend the meeting, conduct negotiations regarding a loan, "for the completion of work on a canal parallel to the Suez". For some students, of whom he was not particularly fond, he prophesied a future in Poland: one a merchant in Lodz, one in Grodno, and two in Warsaw. He sent two to the United States, a professor of Slavic literature, and a doctor. "You see, we know everything about everyone. The twenty years have not broken the ties. We raise a glass of Carmel wine and make a toast that also in the future the ties will remain unbroken. *'Le'Chaim!* To Life! To friendship!".

With similar humour, **Abraham Skolnik** described his classmates, not in the future but in the present, by way of a caricature entitled "In the Prominent Mirror". The article commences with the following: "A generation passes and a new one appears, and the Gymnasium continues forever". To his descriptions of character, Skolnik devoted a short passage from "The History". "Many of us entered the Gymnasium prep. classes. We were infants, real micro-organisms. And there were those older ones who joined the higher classes, and in a short period they integrated with us. Yet each one had to pass a test, a sort of exam. That is to say, when he reached his *Bar Mitzva* (thirteenth birthday), his friends would up-end a desk, throw the victim on to it, and fling him into the air for as long as he could withstand it. When he had passed all the tests, he was accepted as a member of the class, and was given a nickname, complimentary or otherwise, which would remain his official name for the rest of his schooldays".

Chaim Jablonski wrote, in the article entitled "My Town", about the small town 'Z' (apparently Zabludow). In straightforward style, different from that of his friends, Jablonski described the inhabitants of the town of his birth, the Jews living on next-to-nothing from the economic point of

view, within the sea of hostility of their anti-Semitic neighbours. "In spite of this, the town is constantly changing for the better", wrote Jablonski optimistically. "New houses are being built, the pavements repaired, electricity fixed, schools and charitable organizations founded. My town is proud of the sages and scholars who were born in it, many of whom left and made names for themselves in the outside world. I love my town, with all its features so characteristic of a Jewish town, as constantly described in our literature".

In a nostalgic section entitled "Do You Remember the Days?", Daniel Albeck, Dov Kadlobeck, Zalman Bialystotzki, and Chaya Smuklerewitz recalled their early days in the Gymnasium.



Daniel Albeck

"The first days were unbearably difficult for me", **D. Albeck** confessed, who came to the Gymnasium from a non-Zionist family and an assimilated environment (his father, who was not a Zionist, sent him to the Gymnasium to rescue him from assimilation). "My classmates made fun of me because I knew neither Hebrew nor Yiddish". Albeck's estrangement in his class was broken after a while, particularly after he encountered anti-Semitism in his home neighbourhood. "I remember the event which opened my eyes. It was like this. Every day, a lad came to our yard to collect the pigeons which were perching on the roofs. After a few weeks, I learnt that he was the 12 year old son of the concierge of the yard opposite. We became good friends. Each day, when I had finished my homework, I would go down to the yard and he would be there waiting for me. We would chase the pigeons for hours, and in the evening we would sit on the steps and make up stories. One evening I heard a child shouting and crying in the street. When I reached the spot, I saw two Christian boys hitting a small Jewish lad, and what increased my amazement was that I recognized one of them as my friend. Vitek! I grabbed his arm. What are you doing? Why are you hitting him? Because he's a Jew, came the innocent reply. So what?, I said, I am also Jewish. Don't talk nonsense, that's another matter entirely. How can you compare yourself to him? But if you want, I'll let the little Jew go. From that day on, I never left the house after lunch, even though I could see Vitek from the window, sitting and waiting for me. I understood things which previously had not crossed my mind, and I became more and more close to my class and my friends. I became a Jew who was aware of the value of his people. Perhaps my friends will say that it was only natural, but for me it was not - as I was living in an assimilated, Christian environment. The Hebrew Gymnasium made this clear to me".

Bialystotzki's and Smuklerewitz's absorption in the Gymnasium was

easier. **Bialystotzki**: "At first, I felt estranged from my surroundings - but time passed and I found friends amongst my acquaintances, and from this moment my family circle grew, I had received new relatives, my classmates". **Chaya Smuklerewitz**: "With an excited feeling, my father leading me by the hand, I passed along two long corridors. We stopped before one of the doors, my father ushered me into the room. Immediately, the teacher approached me, and patted me on the head, as if she wished to show me by this that I had passed from my father's authority to hers. I was somewhat afraid of this change, but I was sure that nothing bad would happen to me".

Kadlobeck wrote nostalgically, not about his early days in the Gymnasium, but of his friends who had left Poland: "My friends have scattered to the four corners of the earth, to *Eretz Yisrael*, to the United States, to Argentina. They were dear to me. We understood one another. And what now? A letter from here and a letter from there". The friend who went to the United States disappointed Kadlobeck, "My friend has forgotten me, he has been thrown into the turbulent new life and has forgotten". The other friend, who had hoped to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael, has gone "to a country as far from his heart, as it is far from our Land". The writer described the farewell party for this friend as follows: "It is not a happy party for me, but one of pain and sorrow. I am reminded that this is the fate of thousands of my brothers, the fate of thousands of Jews who never leave the Diaspora, but wander from one Diaspora to another". The third friend, who emigrated to Israel, "He has also gone, I regret it very much, but at the same time I was happy that I had been granted the priviledge that one of my dearest friends would be in *Eretz Yisrael*. My happiness exceeded my sadness. I was happy when I remembered that in the dust of our homeland I would find my friend's olive tree. If I could not work to rebuild the Land, at least I would enjoy the priviledge of seeing the work of my friend. How happy I was at the farewell party! How much hope the singing of the *Hatikva* put into my heart. I saw a beaming ray of light in my friend's face when he said to me, Next year in Jerusalem".

The following is written on the last page of the magazine:

"We are setting out from the school, leaving the temple of knowledge, parting from the secure shelter of our youth. The youthful days in our beloved school, wrapped in glorious splendour, will never return to us, they have passed forever. A difficult path is ahead of us, full of obstacles, and henceforth the burden of national duty and the yoke of private needs will fall on our shoulders. Farewell to our school. Within your four walls our souls were forged and are in their infancy, and now we stand at the threshold of cruel reality. Can we stand firm? We go out into the market-

place of life armed with faith and confidence, imbued with the Zionist-Messianic spirit. Our faces are directed towards Zion being set free, and in our mouths and in our hearts, we vow and take an oath: in spite of all the haters of Zion and those who ostracize us from within and from without, we shall rise up and conquer yet. There is hope for Israel still, and in the end victory will come!".

Gymnasium Graduation Classes

Graduation Class		Graduation Year
1	-	1926
2	-	1927
3	-	1928
4	-	1929
5	-	1930
6	-	1931
7	-	1932
8	-	1933
9	-	1934
10	-	1935
11	-	1936
12	-	1937
13	-	1938
14	-	1939

Principals of the Gymnasium



Eliezer Furman (Karari),
1919-1920,
later Principal of the
Rishon LeZion Gymnasium.



Dr. Chaim Zweigel
(Zalzali, Sarig),
1920-1921,
later Principal of the Vilna College.
Emigrated to Israel and was
Principal of the Teacher's Training
College at Givat Hashlosha



Dr. Eliyahu Rosenbaum
(Maroz),
1921-1922,
later Head of the Education
Department in the
Municipality of Tel-Aviv.



Dr. D. Rozenman,
1922-1923.



David Braver,
1923-1926,
later Principal of the
Grodno College and Gymnasium.
Perished in the Grodno Ghetto.



Dr. Zvi Lilien,
1926-1929.

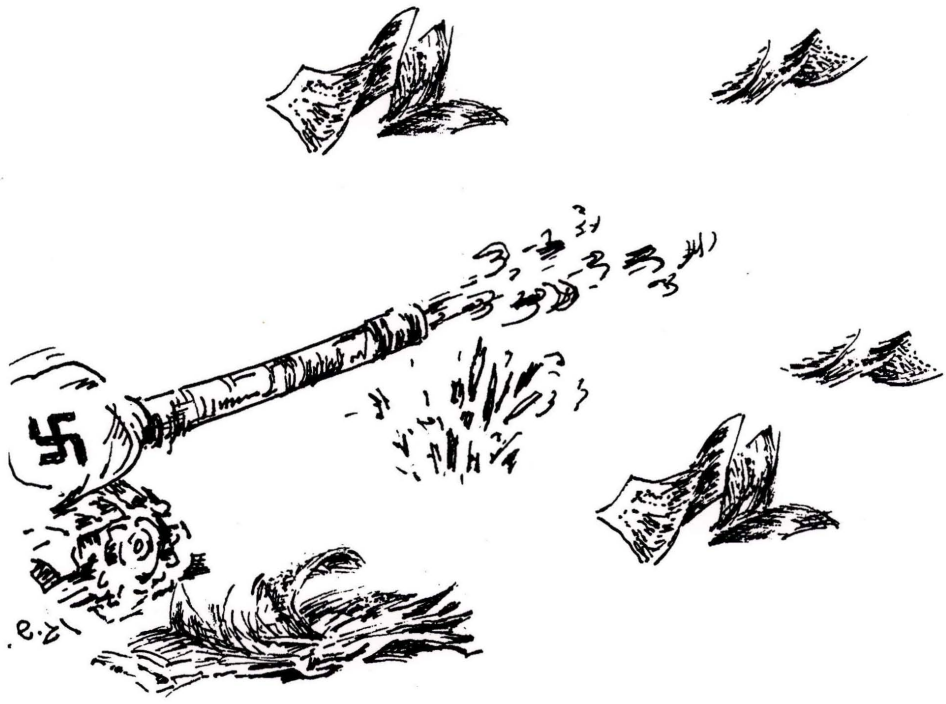


Dr. Zvi Zemel,
1929-1933,
later Principal of the
Bialik High School, Haifa.

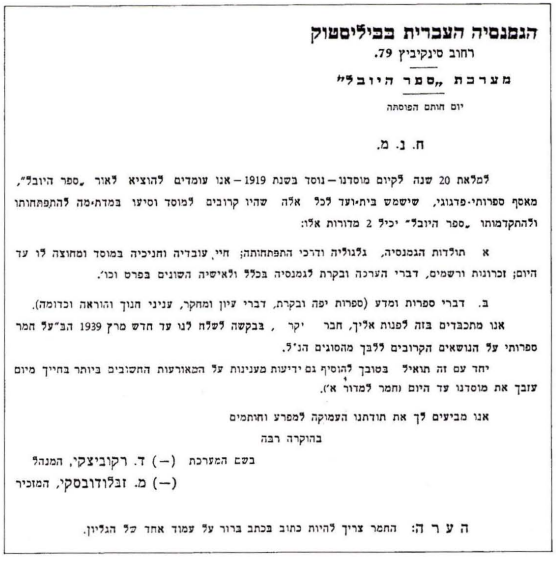


David Rakowitzki
(Rakavi),
1933-1939,
later Principal of Ironi 'A'
High School, Tel-Aviv.

THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY BOOK WHICH WAS NEVER PUBLISHED



On the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Gymnasium, the School Board decided to publish a collection of essays and articles from ex-students. Six months before Hitler's invasion of Poland, they chose an editorial board which sent a circular to potential contributors to this enterprise. Here is a photograph of the circular.



הגמנסיה העברית בביליסטוק
רחוב טיקיביץ 79.

מערכת „ספר היובל"

יום תותם הפוסתה

ח. נ. מ.

למלאת 20 שנה לקיום מוסדנו – נוסד בשנת 1919 – אנו עומדים להוציא לאור „ספר היובל",
מאסף ספרותי-פדגוגי, שישמש ביתי-ועד לכל אלה שהיו קרובים למוסד וסיעו במדת-מה להתפתחותו
ולהתקדמותו „ספר היובל" יכיל 2 מדורות אלו:

א. תולדות הגמנסיה, גלגוליה ודרכי התפתחותה; חיי עובדיה ותניכיה במוסד ומחוצה לו עד
היום; זכרונות ורשמים, דברי הערכה ובקרת לגמנסיה ולאישיה השונים בפרט וכו'.

ב. דברי ספרות ומדע (ספרות יפה ובקרת, דברי עיון ומחקר, עניני הנוך והוראה וכדומה).

אנו מתכבדים בזה לפנות אליך, חבר יקר , בבקשה לשלח לנו עד תדש מרץ 1939 הב"ע את תמר
ספרותי על הנושאים הקרובים ללבך מהסופים הנ"ל.

יחד עם זה תואיל בטובך להוסיף גם ידיעות מעניינות על האורעות התשובים ביותר בחייך מיום
עזבך את מוסדנו עד היום ותמר למדור א'.

אנו מביעים לך את תודתנו העמוקה למפרע ותיתמים
בהוקרה רבה

בשם המערכת (–) ד. רקוביצקי, המנהל
(–) מ. זבלודובסקי, המזכיר

ה ע ר ה: החמר צריך להיות כתוב בכתב ברור על עמוד אחד של הגליון.

Many answered the call. Zvi Bodanowski keeps a postcard which he received from Moshe Zabludowski: "Please hurry, as we are about to print the book". The date of posting of the card was 14 August 1939, two weeks before the invasion.

Bodanowski sent an item to the editorial board, but much to his regret, neglected to retain a copy of the article. We found only two people, Naomi Nof and Yaacov Samid, with copies of the articles which they sent to Bialystok.

Naomi Nof (Goldman), the Biology teacher, sent a scientific essay: "Hibernation in Plant Life", and also wrote an article describing her recollections as a teacher who had experienced the change of the language of instruction from Polish to Hebrew. In this article she quoted written answers that she had received from the students in her class to questions that she had presented to them. One student wrote: "I love discussions devoted to subjects which are outside the school curriculum. I long to be one of the members of the new society in *Eretz Yisrael*. I want to throw off the yoke of the Diaspora and that of present society. I yearn for the complete renaissance of our people and of the whole world". Another student criticized the Gymnasium: "I would define our Gymnasium as

being exclusively a house of study, an institution for acquiring knowledge in many fields, however it is not a national, educational institution whose role is to prepare a pioneering generation for building the Land". On the question: What is your opinion of the Gymnasium as a co-educational institution, in which boys and girls learn together in the same class, one of the students replied: "In this respect, our Gymnasium is considered to be a progressive institution, but in my opinion, coeducation requires proper sex education in preparation for serious relationships in the future. I think that information about sex is required inside the school in order to avoid demoralisation amongst young people". Another student wrote on the same subject: "In my opinion, the negative side of coeducation is that sometimes the student in love sits through entire lessons looking at his girlfriend, and completely forgets what has taken place in the lesson. Sometimes the proximity of the girl arouses passionate feelings in him". A more optimistic student wrote: "There are more pros than cons in the co-educational school. Boys and girls learn how to get to know one another, and boys in the presence of girls try to behave well".

The following is a precis of the article sent to the Gymnasium in 1939 by Engineer Yaacov Semiatitzki, who hebraized his name to **Samid** in September 1940.



Yaacov Semiatitzki,
graduate of the
Fourth Graduation Class

The School and its Graduates

This week I received the announcement of the twentieth anniversary of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium. To tell the truth, a strange and indescribable feeling came over me at the moment that my eyes dwelt on this announcement. How come it was not obvious to me how long the institution, where I was educated and reached maturity, had existed, and that I was unaware of the anniversary year which was approaching? Can one draw the conclusion that I had completely abandoned the "Temple of my Youth", had smashed its high places, and destroyed its altars in my heart? Or perhaps the opposite is true. Precisely because a living and organic connection remains between myself and the school and I feel its very being in all my deeds and conduct - perhaps because of this, I am not in the habit of counting the years and making note of periods and dates associated with it, just as there is no restriction or limit to one's innermost soul. For a high school is not like a university. It is true that the latter provides one with a spade with which to dig, but the former bestows that "heightened spirituality", which at times of rest and calm, provides a never-ending source of elevated spiritual experience. The high school creates and assembles the material foundations from which the university moulds

form and character. "Knowledge acquired in childhood" is the decisive factor which determines the essence of a person in the future.

These ideas disturbed my thoughts throughout that same workday on which I received the announcement. The knowledge of the school's anniversary gave me no respite, and disturbed my mental equilibrium. Wherever I went, pictures appeared before me from the eight years I spent studying at the school. I therefore decided to put my feelings on paper in order to share them with the teachers and students.

And what a surprise! That evening, when I came to put this into practical expression, and to convey some of my innermost thoughts - I saw that my pen was dry. All day I had butterflies in my stomach and my heart was almost bursting with excitement that it could hardly contain, and now their place had been taken by an empty void. Perhaps the reason for this phenomenon was the sense of distance, both geographical and of time, and it was difficult to find the appropriate idiom and suitable tone. Indeed, it is ten years since I left the school, and during the whole of that period I was not only outside Bialystok, but outside Poland. Only once, four years ago, did I meet teachers and students, when I gave them my impressions from abroad. Great changes and transformations have taken place in the course of my life since then: I exchanged my bench at school for one at the university, and later an office desk; other writing and drawing instruments took the place of my pen.

And perhaps one can find the reason in the confused times which we are passing through all over the world, and it is hard to disconnect oneself from nightmarish events and the heavy burden of the yoke of responsibility - even in the realm of thoughts? Day-to-day living demands strength, and the devotion of all one's energies to be on the alert. May one hide in the shadow of the wings of the past from the sound of shooting and the fire in the cornfield? Totally immersed in the labyrinth of these questions, and searching for a reason which would explain this strange phenomenon, my train of thought brought me to the spring, to that same "spring" known to us all, from which "the Children of Israel drew courage and strength" - and instantly, my pen was filled with black, bubbling ink. Surely the educational institution is one golden link in the chain of our renaissance, one of the foundation stones of our national Zionist edifice, and it deserves praise for producing from within it, youth, permeated with lofty ideals, who are prepared to defend the spiritual and cultural assets of their people. Our suffering and our defensive campaign acquires encouraging sense and meaning when we see these national assets!

Over all this hovers the question, has the school justified its existence, and was it correct in the path that it took, and on the other hand, have all the graduates of the school fulfilled the hopes that were placed upon them?

The school, when it set itself the aim of educating a generation deeply rooted in our tradition, and which would be a synthesis of Hebrew knowledge and European culture - not without difficulty, found the

correct and appropriate path for this mission. It had to overcome many obstacles and difficulties: a shortage of suitable teachers, absence of proper text books, lack of settled tradition and method, and in addition, external interference. Happily, one can state that the institution stood firm constantly during its campaign, strove tirelessly to achieve the aim which it had set itself, and did not choose the path of least resistance. In spite of the ill winds which blew around it, trying to tempt it to abandon its main purpose and to adjust to popular demand - it did not lower its stature or alter its true nature. It is sufficient to recall the painful question which created a storm at the time, the matter of the "Matura". The *Tarbut* institutions fought for equal government rights, and in spite of the qualitative and quantitative improvements which were introduced at the school, the government stood by its refusal to award graduates the right to receive a state matriculation certificate. After much lobbying, the government made a pretence of being prepared to fulfil the request of the Hebrew schools, with "one small condition": cutting the hours for teaching Hebrew and increasing those of Polish. This condition, which struck at the very heart of the institution, was decisively rejected by all. I am reminded of the protest strike which was declared when I was in the Seventh Class, against surrendering to the authorities; because at that time there was a fear that, under pressure exerted by individual parents, the institution would agree to accept these conditions. In spite of the fact that we students were the sufferers in this unjust state of affairs, we made sure that the sanctity of the school would not be desecrated and, even if it meant that our future path would be made the harder, and that we would have to multiply our efforts in order to reach a reasonable status in life, we decided that we would not allow our Hebrew spirit to be denied. It would be superfluous to describe the end of this battle, which was distinguished by achievements of both a partial and a permanent nature. In the course of time, the "Polish Matura" lost its magic power of attraction. The tide turned: the Hebrew school proved its worth and succeeded in convincing the general public of its high standard. Its graduates became the subject of envy in the eyes of young students everywhere.

The high educational standard of the school should also be mentioned. I am familiar with educational institutions in *Eretz Yisrael*, and can vouch for the fact that neither our school's curriculum nor its teaching methods fall below their standard. The "spiritual baggage" which Bialystok graduates carry with them when they leave the school is of no less value, and is no smaller, than that of the graduates of institutions in *Eretz*.

I would like to conclude by wishing the Hebrew Gymnasium success and prosperity, and offer congratulations - to the teachers, trusting that they will derive satisfaction from their work - and to the students, in the hope that they will use their knowledge for the good of their people. May this blessing, sent from the land of our aspirations - the source of blessings and consolations - also bear on its wings that spirit which beats in the hearts of the builders of our Land, and cause it to rest on all who support the establishment of national educational institutions.

UNDER SOVIET RULE
1939-1941

The abrogation of the Non-Aggression Treaty between Germany, Poland, and England, became known to the Gymnasium students during the long lunch break. A few 12th grade students hurried to a friend's apartment in Senkiewitz Street and heard Hitler's declaration of the abrogation of the Treaty. They heard the response of Polish Foreign Minister Alexander Beck on the radio in the school hall, together with all the students. "Poland will not allow Germany to seize its land", said Beck with Polish pride. On 1 September 1939, the Nazi army invaded Poland and also reached Bialystok. On the 22nd. of that same month, the Germans left Eastern Poland (they would return two years later), and the Red Army occupied it in accordance with the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

Bialystok's appearance changed overnight. Here is the eyewitness account of one of its residents, Shmuel Soltz: "Now Bialystok was full of refugees who had fled from the west. There was not a house, or even a corridor, which did not contain refugees. Before the war, Bialystok had ninety thousand inhabitants, to these were now added a quarter of a million refugees. It was difficult to obtain food, medicine, and most of all find a place to live. The Community Council and its Chairman, Barash, organized the opening of soup kitchens. The clinics and hospitals were full to overflowing with sick people. Every day we would hear of arrests, particularly of owners of factories and businesses, and community activists. The threat of arrest hung over everyone. We knew not what the morrow would bring, what new orders and new decrees".

Educational establishments were numbered, the Gymnasium in Senkiewitz Street was given the name "Die Ninete Shule" (the Ninth School), and its teaching language was immediately changed to Yiddish. Already, by the following year, the language of tuition had become Russian. Teaching in Hebrew was forbidden, and also speaking Hebrew was considered to be an offence. It was a black day for Moshe Zabludowski when he entered the classroom and said to his pupils: "From today, we will only speak Yiddish".

Chaya Chazan remembers: One day, before the Red Army entered Bialystok, the former gymnastics teacher, the German Bendorf, warned his friend David Rakowitzki: "Flee for your life, the Russians will certainly arrest you". Chaike Grossman recalls that she and her friend Rachel Orlinski told Rakowitzki one night that he must escape immediately. Rakowitzki knew that he had an "unsavoury past", in that he was a Hebrew teacher, the principal of a Hebrew educational institution, and a representative of the *Keren Kayemet Le'Israel* (Jewish National Fund). His daughter was very ill, but he had no choice. After much wandering and hardship, he and his family reached *Eretz Yisrael*. He came to *Eretz* destitute, but not as a stranger. He had come home. His ex-pupils came to his aid, and members of the education department of the

Yishuv (Jewish Community in Palestine) knew who he was. Shortly after his arrival, he was appointed as principal of a high school in Tel-Aviv.

Daniel Albeck tells of the dramatic meeting Rakowitzki had with representatives of the new regime before he escaped. The Soviets wanted to make a pretence of being democratic and tried to stage-manage the agreement of the teachers and the principal to their decrees. The senior students and their parents were summoned to a meeting. The authority representatives made speeches in praise of the alteration of the teaching language and the transition from reactionary to progressive education, and then Rakowitzki was invited to the podium. The principal stood facing the local government representatives and members of the secret police who were sitting in the front rows, and said: "You can force us to do anything, but you will never receive our voluntary consent to change the face of the Gymnasium and erase its Hebrew and Zionist image". There was uproar in the hall. The men from the secret police climbed onto the podium, but Rakowitzki had already slipped away through a side door. The stage-managed consent was not given.

Dr. Shimon Dattner recalls: Moshe Zabludowski, Franca Horowitz, and Chaim Welger received notices of dismissal from the "Ninth School" because of an article which appeared in a local newspaper - "*Der Bialystoker Stern*". The author of the article dared to criticize the attitude of the new authorities to the schools which had been Hebrew ones before the occupation. The three of them found employment in other schools.

Several students from the 1939 graduate year were deported to Russia, and those who were tainted with being "bourgeois" were exiled to Siberia. Naomi Dzivack recalls: "The Gymnasium students who were deported to Russia and Siberia stayed alive. None of those who remained in Bialystok and were shut up in the Ghetto, survived".



Rachel Kalisher (Kaplanski)

The Gymnasium During the Soviet Period (1939-1941)

The name of the institution was changed to "The Ninth School". The teaching language was Yiddish. Hebrew was banned. Hebrew words used in Yiddish such as: *Ganav* (thief), *Hatunah* (wedding), *Emet* (truth) etc. were written phonetically in the Yiddish pronunciation. We, the students, regarded this with scorn: this is what their "truth" looks like. The portraits of important national figures on the walls of the hall on the top floor

disappeared, and were replaced by Soviet pictures and slogans. In the centre, hung a large photograph of Stalin, hugging a smiling girl holding flowers, to illustrate how happy children were in the Soviet Union.

A Jewish teacher from Minsk (I forget her name) was made director in charge of the curriculum. One day she brought a song to the class in praise of Comrade Stalin, which had been written by a poet from one of the Asiatic Republics. She told us of the tremendous love which all the peoples of the Soviet Union feel for the great leader, full of goodness and kindness, the guiding star of the nation. See how your lot has improved, she said, since you were freed from the yoke of the Polish Panowie (masters). You had the great privilege to live in a country which has been liberated by the Red Army, inspired by Stalin. To prove her point, she read the poem, which confirmed her claim, and even embellished it. We, the students, in our accustomed manner from the period before the "liberation", expressed our critical opinion of the poem, and one of the students even dared to disqualify it and claimed that it contained an exaggeration: Stalin is portrayed as an ideal figure, completely pure, but in reality people like this do not exist. Why, even the heroes of the Bible, Moses and David, who are admired by everyone, also sinned. The teacher's face reddened and she became confused, she was apparently unaccustomed to criticism. She fidgeted nervously with her handkerchief, silenced us, and said: Everyone, pay attention! With all this confusion we will never be able to reach any conclusions, we won't go into this question right now. Tomorrow, I will explain the significance of the poem and what the author's intentions were.

And indeed, the following day the teacher addressed us. One of the students, who concealed a book of literary criticism under the desk, followed her lecture, in which, word for word, she quoted by heart from the book. This occurred during the first few days of the school year. After a while, we realized that if we valued our lives and freedom, we had better remain silent.

The shelves in the Gymnasium Library were always full of books in Hebrew and in Polish, but now all the Hebrew books were destroyed. They were burnt. In the depths of night, a few students stole to the site of the bonfire. They were my brother Abraham Kaplanski, Eliezer (Lazerke) Lipkes, and Hanoch Poczebutzki. They raked amongst the piles of ashes and removed a few scorched books which had not been consumed. I remember Abraham returning home, blackened with soot, with books hidden under his coat: "Perhaps these books will bear witness to the crimes perpetrated by the Soviets against the treasures of Hebrew culture", he said.

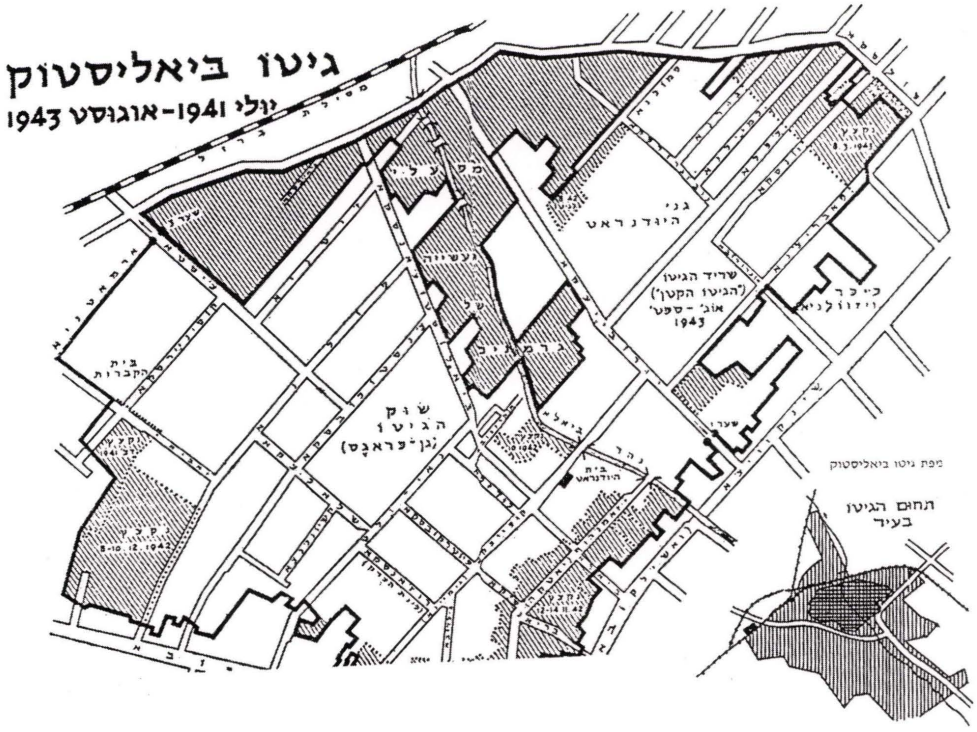
Teacher Moshe Zabludowski, whom the students called Moishele, once met my brother in Senkiewitz Street. In response to his pupil's greeting he

winked slyly, and hinted that my brother should follow him into the schoolyard. With a gentle smile and trembling voice he whispered in his ear: "Kaplanski, we must still speak Hebrew in secret". He glanced about him and added, "Be careful. You can never tell. Maybe we are being followed".

On the eve of Passover, Munkatch the principal, who spoke fruity Yiddish, came into our class and said to us: "Lads, you are probably excited about the Passover *Seder*, I can read your thoughts. You would like to sit at the table on the evening of the festival and read: 'Once we were slaves to Stalin in the U.S.S.R." There was dead silence in the class, and then the principal laughed sarcastically and said, "*A macke farn veln*" (wishful thinking - forget it!). It will never happen. You are going to spend the rest of your lives under Soviet rule".



THE HOLOCAUST
1941-1943



Bialystok Ghetto July 1941-August 1943

The period of Soviet rule came to an end when Eastern Poland was invaded by the Nazi Armies. The first bombs fell on Bialystok on 27 June 1941. Thousands of Jews, who realized what was in store for them, fled to the east. Many of them were killed on the roads by bombs dropped by German aircraft, others were shot by German soldiers, and a few managed to return to Bialystok. Amongst those who fled and did not return were Physics teacher Tauman and Maths teacher and former Gymnasium graduate (Fourth Graduation Year) Novodworski. It was rumoured that they both died on the roads. The Polish inhabitants of the region had been waiting for an opportunity to attack the Jews, and during that month, six hundred Jews from Bialystok were killed by the Poles.



In his memoirs, Dr. Shimon Dattner listed the names of those Gymnasium teachers who remained in Bialystok:

A. Aharonowitz, M. Chazanowitz, Moshe Zabludowski, Dr. F. Horowitz, Chaim Sheffer, Miss R. Solomon, Magister N. Kaplan, G. Shkolnikow, D. Patziner, A. Bomchil, Magister Yaacov Shnapper, Dr. Shimon Dattner, Y. Rotberg, Magister Pnina Berstein, Shmuel Rakowski, S. Yakobowski, and Magister Hadassah Sprung, (Chaim Welger and his family left Bialystok and returned to Galicia. Dattner heard later that Welger's wife and daughter perished in the Lvov ghetto).

On 27 June, the Germans herded two thousand Jews into the Great Synagogue and burnt it to the ground. Dr. Dattner recorded that on Thursday 3 July, the Germans led two hundred Jews from the intelligentsia to the forest and shot them to death. One of those killed was Hebrew teacher Y. Rotberg. In the ghetto, they referred to those who died as "*Die Donnershticke*". Ten days later, on Saturday 12 July, the S.S. shot four thousand Jews in the Paytroshi forest. Moshe Zabludowski was one of those killed. People in the ghetto called them "*Die Shabbasdicke*". It was at that time that Pesach Kaplan wrote the song "*Rivkele Die Shabbasdicke*".

The Bialystok ghetto was set up at the end of July 1941, and in August of that year it was forbidden to enter or leave it. In a number of small streets, surrounded by barbed wire fences, were imprisoned all the city's Jews and thousands of Jews from the provinces. The transports commenced on 18 September 1941. In the first transport, four thousand Jews were deported to Prozani.



Alexander Barash
Head of the *Judenrat*

In November 1942, the Germans killed Jews throughout the region, but did not yet destroy the Jews in the Bialystok ghetto. More than seventeen thousand Jews were employed in factories in the ghetto, manufacturing clothing, hats, and shoes for the German Army. The *Judenrat* concluded that this employment would save the lives of the workers, and the Head of the *Judenrat*, Engineer Alexander Barash, said: "We will purchase our lives by working".

Only one of the Gymnasium's founders avoided the fate of the Jews of Poland. Dr. Moshe Zieman emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1939 (his son by his first marriage, who had settled in Germany, was killed by the Nazis. His first wife and his daughter, who remained in Poland, perished in the ghetto). Dr. Moshe Katznelson was appointed as Head of the Health Department in the ghetto, and later, in his capacity as a doctor, was sent to Teresienstadt with a group of children, and from there to Auschwitz. Mendel Kaplan was appointed to be a member of the *Judenrat*. In the ghetto, Eliezer Kahana continued to deal with the administrative affairs of the Jewish Hospital.

Members of the youth movements and the "*Bund*" set up a Joint Committee, organized groups of partizans, and smuggled Jews into the forests. Rumours of what was happening in the concentration camps caused alarm, and many preferred not to believe them, but in January 1943, a Jew who had escaped from Treblinka reached the ghetto and delivered an eye-witness report.



Ephraim Olcha

The Joint Committee organized an underground in the ghetto, and partizans who were hiding in the forest supplied it with arms and instruction. One of the underground leaders, Ephraim (Paul) Olcha (Oren), had been a Gymnasium student, one of five brothers who had studied there. He and his brothers had played in Shkolnikow's brass band. In the ghetto, Paul married the daughter of Berl Subotnik, the Gymnasium's secretary.

Gymnasium student (Thirteenth Graduation Year) Chaike Grossman (later Member of the Israeli Parliament and of Kibbutz Evron) acted as a courier between the ghettos. Thanks to her "non-Jewish" appearance, she was able to leave the ghetto and travel freely.

In an apartment which had belonged to Chaim Welger before the German invasion, a sort of teachers' "*Kolkhoz*" existed. Dattner listed the names of the "*Kolkhoz*" residents: Gymnasium teachers Franca Horowitz, Hadassah Shprung, Yaacov Shnapper, Shimon Dattner, and other teachers and their families. "From all these", wrote Dattner, "only Hadassah Shprung and I survived".

In February 1943, members of the underground tried to oppose an *aktion* (a round-up of Jews for transport to the death camps) with force, and killed a few Germans. Following this, two thousand Jews were killed in the ghetto, and twelve thousand were sent to Treblinka. The *aktion* continued for seven days, from the 5th to the 12th of the month. Amongst those who were killed was Chaim Sheffer, Math teacher Bomchil, and the

Judaic Science teacher D. Patziner. On 5 February, Dr. Franca Horowitz committed suicide; she had been ill, could not stop coughing, and refused to hide in a bunker and endanger the lives of others.

On 15 August, news spread that the Germans were about to send the remaining forty-five thousand Jews who still survived in the ghetto to the death camps. Mendel Kaplan died of a heart attack at his desk in the *Judenrat* office when he was informed of this. Members of the underground distributed pamphlets calling on the Jews to resist the deportation, but few responded to their call.

The last struggle of the underground in the Bialystok ghetto commenced on 16 August 1943, and lasted for several days. Almost all of its members were killed by the Germans. The date of Ephraim (Paul) Olcha's death is known; the 20 August. He was twenty-two years of age. The Jews were sent to the death camps at Treblinka, Poyniatek, and Maidanek. Bialystok was "*Judenrein*" (free of Jews).



Mordechai Tannenbaum (Tamrof), Leader of the ghetto uprising

When the last transports had left the ghetto, the Ukrainians entered it, searched for and found those few Jews who had survived in hiding-places, and handed them over to the Germans. Amongst those who perished was Historian Avraham Shmuel Hershberg, author of "The Bialystok Notebook". Eliezer Kahana, one of the Gymnasium's founders, was killed together with the staff of the Jewish Hospital. Teacher Pnina Berstein, her husband, and baby son, perished in one of the camps. Dr. Moshe Katznelson died in Auschwitz. David Braver perished in the Grodno ghetto. Gymnasium student Avraham Kaplinski, who was a member of the underground, was handed over to the Germans by Poles in 1944, a few weeks before the Germans retreated from Poland.



Following, are the testimonies of two people who were in the ghetto:
Hebrew Gymnasium teacher **Hadassah Shprung**, who was the secretary of the *Judenrat*,
and Gymnasium graduate **Chaike Grossman**, a member of the underground.



Hadassah Shprung-Levkowitz

Days of Terror

I was born in Sanok, Galicia. I graduated from the University of Yagilonska in Cracow and received an M.A. Degree in Biology and a B.A. in Geography and Geology. I came to Bialystok in 1936 and joined the Hebrew Gymnasium to teach these subjects, in place of Naomi Goldman (Nof) who had then emigrated to *Eretz*. My social life was restricted to the Gymnasium and I was not involved with the life in the city. I loved my work and my students, and they liked my lessons. I developed amicable relationships with the teachers and with the principal, D. Rakowitzki.

I remember the matriculation examinations. Our students were tested in external examinations in all subjects for two days, exam after exam, and the anti-Semitic Polish invigilators tried to make things difficult for them. On one occasion I was unable to restrain myself and asked the invigilators: "Tell me, please, do you think that Polish students could be examined in so many subjects at one and the same time?" When the examinations were over, we invited the invigilators to a festive meal. They ate nothing, and it was plain that they had little desire to join in the celebrations of Jews.

Before the war we tried to prepare ourselves. I was put in charge of first-aid. Some teachers ran away from the city, but I thought: Where shall I run to? The war is going to reach us everywhere.

When the Russians came, and Hebrew became a forbidden language, I found it difficult to teach in Yiddish as my dialect was not that of Bialystok. That was only half the problem. It became more difficult for me a year later when we were ordered to teach in Russian. I felt lost, without a language. I had no choice but to feverishly learn Russian in the evenings, and after a while I was able to conduct lessons. When I heard myself lecturing in Russian, I thought: "Is that really me?" The students would say: "Russian, our teacher doesn't know, but her lessons are interesting". The Russian teachers appreciated our academic level which was considerably higher than theirs. When I brought a model of a human figure into my class, the Deputy Principal said to me in surprise: "In our school, nothing of that model would have survived, they would have stolen everything". I was naive, and when we sat in the teachers' room, talking amongst ourselves, I allowed myself to speak freely. After the Russians departed from the city, we came across documents that they had left, and it became clear that every one of our off-guarded comments had been noted down in their files. In the assessment relating to myself was written: "A good teacher, but ridicules everything".

During that period, in contrast to my usual custom, I used to award high marks generously, and with a clear conscience, so as to enable my students to continue with their studies at university. We were then living two families in one apartment according to the Soviet model. I was sharing with the Reiss family. They had an only son, and before the Germans came, the parents wanted to hide him with a Polish family. The boy refused to be parted from them, and thus his fate was sealed. The whole family perished in the Holocaust.

When the Germans entered Bialystok in 1941, we were all confined to the ghetto. The head of the Jewish community, Rabbi Rozenman, was not a practical man, and was unsuitable to act as head of the *Judenrat*. Alexander Barash was elected to the post. Rabbi Rozenman was an intellectual, and I

remember that when he was due to be sent in the transport to that place from which there would be no return, and was told not to take belongings with him, he asked: "And what will happen to my books?" Barash performed his task like a tightrope walker, and courageously suffered from both the Germans and the Jews. To his credit, the ghetto was admirably organized and there was no famine, and thanks to him, the destruction of the ghetto was postponed time and again. The ghetto was liquidated only in 1943. Barash knew how to influence the Germans and to bribe them. The inhabitants of the ghetto worked in factories which were considered to be vital. Barash had connections with the underground, and during the night its members would enter the factories to repair their weapons. Barash allowed this on condition that they would only start the uprising at the very last moment, when there was no other alternative.

One day, the products of our factories were displayed in an exhibition outside the ghetto. Barash hoped that the Germans would keep us alive so as to profit from us. The Germans demanded money from him, and he raised it from the Jews. Women, whose husbands and children had disappeared, believed that this money was intended for the ransom of prisoners, and when they found out that their loved ones had been killed, they came to the *Judenrat* office, crying, and levelling accusations against Barash. When Barash succeeded in postponing an *aktion*, the Jews were grateful to him, and when he failed, they blamed him. They did not understand that he was not omnipotent. On one occasion, when distraught parents burst into the office, and the guard forcibly ejected them, I shouted hysterically: "Don't hit the mothers!"

Barash hoped for deliverance, hoped to postpone the end until the Russians would arrive. I did not believe in deliverance, and said to him: "We should prepare incendiary material, and when the Germans liquidate the ghetto, we should blow up the factories". He did not agree.

Many people accuse Barash*. I, who was his personal secretary, consider him to be blameless. I know that a German officer offered to provide a hiding place for Barash and his family, and that he refused, saying: "Whatever will happen to the Jews will happen to me too". Once he said to me: "I know that the day will come, after it is all over, that they will blame me, but now I am trying to save as many Jews as possible". When the Germans set up the Ghetto Militia, Barash introduced students of the Hebrew Gymnasium into it, so as to prevent corruption. And so it was that the Bialystok Militia differed, and was better than those of other ghettos. When the Germans demanded that we hand over someone who had been given away by "informers", I would pass this on to the Militia and they would warn him to go into hiding. There were two "informers" in the ghetto. One of them was shot by members of the underground and brought to the hospital where he died of his wounds. We asked the doctor attending him, Dr. Kaplan, to allow him to die. He refused, saying: "I am a doctor and must treat every wounded person".

I had an additional duty thanks to my command of German: Liaison between the German Police and the ghetto. I would bring the policemen wine and cake, and in return would receive exit permits from the ghetto.

Most of the teachers remaining in the ghetto lived in the apartment belonging to History teacher Welger, who had escaped from Bialystok. I shared one room with Franca Horowitz, who taught Polish Literature. There was an underground shelter in the house, and in 1943, before the *aktion*, all the occupants of Welger's apartment hid in it. Franca, who could not stop coughing, refused to go into hiding with us lest she betray our presence, and asked me to give her poison. I have no pangs of conscience: I gave her the poison and lit the stove in our room. It was the least I could do for her. She gave me a piece of jewellery and requested that if I should survive and succeed in emigrating to *Eretz*, I should give it to her sister who lived in a kibbutz. The Germans took the jewellery from me of course, when I was in the camp.

*** Author's Note:**

In his book on the Bialystok Ghetto - translated from Polish into Hebrew by Zippora Aker-Surewitz - Shimon Dattner writes in 1945; "In February 1943, Barash was told to supply 6,000 'non-working' Jews, who were to be sent to the gas chambers. Barash believed that if he handed over these Jews, he could save the remaining 50,000. His great crime was in agreeing to this atrocity. Instead of announcing to the masses: 'It's every man for himself - defend yourselves', or instead of shooting himself in the head - he surrendered to the demands of the Germans. From that moment, Engineer Barash's prestige vanished".

From the shelter, we heard the sound of the German soldiers' footsteps. Dr. Bergman's only daughter, Beja, a sweet four-year-old child, had been given a sleeping draught, but it had no effect, and when she heard the noise above she became alarmed and started to cry. Someone grabbed her by the throat to silence her and, after the Germans had gone, we discovered that the girl had been strangled. When we emerged from the bunker, we discovered that Franca Horowitz was still breathing. We brought her to the hospital where she died. All night long I could hear Dr. Bergman and his wife sobbing.

During this *aktion*, a Jew called Melamed threw a molotov cocktail at the Germans and killed one of them. Melamed escaped and went into hiding, and the Germans announced that if he was not handed over within 24 hours, they would execute one hundred Jews. Melamed gave himself up and they hanged him. His body hung in front of the *Judenrat* for three days.

Before the final *aktion*, the authorities demanded that we supply one thousand two hundred children. I collected children from orphanages and other places, and we travelled together with them, fifteen nurses and myself. One Jew entrusted me with his daughter, a four-year-old girl. We received sacks of bread from the *Judenrat* as provisions for the journey. I said to the children: If the train travels northwards, jump off and try to run away. If it travels westwards, stay. The train travelled to the west. During the journey, I gave the German guards money and valuables in exchange for hot water. The train arrived at Teresienstadt and the children entered the camp, but the Germans refused to accept the small child and she remained with me. We adults were sent back to the train, and it was then that the conductor said to me: "You are going to Auschwitz". An argument broke out amongst my travelling companions: Should I be allowed to take the child with me? The guard overheard this argument and also noticed that the little girl called me "Ma'am" and not "Mummy". He took her from me.

In Auschwitz, I worked in the camp office and was able to see the list of names of persons who were arriving. One day, a transport arrived with "our children". They were all led to the crematoria.

In the men's camp were some of my ex-students. At great risk to themselves, they used to send me food carried by children. Only children could fulfil this task.

I was lucky: One day, a German came to the camp and asked: "Who speaks Russian and German and is familiar with Biology?" These were my qualifications. I was taken from hell, together with another woman, ten years younger than I, who had become my friend in the camp, by claiming that she too spoke Russian and German and knew Biology (it was a lie of course). We were brought to a village called Raisko, to a laboratory in which French scientists who were prisoners were employed. Our task was to produce rubber from plants. Our workers were prisoners from the camp. In the evening they would return to the camp, and by this means I was able to send my students cucumbers and tomatoes which grew in the hothouses. My friend and I did not return to the camp. At the laboratory we each enjoyed the "luxury" of having a bed and washing facilities.

Towards the end of the war, we were sent to Germany on the "Death March". My friend did not have the strength to walk, and I had to support her. One day, we were sitting in a railway station and waiting for the coal trucks which were to take us on a long journey. One of the railway workers took pity on my friend who was quite pretty. Thinking that she was Polish, he said to her: "I will hide you". She would not agree for us to be parted, and so he locked both of us in a clothes cupboard. Before dawn, hearing a noise, he became alarmed, opened the cupboard doors and told us: "Follow me, and act as if you don't know me". He then brought us to a wood and disappeared. We left the wood and came to a Polish village where we explained that we were war-widows, Polish of course. There, we worked in the houses of farmers and became friendly with them. When the Russians arrived, we parted from our employers, and they gave us a letter to the Bishop of Katowicz, and a gift - a sack of sugar, in which they had hidden some money. They thought that we would have refused to accept it openly.

From Katowicz I travelled to Chozow where I managed a school for refugee children. I later married a Hebrew teacher, and we spent some time in Munich where I took part in the founding of a branch of WIZO (Womens International Zionist Organisation). In 1948 we emigrated to Israel, where I became a teacher in the Ironi 'A' High School in Tel-Aviv.



Chaike Grossman
13th Graduation Class

Beyond Space, Beyond Time

Several years ago, I paid a return visit to Bialystok, and as with my previous visits, a compulsive feeling led me along Senkiewitz Street in the direction of the Gymnasium schoolyard. I do not understand why my steps lead me there. What am I searching for in that place, and what am I looking for in Zebia Street where the ghetto cemetery was? And why did I go to Smolna Street and Novogrodska Street where the uprising took place? What once was, is now nothing but a memory, a dull pain which accompanies one "when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up", on holidays and workdays. Not a single trace of this memory remains in Bialystok. The sites which the survivors of the Jewish community marked and commemorated have been erased. There was a memorial on the grave of the last of the fighters of the uprising. The memorial is no more. The large, beautiful synagogue, to which we Gymnasium students were brought on Polish national festivals in order to hear a speech "prepared" by Rabbi Rozman, praising Polish democracy - is also no more. Immediately on entering the city in June 1941, the Germans threw two thousand Jews into this synagogue, and burnt them alive. The skeleton of the magnificent dome lay there for many years as a symbol and a memorial. Now I searched for it and could not find it. On the wall of a house there is a plaque with an inscription honouring the memory of the two thousand Jews who were burnt.

In 1938, I completed my course of studies at the Gymnasium and sent my matriculation certificates to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I was accepted as a full-time student and received an immigration certificate, I thought that I was lucky, I could realize my forefathers' longing for *Eretz Yisrael*. University or Kibbutz, the main thing was to emigrate!

Someone else thought differently. I was ordered to be an emissary for the Movement. Twice my immigration certificate was renewed, both during the war and under the period of Soviet rule, and I was given permission to emigrate within the quota of students, but once again I was ordered to remain in the pioneer underground, under the Soviet regime. I had been taught Zionism in the Gymnasium; in the Movement I was taught to implement it. I stayed, and joined another underground: the fighting underground during the period of the Holocaust.

In January 1942, I returned to Bialystok from Vilna with a message which I brought from the valley of death at Ponar, in which 60,000 of Vilna's Jews had been slaughtered: The programme of the Germans is the total destruction of the Jews. The second message which I delivered - "Do not go willingly to your deaths. Resist" - was directed mainly at the pioneer youth movements and the activists in the *Bund* and the Communist Party.

In the ghetto, I found a group of followers of the Movement, aged between 17 and 20. Some of them had completed their course of studies in our Gymnasium in 1940-1941, and by then it was no longer a Hebrew one. The language of instruction had been changed from Hebrew to Yiddish, and afterwards, very quickly, from Yiddish to Russian. They told me that in 1939, students tried to rebel against the elimination of Hebrew, and even declared a strike. Letters written by Gymnasium students at that time bear witness to the depressing atmosphere which prevailed at meetings which were

held in private houses. Some students reached Eretz Yisrael during the war. In 1939, they fled to Vilna, which in the pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany had been ceded to Lithuania, which at that time was still a neutral country. They went to Kibbutz Beit Zera under the Youth Aliya scheme.

I used to move around outside the ghetto under the guise of a Polish non-Jewess, and was helped in this by my appearance. I knew only three Poles who might recognize me personally: a street sweeper from Wilcza Street, which was near my parents' house, a provincial domestic help who lived in our house, and the Gymnasium caretaker, Jan. The likelihood of meeting any one of them was slim. In the factory belonging to my father, Nahum Grossman, many Poles worked, but I never used to go to that place where my father "exploited the workers", and so we never knew one another; my socialist principles worked to my advantage. Who then could give me away?

However, one day I left the ghetto via the gate in Jurowiecka Street on a mission for the underground. I removed the yellow badge from my chest and back with customary dexterity and stepped onto the pavement forbidden to Jews. And who should approach me, if not Jan the caretaker? There was no way of retreat and I was forced to greet him. Jan stopped, politely said hello, and he too like myself, pretended to ignore the circumstances of the meeting, and refrained from asking what I was doing on this pavement, and what had happened to my badge. He inquired after the welfare of the teachers in the ghetto. The little information that I was able to convey was derived from my sole visit to the apartment in which several teachers and their families were living in cramped circumstances, although not as yet in outright poverty. Helpless, embarrassed people; I hurriedly passed on this brief information to Jan, and from then on I was no longer afraid of meeting him.

I met Dr. Shimon Dattner when Bialystok was liberated. We returned together from the forests and, carrying our weapons, marched through the still burning streets of the city in a parade; however, even in the ghetto, I knew that Dattner had gone to the forests with a group of young people to fight in the ranks of the partizans. This group did not belong to the inter-movement and inter-party organized underground that prepared the armed resistance in the ghetto. At the head of the group stood Judita, a woman who had quit the communist underground organization. How Dattner reached this particular group, I do not know. Perhaps one of the students introduced him to it. After the war, I visited Dattner's home in Warsaw several times when I came to Poland with various delegations. He worked on research of the Holocaust under the Higher Committee for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes in Poland. I followed his personal fortunes from afar.

I had chance meetings with Dr. Franca Horowitz, who taught Polish Literature and was my class teacher. For me, she was a shining example of a human being - Jewish, educated and humanist. I remember that she taught History, German, and Philosophy when teachers of these subjects were indisposed, and in most cases even excelled them. I was never bored during her lessons. She equipped me with spiritual assets and opened wide for me a window into world literature, to the finest literature. Neither did she avoid discussing what was happening in the world around us. I remember a stormy debate in one of the current affairs lessons between members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Betar* youth movements, on the question of whether fascism was possible without anti-Semitism. The teacher neither cut short the debate nor did she adjudicate. Her image accompanied me throughout my wanderings. Tall and slim, erect, with heavy spectacles perched on her nose, always dressed in black or dark blue, with a white collar, unaffected by changing fashion.

In the first *aktion*, at the beginning of February 1943, 12,000 Jews were taken from the ghetto. Almost all were transported to Treblinka. The *aktion* continued for seven days, and when it was over, it became known that two thousand people had been killed inside the ghetto. Amongst these were Jews who had gone into hiding, those who resisted arrest, and those who had committed suicide so as not to be taken alive by the murderers. Amongst the suicides, so I was then told, was Dr. Franca Horowitz. I learnt of the circumstances of her suicide only a few weeks ago from Hadassah

Shprung-Levkowitz, who was my Geography and Nature Study teacher at the Gymnasium. She is now ninety years of age and lives in an old-age home. I discovered her by chance. An historian, preparing her doctoral thesis, came to me to obtain answers to questions which had arisen during her research concerning the Bialystok Ghetto. She was dealing with the relationship between Barash and the underground. During our conversation, she said to me: "But Hadassah claims that you were the only person who could see him at all times, which indicates that he cooperated with the underground". And who is this Hadassah? I asked. "She was your teacher", she replied. "She was Barash's secretary in the ghetto". I went to the old-age home and found Hadassah Shprung, in total command of all her faculties, who could express herself with clarity in perfect Hebrew. After she had been in Auschwitz and the Death March, she had emigrated to Israel and taught in the Ironi 'A' High School in Tel-Aviv. I obtained a statement from her, including the story of Franca Horowitz' suicide. In the *aktion* of February 1943, the Germans promised Barash that they would not touch the owners of work permits issued by the factories in the ghetto. Franca and Hadassah, both senior secretaries in the *Judenrat*, shared a room. They did not possess factory work permits. I was unable to ascertain if they could not obtain these permits or if they did not believe the promises of the Germans. They were supposed to conceal themselves in a hiding-place with other Jews. Franca, who was ill and suffering from a severe cough, claimed: "My cough is liable to give away your hiding-place". Hadassah pleaded with her, but to no avail, so they all descended to the hiding-place and Franca remained in her room. Hadassah, who taught Biology, had previously obtained poison for herself and her friend. Now Franca drank the poison.

The ghetto lived and breathed for another six months after this *aktion*. It was totally destroyed in August 1943. Some 300 young people were at the scene of the battle, between Nowogrodzka St., Chmielna St., and Smolna St. on the outskirts of the ghetto. Very few of the fighters survived this battle. How many Gymnasium students were in those alleys? How many reached the forest? A subject worth researching. What will this study prove? Perhaps we will learn that the substance that is included in one's spiritual accoutrements, which is packed and remains, and is carried on one's back in an invisible knapsack, is what counts. In my advanced maturity I ask: what most impelled me on the path that I took - what the school bequeathed to me, or what I acquired outside its walls? From where did we derive that which weighed on our conscience and demanded action? What is the source of those things which guided us on our long journey into the chasm?

Life goes on, without the six million. Bialystok remains a town minus its sixty thousand Jews. Without too the students of the Gymnasium and its graduates. Babies are born, grow, and go to school. In spite of this, something great, greater than our understanding, has been lost and will never return. It is better to think in relative terms, beyond the sphere of one of the Jewish schools in the Diaspora, however fine and praiseworthy it may have been. Also beyond that time when a Hebrew Gymnasium existed.

Reunions



Graduates of the Sixth Graduation Year (1931) at a reunion in Haifa in 1956



Graduates of the Sixth Graduation Year (1931) at a reunion in Haifa in 1956



Graduates of the Seventh Graduation Year (1932) at a reunion in Tel-Aviv in 1982



Graduates of the Seventh Graduation Year (1932) at a reunion in Tel-Aviv in 1957

REFLECTIONS AND MEMORIES





Naomi Nof

After completing my studies at the University of Vilna, I did my probationary teaching year at a public high school in which the language of instruction was Polish. I felt frustrated throughout that year, even though I had no problems with discipline in class. The students applied themselves seriously to their studies as they had a goal: the longed-for Matriculation Certificate, the "Matura".

I remember the lesson in which I decided that I "had enough". The subject under discussion was the population of the United States of America. When I talked about the mass immigration of Jews to America from Russia in the eighties after the pogroms, one of the students asked: "Why do we have to know about such things? They will not ask us about the immigration of Jews in the matriculation exams!" I was amazed: "Do you consider yourself a Jew?" I asked. His reply was evasive.

I arrived at the conclusion that I had no wish to continue teaching in this institution, so I decided to apply for a post at the Hebrew Gymnasium as a Nature Study and Geography teacher.

My first task was to learn Hebrew. Fourteen years previously I had learnt a little Hebrew at Shimon Ravidowitz's "Young Zion" courses, but had already forgotten most of what I had learnt. I asked Moshe Zabludowski to teach me. He agreed, on condition that there would be a barter: in exchange for the Hebrew lessons, I would have to teach him the rudiments of Natural Science.

Zabludowski not only taught me Hebrew, but also his pedagogic approach. He said to me: "In the classroom, the teacher is put through a merciless test, and dozens of pairs of eyes lie in wait for him, ready to expose his weaknesses. The teacher's success depends on his appearance, voice, knowledge, clarity of thought, ability to explain, and also his resourcefulness and intelligence".

In my classes, I endeavoured to dwell on questions which I found to be interesting. I remembered the boredom which my Geography lessons caused me in the Polish Gymnasium in which I studied: For instance, the teacher made us learn by heart how many head of cattle and pig farmers reared in our country. I conducted the lessons in the form of discussions. At first, the students regarded my method with some reservations, but in the course of time, they came to revise their opinion. Some of my class discussions are indelibly etched in my memory. On one occasion, students, who were members of "*Hashomer Hatzair*", claimed that the

Gymnasium contributed very little to preparing them for emigration to *Eretz*. After this discussion, I wrote in my diary: "They will undoubtedly do more than I in building the Land".

Four months after starting work at the Gymnasium, I wrote in my diary: "I feel that my students take my lessons seriously and find them interesting. Who would have thought that this would happen? I am a teacher in the Hebrew Gymnasium and have been teaching Nature Study and Geography in Hebrew for four months. I feel very privileged".

The five years that I worked at the Gymnasium were for me a period of pedagogic experience, and the time during which my national and social views took shape. In the summer of 1935, I emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*.



Frieda Polatsek (Friedman)

I taught Polish in the lower classes from 1929 until 1940. I remember the day when I arrived at the Hebrew Gymnasium from the Polish Teachers Training College in Warsaw. I was greatly impressed by the large schoolyard, the fine building, the stair carpet held with polished copper rods, the carpets laid in the long corridors, the sports hall, the workshops and the laboratories.

I was also impressed with the cafeteria which, in the long break, supplied students and teachers with hot drinks in winter and cold in summer, and the cloakrooms in which each student had a locker to enable him to exchange his clothes for the school uniform and shoes (slippers) so as not to spoil the carpets.

In addition to normal working hours, we would have a rota. Wherever there were students, there would also be a teacher to supervise them: in the schoolyard, the ice-skating rink, the club, and in the dining room which supplied hot meals to the many students who came to Bialystok from the provinces in order to study at the Gymnasium.

Our Gymnasium was famous in the city, setting an example for other educational institutions, and the School Board recruited first-class teachers, some local and some from outside, from all the Polish universities. I also remember the Polish inspectors, who regarded the Gymnasium with envy and resentment. They had no choice but to recognize the achievements of our students, but would add a reservation to this acknowledgement: "What will come of this? You are preparing them for emigration!" And indeed, one can find Bialystok Hebrew

Gymnasium students amongst the builders of our State, members of kibbutzim, doctors, educators, and political activists in Israel.

Here is a story which illustrates the vicissitudes of fate. At the inauguration of the Gymnasium, one of those conveying greetings said: This house - whose inauguration you are celebrating - is fine and splendid, it is tall, a parapet should be built on the roof to prevent someone falling from it, as it is written: "Then thou shalt make a parapet for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thy house, if any man fall from thence" (Deuteronomy 22, 8). At the time, I thought that it was an amusing play on words (in Hebrew) and laughed. But in 1940, when I was dismissed from the Gymnasium and exiled to Siberia with my two small daughters, I remembered these words, and they had a new significance for me.

A Visit to Bialystok After 50 Years

(This is an abridged version of the essay describing his visit to Bialystok in 1987. The full version appeared in the original Hebrew book).



Prof. Moshe Mishkinski
(Eleventh Graduation Class)

My visit to Bialystok took place 50 years after I left and emigrated to *Eretz* - a short while after graduating from our Gymnasium. I was in Bialystok for a continuous period of two years only, but was always attached to it from the very time that I was born there and onwards. This was thanks to my extended family which lived in the city for five generations, and first and foremost, my Grandfather and Grandmother, their descendants and relatives - from the families Fayans, Kaplan, Halperin, and Shapira. When I visited the city and its environs (especially Knishin, the town of my youth), I was pervaded with that same ambivalent feeling which almost certainly comes upon those who left the city, albeit each in his own way, when they return for a visit. I felt this too, perhaps even more strongly, when I came to the schoolyard of our old Gymnasium, and along the whole length of Senkiewitz Street, which was the main thoroughfare of my Bialystok experiences in those days. I was beset by a dull feeling which almost cut me off from reality which, quite frequently, would not let go of me even after I left Poland. Fifty years as if it were yesterday - and what a change!

I was asked, some time later, to summarize my impressions and experiences in Bialystok. I tried to illustrate them with a story of one episode. During my visit, I met two Jews from the local community. I asked them: How many Jews survived in Bialystok? One of them whispered: "Seven", and the other - "Nine". These figures came as no great surprise, yet they left me completely shocked and speechless. Why? - It goes without saying.

The city of Bialystok, that is to say, the Bialystok Jewish Community, in its composition, was recognized and famous for being a somewhat relatively new phenomenon in the old Poland before partition. At the end of the 18th Century - and for a while after this - it was quite small both in size and quality, and its description "near Tiktin" did not merely reflect its geographical location. Its rapid, not to say stormy, development, placed it within

another circle of definitions. The Hebrew Gymnasium, the central memory of our common experiences, was one of the outstanding expressions of the cumulative historical legacy of the city's Jewish inhabitants.

The part the Jews played in the development of the textile industry is well-known. In Bialystok, as in Lodz, there arose a diverse strata of Jewish entrepreneurs and employers. At one and the same time, a Jewish proletariat sprang up, and it was no coincidence that Bialystok occupied a special place in the formative stages of the Jewish Workers Party. In time, Lodz also took on this role.

Bialystok had, exceptionally, an overall Jewish majority in a heterogenous population: This was the case up until the First World War, after which it had a relative majority. This was a quantitative phenomenon of great significance, and also had a special influence on preserving Jewish character in the reality, with many contradictions, of pluralistic differentiation within the Community.

There is no present without the past, but the past can exist - only if it has a future ahead of it.

Before the Second World War, the number of ex-Bialystok Jews living abroad was no less, and perhaps even exceeded, those in the city itself. Bialystokers throughout the world were distinguished by a loyalty to the memory of their city. There was no more intricate a network of "*Landsmannschaft*" than that of the Bialystokers. Nothing could compare with the number of special periodicals published by the ex-Bialystoker organizations, and this over a period of many years. The "*Bialystoker Stimme*" in New York, by the way, is the oldest of these.

Today, the question of the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in Poland is on the agenda. I had the opportunity to look into this during my visit to Bialystok. I found a concise and accurate expression concerning this subject in an article describing the present situation which appeared in the local paper "Courier Podlaski" under the strident headline: "Dreadful" ("*Zogroza*").

The ex-Bialystoker organizations - who are making an effort in this direction - are of course doing some good. But it appears to me that from the viewpoint of aspiring to immortalize the Jewish community in Bialystok, there are some other aspects which are no less, and maybe even more important. We must see to the recording on film of the many periodicals which appeared in Bialystok, or were published by the Bialystoker associations wherever they were. Secondly, systematic and arduous work is required to discover and collect relevant documents of all types for the purpose of publishing original volumes of source material relating to the city and its schools. Whilst books about Bialystok's past exist, we still have a long way to go in this field.



Dr. Yeshayahu Ostridan

My Teachers

An excerpt from the novel "When the Wind Comes" from the chapter "Bialystok Elite"
Volume Five - the Saga "Methuselah".

Reuven and I in one class.

We entered together. We sat on one bench for only a quarter of an hour. The teacher of Scripture, our class teacher, checks the names, looking for a long moment at the new faces. A nod of the head to the Bialystokers, notes the provincials, looks at us for the same long moment.

"From Pshedbuz, the two of you?"

Our "Yes" was orchestrated, as if spoken by one mouth. The class chuckled derisively. The Scripture teacher smiled.

"What comradeship".

We absorbed the barb and were not insulted. We even received it with love. We smiled with him - and he separated us.

I remained in my place, and Reuven Shitz moved

house to the front row. True, he was shorter than I. It may be that for some reason the teacher wanted him to be near, to observe him at close quarters.

The lesson got under way.

"The Bible and an exercise book will suffice", said the teacher, as if reading a verse from the Book of Books. My ear was receptive to this unique tone. I found it pleasant. No time wasted. A succinct announcement, free of explanations and questions. An absolutely short sentence and already everything is spread out before us as if on the palm of the hand, for an entire year, also the following years, including the eighth class.

The words flow easily, with slight emphasis but with prolonged intervals, as if the teacher was thinking for a moment about the problems.

"Did you understand?" He touched him lightly on the shoulder. "Name?".

"Reuven, Reuven Shitz".

"Reuven will do".

The class smiled. The teacher, serious, fixes probing eyes on him.

"And so?"

For some reason, I am shaking, as if I am the one being examined. I crane my neck, see the back of his neck, a third of my friend's profile. He was quick on the uptake, clever, with a witty tongue.

"May I read the passage again?" And his eyes are fixed on those of the teacher as if they were old adversaries.

"Weren't you listening to what I read?" the teacher inquired teasingly, with a hint of surprise.

"Its my first day at the Gymnasium, the first hour, in a new atmosphere", replied Reuven, as if missing the point, but his voice was calm, the tone of his reply sincere.

"What has all that got to do with listening?" The teacher asked, and the tone of his voice argued as between equals, and he added: "Its the first day here for all of us, the first lesson, in the atmosphere of a higher class".

The girls and boys dissolve with pleasure, most intrigued. Neither of them relaxed his gaze from the other. Reuven did not hesitate for a second.

"I listened to the teacher's reading, but I did not imagine that I in particular, the new boy in the class, would be the first, during the first hour, to be tested for comprehension".

The class is mirthful, keyed up, amused. The teacher is taken aback, he raises an eyebrow. Clever Reuven there and then takes command of the situation.

"I therefore ask the teacher to permit me to read it once more for myself".

The teacher raises his head, breaking off eye contact, sensing the increasing tension and amusement in the class.

"If that is the case, I accede to your request. Read it aloud so that the class can also hear the passage again".

Not bad, I thought. The teacher is a crafty one. He has extricated himself from the predicament. Reuven read with correct intonation, fluently, clearly. He satisfied the teacher. But the class was still tensely expectant.

"Did you understand what its about?" asked the teacher.

"Of course", said Reuven, and lit a red light in the class. The hush and the excitement simultaneously registered like a common shock. The teacher's face betrayed no sign of tension, no anger, his features were a mask.

"Explain why Nathan the Prophet used the phrase 'the poor man's lamb'. What did he mean?"

Reuven set forth without a trace of hesitation. The class rejoiced. The girls were in commotion. Twisting on their benches to the rear, to the sides, their faces flushed. Instantly, all eyes were fixed on the teacher and his pupil. For a long moment the teacher considered the matter, closed his Bible, inserting a finger to keep his place at the page in question, clasped his palms on his protruding stomach on which the Bible rested. It was obvious that he was trying to play for time.

"Not only did you listen well, but your answer was admirable, thorough, comprehensive. I am pleased to tell the class that we have started the new school year on the right foot".

He opened his Bible again, waited for a moment for the class to calm down from the murmuring which still rippled from end to end, and continued the lesson in a monotonous tone, reading and explaining.

The bell. The teacher had hardly crossed the threshold when the girls surrounded Reuven. He sat in his place, looked at their faces, absorbed their praise, lowering his eyes from time to time.

"You're a jolly good sport", said one girl, and their eyes met and lingered.

He got up and came over to me.

"The name Pshedbuz has become famous", I said to Reuven.

We got to know many teachers on our first day. The amazing thing was the hour of Latin in precise Hebrew. The Latin was as obscure as the Hebrew was clear. The portly teacher, with a full, round face, moustached, a dense, unruly quiff of hair, he either didn't comb his hair each morning or the comb couldn't cope with it. He was a sort of inferior copy of the poet Tchernichovski who had once visited the Gymnasium, and that only when he was sitting at his desk on the podium. He always sat. He never risked coming down and displaying his short stature and pot belly before us. He did not wander between the desks, but with blinking eyes tried to check until the last row, whose eyes were in the book, who was wasting time, and he would look at him once, twice, and make a note in his little book. We knew that he had a personal notebook which he kept with him, but we never succeeded in peeping into it, even when we stood at the blackboard, which was very seldom. He and us, tied to our places, and Latin hanging over our heads like a brandished sword. He never succeeded in imposing his authority on the class. The noise did not stop for an instant during the whole course of the lesson. He would enter the classroom like a man prepared for hard labour, swaying on his short legs like a barrel, always trying to skip onto the podium and never quite succeeding, dragging his left leg like an unnecessary addition, and the barrel alighting on the waiting chair, ready for the disasters of the lesson.

He did not treat us unfairly, but demanded that we understand Ovid, and somehow things proceeded wearily, helped by fluent Hebrew to explain the obscurities of the Latin, with difficulty in faltering Latin trying to thread a Hebrew sentence which grated on the ears, in spite of trying to be clever with notes slipped between the pages, fragmentary lines written in ink on the cupped palm of a hand, torn off sheets of paper on the back of the person in front, helpful whispers from one's neighbour, if a miracle should occur and he knew the meaning of a word, or misinformed one in spite of his good intentions to help.

Reuven was disgusted with Latin, but never sought a reason to clash with the teacher. He did try once - and once bitten twice shy. The teacher did not argue with him at all, did not rise to the challenge. After reading three or four stuttering lines, he made a mistake, cleared his throat, and tried to pretend innocence, but the teacher pays no attention to him, urges him to continue reading, to translate, to accurately conjugate the actual verb which he was trying to avoid.

Once, he fixed a dumfounded look on the teacher.

"This is not the language of human beings".

The teacher dismissed his statement as if swatting at a persistent fly on his face, again, and again.

"It is the language of Romans. They built an empire, wrote immortal works in this language, at any rate, they were human beings like yourself - continue".

He never allowed anyone to stop reading. He always demanded that each student read and explain, however lamely and hesitantly, to the end. From time to time he liked to hear an oral declamation, and his face would light up at the fluent Latin in the mouths of the boys and girls. Here, there were many who jumped at the chance. He also distributed marks for declamation. I was amongst the stutterers, but somehow managed to declaim, I knew something, a little here and a little there, a sudden inspiration, and I extracted my "Pass" by the end of the school year, improving my knowledge in the upper classes from the very learning by rote, the declamation, the translation, conjugation of verbs, and also a little creative intelligence.

We were provided with a special experience by the History teacher, who was half-ginger, half-fair. Stern featured, always standing when he taught. Lectured more than explained, but in fact his lecture was a good explanation, at any rate clear, and adequate. Many of us were riveted by him. By the way, History was always one of my excellent subjects. I'll be dammed if I can explain to you what his strength was in controlling the class. True, we were afraid of him, but we also liked his method of teaching. He didn't ask questions, didn't examine us for weeks on end, but from time to time would devote a lesson to testing our knowledge. In particular, he demanded short, precise answers from us ("no literature, explain to the point, this is science"). He would enter the classroom, and silence would reign. He would stand for a moment, looking at us. He did not strike a pose. He would stand in front of the desk and lecture on the next chapter of history as if the book was in front of him, hanging transparently somewhere in the air, and he was reading from it slowly, with great emphasis, leaning on hands spread behind him on the desk, from time

to time waving a hand as if he wished to indicate a nearby battlefield, to acquaint us with a personality by name, recounting their history, explaining their policy. And sometimes, a student would open his history book to follow what was written, as if to verify what the teacher was saying from within its pages. Then, during the flow of his speech, as if the words were included in his lecture:

"Please, close the book. Don't check up on me. What I am lecturing about is not included in the book. At home you can complete your knowledge if you listen to what I am saying. That is how a book should be used".

There and then, he would continue with his lecture, as if the sentences which he had introduced did not bother him at all, his words proceeding with slow solemnity, with a caressing, calming flow. Oh yes, I forgot to mention that from time to time he would wave his hand to chase away a real or imaginary fly. He did this with such exaggerated slowness, that even if a flying tortoise was there, it would have had enough time to escape without injury. But the calm movement of his hand, almost solemn, was directed at the fly. "You do not belong here, please, the window is open, be so good as to fly away". We were convinced that he could see the real or imaginary fly, and he did not interrupt his relaxed, clear lecture of flowing words for even an instant. He was a character. He never spoke to us. If a student bothered him by asking something, he would look at him directly, and always give his one and only reply.

"Consult the book".

After several similar attempts, we stopped asking him. As he had entered, so he left, and the silence in the classroom accompanied him to the doorway.

The Math teacher was a personality. We knew that he was a candidate to inherit the post of the principal in another year or two. Well-built, almost bald on top, with a tranquil expression, explaining, explaining again, asking if the class understood the equations, coming to the aid of a student by the blackboard, dancing around him, correcting, taking the chalk from him - there were many chalks on the blackboard shelf, but he would take the student's in particular, removing it from his hand - adding what was missing in the solution, and when the student stepped down, would send him on his way with a smiling face as if he had passed the test with honour. The grades were a fraction above our feeble, imperfect level of knowledge, but he was most generous with students who knew their math.

However, the moment that the bell rang, he would stop at the height of his explanation, cut himself off from the class, stop seeing it, search amongst his papers for a lengthy moment, arrange them, stuff them into his overflowing bag, and paying no attention to our chatter, calls to one another, and loud conversation, would disappear in the midst of the tumult without our actually noticing when he left.

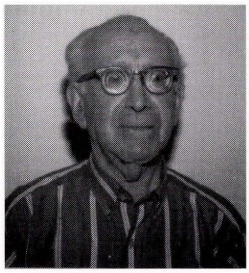
Closest of all to us was the gym teacher. He looked younger than his years, smiling, pleased with everything, from those crowding around him, from himself, from every attempt, however unsuccessful. He always offered consolation:

"You are sure to improve your performance the next time".

He was the first to demonstrate each event, high jump, long jump, throwing the javelin, the discus, and the hundred, eight hundred, and fifteen hundred metre races. Always as one of us, an adult friend, fraternizing with everyone, making no distinction between those who excelled and those who trailed behind, offering encouragement, laughing with everyone at a clumsy performance, but the first to help the failure to get up and stand on his feet, dusting down his shirt - in short, a friend and a comrade. Always urging the girls not to allow the boys to get the better of them, but to compete with them as equals. And indeed several of them produced excellent results. Every lesson with him was a joyful occasion, an opportunity to let oneself go, a call to freedom for muscles, imprisoned limbs, pinned to desks, books, exercise books, blackboard. Subsequently, we were told that he was amongst the fighters in the ghetto, a partizan who succeeded in destroying Nazis, organized escapes. He once visited Israel, if information supplied by past students is correct.

Dr. Moshe Bayliss (Bialystotzki)

U.S.A. (Fourth Graduation Class)



Hebrew Education in Poland Between the Two World Wars

After the first Russian Revolution (in March 1917), which brought equal civil rights to the Jews of Russia, the struggle between the Jewish political parties over plans for Jewish education increased, and the Moscow Zionists founded the *Tarbut* Organisation. The Seventh Russian Zionist Congress recognized *Tarbut* as an instrument for the work of the Zionist *Histadrut* in the field of education and culture. Thus, for a very brief period in Russia, the dream of Ahad-Ha'Am was fulfilled: the founding of a cultural and educational "organization" by the *Histadrut*; However the October Revolution in 1917 put an end to the national aspirations of Russian Jewry. In the discussions on the peace treaties in Versailles at the end of the First World War, the Jews of Eastern Europe demanded cultural autonomy and recognition of Jews as a national minority. And indeed, in the peace treaty between Poland and Germany, there was a clause which required Poland to secure the interests of her citizens belonging to "a racial, linguistic or religious minority". Under the pressure of the Polish representatives and delegations from the Great Powers, and because of a rift in the American Jewish delegation, the word "national" was changed to "racial". The Polish Constitution of 1921 theoretically granted the Jews the rights of citizens of a national (racial?) minority. In practice however, the Polish Government opened, at its own expense, elementary schools for the national territorial minorities (Ukrainians, Germans, and Byeloruss) where the teaching languages were their national tongues, but set up neither Hebrew schools nor Yiddish schools. It hardly supported the Hebrew schools at all, and yet despite this pursued them with all sorts of pretexts. The legal-judicial status of the Hebrew gymnasiums was particularly difficult. The authorities refused to grant them public rights, and their graduates could not go on to study at Polish universities.

As the result of economic pressures, many parents were forced to send their children to the state schools in order to avoid paying school fees. The government set up special elementary schools for the Children of Israel, whose teaching language was Polish. They differed from the other state schools only in that they were closed on Sabbaths and festivals, and in the "Jewish Religion" that was taught twice a week. The great majority of Jewish youth in Poland received a non-national education.

In spite of the legal-judicial obstacles and financial difficulties, a network of National-Zionist schools arose in Poland, the *Tarbut* network. In 1922, the year when it was organized nationally, there were 227

elementary schools in the network, and also kindergartens and several high schools. In 1934-1935, the number of children studying in all the *Tarbut* institutions in Poland reached 44,780. The First National Congress of *Tarbut* (1922) outlined the national and educational aims of the Organisation. Its resolutions state that the *Tarbut* Organisation aspires "to establish the Hebrew language in education, culture, and in all walks of life".

The National Congress which was held in 1927 decided that the perfect Hebrew school which provides its students with general human values in the Hebrew language is the only school of the Zionist Movement. Elchanan Endelman wrote:

Tarbut was intended to educate a new type of Jew who was free of his Diaspora complexes, who aspired to renew his life in the land of his fathers based on human and national foundations, a love of his fellow man, nature, tilling the soil and work on the one hand, and admiration for original Hebrew culture with a pioneering spirit on the other. All this represented the guidelines of the spiritual-ethical image of *Tarbut* education".

In the thirties, when the waves of anti-Semitism and reaction intensified in Eastern Europe, the tendency of governments to discriminate against Hebrew education increased, and the Polish authorities employed oppressive means against *Tarbut* institutions and tried to establish the Polish language in the education programme of the Hebrew schools. The educational authorities demanded that the Hebrew gymnasiums conduct lessons in Polish, especially the subjects of History and Geography. Some *Tarbut* gymnasiums yielded to this pressure and taught many subjects in Polish. The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium was the only one in the whole of Poland in which the teaching of History and Geography continued in Hebrew. "The Gymnasium did not surrender, and justified its name - the Hebrew Gymnasium", said David Rakowitzki, its last principal, at the Gymnasium graduates reunion in Tel-Aviv.

Dr. Ephraim Wapinski



It was not easy for my parents to grant my wish and send me from the town of my birth, Grajewo, to Bialystok, a distance of two hours journey by train, and the financial burden too was quite heavy. And yet in 1923, two days after the Festival of *Shavuot* (Pentecost), my father brought me to Bialystok. The Gymnasium office referred me to one of the students in the Sixth Class to help me prepare for the

entrance exam. After two months of study with Eliezer Remen, I returned home, a certificate of admission to the Gymnasium in my hand, and a Gymnasium cap on my head. There was no end to my joy, and that of my parents.

At the end of my first year of studies, I received a certificate in which all the grades were "Very Good" and "Good", and also a prize, "*Vehaya Heakov Lemishor*" ("And the Rugged Shall be Made Level") by S. Y. Agnon, with the inscription "Presented to Class 3B student, Wapinski Ephraim, for excellence in studies during the year 5682-3. Teacher H. L. Dreher, Principal Dr. David Rozenman. Bialystok, 11 *Tammuz* 5683". To this very day, I cherish this book as if it were a precious stone.

In the following years too, I was a very good student in humanistic studies, and so I was well-liked by Hebrew teacher Bernholtz and the Principal, Latin teacher David Braver. Teacher Pinchas Shiffman (Ben-Sira) used to invite me to read my essays in front of the class. On the other hand, I was no good at mathematics. In Class 4, at the end of the first term, when teacher Rakowitzki read out the students grades, he said to me in his bass voice: "What happened to you, Wapinski? Last year you received a 'Good' in mathematics, why have you dropped to 'Pass'?" I tried to be clever and said: "It was the teacher who gave me the grade and so the teacher is to blame", and he replied, matter-of-factly, "No, it is up to you to improve your grade".

When I was in Class 4, Nachum Sokolov, the Head of the Executive of the Zionist Organisation, was a guest in Bialystok. The whole of Bialystok "went wild" for the visit of the "King of the Jews" (as the Poles called Sokolov). The guest visited the Gymnasium of course, and entered our classroom during the Scripture lesson given by teacher "Moshele" Zabludowski. I recall that I was able to answer a question that Sokolov put to the class because, as usual, the previous day I had read the commentary by S. L. Gordon, and Sokolov kissed me on the forehead.

In the middle of Class 7, I decided to "skip" a class and transfer to Class 8 in the *Tarbut* Gymnasium at Vilna. When I informed Hebrew Literature teacher Orinowski (Ben-Or) of my intention, he wrung his hands and cried: "Wapinski, you're leaving us? How could you do a thing like this?"

I left Bialystok in order to "gain" a year and completed Class 8 at the Vilna Gymnasium, which was also a good one and was dear to me, but the Gymnasium of which I was most proud and for which my heart feels love and longing until this very day, is the **Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium**.

Yaacov Samid

(Fourth Graduation Class)



My Study Years

During the period of my studies at the Gymnasium, the store-house of stimulation which formed my character and values was filled. I entered the Gymnasium in 1921, two years after it was founded. During my eight years of study, I changed three buildings and many teachers. In the early years there was a large turnover of teachers, because it was not easy to find good ones with suitable knowledge and teaching skills. I remember the English teacher who taught Class 2. He was a businessman who had a good command of the English language, but had no aptitude for teaching. During the lessons, he used to walk between the desks muttering to himself doing business calculations... After some years, the staff stabilized, the good teachers stayed on at the institution, and the others left.

In the lower classes I was an average student, but my powers of absorption improved in the higher classes. There are those who achieve success in one moment: the event when I rose to greatness in the eyes of my friends and the teacher is etched in my memory. In one of the lessons, I succeeded in solving a complicated math problem on the blackboard that all the other top students had difficulty with. From that moment I rose to fame, and continued to rise until I completed my studies at the Gymnasium.

I remember the Math and Physics teacher (who later became the principal of the Gymnasium) - David Rakowitzki (Racavi), who explained the study material well, and was a dedicated teacher. He fled from Poland, from the threat of the Soviet boot, and emigrated to *Eretz* after a difficult journey, where he arrived with nothing. Here, his students received him, and after a while he became the principal of Ironi 'A' High School in Tel-Aviv.

I have favourable memories of Literature teacher Uri Orinowski (Ben-Or) who would become aroused during the lessons and sweep us along with his enthusiasm (he deposited the essays I wrote on Bialik and Mendele Mocher Sfarim in the Gymnasium library). Orinowski did not only teach us to think profoundly, but also to derive pleasure from works of literature. It is true that I trained in engineering, but thanks to his influence, to this day I have a latent tendency to take up the writer's pen.

I also remember A. S. Hershberg, who was superviser for the Hebrew

subjects. When he put a question to me and was satisfied with the answer, he would pat me on the cheek and say: "Well done". Hershberg, historian, researcher, and author, wrote the "Bialystok Notebook" and other studies. He perished in the ghetto in 1943.

For nights on end, over a period of several weeks, my friends and I prepared for the matriculation examinations. This intensive work bore fruit, and I completed the Gymnasium with distinction. I was forced to go abroad in order to continue with my studies, because in that year the Gymnasium still did not possess full state rights. I went to Brno in Czechoslovakia, in order to register at the German High Institute of Technology. The Institute's administration could not understand the nature of my Hebrew matriculation certificate, to which a notarised German translation had been attached. I sent a telegram to Bialystok and received confirmation that the Hebrew Gymnasium was under the authority of the Polish Ministry of Education, and only then were the authorities convinced that I possessed a State Matriculation Certificate... I was exempted from paying tuition fees during the first year thanks to my high grades in the matriculation certificate, and in the second academic year I received a similar exemption as the result of my academic achievements during the first year. Later, attitudes towards Jewish students in the German Institute of Technology changed under the influence of the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany, and I had to pay the full tuition fee (in 1933, the Institute stopped accepting Jewish students from Poland).

In 1934 I completed my studies and returned to Bialystok. I decided to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*. For this I had to obtain exemption from being drafted to the army. It was not difficult (the law required the army to appoint those with higher education to be officers, and the heads of the Polish armed forces were not keen on having Jewish officers), but in spite of this I had to use various means in order to receive the exemption. And then another difficulty was placed before me: the restriction on immigration to *Eretz Yisrael*. The British Mandatory Authorities allocated a small number of certificates (immigration visas to *Eretz*) for the institutions of higher learning. Although I was already a qualified engineer, I sent the diploma which I had received after two years of study at the German Institute to the Board of the Haifa Technion, and asked to be accepted for the third academic year. The Board accepted my application and sent me a certificate. So it was that I emigrated to *Eretz* in 1935. My two brothers, who were students at the Gymnasium, emigrated after me, but the rest of my extended family remained in Bialystok and perished in the ghetto. Blessed be their memory.

Chaim Shafir (Reif)

Ramat Hashofet (Seventh Graduation Class)



A Branch of Eretz Yisrael on Polish Soil

There were approximately twenty thousand Jewish students in Bialystok in my time, and they studied in the Polish State Gymnasium, the private Polish Gymnasium, in the High School founded by the Bund whose teaching language was Yiddish, in religious schools - the new style *Talmud Torah*, and traditional style *Heder* - and in craft schools. Amongst all these educational institutions, the Hebrew Gymnasium was a bastion of cultural and national revival. It included a kindergarten (two years), three preparatory classes, and eight high school classes. Thirteen years of education in all.

All the Zionist youth of the city studied in the Gymnasium, where the classes, some of which were duplicated, were an arena for the struggle between the members of all the Zionist youth movements, and on more than one occasion the arguments escalated into fisticuffs. This was not a strange phenomenon in Bialystok, a city in which all the Jewish political parties (Zionist and anti-Zionist) were active. Members of the parties would organize meetings, draft manifestos and recruit members and supporters, organize lawful and unlawful demonstrations, all this actively and energetically, from within the burning conviction of each group in its own way. The disagreements sometimes took place within a cultural debate, enthusiastic and fair, and sometimes also with fists and broken heads. Only during times of a tidal waves of anti-Semitism did the Jewish public close ranks, and an interesting pact would then be formed between carters, beggars, porters, and members of the youth movements.

In 1932, when our Gymnasium was granted State Rights (after many years of struggle and lobbying), a new "front" was opened in the school. Quite a few members of the pioneer youth movements boycotted the Polish State examinations. I was one of those who joined the boycott. Members of the School Board and the teachers tried to persuade us to change our minds, using carrot and stick tactics, with begging and pressure; there were quite a number of outstanding students amongst us, and the members of the School Board were very keen for them to sit the examinations. The rebels saw themselves as citizens of Eretz Yisrael and claimed: "We will be members of kibbutzim, and if we should later decide to study at university - the conventional Hebrew Final Diploma of the Gymnasium will suffice for us to be accepted at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem".

I belonged to the *Hashomer Hatzair* (The Young Watchman). The nucleus of our group was the "Scout Movement", which had existed in the city for several years. At its peak, our movement had six hundred members from all districts and from all strata of the population in Bialystok. In the Gymnasium, the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement was the most popular. *Betar* held second place on the scale of popularity, and the arguments were heated and many. Apart from these movements, there were students who belonged to the General *Zionists*, *Hashomer Hadati* (The Religious Watchman), and to *Gordonia*.

The scout "clubhouse" was the members second home. Within it they had formative experiences, dreamed their dreams, and acquired knowledge. Friendships were also formed in the "clubhouse", people fell in love, and many couples later married and set up home.

The members of the pioneer youth movements carried out a struggle against the anti-Zionist movement, the *Bund*, and against Jewish communists, and in this struggle the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement was a sort of Zionist shock troop. The struggle against the communists was particularly intense, because the ideas and social justice of the Revolution had caused many groups of members in the "clubhouse" to be in a ferment. The instructors and leaders of the movement fought for the preservation of its Zionist pioneering character. The attitude of the authorities to the movement alternated between hostility and persecution on the one hand, and treating it well yet not wholly trusting it, on the other.

The one and only goal of members of the movement was: *Eretz Yisrael*, and the final and longed for stage was *Aliya* (emigration to *Eretz Yisrael*). The stage before this was *Hachshara* (Preparation) which lasted for one or two years. We all hoped to receive an immigration certificate, and at the beginning of the thirties an additional way presented itself, the *Hapala* (illegal immigration). In order to increase the number of immigrants, the lucky one who had received a certificate would marry one of the members of the movement, the "family" would emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*, and there the marriage would be legally dissolved. The institution of fictitious marriages, which was widespread and accepted, led to several tragedies in the new country. Sometimes, the husband refused to grant his "wife" a legal divorce, or a wife would refuse to part from her "husband", but in most cases the "couples" parted amicably and by consent.

When groups of *Shomrim* departed on the train which would take them from Bialystok to Constanza or Trieste - the ports of embarkation for *Eretz Yisrael* - the railway station was thronged with blue-shirted friends singing Hebrew songs, waving, and calling out: "*Lehitraot! Lehitraot!*" (See you soon! Au revoir!)

The "clubhouse" was a branch of Eretz Yisrael on Polish soil. Thus was it viewed by Jewish leaders in Poland who visited Bialystok, and it was recognized as such by important guests from Eretz Yisrael such as Bialik, Weitzman, and others.

The Holocaust put an end to the continuity of the movements' dreams of fulfilment. Very few members of the movement were saved, only a few individuals here and there from towns and cities. Those who survived, filtered into Israel like brands snatched from the burning fire. Members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* fought on all fronts, and by every means. The peak of their struggle was the uprising in the Bialystok Ghetto.

Dr. Baruch Kaplan

Moscow (Fourteenth Graduation Class)



My Hope

Our Gymnasium had a programme of eleven years of study: three preparatory classes, and eight high school classes. In the late thirties, a twelve-year study programme was introduced: six preparatory classes, four high school classes, and two lyceum classes. My class was the first to receive the "Minor Matriculation Certificate" at the end of Class 6. That was in 1937. We had to be examined in ten subjects in order to receive this certificate. At the head of the examining committee stood a representative of the Polish District Board of Education in Brisk.

It was then that I decided to try and enter a university in the United States; A notary translated the "Minor Matriculation Certificate" into English for me, and translated the word "Gymnasium" as "High School". I sent this document to Columbia University and received a letter in reply: I had been accepted by the university and must send them a deposit of 3000 dollars. I therefore gave up the dream of studying in America and continued to study in the lyceum. I had to decide which stream to choose, science subjects or the humanities. I hesitated, because in the humanities teacher Pnina Berstein taught Latin (we called her Perele) and I enjoyed her lessons, but eventually I decided on science because I was a good student in those subjects. In the "Hundred Days Celebration", the traditional party for Class 8 students, which was held according to tradition one hundred days before the end of the school year, there was great rejoicing, even though we knew that the difficult final exams awaited us.

In 1939, thirty of us students sat for the matriculation examinations. Only twenty-one passed successfully. On one particular day, I had oral examinations in twelve subjects.

I sent my certificate to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with an application to the Faculty of Chemistry, and after receiving a positive reply, sent a payment for two years tuition fees to Jerusalem. I received an immigration certificate, and exemption from military service in the Polish Army, and had already purchased a ticket for the journey, when the war broke out and I remained in Poland.

After the Red Army entered Bialystok, a ten-year study programme was introduced at the Gymnasium, and the language of tuition was changed to Yiddish. My younger sister was then studying in the first prep. class. Parents and students held a meeting and tried to persuade the authorities to permit Hebrew to be retained at the Gymnasium. The attempt, of course, failed.

My friend, Dov Grad (Sinai) wrote a fantasy in the "Le'An" magazine, describing what would happen to each one of us in the future. Grad prophesied that I would be a professor of Chemistry in the Haifa Technion. He made an error of twenty years and thousands of kilometres: In 1979, I was appointed Professor of Analytical Chemistry in Moscow. I completed my first university course in chemistry in 1941, in Lvov, and then enlisted in the Red Army and became a machine-gunner. In 1945 I was wounded, my left leg was amputated, and I was left an invalid. I was released from the army and studied at Moscow University until 1949. I received my Doctorate in 1972. I published many books and I am the Chairman of the Scientific Committee for Analytical Chemistry of the Academy of Sciences in the Soviet Union.

I was very excited to receive the invitation to attend the reunion for Bialystok Gymnasium alumni in Tel-Aviv, and it provided an opportunity for me to tell my grandchildren about my life. In May 1990 I could not come to Israel, but my wife and I managed to come for a visit in October. When we visited Yaacov Samid at his home in Haifa and saw the video recording of the nostalgic reunion that he had organized, we greatly regretted not having attended. I was compensated to a certain extent for the disappointment of this missed opportunity by meeting friends in Israel and seeing the tremendous achievements of the State. I trust and believe that in the near future my family and I will be able to emigrate to Israel.



Daniel Poczebutzki, Lawyer

(Twelfth Graduation Class)

Fascinating Lessons

I have a great yearning, and intense desire, to recall from my memory precious moments from the past.

I studied in the *Tarbut* elementary school in the township of Krinki, but it was natural to continue in the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok. My sister Dina was studying at the Gymnasium and was an outstanding student. In my first steps in Bialystok and the Gymnasium I had my sister to lean on. I spent the evening before the entrance exam with her, together with her friend Moshe Perl, a graduate of the Gymnasium, who later became her husband.

In the examination, I had to write a free essay. I remember the subject that I chose: "The influence of Nature on a person's mood". I wrote approximately thus: In the autumn one's spirit is gloomy, in the spring one is filled with hope. Nature causes changes in a person's mood, and these infuse his life with substance. Excitement and calm, strength and weakness, joy and sadness, hope and despair, all these are influenced by Nature. Is human existence an end in itself, like the existence of Nature, or does man perhaps have a purpose, a mission in life?

I was deeply absorbed in writing, when the invigilating teacher passing between the rows of examinees, stood behind me for a moment, glanced at what I had written, and patted me on the shoulder as a sign of encouragement. It was the gymnastics teacher, Shimon Dattner.

I remember how I listened to Chaim Nachman Bialik's "Scroll of Fire", which Literature teacher H. Chazanowitz read to us. Silence reigned in the classroom. In our mind's eye we saw the wrathful man, singing the song of perdition, of despair and destruction, and the clear-eyed youth, torn between his yearning for love and his longing for the holy fire. When the teacher's voice fell silent, we did not dare to spoil the reverent atmosphere with words. He asked us to write an essay on the "Scroll of Fire" for the next lesson, and we were thankful for this interval. Deep in thought, I walked through the long corridors of the Gymnasium, and went out from the schoolyard into Senkiewitz Street, treading through the snow. Townspeople passed me by, Polish echoed in my ears, but I was lost in another world, with the clear-eyed youth and the wrathful man, in *Eretz Yisrael*. Years have passed, and the clear voice of our teacher still sounds in my ears, and his image stands before me.

I remember a Botany lesson. It was a lesson of love for *Eretz Yisrael*. On the face of it, what do Botany and Zionism have in common? For the Gymnasium teachers and students this connection was quite plain. One can breathe the atmosphere of *Eretz Yisrael* whilst studying Botany. Hadassah Shprung, our class teacher, brought "Blood of the Maccabees" (straw flowers) into the classroom as an example of the *Compositae* family, and told us about the legend associated with the name. This plant sucks the blood of the heroes of Modiin from the earth of *Eretz Yisrael*, which has not clotted or dissipated during these many years, and thus its inflorescence and the straw-like envelope surrounding it are red, and remain so even after it blooms. In *Eretz Yisrael* the "Blood of the Maccabees" blooms during the months April and May in the Sharon, the Judaean Hills, the Shomron, the Carmel, the Gilboa, the Galilee, and Trans-Jordan. A spark of electricity passed through our bodies. In our mind's eye we could see Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah.

As we left the Gymnasium schoolyard, accompanied by the heroic characters of our freedom, we were greeted by huge slogans written along the pavements: "We have, for export, three and a half million Jews!", and "Jews to Palestine!".

And here we were, absorbed in the realities of *Eretz Yisrael*.

In 1946, I stood in the schoolyard in front of the building which had once been the Hebrew Gymnasium. The outside wall of the building remained as it was, and it was still possible to distinguish some of the letters of the Gymnasium's name. No more the conversations between students and teachers in the Hebrew tongue, no more the longings of young people to build their lives in *Eretz Yisrael*. The grim reaper had passed over all of these.



Alexander Ekar (Sitsh)

(Third Graduation Class)

I have fond memories of Teacher Bernholtz, who taught us in Class 3, and instilled in us a love of Hebrew Literature. It is true that he was dissatisfied with our achievements, as only a few of us had come to the Gymnasium from the *Heder* and possessed a good knowledge of Hebrew. The mother tongue of most of the students in the class was Russian or Polish, and we made many spelling and grammatical mistakes in our written essays. And so it was that the teacher would give us a "Pass", and there were very few who succeeded in receiving from him the grade "Quite Good". I also have fond memories of the two gifted teachers we had in Class 4: Dr. Zineman - who taught History, and Pinchas Shiffman (Ben-Sira) - who taught Literature. Neither confined themselves to the syllabus, and they enriched our thoughts and knowledge. Shiffman, author of the textbook "*Bikkurim*" (First Fruits), instilled in us the desire to write. He made us write a weekly essay on a book which we had read, and would then discuss each essay with us individually, and correct mistakes in writing and faults in style.

In 1923, when I was in Class 3, the National Poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik, visited our school. The *Tarbut* Organisation invited him to Poland for his fiftieth birthday, and he visited all the schools in the network. We, and the students in our parallel class, more than one hundred boys and girls, prepared an original reception for the visitor. Each one of us learnt a poem by heart and declaimed it in his presence. We more or less covered all his poems from "*El Hatzipor*" to "*Hamatmid*". I read "*Im Yesh et Nafshecha Ladaat*". Bialik enjoyed the reception, talked to us, and expressed an interest in our command of Hebrew.

Not only Hebrew studies inculcated in us an awareness of Zionism. This awareness also crystallized in the Polish History and Literature lessons. And what the school left out, was completed by the youth movement, which educated towards pioneering "fulfilment" in *Eretz Yisrael*. We were all members of Zionist youth movements. I belonged to the *Trumpeldor* organization which later merged with *Hashomer Hatzair*.

Gedalyahu Marmor

(Fourth Graduation Class)



I completed my studies at the Hebrew Gymnasium in 1929. Faithful to the pioneer-Zionist values that I received from my teachers and the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement, I spent a year at a training farm in order to emigrate to *Eretz* - but the Mandatory Government halted immigration at that time (after the "disturbances" of 1929) and I did not receive the longed-for immigration certificate. For lack of an alternative, I went to France and studied Chemistry at the University of Nancy. There I married, and later joined the army and the artillery corps. When the Germans invaded France, I was taken prisoner. At the end of the war, I was released from the prisoner of war camp, and only then, in 1948, when the State of Israel was founded, did I succeed in emigrating.

Several teachers left their mark in a hidden corner of my mind: Hebrew Literature teacher Orinowski (Ben-Or), and Math and Physics teacher David Rakowitzki. The latter an exemplary teacher, for whom teaching was not a profession in order to earn a living, but a mission, a holy calling. He never stinted to give of his time and his strength to us, and would even invite us to his house after school to demonstrate experiments in Physics.

During the 1950-1951 school year, I taught Chemistry at the High School in Kiryat Haim. I had not studied previously at a Teachers Training College but I remembered Rakowitzki's teaching method, and it served as a shining example for me. I learnt from him that it is not enough for a teacher to master the syllabus; he must continue studying without pause, and he must also know how to awaken a love for learning in his students.

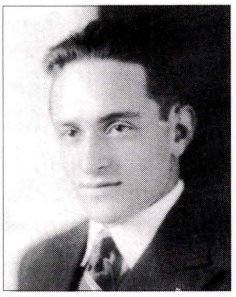
I worked hard and saw the fruits of my labour. In due course, I was appointed to be a Member of the Chemistry Committee at the Ministry of Education, an Examiner for the matriculation examinations, and I trained chemistry students who had decided to become teachers.

One day, I visited the Ironi 'A' High School in Tel-Aviv in order to examine students in laboratory experiments, and there a surprise was waiting for me: the school principal was my teacher David Racavi, previously Rakowitzki. We were both overjoyed to see each other, and related everything that had happened to us during the war and subsequently.

It is a pity that everyday responsibilities prevented us from meeting again. The memory of my teacher and mentor remains in my heart.

Shlomo Patt

(Sixth Graduation Class)



An Incident

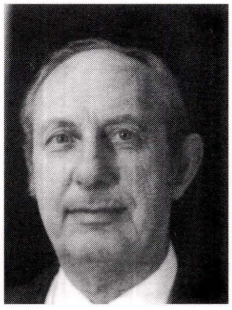
I want to recount an event that occurred in 1930 - during the school holidays between Classes 7 and 8. My cousin, Yaacov Patt, had visited *Eretz Yisrael* and tried to join the education system in the *Yishuv* (Jewish Community in Palestine). He entered into negotiations with the National Committee with the aim of becoming Head of the *Yishuv* Education Department, and because these negotiations failed, he became a *Bundist* and began to slander Zionism and the *Yishuv*. I found out that this cousin was due to give a lecture at a well-attended gathering in the theatre auditorium in Bialystok, and I decided to break up the meeting. I went to the Gymnasium, asked caretaker Jan Raphel for the key to the chemical laboratory, "to make an experiment", and took home from the laboratory a bottle of sulphuric acid and blue vitriol (copper sulphate) in a bag. I concealed scales and weights in the long grass beneath the laboratory window, so as to take them home in the evening under cover of darkness. However, fortune did not shine upon me, the caretaker's children were playing ball, the ball rolled into the grass and landed on the scales. The caretaker, realising that I had deceived him, informed the Gymnasium Secretary. He sent the caretaker to me with an order to report to him, but I did not go to his house. I decided not to return to the Gymnasium, but did not give up the idea of disrupting the meeting. I weighed the chemicals in Nashalski's pastry shop, bought bottles with stoppers at the Pharmacy, and organized ten friends for the undertaking. I made use of knowledge acquired during teacher Rakowitzki's chemistry lessons, prepared some H_2S compound, which smells like bad eggs, and filled the bottles with it. My friends and I slipped into the meeting and each of us surreptitiously hung a bottle under his neighbour's seat. I gave a sign, and the lads opened the stoppers and cried: "What a stink!". Thus I succeeded in making my cousin's name stink, and the meeting broke up in confusion.

When the new term started, I stayed at home; I realized that the chances of continuing with my studies were virtually nil. And it was here that the friendly attitude of Principal Zvi Zemel towards his students found expression. He sent for me, but I did not comply. I thought: In any case all is lost. One day, as I was sitting in my parents' shop, I suddenly saw the Principal at the entrance, and immediately took to my heels and ran. The Principal remained calm, and explained to my parents that he was going to try and convince me to return to the Gymnasium. With their agreement, he came to our house the following day, and I had no means of retreat. Smiling broadly, the Principal offered me his hand in greeting, and said: "Patt, we have to talk. Come, let's go to the woods, no one will

interrupt us there". In the woods Zemel recalled various memories and told me about some of his failures during his youth, and summarized: "Everyone fails sometimes, and a teacher's job is to help his students. Would it not be a shame for you to spoil your future on account of a minor incident? Secretary Moshe Goldberg and Teacher Rakowitzki agree with me. You must not sabotage your future. Return to school, be brave, be strong". I did as he said. It was not an easy year, as it is well known that "the very cap of the thief blazons his guilt". I had learnt my lesson, and from that moment on, was able to resist every temptation.

Mordechai Szczupak

(Sixth Graduation Class)



From the Bialystok Gymnasium to the Haifa Technion

In 1931, I completed my studies at the Gymnasium. There was no chance of our being accepted at a Polish university, as although our Gymnasium was recognized as being an institution of high standard, it did not have State Rights. In 1932, I decided to study engineering. Until then, many Gymnasium graduates had studied in Czechoslovakia - at Prague and Brno Universities - but in that year, these institutions refused to accept Jews from Poland because of the activities of large numbers of Jewish students in the Communist Party, which was then illegal in Czechoslovakia. In the Warsaw daily "*Haint*", I read that there was an engineering college, the Technion, in Haifa. We were very pleased because, thanks to the education we had received at the Gymnasium, we felt attracted to *Eretz Yisrael*. My friends and I wrote to the Technion Administration, and after a short while received a warm, polite letter from Secretary Krupnik, accompanied by prospectuses containing wonderful photographs of the lecture halls and laboratories. At that time, there were only three faculties at the Technion: Building, Architecture, and Engineering (Mechanical and Electrical).

We were the first organized group from abroad which had come to study at the Technion, and we were received hospitably. During the first year, our parents sent us money for living expenses, but later the transfer of money abroad from Poland was forbidden, and we were forced to work for our keep during the whole period of our studies.

We felt "at home" at the Technion. Our perfect command of Hebrew quickly helped us to integrate socially and with studies. We related our experiences in letters which we sent to our parents and to friends who had remained in Bialystok, and many of the latter followed in our pioneering footsteps by emigrating to *Eretz* and studying at the Technion and the Hebrew University. The list of Gymnasium graduates who are active in the fields of building, industry, education, and politics in Israel, is long.

Shifra Gotlieb (Atlasowitz)

(Eleventh Graduation Class)



Encounters

I studied at the Gymnasium for twelve years, and graduated in 1936. We spoke Hebrew at home, and I was a member of the *Betar* youth movement.

When the Russians captured Bialystok, all the Hebrew educational institutions became Yiddish schools overnight - at the instigation of the members of the *Bund*, who adapted themselves to the new regime according to the dictum, "the law of the land is binding and must be obeyed". People of means and Zionist activists were exiled to Russia.

The Soviet authorities announced that those exiles who would be prepared to sign a declaration saying that they had come to Russia of their own free will, would receive Russian citizenship. We were afraid to sign such a declaration, lest we should lose our right to return home after the war. Those who refused to sign were arrested. One of those arrested was a Gymnasium student by the name of Sioma Gotlieb. At that time, I was looking after a baby and a sick mother, but I gave Sioma, who was languishing in prison, my daily ration of 400 grams of mouldy bread. I had to sell my father's suit and fur coat in order to buy food. Sioma is now living in Melbourne, Australia.

After the war, I returned to the ruins of Bialystok, but found no place to stay. We survivors crowded together in the old poor-house. Sheets and blankets, draped on ropes, marked out the living space for each family. The Poles greeted the returning Jews with cries: "What, Hitler didn't finish you off? So many Jews remain?" In the office of the Jewish Community which had been set up with the aid of the Joint Distribution Committee and ex-Bialystokers in the United States, I met the wife of Polish History teacher Chaim Sheffer, who told me with bitter tears how her husband and only son had perished.

Dr. Shimon Dattner, the Gym teacher, was one of those active in the Jewish Community Council. Because of me, he quarrelled with another council member who was of the opinion that I was not entitled to assistance. Dattner placed his pistol on the table and said to him angrily: "My ex-students are my children, and I intend to care for them". The following day, Dattner came to the poor-house yard on his motorcycle and told me: "I mustn't speak Hebrew, and I can't invite you home because there may be eavesdroppers there, so it is preferable that we meet outside". He suggested that I travel to Szczecin, and cross the border into Germany in order to go on from there to *Eretz Yisrael*. "Would that I too could emigrate", he said to me, "but I have much to do here. Perhaps my

dream will come true one day". I think that he was unable to fulfil his dream because of the new family he raised after the Holocaust.

After experiencing many hardships, I arrived in Berlin and taught Hebrew in a refugee camp. I met Baruch Wieder, and for days and nights on end, we sat together and related our experiences. Wieder (Avidor) emigrated to *Eretz* and settled in Moshav Nordia.

I emigrated to Israel in 1948, on the very day that the State was declared. For a while, we lived in tents in Raanana, and later moved to Haifa. My ex-teacher, Zeev Golan (Goldstein), who was at that time an Inspector for the Ministry of Education in the Northern Region, sent me to David Racavi (Rakowitzki), the Principal of Ironi 'A' High School in Tel-Aviv, in order to obtain confirmation that I had completed my studies at the Gymnasium.

My meeting with Rakowitzki was an emotional one. He wrote a letter of confirmation stating that I had completed the course of studies at the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium, and he remembered the actual date. For some years after this, I used to receive New Year greeting cards from him.



Eliezer Avinoam (Lipkind)

By the early nineteen twenties, Bialystok had become a Jewish metropolis in which the Zionist movement had put down deep roots. The centre of Zionist activity was the fondly remembered "*Bet Ha'Am*" (House of the People), and the Zionist youth movements attracted many young people. But in the high schools, all lessons were being conducted in Polish.

Five Jews, for whom Jewish education was close to their hearts, independently took the revolutionary step of founding the Hebrew Gymnasium, which expanded over the years and became the pride of the city. And if, as was claimed by some, this initiative had been somewhat influenced by "commercial" considerations, it does not diminish its value in the slightest.

When I was thirteen, my parents intended to register me at a Polish Gymnasium, so that I would eventually receive the "Matura" and "become a decent human being". My brother Reuven, who was then seventeen and studying in a Polish Gymnasium, did not agree with them. He persuaded my parents to enrol me at the Hebrew Gymnasium, which he could not attend himself because of his age. Thanks to him, I received a Hebrew education, became a member of a Zionist youth movement, joined a *Hachsharah* (Training Farm), and emigrated to Israel. Thanks to him, I stayed alive. Blessed be his memory.

Eliezer Sobotnik

New York

If I am not mistaken, I belong to the Third Graduate Year, which left the Gymnasium in 1928. I commenced my studies at the Gymnasium in 1920, in Class 1. The lessons in those first years were not easy. There were almost no Hebrew textbooks (I remember that we learnt algebra from a Russian book as even Polish textbooks were in short supply), the authorities did not support the Gymnasium, and lack of experience also played a part. Luckily, we were blessed with teachers who regarded teaching as a holy vocation. The teachers, most of whom were from Galicia, spoke fluent Hebrew with the *Sephardi* pronunciation. The Gymnasium's main aim was to prepare the students for *Aliya* (emigration to *Eretz Yisrael*). And indeed, most of the graduates eventually emigrated to *Eretz*, and today many of them occupy respected places in Israeli society.

L. Epstein

Ramat Hashofet (Sixth Graduation Class)



Longings

For the first few years, in three preparatory classes and a regular class, I studied in the four-storey building at No.74, Senkiewitz Street. Later, in the senior classes, I studied in the building in Brokowa Street, in the lawless, run-down district of "Chanajkes" on the outskirts of the city. I remember that when we used to walk with friends from *Hashomer Hatzair* through this notorious district in the evenings, we were a bit frightened.

Nearly sixty years have passed since then, and I remember the teachers, those who are no longer with us, and those who survived. First and foremost, Moshe Zabludowski, who encouraged us to love the Bible, and politely persuaded us to cover our heads in his class. I also remember Rakowitzki, of the threatening look. There were occasions when I was afraid to open my mouth in the presence of his glare, even though I knew the answer; Orinowski, the Hebrew Literature teacher - we enjoyed making him digress from the subject of the lesson to any subject we fancied; Sheffer, who remained rooted to his chair throughout the lesson and would give sidelong glances at the girls benches; Welvel, the German

teacher, who tried to ensure that we did not fail his tests; Dattner the Gym teacher, Jakobowski the Art teacher, and orchestra conductor Shkolnikow; and Secretary Goldberg, who was always ready to help any student. As in a motion picture, I see the brass band before me, leading the *Lag B'Omer* procession: seven hundred students and teachers marching through the city's main thoroughfares to the forest, accompanied by the sound of the band playing a march, and the cheers of the thousands of Jews lining the pavements.

We would also speak to one another in Hebrew outside the Gymnasium, and when we emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, we quickly integrated into the life, thanks to our knowledge of the language.

I completed my studies at the Gymnasium in 1931, and emigrated to *Eretz* in 1934.

I am now more than seventy years of age, and until the day I die, I will always remember the Gymnasium and my birthplace Bialystok, as it then was, and will cling to these memories.

Mina Braun (Gelerstein)

Maabarot (Thirteenth Graduation Class)



In my youth, my ambition was to study at the famous Hebrew Gymnasium, and then to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*. I recall how we, the whole family, were sitting in our decorated *Succah* for the festive meal, when a stone suddenly fell onto the table. The children of our Polish neighbours had thrown it, children I had grown up with, who had gone to elementary school with me. I realized then, that there was only one way to take revenge on those who insulted me, and that was to live in my own country.

I studied at the Gymnasium for four years, received my matriculation certificate in 1938, and emigrated to Israel with my husband in 1949.

In our Gymnasium, which was a private Zionist institution, all the lessons were conducted in Hebrew, including Gymnastics, Physics, and Chemistry. We also had to study the Literature, History, and Geography of Poland in the Polish language, and we also studied Latin, and English or German. The Gymnasium students bore a heavy burden of studies, exceeding that of the students of other institutions in Poland.

This educational institution was a bastion of the Zionist movement. It was renowned for the productions (in Hebrew) which were staged in its

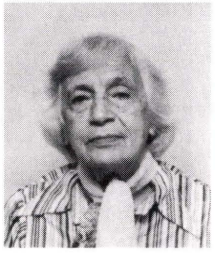
spacious auditorium, and particularly for its brass band which, on *Lag B'Omer*, led the students' procession through the streets of the city.

We were proud of our Gymnasium, and felt special satisfaction when we spoke Hebrew on the city promenade, amongst the other young people who were all speaking Polish.

It was a magnificent school, both in form and in content. To this very day I remember the Hebrew Literature lessons, the poetry of the Middle Ages, and that of Bialik and Tchernichovski. We also studied the Bible and the *Talmud*, and it was during these lessons that the boys would cover their heads.

When we completed our course of studies, we received two certificates: The State Matriculation Certificate in Polish, and a Final Diploma in Hebrew. Because of the *Numerus Clausus*, not all the Gymnasium graduates were able to continue their studies in institutes of higher learning in Poland. Those who could afford it, studied at European universities. A student who registered to study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem could receive an immigration certificate from the Mandatory Authorities. Many took advantage of this opportunity in order to emigrate to *Eretz Yisrael*.

It was a stormy and turbulent period in my life, crammed full of experiences, both in studies and social activities.



Dina Freedman (Bramson)

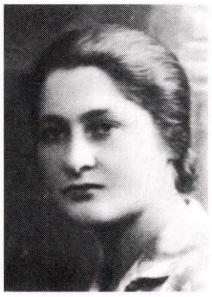
(Seventh Graduation Class)

The Hebrew Gymnasium

Our Hebrew Gymnasium was an institution,
In which we were educated in the love of *Eretz Yisrael*, and in retrospect -
Many of the students remained alive,
Because they came here, in spite of the closed gates.
In the hearts of those young people nested an aspiration, there was an aim
To go up to the Land come what may...
And so they came, whether as students, or as pioneers,
And amongst them there are friends living on kibbutzim.
Before the World War -
No one imagined what a storm would rage there!
Only a few people, who studied in non-Jewish schools,
Came here during those years,

Whilst the remaining multitudes -
Their fate was as bitter as that of the rest of the Jews.
We shall remember today those who were trapped,
And perished in the Holocaust.
Likewise, blessed is the memory
of those friends who were once with us and are now no more.
The Gymnasium building, they say, stands in its place,
And of our culture nothing remains.
The building exists,
But not a word of Hebrew can be heard there!

Chava Sneh



The Gymnasium Secretariat

The first Secretary of the Gymnasium was Zeitlin, and he was succeeded by my sister Chana Goldberg (Suraski) who was appointed to the post. She was a graduate of a commercial school, with wide professional knowledge, and a command of six languages: Hebrew, Russian, German, French, English, and of course Yiddish. Chana brought her family with her to the Gymnasium. My brother Zalman was a member of the "half graduate year" whose studies were cut short in 1924; I was twelve years old when I entered the Gymnasium, and my sister Yona Fishman was ten. A few years later we were joined by my brother Abraham, who commenced school in Prep. Class 1.



Moshe Goldberg



Chana Goldberg (Suraski), Zalman Goldberg

Chana left Bialystok and emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1923. Her place at the Gymnasium was taken by our father, Moshe Goldberg, a man with extensive knowledge of the *Torah*, well-versed in Hebrew literature, active in the cultural life of the community, and a member of the "Friends of the Hebrew Language" Society. In addition to his post as Secretary, my father was also the Gymnasium Librarian, and many ex-students remember how he guided them in their reading. My father emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1931 together with my brother Abraham and sister Yona. He died in 1936.

We were all members of the *Hashomer Hatzair* movement, and my oldest brother Zalman was head of the "Clubhouse". I remember how we took leave of him when he emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1925. He was accompanied to the railway station by all the members of the movement, his classmates from school, and the Gymnasium brass band with its conductor, teacher Shkolnikow. Zalman was one of the founders of Ein-Shemer and in charge of the cultural programme of the kibbutz. In 1930, aged 24, he died while in the prime of life as a result of receiving unsuccessful medical treatment after being bitten by a dog.

During its final years, Berl Sobotnik served as Gymnasium Secretary.

IN MEMORIAM





Principal Dr. Zvi Zemel

Zvi Zemel was born on 20 *Nissan* 5648 (16.5.1888) in the small town of Zorbana, near Lvov, in Eastern Galicia. He studied at the *Heder*, and afterwards at the State Gymnasium in the town of Stryj, learnt *Gemara* and Jewish studies at home, and intended to become a Rabbi. During the summer vacations he used to study in the *Beit Hamidrash* (House of Study attached to the Synagogue). In 1908, he completed his studies at the Gymnasium and moved to Vienna, where he studied at the Rabbinical College and at the University. He read History for a year and then transferred to the Natural Sciences. In 1916, he was ordained as a Rabbi at the Rabbinical College, and was awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Natural Sciences at the University. That same year, he moved to Cracow and worked as a teacher in the State School, later founding a dual-language Gymnasium in the same town, and was active in *Tarbut* and *Hechalutz*.

Dr. Zvi Zemel was active in publishing a Hebrew newspaper "*Arzenu*" (Our Land), and compiled a dictionary of terminology in the Natural Sciences. From 1921-1929, he was Principal of the dual-language Hebrew Gymnasium at Piotrkow, published a Zionist newspaper, was Chairman of the Cultural and Political Committees, and was eventually chosen to be Head of the Jewish Community in Piotrkow.

In 1929, he moved to Bialystok, to become Principal of the Hebrew Gymnasium. Five years later, he emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, and was appointed Principal of the Bialik Gymnasium in Haifa, where he taught mainly *Talmud*.

In 1941 he was taken ill, and for two years was unable to work. After recovering from this illness, he returned to work. He died of a heart attack at his desk, on 19 *Kislev* 5707 (12.12.1946).

I owe a great deal of my success in my work at the Hebrew Gymnasium to the Principal, Dr. Zemel. His relations with the teaching staff were cordial, and he knew how to listen. The students regarded him with admiration and love.

Blessed be his memory.

Naomi Nof



Teacher Moshe Adler

My father was born on 16.11.1887 in Stanislav in Galicia, and died prematurely on 6.3.1938, at the early age of fifty.

He was a graduate of the Classical Gymnasium at Stanislav, with a degree from the Faculty of Law at Vienna, and a degree in Philosophy and Humanism from Yaglonit University in Cracow. He fought in the First World War, serving as a combat officer in the Austrian infantry. After demobilisation from the army, he received a diploma as a qualified teacher of Polish Literature, and from 1925 taught at the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium. My father was a member of the National Caucus of the Revisionist Alliance, Chairman of *Brit Hahayal* (Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen) in the city, Chairman of the local Maccabi Sports Association, and Honorary Treasurer of the Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

He was fluent in many languages including Polish, German, Latin and Greek, and knew some English and French - but did not speak Hebrew. In spite of this, many of his pupils will attest to the fact that he instilled in them a love of the Jewish Homeland and the Jewish People. Till the end of his days, he felt that his mission in life was teaching and educating the Jewish younger generation.

He died at home, and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Bialystok. His whole family, both immediate and distant, perished in the Holocaust, and their final resting place is unknown. Only two survived: my younger brother Nathan, who emigrated to *Eretz* in 1946, and myself. I emigrated to Israel in 1949.

Blessed be his memory.

Pinchas Adler

(Twelfth Graduation Class)



Dr. Shimon Dattner (1902-1989)

Born in Cracow. Studied at the Heder and at a Jewish school, afterwards studied Anthropology and Prehistory at the city University, and in the second year of his academic studies also registered for a university course in Physical Education. At that time, in Jewish schools, there were a shortage of Gymnastics teachers, whilst there was a more than sufficient number of teachers in the Humanities. Dattner received his Doctorate in 1927. He decided to be a Gymnastics teacher.

He taught for three years at the *Tarbut* Gymnasium in Pinsk, and from there moved to Bialystok and joined the Hebrew Gymnasium in 1928.

Dattner brought with him the Swedish system, which was new at that time, and taught his students not only gymnastics but also pride in being Jewish. For a long time, many of them would recall his words: "Don't slouch, keep your heads up, a Jew has to walk tall".

His first wife and their two daughters perished in the Ghetto. His youngest daughter, who was sixteen, lit the beacon as a signal for the uprising to commence in August 1943, and was then shot by the Germans. Dattner was an active member in the underground and took part in actions by the Partizans. Documents attesting to his activities are kept in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland.

After the Holocaust, he arrived in *Eretz Yisrael* as an illegal immigrant (or *Maapil* as they were then called), and after a while returned to Poland. In 1948 he visited Israel once more, and his students organized a party in the Bustan Cafe in Tel-Aviv to welcome their beloved teacher.

When he returned to Poland, Dattner became a member of the Board of Management of the Jewish Committee, and worked on Holocaust research within the framework of the Jewish Historical Institute, and the Committee for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes. In 1968, he was "released" from the Institute because of his refusal to denigrate the Joint Distribution Committee as being a "lackey of imperialism", and to condemn the policies of Israel. A few years later, he was reinstated at the Institute, and in 1985 was elected as Chairman of its Board of Management. He occupied this post for two years. His Polish-born second wife, was head of a department in the Ministry of Culture, and died before him. Their daughter married a Pole.

Dattner published eleven volumes of research, and contributed many articles to Polish and American periodicals. He died in December 1989, and is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.

Blessed be his memory.

The Author



Teacher Franca Horowitz

Tall, slim, and with melancholy eyes. Naomi Nof wrote of her: "Her classes were an aesthetic and intellectual experience. I was present during one of her absorbing lessons, and when it was over, told her how impressed I was. She looked at me in surprise, and said: "For me it was boring".

Shifra Gotlieb (Atlasowitz) relates: "One day, the *Talmud* teacher, David Fayans, was indisposed, and we were told that Dr. Horowitz would take us for the lesson. The Polish Literature teacher entered the classroom and to our amazement said, "Good morning. Please take out your *Talmud* books". She conducted the lesson in fluent Hebrew, and it was the most interesting lesson in *Talmud* that I have ever heard".

Naomi Nof tells of Franca Horowitz's visit to *Eretz Israel*: It took place during the "Disturbances", and I advised her not to travel about too much. "I am not accustomed to being afraid", she replied. And indeed, when we were about to travel from Nahalal to Degania, we were told that many Jews had been killed that night near Kibbutz Alonim, amongst them Alexander Zaid. It was expected that the day would be a tense one, and I decided not to go. Franca was not deterred, and she set out alone. When I used to express my excitement about the land and the kibbutzim, she cooled my enthusiasm somewhat, with the comment: "Don't you think that you have become a chauvinist?" On more than one occasion, she told me that her choice of teaching the subject of Polish Literature had been a fateful error: "If I was teaching one of the Science subjects, I would have emigrated to *Eretz* a long time ago". Before we parted, she told me that she intended to study English in order to emigrate to *Eretz* as an English teacher.

In February 1943, she took her own life.

Blessed be her memory.

The Author



Teacher Pnina Berstein

She was petite, slim, and dark, and taught Latin at the Gymnasium; always happy, with a keen sense of humour, well-liked by teachers and students. We called her Pninka.

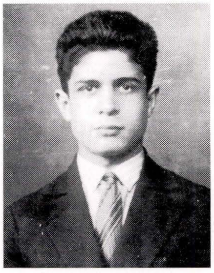
Before the War she married a doctor, and their son Baruch was born in 1941. In the Ghetto, I lost contact with her for a while, but we met again during the *aktion* of 1943. She was still beautiful, but her zest for life had disappeared. She told me what had happened to herself and her family.

She and her husband, who was employed at the hospital, sought a place of refuge for themselves and their two-year-old son. Old acquaintances refused to accept them in their shelters, because of the boy: during the seven days of the *aktion*, the crying voices of children had given away many hiding places. Not only children were not "accepted", but also the elderly, and those suffering from asthma. The consequence of this refusal was plain. Death for those remaining outside.

Pninka and her husband did not desert their son in order to stay alive, and one day they were caught by armed police who brought them to the assembly ground in the Jurowietzka-Senkiewitz area. A miracle occurred: Pnina's husband was wearing a doctor's gown over his clothes, and the *Obersturmfuhrer* sent him with his wife and child to the Ghetto hospital. They remained alive until the 16th of August. That day they disappeared, together with the remaining Jews in the Ghetto.

I salute your memory, Perele, Pninka.

Shimon Dattner



Mordechai Samid (Semiatitzki)

The essence of Mordechai's personality and being are summed up in the words engraved on his tombstone (which were suggested by his friend, the writer Yitzhak Lamdan), "A man of the book and the pen". Mordechai was indeed a man of the book and the pen, a tireless scholar, a walking encyclopaedia.

Mordechai graduated with honours from the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium in 1929. He decided to continue with his advanced studies. In that year, the Hebrew Gymnasium did not yet have State Rights, so he studied for a year at a Polish gymnasium and won a place at Warsaw University, where he received the degrees of Master of Law and also Philosophy. Afterwards, he studied at the Higher Institute of Judaica and graduated in 1937. He was a brilliant student throughout his academic career.

In the late summer of 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, he left Poland and came to *Eretz*. In spite of his command of Hebrew, his absorption was by no means easy, as there was extensive unemployment in *Eretz* during this period. He did not have the means to complete the period of specialization necessary to receive a license to practice Law, and for lack of an alternative, turned to teaching at High School.

In 1941, he volunteered for the British Army, and served in an infantry company which was the nucleus of the Jewish Brigade. He extended his knowledge during his military service; when he was in Egypt - of Egyptology, when in Italy - the Art of the Renaissance and Rome. It was there that he also learnt Italian, and purchased professional literature with his meagre army pay.

Mordechai reached Europe with the Jewish Brigade and went through the difficult experiences of encountering the few survivors.

He was demobilised from the Brigade in 1946, taught for a short period, and afterwards worked as Editor and Translator for the book publishing house "*Omanut*" of Shoshana Persitz.

On the day that the State was declared (15.5.48) he joined the Israel Defence Forces, and after his demobilisation in 1949, returned to his work at "*Omanut*".

On the recommendation of Member of Knesset Shoshana Persitz, David Ben-Gurion appointed him as Editor of "*Divrei Haknesset*" (Knesset Affairs), a post in which he gained recognition and was held in high esteem.

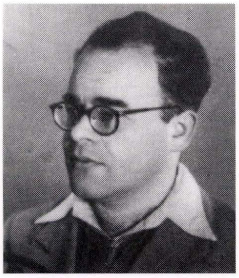
Mordechai was very satisfied with this work, and intended to publish his book "The History of Polish Jewry Before the First World War", and to continue with his studies with the aim of receiving his Doctorate in Jewish History.

All his plans were cut short however. He died suddenly, after a brief illness, on 11 *Iyyar* 5709 (1949).

He left a wife, Pnina, an only daughter Edna, two years of age, and his brothers Fischel and Yaacov, long may they live.

Blessed be his memory.

Pnina Samid



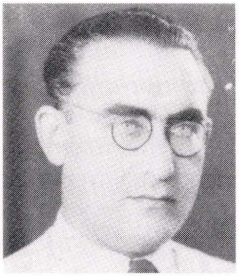
Dov Shuval

My father, Dov Shuval, was born in 1908 in the small town of Knishin, and when he was seven his family moved to Bialystok. He entered the Hebrew Gymnasium in the year that it was founded (1919), and his school friends were those of the First Graduation Class of 1926. From the age of 14, he contributed poems and essays in Hebrew to the monthly magazine "*Hed Hanoar*" which was published in Warsaw. Dov emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* in 1930. He was a member of Kibbutz Ein-Hachoresh for three years, and then moved to Haifa where he helped to found the newspaper "*Al Hamishmar*". He wrote for this paper for 30 years, and followed developments in the city of Haifa from the years before the State until his retirement. He was a combination of thoroughness, industriousness, and integrity. He was well-versed in the treasures of the Hebrew language, and after his retirement became Editor of Publications for the Technion.

He died aged eighty, on 13 September 1988 (5749).

Blessed be his memory.

Shosh Ruti Katz



Shmuel Shamir (Lapshin)

My father, Shmuel, was born to Rachel and Moshe Lapshin in 1912 in Bialystok. His parents were well-to-do and owned a textile factory. He studied at the Hebrew Gymnasium, starting in Class 1, and graduated in 1930. He played the clarinet and was a member of Shkolnikow's orchestra. Throughout his youth he was active in the *Hechalutz* movement.

He was sent by the movement to set up an elementary school of the *Tarbut* network in the small town of Michalowa. In 1932 he completed this task and handed over an active and well-organized school to *Tarbut*. He emigrated to Israel and was one of the founders of Kfar-Menachem (Kibbutz *Hashomer Hatzair*). In the mid-thirties he went to France to pursue his academic studies, and in 1938 graduated with honours as a Civil Engineer at Caen University. He worked as a building engineer in design and construction work until 1950, and afterwards as City Engineer in Bnei-Brak. From 1952, until his death in 1978, he was the City Engineer in Kfar-Saba.

My father was active professionally in the Association of Architects and Engineers, and a member of the Urban Engineers Committee of this association.

Blessed be his memory.

Engineer A. Shamir



Professor Menachem Stern

Menachem Stern studied at the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium for seven years, before emigrating to *Eretz Yisrael* with his parents in 1938. One was always aware of his Bialystok roots. After finishing his High School studies in Tel-Aviv, he studied at the Hebrew University, and in 1960 received his doctorate and joined the academic staff as lecturer in the Department of History of the Jewish People, and in 1971 was appointed as a full-time Professor. He was considered to be the foremost scholar in our day of the Second Temple Period, one of the greatest Jewish historians and senior experts of Hellenistic and Latin Civilization,and published dozens of articles and research papers on the Hasmonean Period and the History of the Jews at the time of the Second Temple.

In his research studies, he achieved that rare feat of combining a classic form of textual criticism with profound historical analysis. Professor Stern, who was a visiting Fellow in many research institutions, was also a member of the Bialystok Archives Committee of the National University Library in Jerusalem (the founder of the Archive had been Bialystok born, Dr. Joseph Chazanowitz). Professor Stern was a member of the Executive Committee and on the Academic Council of "Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi", Chairman of the Israel History Society, amongst the mainstays of the Shazar Centre, and one of the editors of the Journal "Zion". He was modest in demeanour, eschewing academic pomposity, an amiable, peace-loving man.

On 22nd of July 1989, as he was walking from his house to the National Library by way of the Valley of the Cross, he was stabbed to death by an Arab.

Blessed be his memory.

Prof. Aharon Oppenheimer



Mordechai Laznik

The first Gymnasium graduate to be killed whilst defending the soil of the homeland, was my brother Mordechai Laznik.

He was born in Bialystok, graduated from the Gymnasium in 1931 and joined the *Hachshara* in Klosowo, but did not receive an immigration certificate as a member of the *Hachshara*. He sent his diploma to the Technion in Haifa and was then granted a certificate after being accepted by this institution.

During his first year in *Eretz Yisrael*, he studied at the Technion, and afterwards answered the call of the Jewish Agency and joined the Police.

He completed the Officers School in Jerusalem and was commissioned to work in Tel-Aviv. After a short while he decided that Tel-Aviv did not

satisfy his national aspirations and he joined the mounted unit in the Sharon.

Before going to Lydda to collect his things, his fellow policemen advised him not to travel in an Arab bus, but he ignored their warning and set out on the journey in a bus full of Arabs. On the outskirts of the town, gangs set upon him and killed him. That was on 4 *Ellul* 5698, 31.8.1938.

He was buried in the cemetery at Nachlat-Yitzhak in the section for the fallen of the *Hagana*.

Blessed be his memory.

Arieh Laznik
(Seventh Graduation Class)



Abraham Kaplanski

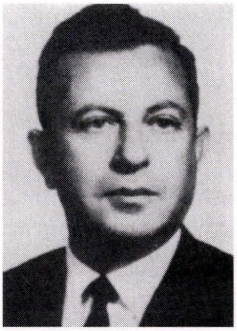
My brother Abraham Kaplanski (Shmulik), interrupted his studies at the Gymnasium in 1939 at the time of the Soviet invasion, when he fled from Bialystok to Vilna in order to travel from there to *Eretz Yisrael*. However, he never reached *Eretz*.

In Vilna, he was active in the *Betar* movement even after the Soviets captured the city. He was a member of the editorial board of the underground newspaper of his movement. If my memory serves me correctly, the newspaper was called "*Migov Rikavon*" (From the Den of Decay). After many wanderings, he reached the Ghetto in Bialystok. There he joined the movement organising the uprising, and was the person who liaised between *Betar* and Mordechai Tannenbaum (Tamrof) - the leader of the uprising in the Bialystok Ghetto.

My brother was eventually caught by Poles, who handed him over to the Germans. At the beginning of *Tammuz* 5704 (1944), six weeks before we were liberated, Abraham was shot.

Blessed be his memory.

Rachel Kalisher (Kaplanski)



Hillel Aldag (Oldak)

Hillel Aldag was born in Bialystok in 1919, son of Zionist activist and Chairman of the Jewish Community, Chaikel Oldak. He completed his studies at the Hebrew Gymnasium in 1936, emigrated to *Eretz*, and studied in the Faculty of Architecture at the Haifa Technion.

As a student, he was active in the *Hagana*, after completing his studies in 1940, he joined the *Palmach* (the commando arm of the *Hagana*). In 1941,he enlisted in the British Army where he served as an officer, and was later transferred to the Jewish Brigade and took part in the rescue of survivors from Poland. After

demobilisation from the British Army, he only worked for a short period in his civil profession. With the declaration of the State of Israel, he joined the Israel Defence Forces, reached the rank of Colonel, and was demobilised in 1953. After his release, he returned to the Solel-Boneh company where he worked for five years. In 1958 he returned to the I.D.F. once more and served in the army until 1964.

For a period, he held the office of scientific adviser at the Israel Embassy in Washington.

Hillel Aldag died in July 1989 in Rehovot, leaving behind a large family: three sons who are engineers, six grandchildren, and a sister, Aviva Ben-Tov.

Throughout his life, his deeds and activities were dedicated to his family, his People, and his Land.

Blessed be his memory.

The Author

Yitzhak Gorfin

My friend, Yitzhak Gorfin, a fellow student at the Gymnasium, was a youth leader in *Betar*.

Those were the days of increasing hatred towards the Jews in Poland. We would escort the girls home in groups. Whoever was able to do so, acquired a pistol, and others concealed knuckle-dusters and knives on their persons. On *Lag B'Omer* 1934, when rioters attacked the Gymnasium procession, we fought them off with flagpoles.



Yitzhak Gorfin (with hat) with Baruch Wieder in Italy, during the Second World War

I parted from Yitzhak when I emigrated to *Eretz* in 1937. He remained in Bialystok, and when the Second World War broke out, fled to Vilna with Zionist friends. Fortunately, they obtained immigration certificates and eventually reached *Eretz* after a long journey by way of Russia, Japan, Singapore, India, and Aden.

In 1942, we both volunteered for the British Army, and in 1944 we joined the Jewish Brigade. At the end of that year we received our flag, badges, and modern equipment, and we were sent to Italy. We took part in winter manoeuvres in the mountains, and Yitzhak, who excelled during training, passed a course and was promoted to be officer in charge of a section in the platoon in which I also served.

At *Passover* we were sent to the front. Thousands of Jews took part in the war on all the fronts, but we were the only ones who fought with a Star of David on our flag and on our uniforms. At last the day arrived, and we left the trenches. Sappers opened paths through the minefields. We crossed the River Sénio and advanced into the Po Valley. Of the Germans there was nothing to be seen except the corpses which remained, and the British Battalion Commander ordered us to march along the road. Suddenly, mortar shells landed all around us and machine-gun fire was directed at us from German suicide units who were firing from a nearby church tower. I crouched down as bullets whistled over my head. Yitzhak lay outstretched on the road. We quickly evacuated him to the rear, but he was no longer alive.

That was the Brigade's last battle. After a short period, all the German forces in Italy surrendered, and this was followed by the surrender of the whole of Hitler's *Wehrmacht*.

Yitzhak Gorfin remains buried in Italian soil. May these lines be a tribute to his distant grave.

Baruch Avidor-Wieder

Moshav Nordia (Ninth Graduation Class)



In Memory of My Mother, Chaya Rothstein (Efron)

My mother was a student of the First Graduation Year. She died on 21 *Ellul* 5731, in Tel-Aviv. For a long time I have been trying to find appropriate words to explain the longing which suddenly engulfed me, longing for a city that I never knew. After all, in my mother Chaya and father Binyamin's house in Tel-Aviv, I had heard the name Bialystok throughout my youth. They used to say to me: "We are from Bialystok. It is in Poland, far from here. We are from Bialystok, which no longer exists".

And they showed me photographs, boxes full of photographs. All sorts of faces looked at me from the brown photographs, and mother called them by name, a name for each face. And the stories that they told me... How they used to walk for hours in the endless forest, how they used to go tobogganing on the ice, girls and boys in groups, how they would go to the youth movement, how they would sing songs on Sabbath eve at home, seven sisters, one brother, and their parents. And I hear, and do not understand. "The Nazis killed them all", said father. "All of them. Bialystok no longer exists in the world. It is no more".

And I look at the photographs, and I have no grandmother, and I have no grandfather, and there are no uncles and aunts. Only mother and father, and Tel-Aviv.

Some years later, I was walking with my son in Ben-Yehuda Street, and I showed him my parents' house. I no longer have the key to enter, a strange curtain is waving in the window. "Here I learnt to walk, to talk, and to read", I told Assaf. "Here I was a young girl. The street has altered, the shops are different, people have changed, but the father of Ahuva from my class still rides his bicycle. There, do you see him?".

When we returned home, we looked together at my album, and envy gripped my heart, envy of my son who can come to the city where I grew up, to see and to hear it, to smell, to breathe and to touch. I think about the memories of my parents' youth, the memories that I could not understand, that I did not want to understand, the memories that I did not have.

I think of my parents who are no more, and miss you - my near, far away city - that I so much wanted to reach, and you no longer exist.

Nira Harel

THE HEBREW GYMNASIUM STUDENTS REUNION

Commemorating its Fiftieth Anniversary

On Sunday, 7 *Cheshvan* 5730, 19 October 1969, former students of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium gathered in Bet Hachayal in Tel-Aviv, to mark the Jubilee - the Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the Gymnasium (in 5680).

The initial idea for the reunion came from its last principal, David Rakowitzki (Racavi), and its main sponsor was the Organisation of Former Bialystokers in Tel-Aviv. It was organized by Gymnasium graduates **Eliezer Sochowolski** and **Yosef Chwojnik (Oren)**, who were assisted by staff from the Herzlia Gymnasium, Tel-Aviv.

Nathan, the son of Gymnasium founder **Mendel Kaplan**, opened the proceedings. The arranger and master of ceremonies was radio personality **Gideon Lev-Ari**, who had worked on the research for many months. During the presentation, photographs of all the graduation class were screened, and the orchestra, most of whose members were Gymnasium graduates, played old favourites.

The presentation, consisting mainly of greetings and speeches, lasted for three hours. Principals, teachers, and former students ascended the stage in turn and reminisced about old times: the first Principal, E. Furman (Karari) and the last Principal, D. Rakowitzki; teachers A. Orinowski (Ben-Or), Z. Goldstein (Golan), Dr. M. Meller (Mikam), Tash and Naomi Goldman (Nof); the children of the Gymnasium founders: Yona Kaplan, Zeev Katznelson (Negbi), Akiva Patt and Rachel Kahana (Kreisman); former students Lawyer Y. Serlin, Dr. A. Remen, Dr. A. Zifroni (Gimpelewitz), N. Katz, Shoshana Katz (Bori), Dr. Amalia Klocznik (Vishnitzki), Lawyer Rubinstein, Lawyer M. Porat (Porozowski), and A. Weinstein (Gafni). Moshe Olkinitzki (Elkoni) read a Mekama, or prose poem, part of which appears below, which he had written in honour of the occasion, and Chaya Raphaelowitz (Meller) performed some of the songs which we used to sing in those days.

The reunion was recorded on tape. Many quotations from the recorded speeches appear in previous chapters, together with the names of their contributors.



Moshe Elkoni (Olkinitzki)

(Seventh Graduation Class)

Hymn of Unity to the Hebrew Gymnasium

Just as our eternal capital is noted for
The Western Wall and the National Library,
So did the Hebrew Gymnasium set Bialystok apart.
In fact, I do not know how to begin,
For the memories are many more than we can include
And we no longer have the strength to tell all.

And so what to tell and what to pass over?
Like that same grandmother when asked for what reason and why,
Confesses in old age to a misdeed that she sinned some years ago
Apologizes very gracefully - for it is pleasant to remember the transgressions of one's youth,
When we were still young and beautiful and desirable.
Yes, we too cling to the memories of the past,
Since it is pleasant to remember that which will return no more.
All the teachings which we acquired are as nothing
Compared to the one which was absorbed in our blood like wine.
It is the teaching for which our school was founded,
It is the teaching of love of the Land of our Fathers.
And even though the city is destroyed, and the house
Standing there put to shame,
We have built it here anew.
Sycamores have been cut down, we have built cedars in their place,
The State of Israel, that will live forever.

This poem is a part of a "Mekama", witty stories written in Hebrew prose interspersed here and there with rhyming verse, which was printed in its entirety in the original Hebrew Book.



THE HEBREW GYMNASIUM STUDENTS REUNION

Commemorating its Seventieth Anniversary

On Monday, 26 *Iyyar* 5750, 21 May 1990, former students of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium gathered in the Gan Oranim in Tel-Aviv, to mark the Seventieth Anniversary of the founding of the Gymnasium (5680 - 5750).

The original idea for the reunion was that of **Yaacov Samid (Semiatitzki)**, graduate of the Fourth Graduation Class (1929). His initiative was received with enthusiasm by former students. Many encouraged him by telephoning and writing to wish him success: "Your esteemed initiative is welcome, and worthy of full support" (Dr. Chen Merchavia), "Congratulations! May you succeed with your noble initiative" (Teacher Naomi Nof), "Blessings upon your initiative and work" (Dr. A. Wapinski), "I received your invitation to the reunion with thanks and much excitement" (Chaim Reshef).

Samid spent a whole year preparing the reunion. His activities included locating former Gymnasium students in Israel and abroad, raising money to pay for the occasion, contacting public institutions etc. In locating former Gymnasium students abroad, he was helped by Michael Shiloh from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Shmuel Savion from the Ministry of Tourism. The New York newspaper "*Bialystoker Stimme*" issued an appeal to former students living in the United States for help in organising the reunion.

Samid's research work included distributing questionnaires amongst former Gymnasium students and their relatives, and writing the presentation which was the centrepiece of the reunion (the questionnaires which former students completed will be documented, and will be a source of information about the history of the Gymnasium).



Standing for the "*Yizkor*" memorial prayer

The artistic programme was prepared by members of the Information Centre in Tel-Aviv - Netta Rozenblatt, Gaby Dubek, and Osnat Levy. Appearing in this part were the Alcharizi School Childrens Choir from Tel-Baruch, and the Dixie Orchestra of Tel-Aviv. The master of ceremonies was Miron Zur from Kol Yisrael.



The Alcharizi School Childrens Choir from Tel-Baruch

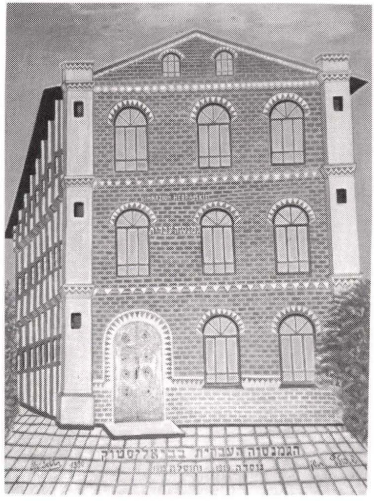
A large painting of the Gymnasium, by Shmuel Soltz from Givatayim, was fixed to the back of the stage in the hall where the reunion took place. More than four hundred people attended, including two from the First Graduation Class (1926), former students from all the graduation classes up to the final one (1939), and students who had continued to study at the Gymnasium under the Soviet regime. Many had come to the reunion from the four corners of the globe: from the United States, South America, Australia, South Africa, France, and other countries. Bialystokers who had studied at other gymnasiums were also invited to attend as guests.



The metal Gymnasium badge

The nostalgic meetings between those assembled, the moving presentation, the artistic performances, and the gastronomic offering - a festive luncheon, were recorded on video and audio. These tapes, the brochure, and the metal badges which were issued in honour of the occasion, serve as a memento for the participants, their families, and the few Gymnasium graduates who, for various reasons, were unable to attend and participate in the reunion.

The reunion consisted of three parts: a) a social get-together for the fourteen Graduation Classes, b) the presentation, lasting an hour and twenty minutes, which included a description of the twenty years of the Gymnasium, accompanied by authentic songs performed by choir and orchestra, c) a splendid luncheon served at long tables.



Front page of the brochure distributed to the participants

The presentation commenced with words of greeting from the Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Shamir (Yezernitzki), graduate of the Seventh Graduation Class (1932), under whose patronage the reunion was held. This was followed by a speech from Yaacov Samid, initiator and organizer of the reunion. The sons of two of the founders, Yonah Kaplan and Moshe Negbi (Katznelson) told of the Gymnasium's early days. Teachers Naomi Nof (Goldman) and Frieda Friedman (Polatsek) reminisced, and Chaike Grossman described the last years of the Gymnasium and of Jewish Bialystok. Moshe Elkoni's granddaughter read the *Mekama* that Zvi Bodanowski had written in honour of the occasion (part of this Mekama, which was printed in full in the original Hebrew book, appears below).

There was a slide presentation illustrating the life of the Gymnasium, a video film documenting an interview with Teacher Shimon Dattner which had been made a few months before he died, and a video film showing the Gymnasium building as it was in 1989. Those attending the reunion were able to spend a few hours together and reminisce, and fifty-three of them expressed their feelings in writing in the "Book of Impressions" which was placed at the disposal of the participants. Here are a few quotations from the book:



Yaacov Samid
addressing the reunion

"What a marvellous feeling! I felt that I was 18 years old" (Zipporah Eker). "Today, the 21.5.1990, is a great day" (Avraham Agmon). "It was a very pleasant experience to meet friends and companions from the days of one's youth" (Hillel Eshkol, Nahalal). "A moving and absorbing meeting both in content and organization" (Brunia Bendek). "Thanks for the hours of pleasure and spiritual uplift" (Edna Eshel). "Well done! Congratulations!" (Yonah Kaplan). "The success of the reunion was much greater than one might have expected" (Nathan Kaplan). "I would not have believed it possible to mount such a project. Congratulations on the wonderful meeting" (Moshe Zak). "The reunion was admirable and very moving" (Cilla Disha-Shpitalni). "The reunion was organized in good taste and marvellously arranged. I enjoyed myself immensely" (The widow of Shmuel Shamir-Lapshin). "Superbly produced. The planning of the reunion was marvellous. The presentation was mounted in good taste. It succeeded in re-creating the atmosphere of the Gymnasium" (Lawyer D. Poczebutski).

The New York newspaper the "*Bialystoker Stimme*" published an article in September 1990 from Arieh Shamir in Jerusalem, containing the following excerpt: "Everywhere one could see nostalgic meetings between old acquaintances, accompanied by hugs and kisses. The young boys and girls of yesterday may have been serious people occupying important positions in all walks of life, but in spite of the wrinkled cheeks, a merry twinkle remained in their eyes".

We regard it as a pleasant duty to thank those friends who contributed of their time, energy, and money for the success of the reunion, and in the

publication of this book. Worthy of special mention is **Max Ratner** from the United States, who was born in Bialystok, and although he did not attend the Gymnasium, helped to organize the reunion and the publication of the Anniversary Book. He is an enthusiastic Zionist and lover of the Hebrew language, a love, by the way, which finds expression in the poem which he wrote in 1922 and which appears in this volume. Thanks to his generosity, we were able to publish the book in a deluxe edition.

Both the Tel-Aviv Municipality and the Ministry of Education and Culture contributed towards the event, and thus the participants at the reunion and those who bought a copy of the book were only required to pay a symbolic amount. However, several former students made larger contributions: Abraham Agmon, Lawyer Moshe Porat, Lawyer Menachem Shpitalni, Dr. Joseph Goll (Goldwasser), Louis Mow (Movshowski), the late Chaim Movshowski's children, and Sam Kevelson (Shabtai Kivlewitz).

Committees of fellow alumni which had been set up in the three large cities - Haifa, Tel-Aviv, and Jerusalem - supervised the organization of the reunion, the raising of funds, and the checking of expenditure, and received regular reports on all ongoing activities. We would especially like to mention the loyal work of the Finance Committee that paid attention to every detail; Shlomo Patt, Yaacov Samid, and book-keeper Arieh Laznik.

Greetings from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir



Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir speaking at the reunion

Fellow schoolmates, students of the illustrious institution where we had the honour to study in the days of our youth. Organising this reunion was a welcome initiative, and for this I thank Mr. Samid and all those who helped him. Perhaps there will be those who will say: "Why indulge in nostalgia at this time?" And to them I would reply: This is not

just nostalgia. The absence of educational institutions in the Jewish Diaspora such as those in Bialystok, pains me.

When I visit countries which have large Jewish communities and large numbers of young people, I am faced with a problem - how to present *Eretz Yisrael* to them, Israeli culture, the history of Israel? When I visit Jewish educational institutions, I realize that they are not the Hebrew Gymnasium that was in Bialystok. How can one bring it to them? How can one convey that same spirit, how can one bring teachers like that to the United States, to South America, to France, to Britain, and one can now say today, also to the Soviet Union? The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium was the crucible for Jewish youth which found its way to *Eretz Yisrael*. It had one thousand students, maybe more. The teachers were the cream of the Jewish intelligentsia. Most came from Galicia. The language was Hebrew, the homeland - *Eretz Yisrael*. What was happening day by day in *Eretz Yisrael* was the centre of interest. As Shai Agnon said: "They were born by chance in Poland, but in body, spirit, and being, lived in *Eretz Yisrael*".

We need institutions like these wherever there are Jews and Jewish youth. I remember Chaim Nachman Bialik's visit to the Gymnasium. What a



Part of the audience



A meeting between friends



Yitzhak Shamir leaving the reunion

celebration we had that day, a day of spiritual uplift. Our poet came to us from Tel-Aviv, he came from *Eretz Yisrael*, and I think that he felt at home with us.

I spent only two years in Bialystok, I was privileged to study at the Gymnasium for just two years, and I remember the days and nights of those two years as if it were yesterday. What we do today, what we experience today, what we sense and feel today, was all imparted to us there - in Bialystok, where the Jewish spirit of the Hebrew Gymnasium reigned.

Dear friends, our Gymnasium will not rise again. It has fallen and is no more, and we all cherish its memory with love and appreciation. My hope for the Jewish People in all its dispersion, in the Soviet Union, the United States, Europe, and Australia, is that educational institutions will arise in the Diaspora according to the formula of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium. If this will happen, then there is no doubt that tens of thousands of conscientious Jews will come in a steady stream to *Eretz Yisrael*, and not as new immigrants. They will come home and create a warmer, better, more Jewish home for us!

Zvi Bodanowski

(Seventh Graduation Class)



Seventy Years Later...

Excerpts from a Mekama in Memory of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium

(The full Mekama appeared in the original Hebrew book).

In the 19th year of the twentieth century,
As the battles of the War of the Nations were dying down
5679 (two years to the end of the oppressive dictators' struggle),
Was founded the school for the children of Jews,
Speakers of the Hebrew language, in one of the cities,
In Bialystok, the mother city,
As even she hoped for the honour, to be redeemed!

Hebrew reigned for twenty years
In the mouths of hundreds of students and graduates -
Until there came the Red adversary
And changed the local tongue to Yiddish.
Hebrew was hidden away, the springs stopped up,
The teachers forced to impart the will of the conqueror.

Its children, its students, who departed and were saved,
By virtue of their studies and their language, it is said -

Made their home between the desert and the sea -
Tilled and sowed, established a refuge for their nation,
Built villages and towns, realized the dream
Of dreaming warriors, conquerors of their freedom.
Only we - our children and grandchildren alone - survived
The cemetery of Europe, where our people were destroyed.





At the Reunion

Gymnasium Plaque

At the reunion, a decision was taken to fix a commemorative plaque on the face of the Gymnasium building in Bialystok. On this aluminium plaque on a backing of oak, measuring 70 X 50 cms., is inscribed in Hebrew and in Polish: "Here was the Hebrew Gymnasium". Above this appear the words: "For the stone shall cry out of the wall..." (Habakkuk 2, 11).

The unveiling took place on 26 June 1990 in the presence of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Bialystok, the City Engineer, the Head of the Hospital - which occupies the Gymnasium building - and a representative of the former students. The plaque was donated by Max Ratner of Cleveland, Ohio.





Max Ratner

MY NATIVE LAND

I know a country which I love best
And that's my own Native Land.
The land where my fathers years ago lived
And spent their lives in freedom and great deed.

The land which was wasted for two thousand years
And came to life again in the last few years.

Since the great World War came to end and
The league gave to each nation its land
And as she came to the promised land she said,
This is for the Jews, who love their country so grand.

And now after our country is with much trouble won,
There's only one thing that has to be done:
To make it a country of freedom and love,
And the best republic there ever was,
To wake up her children of their long dream,
They shall sing with joy their National Hymn.

They shall go back to their old home,
That was destroyed and wasted by the King of Rome.
They shall turn its wilderness to city and farm,
And live their happy without any harm.
They shall make the Jordan like the German Rhine,
And renew the Old Country of Palestine.

Year 1922.

Epilogue

Whoever has read the book of the history of the Gymnasium closely, cannot but appreciate the great amount of work which has been invested in it.

It began two years ago, when the idea occurred to Yaacov Samid (Semiatitzki), a member of the Fourth Graduation Class of the Gymnasium, to organize a reunion of former students, and - following this reunion - to publish a book documenting the Gymnasium's history.

Samid devoted two full years of voluntary painstaking work to locating episodes from the life of the Gymnasium. He stuck obstinately and diligently to his task, which at times appeared to be an impossible one. His friends with some justification nicknamed him "the bulldozer"; he extracted essays from them, forced them to try and make an effort to remember forgotten events, and encouraged them with letters and telephone calls. From his testimony at the reunion, this work was like a youthful tonic, and according to him, the meaning of the passage then became clear: "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; They shall be full of sap and richness" (Psalms 92, 15).

Many friends assisted Samid, but most of all he was helped by his sons. Teacher Frieda Polatsek wrote with some justification: "Without the continuous and uninterrupted assistance of Gideon and Amnon, the task would have been difficult to perform, and for this he can consider himself a fortunate man".

I worked with Samid on the preparation of the book for printing, and can confirm that he spared neither time nor effort, however bothersome or wearisome the task, in order to gather more articles, obtain more documents, and verify details wherever this was possible. At the reunion for former students of the Gymnasium which Yaacov Samid organized to mark the seventieth anniversary of its foundation, he said: "Virtue has its own reward, and my reward is that my initiative came to fruition". For the work which he has invested in this book describing the twenty years of the Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium, he has been rewarded in similar fashion.

Dikla Golomb

Linguistic Editor of the original Hebrew manuscript.

Quotes from Readers of the Hebrew Edition

- **Chaim Herzog, former President of Israel**

  I am glad that the Gymnasium has been documented so that this historic accomplishment can be passed on to following generations...

- **Yitzhak Shamir, former Prime Minister of Israel**

  ...The book is written and organized in excellent taste with regard to its content and its deluxe format. The Gymnasium was fortunate to have an energetic, enterprising and skilful graduate who undertook this important task of documenting its history.

- **Bialystoker Stimme - NY, USA**

  ...It was a colossal endeavor, requiring obstinacy and energy, to compile material about an institution which has not been in existence for more than 50 years - an institution which was rightfully considered one of the pearls of Hebrew education in Poland. Its archives have been destroyed. The greater percentage of the graduates and teachers were no longer alive. It required a great deal of research and library work. The result of this monumental task is a beautiful book, impressively bound. Acknowledgments must be extended to Yaacov Samid for his initiative and exhausting labor, without which this book would surely never have seen the light of day.

- **Ha'aretz, Daily, Tel-Aviv**

  ...This book is the story of an era, told through the chronology of an educational institution teaching in Hebrew and producing a generation of Zionist leaders.

- **Davar, Daily, Tel-Aviv**

  ...This book is rich in content and elegant in appearance. It amounts to a magnificent historic certificate exalting an institution steep in humanistic spirit and Hebrew substance, so deserving of its title: "The Crown Jewel of Hebrew Education in Poland." This book is a labor of love of Yaacov Samid. It details the impressive growth of the educational activity within

the school. It emphasizes important events in every one of its twenty years.

The animated spirit of the Hebrew Gymnasium is alive within the pages of this book, now joining the list of volumes which together create and safe-keep our national memory.

• Niv Hagimlai, Magazine, Tel-Aviv

A beauty of a book. This volume is produced in a large album-format. Excellent editorial work. It is evident that a great deal of thought and labor was invested in this. Every page brings up a scent of memories, a touch of humor, the lore of friendship between teachers and students – readiness to pitch in for others...

• Dr. Ephraim Wapinsky, Tel-Aviv

The book serves as an outlet of heart-felt emotions and love which engulfed the students of this school, dedicated to Tora, science and the love of Israel - the nation and the country. The reward of this honorable achievement is kept in the hearts of all those who now enjoy the great and tiring effort that was invested in putting the book together...

• Dr. M. Bayliss, California, U.S.A.

I have read the book with great deliberation, and poetic heart beats. You have hand crafted a well-put, splendid object – content and style. What excellent taste! You have succeeded in recreating the sense of continuity and growth of this glorious institution. You deserve much praise for your initiative and your editorial judgment for this anniversary volume. It immortalizes a magnificent chapter in the annals of the dreamers and the warriors of our national resurrection...

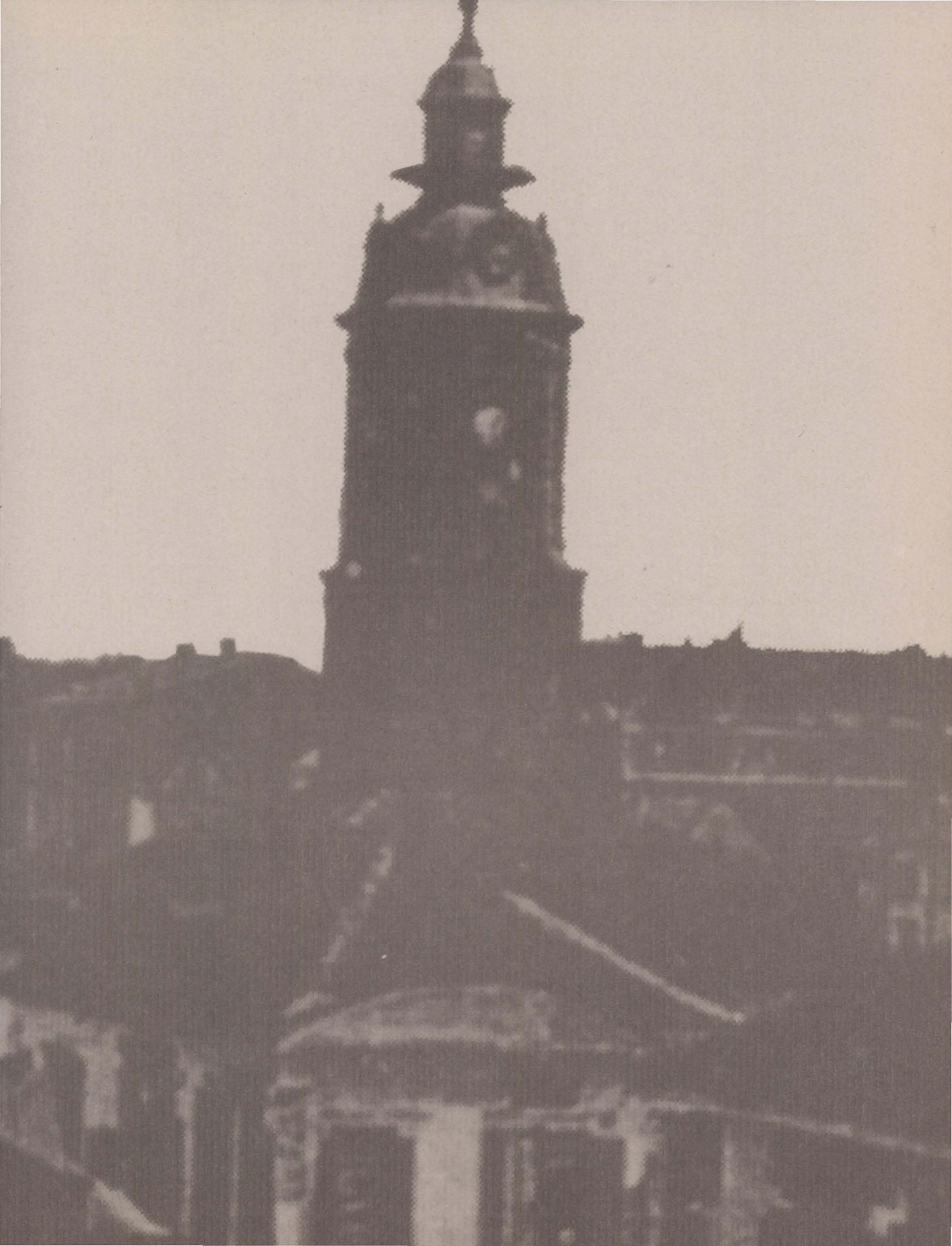
• Daniel Poczebutzki, Lawyer, Tel-Aviv

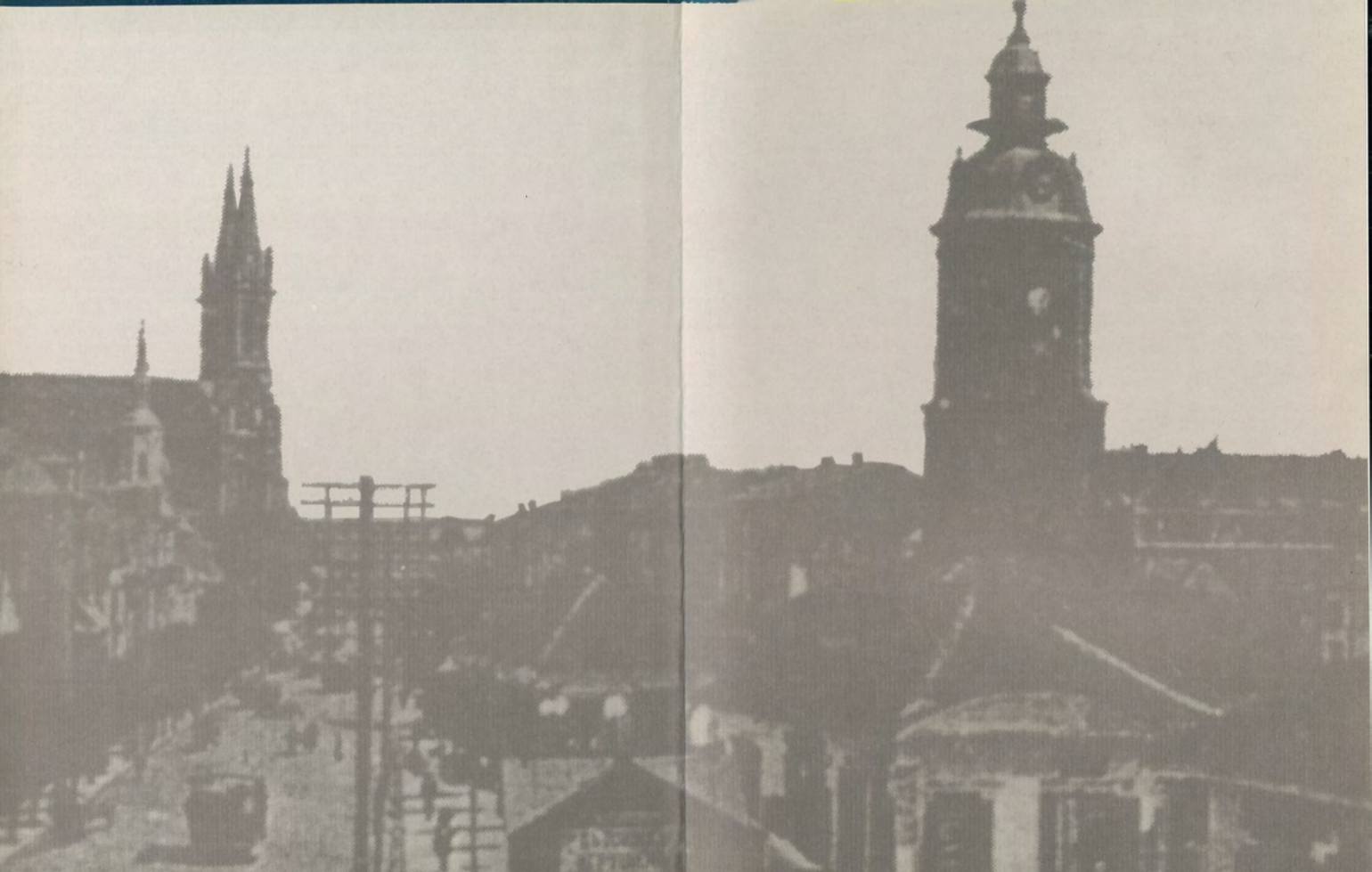
...Only a person who combines within himself both engineer and humanist could have produced such a fine book with its instructive content, elegant appearance and internal arrangement. It is due to your perseverance and determination that we now enjoy this distinguished product.

• Dr. Harry London - Virginia, U.S.A.

...There is no doubt that this book is a most suitable monument to Bialystok and to one of its finest educational institutions, and we of the Bialystok Gymnasium owe you our sincere gratitude.







This story is a testimony to Jewish tradition and the development of Hebrew culture and language in the Diaspora. The Bialystok Hebrew Gymnasium successfully overcame obstacles encountered under a hostile regime in Poland and became a landmark in the history of Jewish education. ***It is a saga of young men and women whose school was eventually destroyed by the Germans. Those who survived, remained faithful to the message instilled in them by their courageous teachers***. We dedicate this book to the ***immortal spirit*** of the Hebrew Gymnasium, and trust that it will help to safeguard a venerated heritage, which has not only lifted the hearts and minds of its graduates, but is a continuing source of inspiration that is being passed on to future generations.

Following are some quotes from readers of the Hebrew edition:

- *"I am glad that the Gymnasium has been documented so that this historic accomplishment can be passed on to following generations..."* **(Chaim Herzog, former President of Israel)**.

- *"...The book is written and organized in excellent taste with regard to its content and its deluxe format. The Gymnasium was fortunate to have an energetic, enterprising and skilful graduate who undertook this important task of documenting its history."* ***(Yitzhak Shamir, former Prime Minister of Israel)***.

- *"...It was a colossal endeavour, requiring obstinacy and energy to compile material about an institution which has not been in existence for more than 50 years. Without this initiative and exhausting labour, this book would surely never have seen the light of day."* ***(Bialystoker Stimme, New York.)***

The author of this book, **Yaacov Samid**, graduated from the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok (Poland) in 1929. After receiving his M.Sc. diploma, in 1935 he emigrated to Eretz Yisrael. In 1990 he organized a school reunion and brought together the dispersed graduates of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Bialystok. Hundreds of surviving alumni from Israel, the United States, Europe, Africa, Australia and the Soviet Union gathered in Tel-Aviv in a moving ceremony. In 1992 Yaacov Samid published the Hebrew edition of this book, now followed by its English version. ***The book proves that the Nazis could destroy the walls of this Jewish school, but could not demolish its immortal spirit***.