The Szczebrzeszyn Memorial Book

ספר זכרון לקהילת שעברעשין



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The Zamość Memorial Book

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Dedication



ל"ע



60 Years

To The "Greatest Generation"

The men and women who fought in the Second World War to rid the world of the scourge of fascism, and in particular, the Nazi horror, which gave rise to the need for these kind of books to be written.

May their candle burn brightly for all time to come

Their courage and sacrifice made V-E Day possible on May 8, 1945, and V-J Day possible on September 2, 1945. Because of them, the world was pulled back, out of the black abyss of an unspeakable barbarity, into a great light, where the promise was made that humanity would never again sink to such levels of depraved behavior.

The heroism of "The Greatest Generation"gave the world another chance. Sadly, the events of the past sixty years have yet to indicate that the world had seized upon this opportunity to elevate itself. Humanity continues to be uncomprehending of what it means to dehumanize one's fellow human beings, and treat them as if their lives had no value. And so, we have seen Cambodia, Rwanda, and the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans. Even as this is written, modern practitioners of genocide rampage through the Darfur Province of the Sudan.

This New Millennium has not begun auspiciously. The United States was attacked – yet again – on September 11, 2001 by a fundamentalist Islamic fascism with no more respect for human life than its many predecessors in kind. And so, once again, we are called upon to wage war, lest we be dragged into the abyss yet one more time.

Perhaps a day will yet come, where all men will show a respectful tolerance for one another, regardless of the degree of their differences, and learn to extend mutual affection, rather than inflict their hatred upon one another.

כן יהי רצון

Supporters Honor Roll

The following members of our extended family of *landsleit*, friends and well-wishers, provided financial contributions to help make the publication of this book possible. Their generosity assures the preservation of this heritage for future generations, by which they have earned a large measure of our collective gratitude.

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Szczebrzeszyn

שעפּרעשין

Translator's Foreword

It remains a source of ongoing gratification to me, that each experience, in translating a Yizkor Book into English, is such an informative and educational undertaking. Despite the fact that the tragic outcome of the telling is known in advance, there continue to be special insights, and a variegated set of perspectives, that refresh the history, and add that much more to the record of what transpired in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe during the course of their existence. In this respect, *Sefer Zikaron LeKehillat Shebreshin* is no exception.

This fifth translation, in a series, provides a memorial to the *shtetl* that is the birthplace of my father, Louis (Leibusz) Berger ז"ע. Despite its extended history, which spans over a half millennium, Szczebrzeszyn devolved into a satellite of the larger, and more prominent, city of Zamość, which emerged as the apple of the eye of Jan Zamoyski, its founder, after whom it is named. Nevertheless, there are many aspects to the history of Szczebrzeszyn that help to enrich the record.

First, there is a parallel to the coupling of Zelva and Dereczin, my first two translations. The coupling of Zamość and Szczebrzeszyn is similar. These are two close-by locations with very venerable Jewish communities that existed side by side, in proximity, for centuries. Accordingly, families in one location inevitably had blood kin in the other. A heartwarming result of this phenomenon, which grew out of this specific undertaking, was to be able to bring together two sets of cousins of the *Maimon* family, here in the United States, one from Szczebrzeszyn and one from Zamość, who were not aware of each other's existence.

The *Maimon* family, which proudly identifies with the great Maimonides, also affords us an interesting glimpse into the foray of a small band of Sephardic Jewish emigrants fleeing the 1492 Spanish Inquisition, into what was then a faraway sanctuary in Eastern Europe. This Yizkor Book tells us that nine Sephardic communities were established in that part of the world, and even though they did not retain a distinct Sephardic identity, the descendants of that emigration continued to preserve the knowledge of their special origins. The great ascetic Hebrew scholar-analyst and writer, Yaakov Reifman, married into this family, and spent most of his life in Szczebrzeszyn.

The oral tradition of legends recorded here is fascinating. The editors are careful to point out that a more objective and rational assessment of the facts does not always support these stories. That does not make them any less interesting, nor less enchanting. The editors have taken great care to preserve these stories, as they were told, without any attempt to make them conform to 'modern' findings. Of particular note is the fact that over 350 Torah scrolls are attributed to the Great Synagogue in Szczebrzeszyn. This is an awesome number, especially when placed against the 'nearly one hundred' attributed to the Great Synagogue in Zamość, a city with greater wealth and a more sizeable Jewish population. Despite the fact that this number stretches credulity, even the nonagenarian Szczebrzeszyn native, Philip (Pinchas) Bibel, today of San Francisco, does not doubt this number. He avers that even in the house of his parents, there were two Torah scrolls used for the conduct of prayer.

Once again, the gruesome hand of the Nazi exterminator can be recognized by its adherence to the plan for *The Final Solution*. Here, from a perspective on the outskirts of Zamość, we see this Jewish

community, sucked into the vortex of annihilation that sent the Jews in this corner of Poland to their death in the 'Hell of Belzec.' The names of the leading perpetrators both from the ranks of the Nazi Germans, and their abettors from the surrounding gentile populace of Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania are confirmed, yet again, to their eternal obloquy.

Of special note is the website at www.szczebrzeszyn.net which is supervised by Tomasz ("Tomek") Panczyk, a native of the town. A Polish gentile, currently living in Rohnert Park, CA, Tomek has devoted much time and energy to assure that the history of the Jewish community remains properly preserved, despite every attempt of the Nazi exterminators to eradicate it completely. The website also documents the respectful restoration of the Synagogue by the local authorities. It also indicates that what remains of the Jewish cemetery in Szczebrzeszyn is in desperate need of conservation.

I am, of course, indebted to Tomasz Panczyk for his assistance in assuring that my rendition of Polish names and places, transliterated from Yiddish into English, were done correctly. Both he, and Philip (Pinchas) Bibel, were instrumental in assuring that we were consistent and accurate in rendering all of the names of the people recorded in the Yizkor Book. Finally, my thanks also go to Yeshaya Metal, the reference desk librarian at YIVO in New York City, who, as usual, was ever ready with a suitable insight regarding the occasional esoteric word that would surface from time to time.

Spring 2005 *Jacob Solomon Berger*

Foreword

Page 5: (Top) *Members of the Israeli Organization Committee*
(From the Right) Ephraim Farber, Chaya Schissel, Moshe Weinstock, Shimon Scher

(Bottom) *Members of the Book Editorial Committee*
Moshe Weinstock, Ephraim Farber, Abraham Wolfson, Shimon Scher, Zvi Traeger (Tal)
(Sitting): Hanoch Becher, Chaya Schissel

The 'Yizkor' Book, of the Szczebrzeszyn Community which was annihilated among more than a thousand Jewish communities in the cities and towns of Poland[1], appears after the passing of 42 years after the slaughter in the town, 39 years after the fall of the Nazi regime, and the end of The Second World War. Is this not somewhat late? Is this not conceptually a case of 'Its time has past, and the offering is stale?' Has not everything about the destruction of Polish Jewry already been said? Has this theme not been fully exhausted?

Certainly, this sorrowful period in the history of the people has not been forgotten, and everything that has been written to date, does not describe the huge ambit of the loss: the tragic end of the vibrant, living, thousand year [history of] Jewry in Poland.

Many 'Yizkor' books to the memory of communities that were destroyed have already been published, but one is not satisfied with this. Every one of those who was saved wants to contribute to the memories of that which is now past, each one wants to see their *own* contribution in a book, their own city, they wish to memorialize that which is their own *personal* theme. Each and every city and town was its own microcosm of a world, a Jewish world with all its signs and symbols, and indicators, with social institutions, parties, organizations, schools, and *Batei Medrashim*, a tradition of partnership. – all of this is unforgettable, and demands articulation.

Szczebrzeszyn was like this also, a town in the Zamość District (*powiat)*, in the Lublin Province (*wojewodztwo*), which before The Second World War numbered 8,000 people, within which were approximately 3,000 Jews.

From that time on, not only many years have gone by: a huge upheaval in life has occurred. Transformations took place in the society, and in the politics, conflicts took place. The land changed hands, new relationships arose, the State of Israel was established, – despite all of this, there remains yet a specific measure of longing for that bygone era, when there existed a complete Jewish life, a social life, a feel of 'togetherness' together in life and in hope.

*

There were no lack of problems in editing this book.

1. Most of the material was written by those who survived the Catastrophe, the *She'arit HaPleyta*, during the first years after The War; part was written about what had taken place while still abroad, close to the time that the events occurred, when memories were still fresh. For this reason, most of the writings are in Yiddish, before the time when the townsfolk made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, or a short time after they made *aliyah.* Few articles were written in Hebrew in the original.

---

[1] According the records of Yad VaShem, over 6,500 Jewish 'communities' were destroyed in the Holocaust.

In order that the younger generation – children of those who survived, born in Israel – who are not well versed in Yiddish, should be able to read the writings, in order that they should not become alienated from this material, but rather that they should become partners to the experiences and feelings of their parents and be familiar with these events that this generation lived through, that suffered the tortures of Hell, we have translated a portion of this material into Hebrew.

Taking into account the townsfolk in the Diaspora, we found it necessary to introduce a summary in English, primarily for the younger generation.[2]

2. This book was not written by historians or skilled writers. Those who participated, pictured the events as they lived them – decrees and their consequences, degradation, repressions, torture, mass-murder, and from the other side – the inner life of the times of peace, the fully-variegated, substantive existence that had such a deep wellspring, the lust for life, the struggle to live through it all, and to survive.

A variety of deficiencies can be traced to this, among them – a partial dearth in data concerning the events. You can appreciate, that in the course of these extenuating circumstances, it was neither possible, nor did anyone necessarily think of, keeping a chronicle of events. Only very few, with an historical sensibility at all, gave any thought at that time, about writing memoirs in order to convey a record of these terrifying times to coming generations, as a memorial.

Not every contribution to the book is the high point of artistic creativity and not every poem is the crown of poetic achievement. People, who were neither writers nor poets, attempted to express in their own way, their feelings and their experiences during this *Period of Catastrophe*, and under these abnormal conditions. But, especially these authentic portraits, these personal experiences, the events of their own, have a special sense of their own, and impart a documentary value to the material all of their own.

3. From the outset, when the material was being assembled, no particular attention was paid to the allocation of themes. Regrettably, no guidance was given, or direction, and every contributor wrote in accordance with their own understanding, unplanned. Because of this, there were many participants who wrote about 'everything:' a few words about being in the *shtetl,* a few comments about the *Catastrophe Period* – about fleeing and wandering, about suffering ans death, and occasionally also several sections about people and personalities, etc. And all of this intermingled.

Since each theme was 'somewhat touched upon' only with the 'tip of the fork' as it were, and everything was written 'in one package,' it is understandable that no single point was completely covered; such an approach could not serve as a means to articulate any single theme. Because of this, there is much 'duplication,' [there are] redundancies. And the material was not in proper form for publication. Because of this, the material was not easy to sort out, or to select what was most appropriate to clarify and complement that which was missing.

In contrast, it is worth mentioning that other participants, thanks to their intuition, were able to recollect up memories and assessments in a specific form, and on a suitable plane.

---

2 This short English translation encompasses only the Table of Contents and this Foreword. Its brevity is indicative of the times, and the lack of good facility in English among the editors. Much of what is said here reflects the motivation for the creation of this book, in English.

4. With the passage of time, changes came about in the Editorial Committee, and this made the work more difficult and created a barrier to publication. On the other hand, the irregular assembly of material demanded a great deal of re-work time.

5. Those who participated in the [creation of the] book are spread out in various places in Israel and outside of The Land. Each revision or clarification was therefore not easy to accomplish.

After everything, despite all the difficulties and limitations, we did everything that was possible in order to achieve completion. We overcame all of the obstacles, through a very strict selection of material, a very caring form of editing, and making a strenuous effort to fill in that which was missing. Apparently, we have brought the book to an appropriately effective level.

The Editorial Staff took no political position. If in some places one senses a sympathetic tone to some political direction or another, it comes from the natural and legitimate sentiment of the writer, and it is implicitly understood that it is for the account of the writer's responsibility.

*

The Editorial Staff paid attention to assuring that the material be faithful and accurate in reflecting the original, without any manifest alterations, only, as far as possible, in the language of the participant, but not containing any errors.

We paid attention to improving the style, but not to overly refine and embellish; correcting, but not enhancing [the text] too much; not to impart a literary style, or introduce phraseology, but also not to permit any material in its ordinary [sic: rough] form. We made the effort not to create any confusion or disorder, just sifted, sorted, clear and relevant material.

*

In the Yiddish portion, we 'struggled' more than just once with a variety of forms of expression: Polish, Russian and German idioms, and also Hebraisms, and local nomenclature and idioms. We wanted to conceal the peculiarity of the language used by the contributors to the book. Not wanting to completely eliminate the local argot, but also not permitting errors or coarse usage, without notation about usage from faraway locations. Occasionally, it was not easy to make decisions.

*

Residents of the towns were mostly not known by their family names; almost everyone had a nickname – part of the time after the name of a father or mother, part of the time after the designation of an occupation or a business. Also, sometimes in line with external appearance, occasionally appended to a specific occurrence, but also comical and even insulting. These kinds of names were so popular, that without them, it is difficult to identify the people and therefore we have not omitted them.

*

We express our gratitude to all those who helped with the sacred mission – both the contributors to the content of the book, and the financial supporters, whose willing financial donations made it possible to publish the 'Yizkor' book.

A special heartfelt thanks is richly deserved by our comrade Mendel Boim, who in the course of many years dedicated a great deal of time, and exerted himself in the assembly of materials from the contributors in The Land and the Diaspora. He was the address for the contact with the comrades in Israel, in Poland, in the United

States, in Canada, in Argentina, and he was the one who gave them encouragement to write. He did this all voluntarily. The five folios (journals) that he published – with contributions from those members of our *shtetl* – were the harbingers that forecast the appearance of the book, and laid a foundation for it.

*

Now, so long a time after the destruction of the *shtetl*, her former residents were prepared to forgive all of her failings and shortcomings – and long for her. People yearn, as it is known, for the place where they grew up as children, and seek the roots of their origins there. But, no, God-forbid, they do not want to return there. Not even for a fleeting visit. They have no one there to visit. There, is where their dear ones were murdered and killed out, and the few who survived fled to wherever their feet took them. The location will not engender pleasure in them, only pain and emotional stress. Only a few of those who survived have enough desire and courage to visit the ruins.

The *shtetl* has definitely undergone a change of appearance with the passage of time. For sure, new buildings have been erected, on the graves and ruins, but they, the former residents of the *shtetl*, carry it in their hearts in the form as it was then, before the terrifying events. The *shtetl* of fantasy, has thereby become a symbol, which concentrates them as a single family.

The souls of the *landsleit,* who today are spread and scattered [all over the world], who live on continents that are far from one another, are sundered. They are rooted in their new place of residence, where they spend their days and nights in the circle of their families, at work, at business, but they feel a greater kinship to the friends of their youth, with whom they can share memories of the past, with current feelings, and with hope for the future, with whom they are able to discuss a variety of subjects, better than they can with their close neighbors. The binding spiritual legacy serves as a contact. The man from New York, from Montreal, Buenos Aires, Saõ Paulo, feels closer to his landsman in Haifa, Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, that to his current neighbor.

It is entirely natural that the 'Yizkor' book appears in the State of Israel. This is not only because this is the center of the Jewish people, but also because here are found the largest number of those remaining from *She'arit HaPleyta* of our *shtetl*.

Let the book be a sign and a testament of a cooperative goal, of common thoughts. Here, in cooperation with one another, here, the contributors have brought their thoughts, their energy, their remaining soul, and want to derive the sense of belonging from this, the 'feeling of togetherness' that leaps across geographic boundaries. It appears that – despite the opposing forces, the conflicts and the wrangling of the past – they find themselves once again united, girded as one, in feeling and thought.

The Editorial Committee

חוי חיים

לעבנס שטייגער

Way of Life

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Page 21: A Picture of the Main Square

The Imperative to Acquire Knowledge

By Moshe Messinger

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Page 35: (Top) *'Unser Gloybn' A Drama in 3 Acts by Sh[olom] Asch. Directed by Moshe Messinger 12/8-22, 1928*

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The town was isolated both economically and culturally – during my childhood years, to the extent that I can recall. Very few people were able to write and read, and it goes without saying as to having any knowledge of the world. Despite this, there were isolated young people, who strove to acquire knowledge, and to take in every ray which penetrated there. For the most part, this was done secretly, against the will of parents.

A few of the Jewish young people of that time – and I was among them – began to carry on Enlightenment activities, and learning, and others, to write and read. This circle consisted mostly of '*shtibl*' youth: by contrast, there was no representation from [the families of] craftsmen. On each street in the *shtetl,* perhaps there was one person, perhaps, who could write out an address in Russian.

We exerted ourselves to obtain pamphlets to learn to read and write. Theses were the so-called 'letter-writers.'

I studied at the Russian School, even before The First World War, with another Jewish friend, and 6 Jewish girls. We were greatly envied.

The imperative to acquire knowledge began. I recall that certain of the '*shtibl*' youth began to inquire about what is being learned, and how the learning is conducted. And not only once did we repeat the lectures for them, that we had heard in the Russian School.

It reached the point, that certain individuals began to go out 'into the larger world,' in the large city, in order to acquire education. At every departure of such an individual, the preparation was very conspiratorial. Nobody was supposed to know about it, especially not the parents. But, after that individual had already crossed the Russian-Austrian border, we told them the secret.

For parents of that time, it was a great shame. The family was ashamed to tell about it. – That is the way it was up to he First World War.

Secret Organizations

The first, who helped to cultivate the young Jewish people, even before The First World War, were: Baruch Bibel, Abraham Yitzhak Becher, Nehemiah Feiler, and myself. We obtained a number of brochures about the Zionist movement and decided to organize the first lecture. We hid the brochures with Shaul Joseph Feiler.

Then, in Czarist times, the fear was very great. The lecture, therefore, was held clandestinely.

We decided to found a Zionist organization, but the plan was not put into action, because immediately, The First World War broke out. I and other friends went off to war, and all plans were interrupted.

Coming home from the war, I encountered a situation that was somewhat changed already. Young people strived, but not really knowing what they wanted. We re-grouped anew, this time in larger numbers. Among those who gathered were: Mordechai Behagen, Baruch Bibel, Hirsch Geld, David Hirsch Messinger, Yossel Szpringer, Ephraim Boim, and many others.

A Library is Created

Our first task was to create a municipal library. Joining us were also: Henrik Bronstein, Ruzha Bronstein, and the Sznycer family. We visited from house to house, and everyone received out initiative happily. Yossel Sznycer, Mordechai Behagen , Nehemiah Feiler and Yekhiel Weinberg contributed a larger number of books and journals.

Large sums of money were needed in order to provide the library with a large endowment of books. For this end, we organized a drama circle, which consisted of the following people: Joseph Sznycer, H. Bronstein, Leib Sznycer, Ruzha Bronstein, A. Y. Becher, Maleh Oberfersht. Moshe Messinger was the director, Prompter – Abraham Yitzhak Weinrib, Decorators – Nikha Sznycer and Chaya Boim.

Thanks to the theater presentation, we were able to put together the needed sums of money. And it was in this manner that we created one of the monumental works for education and knowledge – the Library, named for *Mendele Mokher Sforim* in Szczebrzeszyn.

Establishment of the Zionist Organization

At the same time, we founded a Zionist organization at the location of Chaim Moshe Wasser. It was at that time that the interesting work began, of making our dreams into a reality: enlightening the Jewish youth of the *shtetl*.

With the passage of time, the young people developed, and thinking began to crystallize – opinions about world-level problems, especially about questions pertaining to Jewish society and nationhood.

The following joined our circle: Yossel Merzel, Shmuel Klieger, Abraham Bernstein (who came from 'the outside world' from Warsaw), Hanoch Becher, David Merzel. Our new comrades assisted in our efforts and thanks to their intellectual strength, we made impressive progress along a broad front.

For the first time, a proletarian-Zionist concept was introduced. Up to that point, the young people grouped themselves into the general Zionist organization, later – in a larger measure, around the proletarian-Zionist circles: *Poalei-Tzion, Tze'Irei Tzion.*

Establishment of the '*Bund*'

At that time, Ephraim Boim and Yossel Nahr arrived (Lejzor Papiroshnik's son, and the *Gorajecker's* son) –

both former Yeshiva students, very well-developed spiritually, with viewpoints about the world that were broad in perspective, people, nation and class. They began to conduct a special line of work in Enlightenment, and created a left-wing, labor union by the standards of that time, the '*Bund.*' The union crystallized organizationally and later on encompassed the larger portion of the working class in Szczebrzeszyn. The leaders were: Ephraim Boim, Abraham Yitzhak Weinrib, Yossel Szpringer, Leib Szpringer, David Weiss, Yitzhak Gall, Esther Tulkop, etc.

It was in this manner that Jewish youth was suddenly split in its local thinking, and it its orientation into two camps: one camp – A Zionist-proletarian orientation, the second, a larger portion – under the leadership of the '*Bund.*'

The general cultural work – and especially as it pertained to the Library – was carried out through the general body of two labor parties: *Poalei-Tzion – Tze'Irei Tzion* and the '*Bund.*' The leaders were: Moshe Messinger – Librarian, Joseph Sznycer – Chairman, Henrik Bronstein, Mordechai Behagen, Abraham Bronstein – Secretaries, Abraham Itcheh Becher, Yossel Szpringer, Hirsch Geld, Abraham Itcheh Weinrib – Members of the Leadership Committee.

The Library, named for Mendele Mokher Sforim, grew from day to day. Every month larger transports of Polish books were brought in, Hebrew, and mostly in Yiddish.

Intense Cultural Activity

The two Yeshiva students, Ephraim Boim and Yossel Nahr carried out a broadly-based Enlightenment effort. They place special emphasis on those young men who had studied in the *Radzyner Shtibl.* One of these boys, Yaakov Gershtenblit (today in America), helped us clandestinely – until a certain day, when the Hasidim found out about the secretly conducted effort at enlightenment, which is being carried on in the shtibl, behind the open *Gemara* texts.

It came to an open confrontation. At that time, thanks to the intensive enlightenment effort of the Library leadership, from one side, and the open confrontation, which broke out in the Radzyner *shtibl*, on the second side, the Szczebrzeszyn cultural corpus became enriched with very fecund, and new cultural forces such as: Moshe Bub, Moshe Zvi Berger, Pesach Berger, Hirsch Getzel Hochboim, his two brothers Abraham and Nahum Hochboim, Yankl Honigman.

At that time, the integration of the two Zionist-Socialist parties took place: *Poalei-Tzion* and *Tze'Irei Tzion*, and thanks to this unification, the great Zionist-Socialist Worker's movement, *Poalei Tzion* – Tz. S. was built.

Even with the vigorous growth of the Library, and with the larger growth of enlightened young people, cultural activity did not solve all the problems and needs which were manifest in the development of the young people who formerly were coming up, which had an appetite for knowledge. The courses and the learning to write and read through the *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. party no longer sufficed.

Thanks to the energetic work of the 'Bund' leadership, a second very substantial and practical cultural organization was established at that time, the Tz. Sh. O. school, which addressed not only the illiteracy of the already older youth, but also, primarily on a rather wider front, the poor children of the working classes and the masses, who had no possibility to pay tuition in the *Heder* system.

The Tz. Sh. O. school was established with the assistance of the members of *Poalei-Tzion,* who stood on the standpoint of Yiddish, such as Shmuel Klieger and Yankl Honigman. However later, the school went under the exclusive control of the *Bund* leadership.

Three drama circles were created and developed in parallel. One circle was with *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. Party, under the direction of Moshe Messinger: the second drama circle – under the leadership of Beryl Koyl, Zanwel Aszenberg[3], Yehuda Kellner. Both circles, in large measure, filled the needs for cultural requirements of both labor parties.

Die '*Khaliastreh*'[4]

Also, we did not forget, even for one minute, the youth of the *Bet HaMedrash,* which served us as a reservoir of intellectual resources to carry out cultural-political and social work. Primarily the camp of *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. but also the '*Bund*' did not abandon this wellspring of intellectual young men in the Yeshivas.

It was in this manner that we later drew near to us, and extricated Asher Shapiro from the *Bet HaMedrash*, and Shmuel Ber Liger, Abraham Chaim Nus, and Mendel Boim. Over Mendel, an almost indescribable struggle took place by both parties. The young man has an 'open mind.' Placing books secretly before the young men in the *Bet HaMedrash* – just as we did it in the Radzyner *Shtibl* – we took note of the fact that the young man is not responsive, and doesn't learn at the same time as the other young men do. We followed him one time, and took note that he rises every day at 3 AM, together with Shmuel Ber Liger, and that they both go to the *Bet HaMedrash*; each in a separate corner studies at his own *Gemara.*

On a certain evening, one of the older of our friends from the party, Leibl Schneider, who was still studying at the *Bet HaMedrash*, and at the same time was a secret 'Member of the Underground,' spent the night in the *Bet HaMedrash.* At three o'clock, when Mendel Boim came into the *Bet HaMedrash* with his friend Liger, the observer took note that instead of opening the *Gemara*, Mendel pulled out a '*trayf-possul*' [book] from behind the broom....it was Marx's'[Das] Kapital.'

We supplied the young man with Borokhov's 'Platform,' and 'The Class Interests in the Nationalist Question.' The young man, along with other comrades, became followers and emissaries for the proletarian-Zionist concept and created '*HeHalutz*,' and '*HeHalutz HaTza'ir* in the *shtetl.*

Before the '*Khaliastreh*' from the *Bet HaMedrash* took over the leadership of the party work, there was yet another group of comrades who helped us loyally in disseminating the Zionist-proletarian idea. These were: Mendel Messinger, Yehoshua Zisbrenner, Yerakhmiel Ginsburg, and Yankl Lamm. Especially Mendel Messinger, who had previously founded '*HaShomer*,' and later, Yehoshua Zisbrenner, Hanoch Becher, and Shmuel Ber Liger, lend the up and coming '*Khaliastreh*' from the *Bet HaMedrash* into the responsible work.

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3 A grandson, Mariano Zysman of Argentina, indicates that the full name of his grandfather was Samuel Zanwel Aszenberg

4 A slang term from the Russian meaning 'The Gang.' It was a name adopted by a grup of Imaginist-Expressionist Jewish writers in Eastern Europe, and may have been the inspiration for this choice.

A group of comrades from both labor parties had the opportunity to create the administration of the '*Dozor*' and the '*Parnes*' in the *shtetl*, and the Jewish populace was given the right to elect its own representatives in the municipal leadership.[5] This group conducted a struggle for the socio-economic interests of the working masses in the *shtetl* for many years. In specific instances, it was with the cooperation of the progressive representatives such as Moshe Hirsch Berger and Hirsch Getzel Hochboim.

Mostly, the struggle in the Municipal Administration was carried on by the comrades: Yossel Szpringer, Abraham Itcheh Weinrib, Yitzhak Gall, Abraham Szpringer – from the '*Bund*,' Moshe Messinger and others – from *Poalei-Tzion,* also other representatives from a variety of persuasions, such as Leibl Licht and Shia Lerner.

Social Assistance

Apart from the cultural activity from the already broadly developed labor parties, they also carried on a broad and intensive social assistance effort. Most of all, at the onset of winter, it was in order to provide the extremely poor populace with needed clothing. And especially before Passover, when Jews did not have any matzos for the holiday, a 'collective bakery' was organized of volunteer friends, both male and female, each of whom would come for 2-3 days of work. This very 'collective bakery' or as they were called '*Laden*' were founded at one time, in parallel by both labor parties.

There were also community kitchens, with a warm midday meal, financed by American Jewry, for the poor, and especially for children. Apart from this, there was a committee for social welfare, which I had the honor of leading. For a long many years, it was supported by the brethren who had emigrated to America.

Only in the last years, before he Second World War, was the institution of '*Drops of Milk*' founded, under the direction of Dwora'leh Flajszer, Hinde'leh Briks, 'Sheva Makharovsky and others. This was one of the most decent institutions in the area of social support. Also here, the leadership of both of the parties gave support, in obtaining subsidies from the Municipal administration.

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5 *Dozor Bozniczy* is Polish, for Communal Leadership, or a *Va'ad Bet HaKnesset*. It consisted of three people, who, jointly with Rabbi, must work out a budget that meets the needs of the community. The *Parnes,* was a community financial executive, taking his name from the Hebrew root 'to give sustenance to.'

How The Youth Grew and Blossomed

By David Fuchs

Page 36: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 38: *The Leadership Committee of the 'Young Bund Zukunft' (Author in the Center)*
Page 42: *(Top) The Drama Circle*
(Bottom) The Cast of 'Two Worlds (Faiths)' (Based on the play, 'Dr. Kohn' by Max Nordau) A-play in 4 Acts. 8 and 14 April 1928, Jewish Library and Reading Room in Szczebrzeszyn.

In the year 1926, when, as a 12 year-old boy, I began to learn tailoring with Mordechai Leib Fehlhendler[6], I met an older worker there, Chaim Berger. He led me off to the professional union, and enrolled me there in the youth section.

The [union] local was at Yossel Kulpe's. There was a Library in the union, named after Esther Tulkop. The librarian was Shlomo Bendler ('Long Shlomo'). I was immediately given pamphlets to read.

In a short time afterwards, I became a member on the *Bund* Youth organization, '*Zukunft.*' We would meet there together with other young people. The youth section, 'Young Bund Zukunft' kept on growing. The leadership at that time consisted of: Abraham Itcheh Weinrib, Yossel Szpringer, Yekhiel Bronstein, Zanwel Aszenberg, Yitzhak Gall, Moshe Leib Mittelpunkt, and others.

Several of the comrades, seeing how the young people were being attracted to us, thought, not only once, how to expand the range of our activity. They created the 'Yiddish School Organization' for which a separate premises was immediately rented at Wolf Gedakht. A drama circle was also created of the comrades: Ethel Litvak, Abraham Szpringer, Chaya Berger, Bayl'tcheh Blei, Aharon Frieling, Beryl Kvill, and others. The youth were very active.

Our leadership, seeing that the young people being attracted to us were from the poor class, and for the most part do not have even the most elementary education, among them also illiterates, because they had no possibility in their impoverished homes to learn, they founded evening courses, where the young tailors, shoemakers, and house servants could learn writing and reading. Also Jewish History was studied, natural sciences, and other subject matter. The young Jewish poor acquired their education in this way, reading and writing until they became proficient enough to take part in community political life in the *shtetl.*

Our professional union conducted a very active range of organizational and socio-economic activities. In the early times, a worker in the shtetl was compelled to work 12-14 hours in a 24-hour period. Thanks th the intensive work of the professional union, a 10 hour work day was instituted at the outset, and immediately thereafter, after a short strike of all the manual laborers – an eight-hour work day.

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6 Many Jewish family names were drawn from lines of work. This name means someone who dealt in leather. It is not unlikely that this may have been a trade of the tailor's father, or grandfather, which was assumed as a family name after Napoleon's time, when many of his legal reforms (i.e. adoption of family names) were instituted throughout those parts of Europe where he came to dominate.

The workers received better working conditions and higher wages. For a long time, they tried to straighten out the bent-over backs of the working classes, thanks to the organizational work of the professional union. The leadership of the '*Bund*' had a large part in this.

At the same time, the Yiddish *Volksschule* was established in the *shtetl.* In this endeavor, the *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. Party provided assistance in a very large measure, especially: Shmuel Liger, Joseph Merzel, Hanoch Becher, and others. But, afterwards, for a variety of reasons, only the '*Bund*' leadership was involved in carrying out this work. The following comrades helped a great deal in the development of the Yiddish school movement in the shtetl: Yankl Honigman, Isaac Weissfeld.

It was difficult to support the school. However, thanks to the help of practically the entire Jewish population, also from the religious Jews, as well as, also thanks to the help of our brethren in America, the school developed expansively and well. There were five grades there. The teachers came from the Vilna Teachers Seminary. Periodically, the school children would put on theater performances, which were attended by almost the entire Jewish populace.

This was the manner in which our youth developed and grew, and branched out extensively into community and political life. {This was] without regard for political inclination – in the '*Bund*,' '*HeHalutz*,' '*Betar*,' the Zionist organization and the communist [organization].

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With the arrival of the month of May, on Saturday mornings, young girls and boys, ruddy, breathless, fresh, and bursting, running all over the streets of the shtetl, in a variety of directions – these marching in rows, and another in groups. When you arrived at the '*Wigan*,' or on the Frampol Street, groups of young people would assault your eyes, sitting on the grass, and one of them would be holding forth about actual community questions.

Our young people live well and happily. Where did you not run into our young folk? – Everywhere, in the organizational offices, at 'Big Shlomo's booth, on the New Highway. Young people came together in groups all over, and had discussions – about the '*Bund*,' Zionism, and the *Halutz* movement.

I recall that we, the Young *Bund* '*Zukunft*' conducted a recruitment program and organized a gathering of young people for this purpose. Myself, and Moshe Tanenbaum appeared at that time. Moshe'leh Zisbrenner (who fell in the War [of Independence] in Israel), Shmuel Zilberlicht and other *Halutzim* came to the gathering, and spoke with us.

In general, the entire youth in Szczebrzeszyn was politically and municipally very developed. Groups for preparing pioneers were created by '*HeHalutz*' and '*Betar*.' Our 'Kibbutzniks' were to be found in almost every corner of the *shtetl,* going to chop wood. I recollect how the *Betar* youth would march out of Mordechai Flajszer's street under the direction of Yossel Boim.

After the youth of '*Zukunft*' grew up, and with the establishment of the Yiddish School, a location was rented at Grul's. Diagonally across the way, the *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. had their office, and the young people would shuttle back and forth from one location to the second. Each caught the tunes being sung by the other, and in this way, expressed the lust for life and struggle, in song.

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There was a youth that blossomed like trees.
I see them before my eyes, distinctly and clearly.
It flowed and burbled from the impoverished Jewish streets.
A turbulent youth blossomed forth one time.

To this day, the melody of a '*Hora*' follows me
And hands weave together in a joyful way.
Boys dance – with girls together,
Caught up in a dream of the future and happy days....

Till this day, the melody of '*The Oath*' follows me,
Of the Youth *Bund 'Zukunft,'* my earthy pals,
From pauper alleys, Jewish homes,
Fighters for the morrow, young proletarians.

Montreal, Canada

The Struggle for Cultural Advancement

By Yehoshua Zisbrenner

Page 43: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 44: *The Members of 'Tze'irei Tzion, at the May 1, 1922 Celebration*

It was the year 1915-1916. In the time when an opposition was established against the Czarist oppression in Poland, and the youth became entranced and was torn along with the rising storm of 'Going to the People.'

The beginning was very difficult. Not only one of us withstood a very severe struggle at home with their Hasidic parents. Paying no mind to this, we presented our struggle even in the Radzyner *shtibl.* This was a struggle to stand up and become visible. And the rhetoric about the coming of the Messiah had no traction: we must – by ourselves – find the means to liberate the Jewish people and that is the way of Zionism.

A large part of the young people indeed, did come over to us. The organization of Zionist parties was initiated, and of communal committees for *Keren Kayemet* and *Keren HaYesod.* In the course of a short time, we led the majority of young people into the way of the Zionist Labor Movement, which was grouped under the general Zionist organization.

The following were engaged in Enlightenment work in the *shtetl*: Abraham Itcheh Becher, Moshe Messinger, Baruch Bibel, and others. A group of older comrades: David Merzel, Abraham Bernstein, Shmuel'keh Gerenreich carried on clandestine activity in the Radzyner *shtibl.*

Among those previously mentioned, were also the founders of the Library named after *Mendele Mokher Sforim.* Every evening, members would sit in the Library to read and learn.

In the year 1920, the new Polish government suspected us of being communists, and confiscated the library [contents]. The entire inventory, with several thousand books, almost entirely went to ground. A number of the members were arrested.

In a couple of years, the permission to open the library was renewed, and once again, we undertook the work anew. Part of the books were torn, and a large part were missing.

A struggle for the control of the library began between the two labor parties: *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. and the '*Bund.*' The *Poalei-Tzion* – Tz. S. party fought to make the library a municipal one, non-partisan, for which there should be free admission for everyone, in order that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the Yiddish literature. After an extensive and strenuous effort, it became possible to transform the library into a cultural institution for the entire Jewish population.

There was an active drama circle, affiliated with the library, which successfully performed plays ranging from 'Moshe Heit' to 'Der Dybbuk' by An-Ski. The performances took place in the hall of the fire-fighters.

The circle consisted of the following members: Esther Stern, Nekhama Lerner, Shia Zisbrenner, Yisroel'keh Lerner, Mendel Boim, Mordechai Mintz, Rivka Weinstock, Yaakov Lamm, Joseph Lerner, Sarah and Chaya Boim, Pesha Hochgelernter, Leah Groiser, Tila Schwartzberg, and others. 'Der Dybbuk' was repeated (after

the renovation of the Library). The result was colossal.

They came from the surrounding towns and from Zamość to see the play. Meaningful revenues were generated, which were dedicated to the library and helped with the acquisition of a variety of books from the Yiddish literature.

The cultural activity gave our little shtetl much inspiration and a big boost from the outset. Many young people joined in to the activity and we progressed on the community and political front.

The *Kapotehs* Were Discarded

By Yehuda Kellner

Page 45: *A Portrait of the Author*
(Bottom) A Group from the Youth Bund 'Zukunft.'

New winds began to blow through the *shtetl*. In the year 1914, with the onset of The First World War, a community life began to take shape. [Political] parties were founded. Organized labor and the professional unions arose. Reverberations about equality and fraternity were heard, and about the living of a national life.

An upsurge of enthusiasm occurred among the young people. Seeing a new life taking shape in the *shtetl*, the young people abandoned the *Bet HaMedrash*, and the *shtibl*, sloughing off the long *kapote* from their backs, along with the 'Jewish hat' and putting on a [conventional] suit and a cap.

During the first years, one felt resistance from parents. First and foremost, it was expressed on the Sabbath in the *Bet HaMedrash*. You could hear talk of the following nature: – Where was this ever heard before, that girls and boys should gather together, or lighting a lamp on the Sabbath. To take on the role of a comedian and to put on theater productions?... God forbid, a punishment for these sins will befall the *shtetl*...

The youth of Szczebrzeszyn, with its community and partisan activities, earned a reputation throughout the entire Lublin District. This was with the Zionists, the *Bundists* and the communists. If you came to a partisan gathering, all you had to do was say that you are from Szczebrzeszyn, and you were sat up front.

I am reminded that always on Saturday, when we went for a stroll, the *Bundists* went in one group, and they sang the *Bundist* '*Oath*,' the Zionists – in a second group, singing Zionist songs. When the two groups would meet, they would rapidly separate from each other, just as if these were two enemy armed forces...

The young people did not think much about making a living. Parents provided sustenance. There were not many possibilities for employment. Jewish workers were [typically] tailors, shoemakers, table turners. The *shtetl* did not possess any heavy industry. Only Polish workers were employed at the sugar factory of Graf Zamoyski. Jews were not permitted there.

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It was in this manner that the young people lived, and made their mark. And it was in this [same] manner, that parents could not relate to the spirit of the new times, and exhibited a distant relationship to the new currents.

Nevertheless, not considering all these things, I long for those times, for all those struggles, and I cannot conceive that all of this now belongs to the past....

Buenos Aires

'You Need to See a Psychiatrist!...'

By Baruch Bibel

Page 47: *Portrait of the author*
Page 48: *On the Occasion of the Aliyah of Menachem Messinger to Israel – 1933*

A terrifying darkness, literally palpable to the hands, had enveloped the *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn at the time of my arrival, after I had been in Chelm in the *Brisker* Yeshiva. The young people knew of nothing, and did not want to know anything, only to outrank the other in [need for] eyeglasses, in order not to have to serve [in the army of] the Czar.

The Hasidic neighborhood, in which I found myself at that time, suffocated me. I longed for a ray, just one ray of light. Today, standing in the midst of the 'uncleanliness' – in the center of assimilation, here in San Francisco – I feel better, and I can more effectively evaluate the sanctity of our people in general, and of Hasidism in particular, and I long for it.

Fireberg douses the candle on Yom Kippur because he feels his location closing in on him. But when he leaves the *Bet HaMedrash*, and encounters the secular weekday environment, he is drawn back to the holiness and he calls out: "Where to? Where to? Where to?"

I made the acquaintance of Wolf Klotzer, something of a *Maskil* by the standards of that era. The first instances when I engaged him in discourse, had to do with establishing a library in Szczebrzeszyn. The sharp look that he gave me stands before my eyes to this day, when I spoke the word 'library,' and, indeed, he immediately gave me a suggestion, that I should see a psychiatrist, because my thought processes were not clear...

But as I spoke of this issue once, then again, and yet many times again, he said: perhaps? An application for a permit was then sent off.

Yes, truly, nothing came of it. But the move itself at that time was a great accomplishment. One can justifiably say that I planted the seed in the ground at that time, from which the Szczebrzeszyn library eventually grew in the ensuing years.

I made the acquaintance of Abraham Itcheh Becher, a man so full of energy and stamina, that it is truly difficult to find his equal. I truly loved him. I also made the acquaintance of Nehemiah Feiler, Yekhiel Weinberg, Mordechai Benhagen and my neighbor, Yitzhak Hirsch. I spoke and intoned [my idea] with each separately, that it was a great crime not to do something for Zionism. In the end, I had the possibility on one holiday, to bring them all together on the Gorajecker mountains, and at that location, Weinberg spoke from a prepared piece of paper on the subject of Zionism, over which, he most certainly worked and sweated for a long time, before he got it all together.

The first Szczebrzeszyn Zionist Organization was established there. Indeed, right there, we decided to set aside funds in the collection boxes of the National Fund. There was a problem: what should we do with the paper in order that it not, God forbid, fall into the hands of some ordinary Jew. It was decided to burn it. When the paper was already consigned to its grave, somebody advised that the grave should be burned, and indeed, we did burn it. That, was the fate of that poor little piece of paper....

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The First World War broke out. The Austrians brought in a spirit of culture to Poland in general, and something of this into Szczebrzeszyn. I called the young people together, to the house of Yossel Szpringer, and there decided to establish a Jewish library.

San Francisco

Memories of Someone Not from Szczebrzeszyn

By Luba Gall

Page 49: *Portrait of the Author*

Page 55: *(Top) First Grade, 1927/28*
(Bottom) 1929

Do not wonder that I, someone not from Szczebrzeszyn undertakes to write about Szczebrzeszyn, and not about other towns in Poland. The reason: as a freethinking person, I felt like a free person immediately on the first day of my arrival in Szczebrzeszyn. I immediately grew into the town, and became a part of it. The people became my brethren. All my best years and my most beautiful dreams are tied up with Szczebrzeszyn. Szczebrzeszyn was dear to me, and I loved it, and therefore I wish to take the right, along with all of you, to mourn the destruction of a *shtetl,* which was so sacred to me.

No Personal Animosity

It appears to be a *shtetl* like all other small towns in the Lublin District. The Municipal building in the middle of the muddy marketplace – surrounded with four rows of stores, big and small, with tables laden with all manner of merchandise. Women, men, burdened with worry, besmirched. Running first thing in the morning to prayers, and then to making a living. It seems that this is the same as many other places, but it is not the same.

Szczebrzeszyn in my time had the uniqueness that every individual could freely live in accordance with their own meaning and aspirations. There were pious Jews there, decent, full-hearted, who had complete faith, but did not wish to compel anyone to believe as they did, or perhaps in their naive decent faith, they thought that no one could believe in a manner other than their own. The important thing is, that these two camps, the pious and the freethinkers did not carry on any active struggle with one another. Each lived their own lives, going in their own way. In this, lies the difference about Szczebrzeszyn.

There were parties of all kinds. From extreme right to extreme left. There were partisan conflicts – conflicts, sometimes quite heated. It got to the point where people picked up benches and threw punches, but...the people of Szczebrzeszyn were decent in their partisan conflict, and didn't carry any personal bitterness against one another. Even after the most bitter of conflicts, in the library, or the voting hall, or after a meeting of the municipal council (because differences of opinion always existed), you could find Moshe Hirsch Berger (a Zionist) strolling with Yossel Szpringer (A *Bundist*), carrying on a friendly conversation, and that was also the case with others. In Szczebrzeszyn one had a greater sense of respect for another person, even if he was from an opposing political party.

The Productive Activity of The '*Bund*'

A great deal has already been written about Szczebrzeszyn and its residents. I, however, as a person of a particular persuasion, want to write a few words about the '*Bund*' in my own modest style, or better said, about the *Bundists* of Szczebrzeszyn. About a number of them.

When I arrived in Szczebrzeszyn in March 1921, I made the acquaintance of a rather nice group of *Bundists*, who carried on a modest level of work: an illegal professional union, evening courses for workers, as well as partisan discussions and debates. It would appear, that from these modest activities, deep roots were sunk into the poorest classes of people. Because, afterwards, when the professional unions were legalized, and it came time for municipal elections, it first became apparent how strong the *Bund* was among the workers and the folk masses.

Out of the total of 24 members of the city council (Jews and Christians) we received 8 mandates (out of the 11 for the Jews). That is to say, on paper, because the reactionary Polish regime had already taken care to see that we would only get 4 (the remainder were nullified) and it was here, first, that *Bundists* began to carry out their activity. The struggle in the city council was hard for two reasons: As socialists and as Jews, understandably, it was not possible, God forbid, to take over control of the government.

The issues were day-to-day ones. Mostly, they were economic. Overwhelming taxes were levied on Jewish craftsmen and tradespeople of all kind: incidentally, the larger merchants were not particularly big-time capitalists either. With the exception of a small group, the entire *shtetl* exerted itself mightily to make a living. There were concerns about taxes, various decrees, and [the need for] social help, which consisted of a bed in the hospital at no charge (if there even was a place), a house visit by a doctor, and medication (not more than up to 2 zlotys) for those who could not pay and were usually the ones most vulnerable to fall sick.

In a certain measure, the assistance was political: submitting protests and resolutions against the wild, anti-Semitic incitements in the country and in our *shtetl*. The activity of the *Bund* at the municipal building went on from the first day that the municipal council was founded, up to when Hitler, may his name be erased, disbanded it.

And here, I wish to recall two of our city councilmen: Yossel Szpringer, and Abraham Itcheh Weinberg (now in Brazil, he was the *Lavnik*), it was not enough that it happened that these two (and maybe others) carried on the struggle in the municipal council. They needed also, to dedicate a great deal of time and energy when it came time for new elections, to prepare our candidates for the examination. The Polish law demanded: any person who can read Polish and sign his name, can run for office, provided that he has a sufficient number of signatures.

Polish Chicaneries

But the plight of the Jewish candidates in general, and the *Bund* candidates in particular, was different. Regardless of how many times a candidate was elected, every time he was required to sit for the examination, and indeed, it was a difficult one. Not only did they not feel ashamed to test former members of the Council, and among them Yossel Szpringer, and Abraham Itcheh Weinrib (a teacher of trades), they didn't even feel embarrassed to test Yossel Blei, a student of the Juridical Faculty. So, indeed, after a hard days work, laborers would first have to sit down and begin to learn Polish, grammar, history. The group always needed to be a larger one, because one never knew whom they would disqualify, and while Yossel Szpringer and A. I. Weinrib, had to work hard again after their regular day's work (without pay), teaching mature adult people, who for the most part had never even been inside a school; but nevertheless, they did their work.

Our group of councilmen (with little change) consisted almost always of Yossel Szpringer, A. I. Weinrib, Yitzhak Gall, Leib Szpringer. Abraham Szpringer. Yossel Blei, Yaakov Yehoshua Feder, and my minor

participation, when it turned out that I was elected three times in a period of eleven years, and because of this, more or less, I am familiar with all the details of harassment that all the Jewish councilmen had to put up with, especially me.

Ignoring the fact that, the Chief of Police would come with his entire retinue, to every meeting, and could arrest anyone for any word they might utter, sometimes with the added help of other Jewish members of the council, interdicted proposals and defeated the dirtiest of the attacks. We dug ourselves into every nook and cranny of life in the municipal governance, searched and brought things out to light, looked at our fingers (a great hero in this regard was Yossel Szpringer), not permitting public funds to be used for spurious purposes. We saw to it, that at the time when funds for social welfare were curtailed, that the sums allocated for balls and banquets for the councilmen, and the renovation of churches, were also cut back. As a woman, courtesy was always extended to me ('*Damen Ehre*') to read the political resolutions, for which I was 'sent to Russia' not only once.

It was not always possible to get something done, because the Poles had the might, but it didn't come easy to them, since that is how carefully they conducted themselves under the scrutiny of *Bundist* eyes. But because of this, they did not fail to take their revenge on our people wherever and whenever they could: writing up protocols for transgressions that never occurred, sentenced to spend time under arrest, or paying fines, which was worse than being incarcerated. However, this did not deter us.

Not For Personal Purposes

Among the people of Szczebrzeszyn in general, and among the *Bundists* in particular, the ideal stood higher that their own lives, and here are a couple of examples.

Yossel Szpringer's father-in-law was a *Shokhet,* and Yossel – a *Dozor* in the Jewish community leadership. The Jewish ritual slaughterers obtained their living from the Jewish community. They were well paid, and the community found it necessary to levy taxes on meat, to the extent, that poorer people could not allow themselves to buy a bit of meat, even for the Sabbath. When the burden became too great, a proposal was presented: let the ritual slaughterers be separated from the community. Let them work by piece – whosoever require slaughter, that person will pay. This does not appeal to them, and they raise an outcry, however, when an attempt at discussion is initiated, Yossel Szpringer is the first to raise his hand in this connection. Well? Afterwards, at home – a scene: The wife bemoans the livelihood of her father, but Yossel doesn't even hear it.

Fact Number 2: It was decided (the '*Bund*') to open a Jewish secular school. So, what? Among the founders of the school committee are found 3 people, whose families stand in the vanguard: again, Szpringer, Weinrib Gall. They need to select: m y s e l f , or the i d e a l . Yossel Szpringer and Weinrib were teachers of crafts, and Yitzhak Gall – the son of a *melamed.* The families inquire: a Yiddish School? Well, and what will become of you? From whence will you derive a living? (They could not be a teacher in the school). And Shlomo Gall asks: A school in opposition to the *Heder*? Is this what you do to a father in his old age? And Yitzhak is a dutiful child, and loves his father, but...it had been decided and the school opens. Personal interests are not taken into account: the essence – the general community must not suffer.

The '*Bund*' did a great deal in the area of education among the poorest, for whom their parents could pay nothing. Circles were run for years, lectures were organized, and lo, out of the workplace arose an informed cadre of young people. When I was in Canada, Montreal, a former '*Zukunftist,*' now a grown man, a father

of children, now no longer a *Bundist,* declared to me with the greatest respect, that were it not for the '*Bund*' he would have been ignorant even of the little bit that he did know, and it seems that he now knows a great deal more than just a little.

A Labor Intelligentsia Full of Talent

It is from this very youth, which received its education from us, that I wish to pause about one, Beryl Koyl. He was born to a father who was a porter, called '*Batchmar.*' He was a simple man, quite stout, but very decent, and a profoundly poor man as well. Not only his parents could not afford to give him any education, but not even any bread to satisfy his appetite. Because of this, he was compelled to learn a trade in his earliest years, as a shoemaker.

At that time, the youth organization, '*Zukunft*' already existed. Together with Yossel Blei, Zanwel Aszenberg, Moshe Leib Mittelpunkt, and others, are drawn into the 'Zukunft' and there, they receive their first education. Beryl throws himself at it like a man parched with thirst at a fresh source of water, and he learns how to read and write a little bit. Most importantly, reading. He reads a lot, he was gifted with a wondrous memory, and extraordinary faculties for understanding material. In a short period of time, he grows into becoming a wondrous speaker, and a shining public speaker with an awesome understanding of literature and art, a truly blessed amateur on the stage, composing occasionally a beautiful song – and Beryl '*Batchmak*' becomes Beryl Koyl, a member of the labor intelligentsia, a well-informed labor activist, but being naive in his straightforwardness.

He marries, has a wife and two children, whom he loves more than his own life, but when the Second World War breaks out, and young people are called to battle against Hitler, Beryl was the first [to respond]. He knows that he, personally, will not accomplish much. However he wants to – he says – fire at least a few rounds into the fascist beast. He is captured and imprisoned by the Germans, where he is subjected to the most terrifying torture. In March 1940, when Hitler decided to liquidate the Jewish war prisoners, they were sent *en masse* to Lublin (where I happened to be found at the time). They were brought half-naked. The Jewish community received an order: if someone among the prisoners wants to be set free, during the course of the next two days, a kinsman must come, and incidentally, also bring him clothes; if not, they will be shot. (Those who were not set free were indeed shot).

On one of the days, Mirel Zaydl (Gershon Schuster's) came to me and told me, that Beryl Koyl is to be found among the prisoners. We immediately went to the camp, and after strenuous efforts of an entire day, we had the opportunity to get Beryl out. Ephraim Farber (Mendel Kliskis's son) was found to be with him. Beryl came out sick, swollen from hunger, and in a condition that is not possible to forget. I took both of them to me. They washed themselves. Beryl laid down in bed, and we brought him a doctor, and administered medicaments. He suffered a great deal. He said: 'Luba! I don't know if I will live through this war, but I am certain that Hitler will earn his downfall, and I consider myself fortunate to have participated in the battle: Oh, did I shoot at them!' Along with this, he gave a childish smile. I will never forget that smile. He got a little better, and he traveled off to Szczebrzeszyn. Well, what happened to him? The same as happened to all our dear, sacred Jews.

Do Not Forget!

And for this reason now, writing these lines, I want that they be engraved onto the hearts of all people from Szczebrzeszyn, their children, and grandchildren. And during the occasions of our greatest joy, in the reflection

of the raising of the Jewish crown, of the Land, the terrible calamity must not be permitted to fall into the shadows. What happened to a third of our people and among them, our dear shtetl of Szczebrzeszyn. And let us, as we once did, by the rivers of Babylon, saying: may our tongue cleave to our cheek, and my our right hand lose its cunning, if at the time of our greatest joy, we should forget, because the world wants to, and already has forgotten.

Jewish blood is again treated as worthless. If something happens to a city, even a transgression, then the whole world is up in arms. The calamity is remembered annually. But even we Jews are beginning to forget our dear martyrs. Those who survived the Hell want to forget in order not to open the wounds: they suffered entirely too much. Our brethren, who had the good fortune to live at a great distance from the tragedy, do not want to darken their clear skies. So the cognizance is bought off with a few dollars, that is donated to one cause or another. One does penance, and one is certain that the sins will be forgiven.

But no, no matter how great the pain is to us, our enormous catastrophe must not be forgotten. It is the greatest catastrophe and must be inscribed with the blood of our hearts for the coming generations, engraved into the hearts of our children and grandchildren, so that such a time will never again return.

A Street in Szczebrzeszyn

By Emanuel Chmielasz

Page 56: *Portrait of the author*
Page 58: *Untitled Scene of a Path with Two Strollers*

On the street where we lived, the Green *Gasse*[7], there were Jewish tradespeople of all varieties, and all manner of merchants: shoemakers, garment seamers, tailors, table turners, bakers, water carriers, gardeners, wagon drivers, bathhouse attendants, ritual slaughterers: food businesses, stores of other articles, grain jobbers, cattle jobbers, jobbers who handled the fruit from the orchards, dairymen, etc. There was also a factory for cigarette wrapping.

The most beautiful house in Szczebrzeszyn was on the Green *Gasse*, the house of Mordechai Flajszer, the biggest magnate in the *shtetl*. In the cellars of the house, there were storage rooms for apples in the winter. There was a closet in the house: when the closet was opened, a set of stairs were revealed leading down to a flowing stream, for water.

At the edge of the house there was a permanent *sukkah*, the inside of which was decorated with drawings of sacred Jewish images, with a variety of [biblical] quotes.

At the side of the Green *Gasse* there was a door with concrete steps – to go up to the house of Esther'sheh, Mordechai Flajszer's daughter. Upstairs, the daughters lived with their husbands and children. The husband of the daughter Faygel'eh was R' Yirmiah Rabinovich, a scion of the rabbinical line of the Rebbe of Bialobrzegi. Faygel'eh, along with her sister, Matcheh had a large common kitchen.

Chana'keh and her husband Reuven Mintzberg and children lived in another residence. Mordechai Flajszer's only son, Dan'cheh, lived downstairs, with the windows facing the Green *Gasse*, along with his wife Dwora'leh and the young son, Siomek.

Mordechai Flajszer's 'Empire'

All his sons-in-law and his daughter-in-law came from distinguished families. For the entire time that Mordechai Flajszer lived, all of his sons-in-law were employed in his 'Empire' – the mill and factory.

In the summer, Friday afternoon, Mordechai Flajszer's children sat themselves out front on the steps, where the neighbors would drop by for some friendly conversation. Mordechai Flajszer himself sat in the open entrance on a patriarchal chair, resting in an amicable fashion, until it was time to light the candles. He distributed money to his young grandchildren, and they went off to Shimon Goldman's candy store, exactly diagonally opposite him, and bought things to snack on.

The Flajszers also established a small *Bet HaMedrash* and it was there that Mordechai Flajszer and his sons-in-

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7 Called *ulica Zielona* in Polish.

law and neighbors would pray. The Third Feast was always served there on the Sabbath, which was provided for by the Flajszer house. R' Yirmiah Rabinovich would speak on the Torah, and Sabbath hymns were sung.

The son-in-law, Yankl'eh Mintzberg, who lived in Lublin, would often come to Szczebrzeszyn. On the Sabbath, he would donate his services to lead the prayers for the congregation. The worshipers were elevated by this, because he had a very beautiful voice. On Friday night, or Saturday during the day, many people would come and stand near the windows, and would listen to his singing.

After Mordechai Flajszer's death, his businesses declined. The 'Empire' began to fall apart and it became difficult to make a living. R' Yirmiah Rabinovich went away for a while. It was said that he was in Belz to ask advice from the *Rebbe,* as to whether or not he should become a *Rebbe* [himself]. The *Belzer Rebbe* gave him his blessing, and R' Yirmiah returned to his family as a *Rebbe*. After a rather short period of time, he took up residence in Warsaw, and carried out his Rabbinical duties there.

When I came to Warsaw to look for work, the *Rebbe* helped me to secure a post in a boot factory, and this became my first job in Warsaw.

The Good-Hearted Wagon Driver

There was also a grain silo in Mordechai Flajszer's yard, where my father, a grain merchant, would store grain until he could sell it. Afterwards, it became the residence of Hona the Wagon Driver. He lived there with his wife, Menucha, and the children. Adjacent was the stable for his horses.

On the attic of the stable, Hona laid out a bed of straw, and gave night lodging to the poor people from other towns, who would come to Szczebrzeszyn to gather donations.

Jews from the surrounding villages would come into the city to the big yard, and this was where they had their station for horses and wagons.

The Rabbi's Prescription

Yisrael David the *Shokhet* and his family lived in a new, wooden one-story building. He was a *Gerrer* Hasid, known by the name, 'The *Vionvonicer* Shokhet.[8]'

One of his children, Binyomeh'leh, fell sick with a head fever. Three doctors came to sit with him on a consultation: Klukowski, Kozicki, and a doctor from Zamość. A prescription arrived from the *Rebbe* of Sokolov, R' Zelig Morgenstern. The doctors were awed by the prescription and it helped: the child became well.

Montreal (Canada) October 1980

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8 This is the town of Wawolnica(pronounced *wonwolnitza*) - it is a town in Lublin district. It can be assumed that the *Shokhet* moved to Szczebrzeszyn from that town and that's why he was called this way.

At the Shore of the Wieprz River

By Rivka Smoli (Katz)

Page 59: *A Picture of the Author*
Page 61: *Szczebrzeszyn – A Portrait of the Fire Brigade*

It is not possible to talk about the little *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn and not recall the Wieprz River, that has existed from the beginning of time. Around the river, Jews lived densely packed, especially those who were of the poor class.

Secret-filled lovers' meetings took place near the river, which lasted for a long time, often eliciting effusive reaction with their subsequent revelation... there, under the interwoven branches, schemes were spun and woven, legal and illegal. The river was the greatest attraction for young people of both genders.

However, the river was also witness to bitter disappointments, of intimate, heart-rending tragedies.

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In the deep grasses near the river, Jews with their entire families rested from a week's work, all year round. Here, they found an oasis, between the thickly interwoven tree branches.

Women would modestly bathe here in shirts, feeling at home and comfortable. And when Friday came, Jews would stream to the river en masse, with towels thrown around their necks. 'The common people' with speed and triumph, demonstrated their skill at 'underwater swimming.' For at least one twenty-four hour period, Jews wanted to isolate themselves from their surroundings, from the storm, which was already at the gates of the settlement.

Young women would come here to wash plates and other utensils. In the winter, when the river lay dormant and frozen, daring young men would skate across it on sleds. It was not only once that, with 'bravado,' they would plunge through an opening, that someone had made for the purpose of doing laundry, not realizing they had transformed it into a tragedy...

It was the women who conducted the commerce in the *shtetl,* who threw themselves into helping their families, each in accordance with her talent and skills. Their entire worth consisted of a few tens of zlotys. There exertions were difficult. In the winter, they protected themselves from the cold and the frost with a pot full of glowing coals, which my father Zalman Katz ז"ל distributed generously to them.

Their income was meager and pathetic. Potatoes comprised their daily fare. However, they ate this delicacy with an intense appetite, to the extent that their faces would flush with joy. Chaya-Liba was once asked: What is the secret that causes the potatoes to be so tasty to you? To which, Chaya-Liba responded somewhat sarcastically: it is not necessary to cook the potatoes....really, in Szczebrzeszyn the art of cooking potatoes was well developed. This was the most favorite food of the poor.

Meat was a seldom seen guest with the larger part of the populace. It was on the Sabbath day that meat would appear on their tables. At that time, songs were sung, *zemirot.* The sanctity of the Sabbath reigned in every home in all of Szczebrzeszyn.

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The young people, who were brought up in difficult economic circumstances, were, despite all the difficulties, crystal clean from any form of wrongdoing. The young people admired national pride and individual worthiness. Everyone helped one another. Community activity was manifest. One subscribed to periodicals for the very last pennies, created libraries, reading rooms, created drama circles, etc. There was a strong impulse on the part of the young people to raise the cultural level. Those of the comrades who were enlightened and educated, volunteered themselves to do community work.

One of them was Leibl Licht, ל"ז. He created circles, one of which I belonged to. He taught us Hebrew, awakened national pride in us. For everyone, these were hours of rich emotion.

Leibl Licht developed from a Yeshiva student into an energetic leader of '*Herut*' in Szczebrzeszyn. He was a young man full of talent. He dedicated his free time to organizing the youth and raising its cultural level. And he succeeded in this regard.

Our circle observed national holidays, and were celebrated in our home. It was in this way that the entire choir, named for Sarah Czizik, gathered for Hanukkah in 1934, with Leibl Licht at its head. A holiday air reigned in the house. Faces were flushed, despite the fact that the taste of frost was in the streets. And here we are, sitting ourselves around the table, and Leibl Licht leads off with the word, and masterfully gives an overview of the epoch of the Hasmoneans, their struggle for the Land, and their tragic end. We are all electrified. We intuitively transport ourselves to that distant time, and we become participants. We are with them, with the energized warriors. Tears fall on our youthful faces. Leibl Licht ends [his story]. We sit entranced. We cannot free ourselves from our enthusiastic mood.

We spontaneously throw ourselves into a *Hora* dance, which brings us back tot he real world. The final attraction of the evening were the hot *latkes*., that we had prepared by ourselves, and which enchanted us with their aroma. In the streets, one could already hear the crowing of roosters, and yet we continued to dance.

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In Russia, in the most difficult times of hunger and need, we did not forget our home. It is not possible to forget our heartfelt Jews, who worked so hard for their entire lives, not losing the hope, or their pride.

I see them before my eyes as if on a screen, the work-burdened families, engaged in a variety of businesses – carpenter, shoemaker, tailor, rope weaver, water carrier, who accompanied their work with song. The sweet melodies from the variety of synagogues reverberate in my ears. I hear the martyrs from the homes, the '*Melaveh Malkes* ' with their melodies, accompanied with hand-clapping. I literally can hear them now, as I write these lines — — —

Kiryat Noah

The Match

By Aharon Schrift

Page 62: *The Schrift Family – The Author, Aharon – Above on the Left*

Shia Poytak was a medium height thin little Jewish man. He had a small black beard, longer on the sides, and short in the middle; he dressed in a fur-lined *kapote*, boots full of patches; on his head – a Jewish-style hat.

This meant that he was a lumber merchant, but as I understood it, he was also a speculator. He would make the rounds of all the villages, buy up wood from the gentiles, and would give them money that he had in hand; the rest was paid by the merchant, to whom he would immediately sell it. On the following morning, he would immediately return to the village. On his own, he never had any money to pay for the wood – and it was in this way that he used to 'manage.'

He had a wife and children. She was called Itteh. She was a good wife and a good mother. Because she was very tall, much taller than her husband, she was given a nickname: *Hoosh*.[9] I would come into their home, because their son and I went to the same *Heder* together.

Itteh *Hoosh* was very punctilious. I took note of the fact that every thing that she would take up in her hand, she laid down close to where she could see it with her own eyes. I used to laugh, seeing on Friday, when she chopped fish for the Sabbath, she would put the chopping block and her chopping knife so close to her face, that she once cut herself on the nose.

Jokesters would tell that one time, when she prepared the *cholent* for the Sabbath, and filled the *kishke*, a child began to cry. So she ran to calm the child down. Coming back, she didn't notice, and she sewed up the *kishke* with a kitten inside....the *kishke* began to dance.... I myself did not see this.

Thanks to God, once every couple of years, a child was born to Shia and Itteh, and each child got no less than three names. On the occasion of one circumcision, I accompanied my father. Pinchas *Shokhet* who circumcised the child.[10] And I hear him call out no less than: Yisrael, Abraham, Yaakov, Lejzor – four names....my father, Reuven immediately noted, that he should not so completely inundate the child with names, because he might run out of names.

Shia Poytak always stood ready to do anyone a good turn. When anything happened, he would come to give advice, despite the fact that his advice was not always followed.

I remember that the sequestrator[11] would come and wanted to take something – and he was a frequent guest

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9 The Russian word "*Ooshasty*"" means to be 'long-eared.'

10 It was quite common, in the smaller towns, for either a ritual slaughterer, or the cantor in a town, to also serve as the *Mohel*.

11 One who sequesters property, or takes the possession of it for a time, to satisfy demand out of its rents or profits.

with us – so someone threw down a filthy sack from the attic and hit him in the head, and he was nearly blinded. He sued us in court. However, for this, witnesses are required, to testify that 'the sack fell by itself from the attic.'

And whom, do you think, was that witness? – Shia Poytak. When he received the invitation to the legal proceedings, he came to inquire of us as to what he needed to say. My father reviewed this with him, and his testimony was received in the best of order.

It was not only one time that the sequestrator would come to demand money, but Shia had more important uses for money. – How does one rid one's self of this gentile? So a thought entered his mind. He closed the flue to the oven, and all the smoke filled the entire house... the gentile could not stand it: his eyes were burning, and his nose was running... he left with nothing....from time to time, he would drop into Shia's, but never got anything.

A Game on The Sabbath

At that time, the Zionist movement in Szczebrzeszyn was very popular, and the Jews sought ways to travel to the Land of Israel. The anti-Semites, at that time, reared their heads, and at every move and turn, one heard: '*Zydy, do Palestyny!*' One signed up in a variety of organizations: *Betar, HeHalutz, Bund*, from the earliest years on, and we were inculcated with a variety of doctrines.

However, young people took a greater interest in sports. Sports divisions were created: soccer, swimming. We would march singing through the town. The smaller children would run after us: the parents would sit back and take pride in us.

A soccer team was formed out of the best players. Shimon Diament stood at their head. I was also on the team. We had no uniforms as is the custom today, because it would have cost a lot of money. My father used to say, that for one small shirt, nine people can eat a good lunch. But, what's more important? There was no option, and everyone played with what he had. We made an extra effort that things, more or less, should 'look appropriately.'

"Nobody Should Know!"...

We competed against all of the teams in Szczebrzeszyn and always won. We also accepted invitations to play against other towns, and it worked out well for us. It went so far, that our captain, Shimon Arik's accepted a proposal to play with a gentile team in Bilgoraj, 30 km from Szczebrzeszyn. It just so happened that he match was supposed to take place on the Sabbath. We all shouted: that cannot be! Pandemonium will break out in the *shtetl*!

However, it didn't help. The evil inclination gained the upper hand, and we decided to travel. But how are we to do this, so nobody would find out? Four of our friends were selected to rent country wagons with large ladders, filled with straw, and arranged for them to wait on Saturday after the noon hour near the slag heap, two kilometers from the *shtetl*.

We calculated that after prayer services, after the noon meal, singing of *zemirot*, it will be about 12:30PM, and the trip would take a half hour: so we set ourselves to meet at 1 o'clock at the wagons. The calculation was,

that every Sabbath – whether summer or winter – we, the children, would leave the house, and parents were left alone; when we would return home, it was already dark.

All the players, and their fans, arrived punctually. There were approximately 40 young folk. We sat ourselves in the wagons, and the horses, like eagles, gave a pull. The exhilaration reached 'to the skies.' The day was a very nice one, the sky – blue, the fields were covered in yellow sheaves that the peasants had cut. On both sides of the road, green orchards stretched in all directions, which were full of juicy apples, pears and plums. The air was a delight – it smelled of flowers.

The company were inspired by all of this. Out of great emotion, we began to sing Hebrew songs. The voices carried very, very far. We rode off about 8 kilometers.

Suddenly, I see a Jew walking. Who was this? – Shia Poytak! He immediately hid behind a fence, and saw all those riding on the wagons. I immediately understood, that this would not end well.

Indeed, we lost the match. Almost every one of us rode home with a blue eye, swollen feet, or banged up sides, and worst of all – with a heavy heart. We imagined that this was not everything yet. At home, we will have to give an accounting yet. And indeed, this is what happened.

Shia Poytak, seeing the two wagons packed with young people, virtually all of whom he knew, quickly entered the *shtetl,* and immediately went of to the *Bet HaMedrash*. There, Jews could already be found, who had come to study *Pirkei Avot*, to pray the afternoon *Mincha* prayers, and also to arrange the Third Feast. He immediately approached the table, and gave a bang, and called out in a weeping voice: – Jews, I fear, God Forbid, that a misfortune will befall the *shtetl!* I myself saw two wagons full of young people who were riding on the Sabbath. They were violating the Sabbath. I can swear [to this] on my beard and side locks, that what I tell you now is the truth! And he then began to enumerate the names of all the young men that he knew.

The mood of the parents was an extremely oppressed one. Each one felt a yoke on themselves, a responsibility for the sons that had transgressed. They decided that the young people must be punished. Each father made a decision in accordance with his position.

A Tumult in the *Shtetl*

When we arrived in the *shtetl*, it was dark already. Despite this, we took note of the fact, that the *shtetl* was astir. We stepped down from the wagons, and approached the crowd on foot. Part of the people were shouting, and a part wept. The tumult was very great. Also, some of the mothers came, because they did not trust their men; they feared that the fathers would punish the children too severely. When one of the fathers grabbed his son and wanted to hit him, the mother placed herself between them and did not permit it. In the end, each one took their son and went home.

Nobody was waiting for me. I knew that my father would punish me with a full hand. And, indeed, that is how it was. In the meantime, I remained to sleep at my friend Ephraim Farber (Kliski). They had a full attic with hay, which they would cut in their fields. Sleeping there was actually a pleasure. However, in the course of time, but not at that time, when I knew what was hanging over me, I would be forced to think about eating, because I had an appetite like a wolf.

On the morrow, I went to see how the situation looked, and also to grab a bite. I noted that my father left the house, and I then entered. My mother gave me food, and lectured me: – and this is how you behave, you go out violating the Sabbath? What will become of you in the end? I, as your mother will do nothing to you, but your father will not let you get away with this.

I slept for three nights in the attic at Ephraim's, and during the day, I came home to look for something to eat. My father saw, that this cannot continue any longer, this game of 'cat and mouse.' He knew very well, that I am standing behind the wall, and I am waiting for him to leave. I see that he leaves the house, and not waiting very long, I enter. I did not look around, and I hear the door bang open. I look: my father is standing by the door, and he slowly takes off his belt, and says to me in a cold-blooded manner: lay yourself down on the bench!

Nothing helped. My father rolled me over, and he flayed me on my behind with his belt until I became black and blue. I could not sit for days. My yelling could be heard out in the middle of the street. My mother left the house in order not to hear and see how her husband was beating her son so severely. Her heart hurt her considerably. After all, she is a mother. And this is how the match ended.

*

To this day, I do not understand: what was Shia Poytak doing on the Sabbath eight kilometers from the *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn?

It did not occur ro anyone to ask Shia: what was he looking for on the Sabbath afternoon in a village outside of the limits one observes on the Sabbath?

Tel-Aviv

Heroism
(Episodes)

By Yankl Lapp

Page 67: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 70: *(Top): The Youth Bund Organization, 'Zukunft.'*
(Bottom): Leadership of the Secular Volksschule in Szczebrzeszyn, 1928

We also had a coterie of people with broad shoulders, who did not stay silent when the Polish hooligans would fall upon Jews. They weighed in to hit back, and to rescue their honor.

*

This took place a couple of years before the Second World War. Towards evening, Polish recruits returned from Zamość in several tens of wagons. They immediately jump out like wild people, instill fear, and a tumult ensues. Jewish saloons close up. One flees the streets, and goes into the house.

A group of porters gathered at the booth of Big Shlomo, ready, with staves in hand... the first runners give a signal to the others – and the recruits immediately retreated....

*

Rabbi Rokeach of Bilgoraj (from the *Belzer* sect) comes for the Sabbath to [visit] the *Belzer* Hasidim. On Friday, towards evening, exiting the home of Shlomo Maimon[12], escorted by a couple of ten Hasidim, on the way to the Great Synagogue, a group of Polish hooligans attacks them unexpectedly. They are however, beaten off with murderous blows by R' Menashe Katzenellenbogen, R' Berish Katzenellenbogen, and Shimon Nickelsberg. The hooligans retreat.

*

When Hertz, the Pole from Zwierzyniec, would come down from the horse market on Tuesday evening to get drunk, the first thing that happened was that all the Jewish stores closed down.

He walks along the sidewalk, and a claque of gentiles follows around him. In front of Shlomo's booth, they are met by the porters, Aharon, Yankl, Moshke Millstein and Shimshon Garfinkel, with a friendly greeting. They carry on a conversation with him about horse trading, and 'talk his teeth off.' They drive off the claque of gentiles. Meanwhile, the bus from Zamość to Zwierzyniec arrives, and the drunkard rides off...

*

1937, Summertime. Several days before the 'Religious Holiday' the Jewish community receives a letter from the Magistrate, signed by the Secretariat, with the representation, that on the following day, in the morning hours, when the procession will pass through, Jews should not have the temerity to appear in the streets.

The community decides: not to go out. However, the young people decide to appear in the streets. And as always, they indeed did appear in the street, the procession went by, and mercifully, there were no incidents.

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12 This venerable Sephardic name, taken from the father of the *Rambam* (Maimonides), is often rendered as *Maiman* to conform with the Polish rendition of *Majman*. Nevertheless, we have adopted the spelling *Maimon*, consistent with the use of the Hebrew vowels in this text, and with the Hebrew pronunciation.

*

1937, Summertime, Saturday, 10 o'clock in the morning. I go out into the street. Near the brook, on the sidewalk, about ten or so young people gather together with anxious looks at the municipal building. They show me, that on the wall in the front of the municipal building, large anti-Semitic 'poison placards' have been pasted, decorated with artistically drawn pictures.

I call out: – let's go and tear them down. I do not wait for an answer, and I begin on the row to tear both left and right. I finish, and come down the steps with my bones intact. By that time, a group of young people had gathered to stand around me.

*

Yom Kippur 1937, about one o'clock in the afternoon. Jewish young people are taking a stroll on the sidewalk. The well-known Polish hooligan of the shtetl, Szustak, appears, in the company of the Polish corporal, and both attempt to get into exchanging blows with the Jewish young people.

Moshke Millstein is standing at Shlomo's booth on the sidewalk. The two big shots get close to him. He remains standing fearlessly. The corporal asks Szustak: – Is this a Jew? Szustak takes one look at Moshke, and he pulls the corporal away.

The corporal is angered by the 'Chutzpah of the *Zyd*' and begins to hit. Moshke immediately gives each of them a blow from the right and the left, as it needs to be done... a group of 'the guys' detain Szustak, preventing him from fleeing, and he is given his just desserts...Szustak is not seen in the street for a while.

*

1938, Berish Katzenellenbogen's wife, is making her usual Wednesday morning trip to the market fair at Zwierzyniec, with a bit of merchandise. Polish pickets are not allowing buyers approach the Jewish pushcarts. The secretary of the '*Sad Grodzki*' from Szczebrzeszyn stands watch opposite her little store. She gets up her nerve, and drives him away from the place.

The patriots lodge a complaint against her in accordance with the style of that time: she called a Pole '*Parszywy*' (Mangy). The Jewish community pays for providing a lawyer, and she is sentenced as a first-time offender to 6 months in jail. It is appealed to a higher court, and it appears that it was still under appeal up to the time of the War.

*

1939, Yom Kippur, 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans are drawing back. Young people appear in the street a little at a time. A group of Polish residents tear open Lemel Hochgelernter's cellar, and drag out about ten kegs of salted herring. Which belonged to Chana Reisz.

At that moment, I happen to be on the sidewalk opposite Heni Jarpest's house. I observe this gentile high-handedness from a distance. They had already reached the brook, rolling the kegs slowly, while laughing in great pride.

Patience evaporates. I shout out to the gathering of young people: – let us together stop this robbery! All of us fell upon them, and forcibly took the stolen goods out of their hands. Quickly we threw this onto the covered walkways, and rolled it into the house of Azriel Zirrer.

In the corner, near Nickelsberg's house, a German military truck is standing, and a broken wheel is being repaired. A number of the [Polish] residents attempt to rescue the situation by running to the Germans for help. Fortunately, the military personnel did not want to get involved.

Brooklyn, New York

Poland

By Pinchas Bibel[13]

Page 71: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 74: *Two Pictures of the Betar Group (Above – 1930; Below – 1932)*

Poland, you Fatherland of mine,
You are exactly like health itself!
How correctly to judge you
So everyone can simply understand
What it is that you have lost.[14]

No, Poland, I will not sing
My *Ode* to you like Mickiewicz.
Though I long for you
No less that he does.
After all, I took my first steps
On your ground,
Saw your heavens, ate your bread,
Felt my first love on your soil.

Your pine forests,
Fields with red grain,
Winding alleys,
Village paths and highways,
That lead to the larger world about –
[All] lie deep in my memory.

And sharply echo
The voices of my school teachers:
"Jews are parasites, Jews are leeches
On the healthy body of Poland.
We have to get rid of Jews."

My home was in the Lublin District,
A house with a garden, large and warm,
At the edge of the city.
An open door, a table that was always set,
Day and night
And itinerant Jews and peasants
Always found a night's lodging,
And received a meal without charge.

---

13 We know him as Philip Bibel, residing in San Francisco, CA.

14 The beginning of Bibel's poem starts with the same words as Poland's greatest epic poem *Pan Tadeusz by Adam Mickiewicz*, which opens with, "*Lithuania My Fatherland, you are health, only he who has lost you can know how much you are cherished.*"

Mickiewicz he was referring to Lithuania as a province of Poland. Bibel has replaced Lithuania with Poland to make it easily understandable for those without knowledge of Polish history and literature.

My grandfather, and six blond uncles
Were skilled, simple carpenters.
They made beds, tables, and containers for cookware.
And one uncle, he was called Meir,
Adorned furniture with a steady hand:
Roses and grape clusters, daffodils and tulips
So artistically did he make them,
That bees would come to collect pollen from them.

And every summer in village homes,
From Monday, in the beginning, to Friday at candle-lighting time,
My uncles would
Make the homes of peasants more comfortable
And at candle-lighting time they would carry their earnings to my grandfather.

It was a broad-hearted home.
A little grandmother, round,
Always sat by the oven
Packing quarts of chicken fat and conserves and jellies.
And grandchildren, like puppies in the yard
Were always around between the feet.

The cemetery was outside the *shtetl,*
Waiting quietly, like a warm bed,
For the exhausted Jews.
An old resting place,
It was barely possible to read the gravestones,
Six, seven, eight hundred years old.
And one gravestone, a tall one,
For a good Jew who had passed away a long time ago,
Would continue to grow
Taller, and taller, with each passing year,
Like a watchman who guarded the full burial place.

The synagogue was old, with thick walls,
Sunk its foundation deeply into the earth,
In order not to offend gentile eyes.
Even though Casimir the Great gave permission to build it,
Jews, with concern for the future,
Built it like a fortress,
With elaborateness inside, but modesty outside.

And the days and the nights
Their steps fell lightly across the *shtetl.*
Only outside of the *shtetl,*
In the dark night,
Bestial hands honed the hatchets
And prepared the warm Polish soil
To be a grave
For my entire past.

San Francisco

Ways of Making a Living

By Moshe Messinger

Page 77: *Yisrael'keh the Water-Carrier*

The *shtetl* was developmentally arrested in the economic sense. The requirements for sustenance were modest.

Craftsmen occupied a great place in the economic life [of the *shtetl*], especially tailors and shoemakers, also people who worked with wood. The Jewish and Christian hand workers would engage their workers for the entire week in the preparation of clothing and shoes for the peasants of the surrounding area, who would come in one time during the week, on Tuesday, for the *Yarid*, or the market day, in order to exchange their agricultural produce and to purchase all their requirements for their work and for the family.

The Jewish manual workers would sell products for the peasants. The peasants would sell their produce and the Jewish merchants would intermediate it for the entire country.

Many Jews yearned for that great Tuesday. They would set out their modest stands, to sell items off their shelves that were almost entirely bare. No great fortunes were made from these market days. The income was on the order of pennies, and everyone was chronically short for [the expenses of] the Sabbath. There were a large number of people, who needed to be helped out [financially], or they helped themselves – by visiting the houses and begging for donations. In those years, before The First World War, need continuously reigned among the middle classes, as well as among the craftsmen.

*

In that period, there was a Christian priest in the *shtetl*, Jan Grabowski, who did many good deeds, especially for the poorer Jewish populace. He was already familiar with the poor people, and would give them money for the Sabbath. He would retain many Jewish workers, and gave them an opportunity to make good incomes. In the summertime, he would lend money to the orchard workers to enable them to lease the orchards.

If a Jew needed to marry off a daughter, and didn't have any money, one went to the priest, and he provided a handsome emolument that covered the entire cost of the wedding.

His sister, who was called 'Pani Trelecka,' was an eye doctor. She would treat Jewish children without charge, and additionally, would provide medication at no cost.

At the funeral of the priest, the entire Jewish population took part, and we brought a flower arrangement to his grave.

*

The Jewish orchard workers, who leased all the gardens from the surrounding peasants before the produce ripened, played a great role in economic life,. Tens of Jewish families derived their sustenance from this.

Trade in wood products especially helped to enrich the economic life, for which the first pioneer was R'Mordechai Flajszer with his family, and which later took on many Jewish employees. This enabled the Jewish intelligentsia to have continuous employment.

*

There were a number of factories in Szczebrzeszyn, which helped to solve the economic problems for a large number of the Jewish and Christian residents.

In first place was the sugar factory, which belonged to Count[15] Zamoyski. In the last times, before the outbreak of the Second World War, commercial relationships were disrupted because of the anti-Semitic incitement of such circles as the N.D. and the K.D., who took away the sustenance from many Jewish families.

A second was the brick factory, which manufactured a variety of bricks, and it was Jewish hands that distributed it throughout all of Poland. The Messinger family mostly made a living from this, especially the son, Yossel, and his brother Moshe.

The third factory, built already in the final years before the Second Word War, was the Turpentine factory, 'Alpha.' The Groiser family benefitted from the factory most of all.

However, this very factory left behind sad memories for the survivors of Hitler's destruction. The Turpentine factory served as a concentration point of all our martyrs, who were gathered up from the villages, and mostly from Szczebrzeszyn, and from there they were led off to Belzec and Majdanek. The lodged in the cordoned off factory, and waited until the death-train arrived.

*

This is the way life went on, until the shtetl tore itself away from the economic trap. Young people began to learn a trade. After the First World War, Jewish children began to attend government schools en masse. Many of them allowed themselves to openly go study 'in the larger world' – in Zamość, Lublin, and Warsaw. In the very final years, Jewish children began to attend the State Teacher's Seminary. Also, a Hebrew school was founded, and a Yiddish school, where Jewish children studied in the afternoon.

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15 The Polish title is *'Hrabia.'*

We Worked Hard to Make a Living

By Zvi Traeger (Tal)

More than anything else that I remember from my childhood years, was how my mother, Chana'tcheleh ז"ל, struggled bitterly and with difficulty for the existence of the entire family. She ran our downscale tailoring business, traveled to the fairs, bought the goods in Warsaw, and cut it herself for the workers, who worked for us in our home. – This did not prevent her from running the household. Later on, circumstances became worse because of the bankruptcy. We threw ourselves at all manner of ways by which we thought we could support the family.

My father, Mordechai, the fisherman and fishmonger, was always in the villages. In the summer, he would bring fish, which we sold from large vats near the platforms of the marketplace. In the winter, when commerce in fish was slow, he worked with geese, ducks. But the principal form of making a living came from maintaining an orchard, or orchards. With the onset of summer, we would lock up the house and go over to the orchards in order to guard the fruit and bring it to the city for sale. We would bring the winter fruit to our home, pour into the cellar and pick from it, from time to time. We exerted ourselves to make it last as long as we could, in order to be able to command a higher price.

We barely made a living from all of these occupations. How does one say it: many occupations, few blessings. Nevertheless, life went along pretty decently for us. On the Eve of the Sabbath, and Festivals, the neighbors would bring their *cholent* pots to my mother, as well as bottles of coffee milk. My mother considered it a mitzvah to push these pots deep into her large oven, and to put the coffee with the milk on the keep. All of the neighbors were very thankful to my mother for this, and would wish her a cornucopia of blessings.

I cannot forget the upheaval in our home when we began to prepare for the baking of matzos. The entire family worked hard and bitterly, because all of the baking was done in the final two weeks before the holiday. On the eve of the holiday, everything had to be put into order, and bring the Passover into the house. My mother worked harder than everyone else. No single thing was too hard for her to do, only to assure that hunger should not find its way into our home.

*

My mother was blessed with very gifted children, one more handsome than the next. Our oldest brother Eli Moshe provided a great sense of satisfaction, for something that had never before occurred in the *shtetl*. He studies in the *Yeshivot*.

During the oral examination in school, there was a competition between him and the Rabbi's son, Meir. Each of them wanted to demonstrate that he knew more pages of the *Gemara* by heart. The examination elicited a great deal of curiosity. All those who partook were seated, fully dressed, and listened in on the contest. My father and mother, sitting at their places, considered themselves as the luckiest people in the world, with the *nachas* they got from their son. Many people envied them for having raised such a Torah scholar.

Being young, I did not understand this. I still remember the shining face of my mother, and the tears that flowed from her eyes, when she spoke of her children, and especially about her eldest son.

Up to the War, Eli Moshe was a Rabbi in Tomaszow Mazowiecki. I never visited him. He had five beautiful girls. He was killed with his family during the initial period of the occupation of Poland.

*

As we lived on the street of the school, I would hear the singing of the Yeshiva students on the Sabbath and Festivals, during their Hasidic dancing. Their singing, filled with ardor, would echo around and around.

I remember the Friday evenings, when every young person went off in his direction – some to the Zionists, others to *Bundist* offices, where debates were organized, lectures, discussions, or entertainment evenings. There were also those who gathered in private homes, and spent time in cultural circles.

Such events also took place in our house, because of the initiative of my brothers and sisters. I also remember my neighbor, Beryl Koyl, who took part in these evenings. He was very talented, and full of ideas. He would read to us, and present heroes of the type from Sholom Aleichem's writing, from the '*Dybbuk*' and from other writers and works. He did a great deal for the cultural life of working-class youth. We had many people like Beryl Koyl in our *shtetl*. Our Szczebrzeszyn could take great pride in their cultural initiatives.

Tel-Hanan

We Got Along Fine, And Conducted Ourselves Decently

By Emanuel Chmielasz

I am today, with God's blessing, 69 years old, and 43 years out of Szczebrzeszyn, and today, in front of my eyes, I see Szczebrzeszyn: the streets, the houses, the Jewish houses, and smaller dwellings, and last, but not least, the local Jews themselves. I hold the impoverished Jewish life of theirs before my eyes, yet, their life was also dignified.

The 'person-to-person' relationships among the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn was at quite a high plane. One did not live only for one's self. The neighbor, or whichever other Jew, family members without saying, was a fundamental part of their lives. Each individual helped the other with substance and action.

I am in America for 32 years already, and I know what life here is like already. I can see what, and whom we have lost. All Jewish cities and towns were similar to Szczebrzeszyn, and the American Jews, after all, come from those very towns, and they traveled many times on visits – not only to be able to see their kin, but also to take on spiritual strength in order to be able to carry on with a Jewish life in the New World, America.

Myself, when I lived in Warsaw, and worked there, every year, I would travel to Szczebrzeszyn for vacation. I did not travel to Kazimierz[16] or other leisure locations, but rather specifically to Szczebrzeszyn – home, to father and mother, sisters, brothers, and for at least two weeks to be present in the Szczebrzeszyn environs. Then, being only twenty-some odd years old, I could have, perhaps, had greater pleasure in the summer leisure locations; despite this, I chose this small *shtetl* for my two-week vacation.

Today, a day does not go by that I will not see before my eyes, or my mind will not contemplate about that one-time home, about Szczebrzeszyn, with all of its Jews, with all of the streets and byways.

Our little *shtetl* had a genuine Jewish way of life, in the traditional sense, and in a high moral sense. Family life was pure, decent. One Jew was prepared to provide help for another. There was a great affection one for the other.

In the *Batei Medrashim*, Synagogues and *shtiblach* – no matter how apart they were, Jews from other cities, on a Friday night, or on the Sabbath during midday, none of them remained without [an offer of] a Sabbath meal. The *Shammes* of the house of worship had already seen to it, that the *balebatim* should be provided with a guest for their Sabbath table. No matter how great the worries were, of each of the Jews in the *shtetl*, regarding how to extract a living during the secular week, despite this, the needy were helped out with monetary support. There was also charity given discreetly and anonymously.

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16 'Warsaw's favorite summer resort' has always been connected with Jewry, with a community existing here as early as 1406.

Gemilut Hasadim

My father[17], Berish, was a nervous person, but a very good man, a decent man, with an open heart. As a boy, I saw events in the home that are rooted in Jewish values that one does not see today.

I remember on one occasion, R' Yirmiya Rabinovich came to father, and said that a young woman has to be taken to Lublin in the hospital, and for this purpose, 100 zlotys were needed. So, R' Yirmiya with father went off for a short stroll to certain specific individuals, who had the means, and wanted to donate. Even Christian nobles, who lived in the city at that time, partook in this assessment, and so in the span of about an hour, the sum was in hand.

On a Saturday afternoon, after eating, Baruch Schissel came to us, along with someone else, entered the room where father was taking his afternoon nap after mealtime. Father woke up, and Baruch said: – Berish, we have come for a donation. Father answered: – If you are coming on the Sabbath, this must therefore be a great need. He pointed to the top of the credenza and said: – There are the keys. Open up, and take as much as you understand to be needed. Baruch did this, and said: – Berish, I have taken 10 zlotys.

On a winter evening, a Szczebrzeszyn Jew was sitting at our house. He had a wife and two young children, however, when it came to a living, it was a case of 'let the heavens open.' They lived on parcels from America. Father remarked: – Take my horse and the small wagon, the horse is standing in the stall somewhere, and it also eats, and travel to the village and buy grain on my behalf from the peasants. Bring it into the city. Either you will sell it at the mill, and if not, I will buy it – – –

And another instructive fact. – On one day, a Jew came traveling to my father, a grain merchant. He was a scholar, a master at casuistry. Speaking with my father, he proposed a business deal. My father called him by his name, and said to him: – And where is the 'What will God's creatures have to say?' ... – Therefore, we see that in commerce, there were also 'barriers' that were moral, where one declined participation in deriving income, just to be sure one would not transgress human and Jewish principles.

In our *Old Home*, in the smaller towns, our Jews carried on commerce without contracts, without lawyers. One had faith in a person's word alone.

I am more than 32 years in the land of America, immersed in the small business world. I see the difference between our Old World to the one today. I will not, God forbid, belittle or cast a shadow on Jewish life in the wealthy world. However, let it be noted that we, the survivors, have lost the old, beloved world, where we were brought up.

Montreal, Canada 1982

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17 The writer uses the Yiddish endearment, '*tateshi*,' for his father.

The Window Was Knocked Out – The Strike Was Won

By Yankl Itcheh Traeger
& Leibl Ackerfeld

Page 84: *A picture [of the authors] from days gone by...*

We lived in the *shtetl* without electricity, no water distribution, and without a bathroom in the house, without a future for the young people, and part of the time without a piece of bread to eat, and a shirt on one's back. To have a piece of fabric from which to sew shirts for the children was a 'great treasure.'

We could become tailors, shoemakers, table makers, hairdressers, or taken up other trades. However, to go study at a gymnasium, and in a university, that was a utopia for Jewish young people, something that was not possible. The Poles did not permit access to this.

*

We worked for bosses, who exploited us, despite the fact that there were 'capitalists' among them, who themselves did not have enough funds for a Sabbath.

But there were bosses of the type who could pay the worker, but they cared only for themselves. So we, who were in the leadership of the professional union, needed to send for strong-arm comrades to these bosses, and then, they finally were compelled to pay the impoverished worker for 3 or 4 weeks of withheld wages.

In another instance, the professional union carried on a struggle for its existence. Declaring a strike against the tailor, Kalman Kalfeld, the rich man, who had a very handsome establishment. He had said that he had to break the union, and that one of his workers was a strike breaker. It was a difficult situation: either we win, or we lose, and then the union is broken.

Together with the leader of the '*Bund*,' Yossel Szpringer, we wracked our brains: what shall we do? A proposal was made to pour vitriol on Kalman's goods. A second proposal was: to knock out the large beautiful pane of the window. We, the active youth, carried this out immediately. We immediately won the strike.

Afterwards, the leadership of the union held a meeting. Yossel Szpringer, the head of the '*Bund*,' said: – Blessed be the hands that did this!

*

The question is then posed: where did we get the strength to carry this out? The answer is: the great belief in the better tomorrow and the loyalty of our comrades (who all later were killed by the Hitlerist murderers, with their accomplices, the Poles and Ukrainians).

We (the undersigned) fought for a better future for humanity, were enthusiastic for the ideal, and prepared to sacrifice our young lives for its sake. Regrettably, we were disappointed during the time of the war in Russia, seeing the anti-Semitic politics that the Russians conducted in general against the Jews in the world, and later against Israel.

The youth of Szczebrzeszyn were among the most progressive in the area. When we met with comrades from neighboring towns, and even from the larger cities in the area, we were among the most well-informed. This was true not only of the socialist and Zionist youth in Szczebrzeszyn, even the religious young people in our *shtetl* were not at all oblivious.

A Sabbath is recalled, a Festival, or the beautiful May days, when our young cohorts would go for a stroll with their beautiful waistcoats, eyes that called and yearned for a better tomorrow. Together, we would go to the waters, the hills, and enjoy the beautiful Polish climate.

However, the area around us was a very hostile one, one that hated us. We were afraid to walk in the Christian streets. How many times were we beaten for going to the water, to the '*Wygon*'. We had lived with Polish neighbors for hundreds of years, but in reality, they were very distant from us. Nevertheless, we hoped that we could achieve a better life.

Montreal, Canada, 13.10.1980

Secular and Festive

By Yankl Frost

Page 87: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 88: *The Leadership of the Professional Union in Szczebrzeszyn (undated)*

On the *Schulhof*, near the great *Bet HaMedrash* and the inn, there were half-sunken 'shacks.' The windows – had been lowered to ground level, bent out of shape like a crooked smile. The stench from this great 'location' could be sensed from a far distance. The way to the city cemetery went by the *Schulhof*. Town funerals had to pass by the inn, and the great *Bet HaMedrash*.

Very decent, laboring Jewish people lived in these 'shacks,' together with their families. Among them were the families of Benjamin Frost and David Frost. Both substantially branched families worked hard in order to find a way to make a living.

Benjamin Frost, tied around with thick rope, hauled heavy sacks of flour from the wagons of wagon owners. He was fortunate when he had a sufficient number of sacks to haul. It was not only once, that he would wait whole days for nothing, and found nothing to haul from the wagons. On many such idle days, he would go around without so much as a *groschen* of earnings in his wallet.

He never complained to anyone. A smile was always poured out on his mild-mannered face. He was an individual who had found contentment with his lot, a *lamed-vovnik*.[18] The *balebatim* paid him a few *groschen* for his hard labor. He never once haggled over what he was paid. A '*Bontche Schweig*.[19]'

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And along comes the holy Sabbath. Jews go about with faces ablaze, wet beards and side locks, from the *mikva*; Benjamin Frost in their midst. They run to the preparations in order to receive that exalted guest, the Sabbath, with elevated and sanctified intentions. Decked out in their Sabbath finery, with the Sabbath casket: the little children – decked out scrubbed clean. The Sabbath Queen illuminated the Sabbath table. Pleasant intonations and songs enable one to cast off the secular weekday, and its day-to-day concerns.

Benjamin loved people and people loved him. He was respected by large and small alike, because of his simplicity, friendliness and openness. He radiated a specific kind of Jewish charm.

*

The years flew by, until the *Dies Irae* arrived, the days of the destruction and annihilation of Jews and *Yiddishkeit*. The devouring Satan gained the upper hand and his minions, the Nazis, began to destroy the thousand-year Jewish settlement that had been established in Poland. They killed with bestial cruelty, implemented executions by all manner of means to kill. Also, these two, well-branched families were eradicated from the earth by the German murderers.

May these words serve in the place of a gravestone that does not exist.

Haifa, June 1982

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18 The writer likens the subject to one of the thirty-six *(lamed-vov* in Hebrew) apocryphal righteous people for whom, it is believed that God continues to permit the world to exist.

19 *Bontche Schweig* is based on a tale by I. L. Peretz about a poor, defeated man——a man who has not known a moment''s hate in his life——who dies and goes to heaven.

Night Work in a Bakery

By Avigdor Rieder

Page 89: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 90: *A Street Scene*
Page 91: *The Keren HaYesod Committee of Szczebrzeszyn*

My father was a baker. We had our own bakery, you understand – not mechanized. One worked with primitive methods: everything was done by hand. We worked day and night, by a lit kerosene lamp. We looked forward to Passover, as the one time when we could really sleep well, and rest our weary bones.

It was not on one occasion that my saintly father, with tired, drooping eyes, would stand at the flour bin, with his sleeves rolled up, putting his fingers into the dough. In the first minutes, damp dough would cling to his fingers, and one thinks that one will never get rid of the dough. You turn it over several times, and so, a little at a time, the dampness vanishes, and the dough becomes smoother. Little bubbles appear in specific places, and if you come upon them, it whistles, until such time as the dough is fully worked out.

On the holidays, you could smell the odor of the cinnamon and raisins for over a kilometer. The baked goods were not only tasty; it also had an esthetic appearance. The braided *challahs*, that glistened on the table, were symmetric; in fact these were not *challahs* at all, but rather pretty jewels.

Our entire family lived in a small, crowded dwelling; father, mother, and 12 children – 4 sons and 8 daughters.

My father died in 1914. After I completed studies in *Heder*, I was compelled, at the age of 15 to go to work. I traveled to Lublin to seek a way to make a living. I found a work position with a baker. However, the pay was so meager, that I could not buy a pair of shoes or an item of dress. I worked there for two years, for a piece of bread and occasionally not even that.

My *landsleit*, Joshua Wachs and Sholom Volvish's son, ran into me in that position, exploited and isolated. They immediately provided me with a better post at a confectionery baker. I recall them in praise, and to this day, I am grateful to them for the warmth of their relationship, which they showed to me at a time of distress.

In the year 1914, when my father died, I came home and worked there.

In the year 1926, I opened a bakery in Szczebrzeszyn in the house of Ephraim Stoll (a son-in-law of Shimon Gold). However, I was blocked by the sanitary commission on one side, and Zalman Stern (the owner of the house) from the second side. One time, on a Friday, when I had traveled to Zamość to procure flour, a commission arrived and wanted to close down the bakery. My wife, of blessed memory, ran to Kosciol, a Christian, and implored him to rent us premises for a bakery. She paid him 1,500 zlotys, without binding the agreement by contract.

When I returned from Zamość, I went to Kosciol in order to complete the contract. He told me that I should return on Saturday night. When I came back again, he took out a completed contract and requested that I sign it. In reading it through, I was appalled, because the terms were deplorable. I demanded that he return the money, but all he did was laugh.

So I traveled to see Joshua Peretz (the brother of I. L. Peretz) in Zamość, and he composed a petition for me to the *komornik* (tax collector), for him to demand a return of the money. When the *komornik* came to the owner of the house, he argued that he was not going to return the money. I therefor registered a complaint in the court, hired a lawyer, and provided Zelig Berger as a witness. I lost the first round. So I was advised by Yossel Lerner (Joshua Lerner's son), that I should make an appeal in Lublin, and to submit a statement of financial need from the magistrate. Abraham Itcheh Weinrib took out the statement with the signature of the *Burmistrz*'[20], and I won the case and also received designated interest.

At that time, the owner sold his house, and my claim was counted as a lien on his house. Isaac Weissfeld and his son-in-law, who had purchased the house, settled with me, and I received the money, and in the end, rescued it from gentile hands.

*

But one does not live by bread alone. There was also an interest in the way of life, and there was also a 'soul involved.'

*

On the Sabbath, we would go the *Bet HaMedrash*, not only to pray, but also to listen and learn. However, with the passage of time, new winds began to blow. The younger generation began to visit a variety of organizations, where one would learn how to write, read, and take part in debates, discussions and entertainment evenings.

Understand that the older generation looked askance at all of these things. The older generation was very observant, possessed of deep-seated belief, and we inherited the ardor of that faith from our parents. However, we traded in the Messiah, the Son of David for a socialist solution and waited for that bright tomorrow, or for a national home in 'Palestine.'

*

I beg of God that he transport me, and my longing soul to my *shtetl*, to the *Old Home*, with its negative and positive personalities, to the working man and the magnate, to the water-carrier and the teacher, to the *Bet HaMedrash* and to those one-time organizations and institutions that were full of life, to the close relatives and warm neighbors.

Acre

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20 From the Russian, for a 'bailiff' or a 'steward of an estate.'

"Don't Miss the Train!"

By Abraham Becher

Page 92: *Portrait of the Author*

Page 95: *(Top): The Membership of Histadrut*
(Bottom) *No Legend Given*

We were still young then, after the First World War. [We had] just completed *Heder.* Saul Zisbrenner and I went over to learn at the Radzyner *shtibl.*

Every evening, our older comrades who take the opportunity to get away, and leave the *shtibl.* We never knew where they disappeared off to, and this interested us greatly. We investigated this further, and how dismayed we were at the revelation, seeing that they were carrying out conspiratorial activities and going off to *the Poalei Tzion* – Tz. S. Party.

I, together with my friend, Saul Zisbrenner, silently followed our older comrades on one evening. To our great pain, they did not permit us to enter into the local office. On the way, we ran into Abraham Chaim Nuss, and Shmuel Ber Klieger. For a while, they let us walk ahead, and then called us back. We noted that before, they argued between themselves. Shmuel Ber Klieger ('The White-haired One') asked us suddenly: – Guys, where are you coming from? We related that they are not letting us into the club of *Poalei Tzion.* They looked at each other, and answered us: – they don't let us in either....

Conspiratorially

We went along together as a foursome as far as the center of the *shtetl.* There, we encountered Lutsha Kandel. He treated us to some hard candy – and we waited. For what? – For sure, I had no idea. However, it seemed that Kandel and Klieger both did know, because a while later, to my question: – What are we standing here for? – one of them answered: – Wait a bit, what are you afraid of?

It does not take very long, and Mendel Boim draws near to us, or as we called him, 'The Three-Locked *Belzer,*' because he had long side locks. He took a look at all of us, and remarked: – Come, but one at a time! This was at a time when youth organizations – such as '*HaShomer,*' 'Football Youth,' – were created in our midst in the *shtetl,* and we were also drawn to join, just like the older comrades of the *Radzyner shtibl* were drawn into an organization.

We followed him quietly. One at a time. We practically ran. We came up nearly to lame Shmuel's, and we entered the home of Pinchas Bibel. 'The Three-Locked Belzer' pulled a brochure out of his overcoat, and read to us about Joseph Trumpeldor. '*HeHalutz*' was founded that same night.

We would meet every evening. I recall that on one occasion, Abraham Chaim Nuss asked him: – Well, Belzer, the Three-Locked, where are we going today? And 'The Three-Locked Belzer' would take us as follows: – one time to Pinchas Bibel, [once] to Shosh'eleh in the *shtibl,* where on an evening, there stood a Holy Ark, one time to Asher Shapiro in a city house, once to Saul Moshe Pinia's in a small alcove. We always followed him.

'*HeHalutz*' Was Created

We were almost 18 years old. Mendel Boim stands at the head of '*HeHalutz,*' '*HeHalutz Hatza'ir*. New male and female members join. We take in a large part of the youth of the *shtetl*. Mendel Boim arranges for lectures about political and economic themes, according to Bogdanov, and about Boruchov's 'Class Interests and the National Question.' Most of the time we hold the lectures on the Sabbath, in the bosom of nature, between the beautiful hills.

No matter how substantially '*HeHalutz*' grew and diversified, we, all 6 comrades, held ourselves together. Lutsha Kandel always got elected as the Treasurer. Mendel Boim always got elected as the Executive-Secretary, together with Shmuel Ber Klieger. We 4 friends, they called the 'group.' At every evening, Mendel always spoke, and occasionally – Shmuel Ber. Even after we got married – and I was the first – my home was open to this 'sextet.'

Fate decreed that Shmuel Ber Klieger, Abraham Chaim Nuss, and Saul Zisbrenner should be cut down by Hitler.

"If You Want to Stay Alive..."

The economic condition of Poland deteriorated. There was no [good] outlook for existence.

Once, sitting in my home, talking about 'reality,' Mendel chimes in: – 'Whoever will build his life in Poland will not have a good end!' This was after an evening when we had designated '*HeHalutz*' comrades for *aliyah*. Coming to me tired and spent, like a prophet, he expounded the perspective of Polish Jewry.

Lutsha then remarked: – You designate everyone else, but you will not designate any of us and help us obtain [emigration] certificates. We have sat and been silent for a long time. And then, Mendel retorted: – We have remained as three comrades. Shmuel Ber had married and is gone; Abraham Chaim got married and went away; the same is true of Saul Zisbrenner. They have striven to obtain a dowry, and because of this have gotten closer to death. Comrades, we have worked for ten years for one thing, for the ideal. I already have enough, I am going to the Land of Israel, and if you want to remain alive, come with me!

In our hearts we felt that he is right. We were silent. I remember, as if it were today, how Mendel, as was his manner, began to speak in a loud voice. The children were asleep in the second room. My wife, Rivka, served us tea. All of us paid attention to the prognosis of Mendel Boim about the political constellation of Poland, and about the Jewish minority in Poland.

He, again, fell silent. My wife broke the silence and said: – Mendel, you are trying to travel to the Land of Israel this way for ten years, and will you now not travel!

A while later, he stood up and said: – Listen, comrades, Lutsha and Abraham! I am going away at the end of December 1932 or 1933. If you want to, I will provide you with passes, and you will travel with me together. If you will not want to travel, you will later – whether you want to, or you don't want to – be brought down. However, remember, you should pay attention and make sure that you do not miss the train!

In the beginning of February 1933, Mendel Boim with Rokheh'tcheh Allerhand went off to the Land of Israel.

Haifa

Satan Was Left Unemployed...

By Pinchas Bibel

Page 99: *An FAP meeting (Literary Society) in Szczebrzeszyn with the friend, Szafalewicz, from the Land of Israel, Aug 18, 1931.*

R' Shmuel Yaakov, that handsome Jew, and Shofar Blower in the synagogue, began to practice on the shofar about two days before Rosh Hashana. In the midst of such a practice session, he noted that Satan was standing near him. In his thought, he then hurled a curse at him: 'Let his name be erased, that one, he has already caught the scent of the Shofar!' However, he did this only in his mind, because one does not start up with Satan. May God protect one from what this wise guy is capable of doing if he is made angry.

Therefore, R' Shmuel Yaakov made a special effort to exert himself to assure that his face looked happy and satisfied. He stretched out his hand to Satan, and asked: – How are you, R' Satan? – *Oy*, R' Shmuel Yaakov, I don't feel good! – Surely, you must have overworked yourself, R' Satan, because nowadays it is difficult to cause a Jew to commit a sin: it's no small matter, after all, it is before the Day of Judgement, and Jews are afraid.

Hearing the words from R' Shmuel Yaakov, Satan burst into laughter, and his laughter was heard in all worlds: – *Ay*, R' Shmuel Yaakov, I thought that you were really a clever Jew, because everyone in the *shtetl* holds you to be so. What do you thing, R' Shmuel Yaakov, that today is like former times, when I had to work so hard before I was able to bring a Jew to commit a sin?

You certainly recall that Friday, before dawn, when they caught R' Shmuel Asher, the *Shokhet*, in the baths with the *shikse,* Zuzgeh, the bath-heater. Do you recall how easy it was for me to seduce that Jew, who observed each and every mitzvah as if it were the eye in his head, and who fled from every sin as if from fire, to bring him together with the *shikse* Zuzgeh? *Ay, ay*, how much effort I put into this particular matter! Night after night, I would come to him with Zuzgeh, and Zuzgeh would take off all her clothes until she was stark naked, and I would say to him: – R' Shmuel Asher, just take a peek at Zuzgeh's feet, how beautiful they are, and how red they are! Blood literally spurts out of them. However, R' Shmuel Asher had shut his eyes, and thereafter shouted out: What does Satan, may his name be erased, want from me! However, on the third night, he half opened his eyes, and took a look at Zuzgeh's red feet. A little at a time, he could not tear his eyes away from her feet.

When I saw that I had him along a path, I went further: – R' Shmuel Asher, take a look at Zuzgeh's breasts. *Ach*, how beautiful and graciously they stick out from her breast cage. And the same process occurred. At first, he closed his eyes, and hurled an imprecation at me. Afterwards, he couldn't tear his eyes off of them. And so, the entire matter went, up till last Thursday evening, at which time, R' Shmuel Asher the *Shokhet* not only didn't close his eyes, to keep him from looking at Zuzgeh's naked body, but rather clamored into her body with both of his hands, to the extent that I permitted myself to make a joke with him: – You see, R' Shmuel Asher, Zuzgeh's right breast is Moses, and the left is Aaron. The joke pleased him a great deal. He laughed quite heartily, and said: – In addition to the travails he inflicts, Satan is clever as well, may his name be erased!

When it was about two hours before dawn on Friday, I said to him: – R' Shmuel Asher, let Zuzgeh go; she has to heat up the bath, in order to warm up the *mikva* for the Jewish women, in honor of the Sabbath. However,

R' Shmuel Asher was no longer the master of his own will. A terrifying passion had taken control of him, and he would not release Zuzgeh from his hands. Well, I thought, now I can talk turkey with R' Shmuel Asher. – Listen, R' Shmuel Asher, Zuzgeh has to go, a living is a living. And after all, how long can you carry on, inflaming your blood and never quenching your desire? My advice is as follows: let Zuzgeh go now to attend to her work. In an hour or so, she will be done, so get yourself dressed, and go to her in the baths, and put a coin in her hand. I assure you, that she will completely surrender herself to you, and you will be able to still your passion. And R' Shmuel Asher did just that...

*

However, don't think that this sin came so easily to R' Shmuel Asher. That is why I am Satan, in order to do evil as much as it is possible for me to do.

On that same night, I sent to David Zvi, that silken young man, my assistant, a girl who was a knockout (also a Devil) for her to work him over.... and what to do, and how to do it, I didn't need to tell her: she knew what to do better than I did....

David Zvi, that young silken youth, knew 'nothing from nothing,' and didn't want to know. What interested him was to sit and learn, and father children. He didn't have to worry about making a living; his father-in-law worried about that. Six weeks had passed since his wife had given birth to a baby girl, and he had become so distanced from her, that he would not even give her the keys to the various pieces of furniture, rather, he simply tossed them on the table, and six weeks needed to pass before he could even touch her.

I sent the she-Devil to this very silken young man on that very same night, to work him over... so that David Zvi awoke before dawn, and felt that his nightshirt was very wet in a specific place.... a cold sweat broke out on his brow, and he leapt down from the bed as quickly as a cat. He poured the ritual water over his nails, stood himself in a corner, and said: – Master of the Universe, you are my witness that for the entire time, that I could not come in contact with my wife, I did not permit myself to draw near to a single evil thought, and when evil thoughts attempted to draw near to me, I immersed myself deeper into study, and did not permit the evil thoughts to come near to me. How could this have happened to me on this day? However, as your ways are, Great God, straight and full of justice and compassion, so are the ways of Satan crooked and full of anger. I take it upon myself to fast for two weeks, and only at night will I eat something, in order to have the strength to serve you, Great God!

And despite the fact that David Zvi knew that in the intense frost, the *mikva* was not yet warmed up, and a thin layer of ice was still on the top of the water of the *mikva*, despite this, he ran there in great haste. God in heaven, what David Zvi's eyes fell upon as he came into the bath!

On the floor, on which the *kapote* of R' Shmuel Asher was spread out, close to the oven, which was full of burning wood, lay R' Shmuel Asher, sunken into Zuzgeh's half-naked body. The long feathery fringes of his *tallit-katan* were wound around Zuzgeh's body. The fire in the oven crackled. From the ends of the wood, which the fire had not yet reached, bubbles of water erupted with a hiss. The water bubbles were the tears of the wood... the tears with the hiss and the crackling of the fire were an expression of protest, that light and warmth were now being used for sin, rather than for a mitzvah, that is, to warm the waters of the *mikva* of the Jews in honor of the Sabbath.

Seeing this terrifying picture, David Zvi gave a shout: – Wicked man, what are you doing? And he went into the *mikva*. R' Shmuel Asher, pale and frightened, wanted to pick himself up and run away from the bath. However, Zuzgeh enfolded him in her strong hands: Hey, you, mangy little Jew, what do you think, that my

blood is water? You made it hot, now cool it off!.... Well, did R' Shmuel Asher have a choice?....

As R' Shmuel Asher, on that Friday before dawn, after this occurrence, ran in the streets of the little *shtetl*, pale and frightened, I, Satan, stood in his way, and said to him: – Hey, you fine Jew, was it all worth it for that disgusting *shikse*? *Tfui* on you, for having lost both worlds!

And what the end was, you know already. On that very same Sabbath, he was compelled to flee out of the *shtetl*, and he hung himself with his *gartel* in the forest.

*

Yes, that's the way I had to work years ago, in order to bring fine Jews to commit a sin. But not today! Today, when I think out really neat little transgressions for a fine Jew, and I come to him, I find out that on the way to him, he has sinned in this manner of his own volition. Yes, my friend, it is really bad! I am confronting not only the danger of losing my job, but also [the danger of] being entirely liquidated. Do not forget that the Master of the Universe is already laden with years, and when one gets to that age, one gets nervous and anxious. Yes, he doesn't want to know about anything, only that it is necessary to cause fine Jews to sin.

I have, in recent times, visited with the staff of the Master of the Universe, and demanded of them that they should plead before him to turn me into a force for good, so that I would have a better line of work in trying to get a fine Jew to perform a mitzvah. However, they replied to me, that when the Master of the Universe creates someone to be Satan, he remains as Satan, until he meets with an untimely end....

Yes, my friend, I have become fat from doing nothing. So I come to you, to see if your Shofar is large enough, so that when on Rosh Hashana, when you will cry out the *LaMenatzayakh* prayer with conviction, and begin to blow, that I can crawl into the Shofar, and lie there until you crack from trouble.... please don't take this to mean that I like doing this, but what does one not do in order to survive?

In the Area of Religion

Page 100: *(Top):* *The HeHalutz Organization in Szczebrzeszyn, 6/6/1931*
(Bottom): *Poalei Tzion*

Page 101: *The appearance of the Synagogue of Szczebrzeszyn after it was rehabilitated by the Polish government.*

Page 102: *Several of the descriptions of the ancient synagogue in Szczebrzeszyn, with regard to the richness and beauty of its interior decorations – in comparison with the number of years of its existence – appear to be exaggerated, despite the fact that these items are repeated, and restated in the descriptions of several of the participants, residents of the city. The editorial staff did not have the ability to verify these facts. Here, we present these descriptions as they were written, along with comments from our side.*

The Szczebrzeszyn Synagogue – A Work of Beauty

Modest Without, Crowned in Decoration Within

By Engineer David Davidovich

The custom, according to the *Rambam*, "One does not build a synagogue except that in its height it is according to the height of the city, and it is raised to the point that it should be taller than all the houses of the city" (Rambam, 'Customs of Worship,' Chapter 11, Paragraph 2), was beautifully realized in Jewish Szczebrzeszyn. The artistic Synagogue, whose roof covered two stories of height, stood out over all of the houses of the city, and was thereby a symbol of its lofty purpose, which filled the lives of the members of that ancient Jewish community, that had such an illustrious historical past. The community is first mentioned in the 17th century.

The Rabbis of Szczebrzeszyn, who were emissaries of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*, served with glory in famous congregations throughout Europe, and their names are bound up tightly with the origins of Polish Jewry up to the days of its destruction (see, the Pinkas of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*, Collections of Amendments, Writings and Lists, arranged by Israel Halperin, Jerusalem 5705/1944 , pp. 32,35,37,40,63, 67, 78, 120, 143, 169, 182,209,214,267,274,287,289,307,333,453,456,516). The name of Rabbi Meir son of R' Shmuel is to be singled out especially, as one of the distinguished members of the Szczebrzeszyn community, in the first half of the 17th century, who fled to Krakow, after the invasion of the Cossacks into Szczebrzeszyn. He wrote the book "*Mizmor Shir LeYom HaShabbat*" (Venice 1639) and the well-know chronicle of the Decrees of 1648-9 "*Tzuk Halttim*," (Krakow 1650; Venice 1656). This book is a valuable relic, and only examples of the second edition (that is to say, Venice, 1656) are to be found in "Bodlina," in the British Museum, and before the war it was in the community library of Vienna, and in the library of the Rabbinical Seminary of Breslau.

Among the square synagogues, in the style of the Renaissance, that graced the Jewish communities of Congress Poland in the past, it is worth pointing out the old synagogue of the Szczebrzeszyn community. It was built at the end of the 16th century, that is to say, in the same period that the synagogue in neighboring Zamość was

also built in the Renaissance style.[21] Indeed, both of these synagogues resemble each other from the standpoint of style (see D. Davidovich: Synagogue in an ancient town, in the community of Zamość, in the Yizkor Book, "*Zamość Bi'Geona U'VeShivra*," Tel-Aviv, 5713/1952).

The Szczebrzeszyn synagogue was among the richest in decoration in the Zamość valley. The appearance of the arch of the prayer sanctuary (23.48 x 21.35 meters) was like in a monastery, that possessed transoms which surrounded six windows, and six entrances to the women's sanctuary. As was the custom, the women's sanctuary was on an elevated floor, as an addendum to the building that was adjacent to the west wall, such that on the ground floor of this addition was found the '*Polish*,' and an assembly room. Also attached to the women's sanctuary were small halls, that were attached to the northern and southern walls.

All of these additions to the structure were of modest appearance, without any architectural adornments. Indeed, the exterior of the synagogue was all modest in appearance: the walls were divided by pilasters, and only the mansard roof provided any form of external decoration, the only [decoration] for the building. However, the inside of the building excelled in the quality of its distinct, rich decoration.

Geometric decorations were to be found along the borders of the arches inside the synagogue, with interlocking clasps that resembles those that were to be found in the Christian churches of Szczebrzeszyn. These clasps, undoubtedly, date from the period in which the group of similarly designed churches was built in Zamość. Part of the arches, that is to say, the sections that were between the transoms, and above the Holy Ark, and on the edges of the side walls, and above the entrance, were decorated in an especially rich manner. This ornamentation went for the length of the line that passed below the windows. The Holy Ark, constructed of stone, was distinguished by its late Renaissance style, even if its realization was simple in the extreme. Even more, the gate in front of the Ark was carved from wood, done in an arresting Oriental style. The coloration of the front, accented several features of the archways, and was largely a royal blue.

(A. Szyszko-Bohusz: Materialy do archtektury bóznic w Polsce – Krakow 1926, p. 23)

The iron *Bimah*, made from forged iron (*fer forgé*), was built at a much later time, certainly in the 19th century. Its modernity had an impact on the appearance of the old synagogue. There was a piece of furniture on this *Bimah*, perhaps one of the most interesting and singular ones among the synagogues of this era, that enlivened the center of the abode: this was the Seat of Elijah, built of wood, whose appearance reminded one of a sort of canopy. This seat leaned against the western side of the railing of the Bimah, and was distinguished by a pleasant-looking canopy, supported by two beams. The contours of this canopy were executed in the spirit of the heraldry of the gables found on smaller Holy Arks, that were to be found in simple houses of worship, or '*Shtiblach*' of the *Hasidim*.

While the general floor plan and internal decorations did not differ substantially from that found in the synagogue of Zamość (the style of the arches, and the nearly square prayer hall), when it came to the wall

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21 Author's Footnote: In contrast to the opinion of Ing. D. Davidovich, which appears to be correctly based, In Szczebrzeszyn, there is an oral tradition, that the synagogue in the town was 900 years old (and possibly more), and all the other participants in this book also say so. Because of this rooted idea, we have not altered anything from the words of the writers, even though they stand in contradiction to the scientific evidence.

decorations, the Szczebrzeszyn synagogue is recognized to have come first. On the walls, in the area between the windows, and the entry ways into the women's sanctuary, there appeared a beautiful ornamentation, which it would be possible to limit it as a classical blind arcade, that could be found in a much later period inside a synagogue of the Baroque fortress style. This arcade was made up of descending lines, made up of semi-circular arcs, set between pilasters, resting on three plain columns. The field of the blind arcade were here and there, set off to advantage as pools, in reference to certain chapters of prayer (see Davidovich, The Hebrew Letter as a Decorative Element in Synagogues, Part 3, Had Publishers, 1953 Volume).

Even the construction of the roof was recognized as an outstanding structure, from the perspective of the two synagogues that are being discussed. Even though the appearance of the roof shows the impact of influence from the Zamość synagogue, it was simple in the extreme, and did not add a single feature to the design of this resplendent synagogue. For the design of the roof of the Szczebrzeszyn synagogue, which was double-roofed, which brought to mind so vividly the form of the artistic roofs of most of the wooden synagogues built in Poland, invigorated the outside of this ancient synagogue. There are grounds to assume that the roof of the synagogue was not originally built this way, but was switched to a mansard roof – like most of the square synagogues, of a fortified appearance, after a fire, or alterations that were required with the passage of time.

Among the sacred appurtenances having artistic value, which also beautified the face of the synagogue, it is appropriate to recall the hanging candelabras (the 'spiders') so characteristic of the old synagogues of Poland: a menorah with nine candles, and over it an eagle rampant, and flying Torah crowns , light reflectors, many Torah scrolls, curtains, etc.

Already, during the first days of the war that was to prove so terrible to Polish Jewry, the synagogue of Szczebrzeszyn was razed by the Nazi murderers. This synagogue too, took part in the bitter, abrupt fate along with the remaining synagogues of Polish Jewry along with their faithful, worshipers, attenders and those who sang their praises.

Tel-Aviv

One of the Most Prominent Synagogues

By Meir Balaban

Excerpts from the book: Zabytki Historyczne Żydów w Polsce

Page 106: Picture of the Szczebrzeszyn Synagogue Interior: Menorah Relief

Among the prominent synagogues – such as the Vilna Synagogue, Krakow, Lemberg, Lublin, Posen Synagogues – the Synagogue of Szczebrzeszyn is also mentioned.

Almost all of the synagogues of eastern Poland were built in the form of a quadrilateral. When one enters the synagogue, one immediately notices that the Prayer Hall is configured lower than the level of the street near which it was built. One descends into the synagogue by way of steps. Those who are educated [in Scripture] interpreted this with a religious significance, based on the sentence from the Psalms 101:1: "From the depths do I cry out to thee, O Lord.'

In actual practice, this is quite different. In order to comply with the requirement for depth (*ma'amakim)*, the place where the Cantor stood was made a bit lower, but making the level of the [entire] synagogue lower, was tied up with a ruling having to do with churches that said: 'the unbelieving Jews shall not construct synagogues that are handsome, but abridged and of middling size.' In order to obtain a permit to build – despite the prohibition of the bishops and of the monarchy – it was necessary to lower the [ground] level.

To the right of the Cantor, on both sides of the Holy Ark, in a number of synagogues there was a mortared table in the form of an altar. It was here, on Yom Kippur, that Yizkor candles were burned. A large nine-stalked candelabrum stood on this table, in the form of a seven branched menorah which was memorialized in the Arch of Titus in Rome (see illustration on P. 106). There were such menorahs in a variety of synagogues, some small, some large. Larger menorahs are found in the synagogues of Pohrebyszcze, Szczebrzeszyn, Zamość. Some have smooth stalks, others have stalks covered in satin buttons, flowers, etc.

On the base of the candelabrum, sometimes the name of the sponsor can be found.

In the Szczebrzeszyn Synagogue, as in the synagogue of Zamość, the soffit is constructed centrally, and the prayer hall is square and not a large quadrilateral.

Small Angels Sing a Song of Praise

By Menachem Messinger

Page 108: *Relief on the Wall of the Szczebrzeszyn Synagogue with an Excerpt from Psalms 24.*
Page 109: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 110: *A View of the Synagogue Interior, above.*

Descending the old stone steps, and going into the synagogue, a blinding light encompassed the ambit of your being. You were left standing inspired and in wonder. Against your will, you closed your eyes.

At the entrance – seven rows of high benches, symbolizing the seven days of the week. On the Sabbath, all the *Heder* teachers would bring their little students, seat them on the higher benches, and like a choir of little birds in the morning, in concert, from their little mouths, after each blessing would emanate a *'Baruch Shemo,'* and an '*Amen*' in unison.

Pushed together, they would sit like little angels, dressed in their Sabbath finery. Each, in their small hand – had an apple or a small roll, that their mother had provided for the Sabbath. They followed the person leading the prayers with a sacred feeling and tremble. From time to time, their voices would rise more strongly in a '*Baruch Shemo,*' and an '*Amen.*'

Everyone in the synagogue would turn their eyes towards the little angels, who would say and sing the praises of the Creator of the Universe.

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In the middle of the synagogue, there rose the tall, carved, etched and decorated gallery platform. On both sides – seven wooden steps. On the wide commode table, with many drawers, several Torah scrolls lay, decorated with beautiful fabric mantles, woven through with golden thread, with royally artistic engraved symbolic crowns – '*Keter Yisrael,*' hung with tiny golden bells, which at every movement, gave off pretty musical ringing. These bell ringing sounds awaken and ignite in our small child-like hearts, the memory of the regal distant past, about which we learn each day in *Heder*, and awaken in us a strong will and faith, that we will yet live to [see] the re-building of our ancient homeland. How many of those young children lived to see the re-building and the ingathering to our beautiful, sunny, colorful land!

Raising our childish gaze to the high, colored soffit, our eyes are blinded and carried away with great inspiration to the extensive play of the sunlight in the high windows in the tower. With the largest span, we follow the play of light from the sun's path over the various artistic drawings of Jewish artisans.

Then the four satin platters appear before our eyes, which were securely rammed into the high, colored relief, divided into a four-sided figure, from which thick, braided and turned flaxen cords are let down, which end in satin chain links, from which hang beautifully etched hanging lamps, with small stalk in which are stuck white candles.

We children lighted those small candles often, in a festive mood, which then shined together with the candles from the four hanging chandeliers on all four sides of the dais, in honor of the *Hakafot.*

The handsome, stately Cantor, R' Moshe, with his wide, long white beard, with his steady, full voice, carrying

in his secure forearms a beautifully decorated Torah scroll, with a red satin mantle, with a double crown, riding on its engraved poles, hung with jingling golden little bells. Following down from the wooden steps, and carrying Torah scrolls in their hands, he is followed by a number of honored *balebatim*, following at a measured few paces behind the *Hazzan*, who begins with his strong, projecting voice: *'Anna HaShem, Hoshia Na: Anna HaShem, Hatzlikha Na!'*

All at once, the high, wide wooden doors, which remain securely locked all year round, are opened wide by R' Moshe Farber, who calls out names festively, and accords the honor to each and everyone to take a Torah scroll, which is reckoned to be the highest honor, to take part in the *Hakafot* with a Torah scroll, which was written hundreds of years ago, having been sponsored under specific circumstances, and escorted in dance and with music into the synagogue.

The Burned Synagogue is Renovated

Page 112: Two Views of the Synagogue after the Fire (1939)

At the end of 1905 great conflict arose over the election of the new *Dozor*. The newly elected *Dozor*, Nickelsberg – with the support of Mordechai Flajszer, the large, and well-branched family of Scher, which had the 'Taxi' franchise in the *shtetl* in those years, and also the support from workers and *balebatim,* and also with the assistance of a part of the Christian community – energetically approached the renovation of the burned synagogue.

Great artisans were brought in from all over the world. As to the very old chandeliers, which were centuries old, modern gas lamp fixtures were installed. The ancient platform dais was renovated, with new steps added to it. The ornaments of the Holy Ark were freshened, and the prayer stand was rebuilt in its original style, where the elderly Cantor and *Shokhet*, Reb Moshe Hirsch, used to lead prayers. In a like manner, the eastern wall was renovated, where the elderly Rabbi, Rabbi Simcha'leh would sit (the father of Fishl'eh Goldberg).

Near the entrance of the synagogue, high benches were added for the little children, in order that they should be able to say, '*Baruch Hu, U'Varuch Shemo,*' and '*Amen.*' Also, the arcades, where almost all of the prayers were drawn out in black letters, were renovated with great skill and talent through the auspices of that fine Jewish man, R' Abraham Mordechai Boim, a son of Lejzor Papiroshnik.

It was in this manner, that the old burned synagogue was restored to its historical appearance and artistic value in the year 1905.

Haifa

Crowns of Gold and Jewels

By Mendel Farber

P. 113: Picture of the Author
P. 115: An Ark Cover –5583 - 1823

The Szczebrzeszyn synagogue, which was as old as the history of Polish Jewry, was very beautiful. Inside – high and circular with beautiful cornices. Excerpts from the Psalms were painted on the walls in color. Also it was full of wood carving, which symbolized the periods of Jewish history, beginning from the destruction of the Second Temple and forward.

Over the Holy Ark, two chains of wood hung, and between them – a cluster of grapes. Between the grapes a date peered out, which gave the age of the artwork, as is believed – 900 years.[22] There were 310 Torah scrolls in the Holy Ark. One of these scrolls contained only portions of the *Haftarah*. The ark covering was tooled from deerskin.

There were many crowns for the Torah scrolls in the synagogue, most of them from gold, diamonds, and other precious stones, on which were also engraved the dates of 300, 500 and 900 years in age. There were also silver crowns, that were used on the Sabbath and for Festivals, but on the High Holidays, only the golden crowns were utilized.

There were also valuable ark covers in the synagogue from a variety of eras. On one such cover, the words '*Yizkor*' and '*El Moleh Rachamin*' were woven in thread of pure gold. This was a gift of R' Yozil ben Chaya and was 300 years old. Of the many embroideries that the Torah scrolls were dressed in, there were those with dates that went back 300-500 years. In each embroidery that was made of silver, a small image of a Holy Ark was engraved as well as the Ten Commandments.

The vessels, used to wash the hands of the *Kohanim* before they bestowed their ritual blessing (the *Dukhan*), attracted a special attention. All of these very vessels were made of silver, among them also a small golden container from the donor, R' Naphtali Ka"tz.[23]

Twelve golden candelabra lit [the chamber] that were 600 years old, a gift of righteous women. Only one of these candelabra, had a date on it that was 140 years ago; on it, was engraved the name of Chaya bat Tova Szper. A large menorah, with a span of 2 meters, with 8 stalks, hung over the platform, and over it – a bird fashioned from gold. This menorah was lit only on Hanukkah.

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22 Author's Footnote: In contrast to the representation of Engineer David Davidovich, which appears to be more correctly [sic: scientifically] based, that the synagogue of Szczebrzeszyn was built in the 16th century, there was another version, that the synagogue was 900 years old (and possibly more). This version, accepted by all the other contributors to this book, who were residents of Szczebrzeszyn, was deeply rooted, and despite the fact that it is not in harmony with a scientific estimate, the editorial staff chose not to leave it out.

23 This older abbreviated usage of the latter-day name 'Katz' is the acronym for '*Kohen Tzedek*' implying the priestly lineage of the individual. It is especially appropriate for such an individual to have donated an item of ritual closely identified with the *Kohanim*.

In the year 5666 (1906) a renovation of the synagogue was undertaken, in which only mature Jewish workers were employed, under the supervision of Abraham Mordechai Boim ז"ל, a prominent scholar, who had great artistic talents in drawing and carving. In the synagogue, at the entrance, he painted a work of art, and signed it: this is the product of the hands of Abraham Mordechai ben Eliezer Boim, Year 56666.

In the corner on the attic of the synagogue, a small room had been built out for one person. In the *shtetl*, it was taken for certain that, in the past, this room served as a place where a person would be confined, who had transgressed against the community, or had committed some crime. Also, in the attic of the synagogue, there were old clothes. As was customary, in the attics of synagogues, old prayer books (called '*shamehs*'), and also no-so-old clothing, [were stored]. It was accepted by the people, that the old clothing were those from the martyrs of the evil one, Chmielnicki.

Also, there were many old books up in the attic.

Kiryat Yam

A Magnificent Sanctuary

By Chava Sapian

Page 116:		*A View of External Stonework*
Page 117	*(Top):*	*Detail of Prayer Panel*
	(Bottom):	*Context of Prayer Panels*
Page 188:	*(Top):*	*Women's Gallery*
	(Below):	*Entrance Gate*

When you entered the synagogue, you were seized with a shudder, as if you had visited the original Temple itself. I can barely believe that I saw such a place with my own eyes. The colors and nuances had within them much of the beauty of the sun, of the moon, of the rainbow. It shone with a dignity and reverence.

It is told, that hundreds of years ago, a Jew came from a faraway place, whom nobody knew. He assumed the responsibility to build the synagogue, which lasted a number of years. After he had completed the work, he vanished.

On the morrow, all of the money, that the community had paid for his work, was found in a corner of the synagogue...

It was said: this foreign master builder was no other than the Prophet Elijah, because no ordinary man could complete such a magnificent sanctuary, especially, since the entire payment came back in such a remarkable fashion...

When I write these words and think, that the synagogue was destroyed, tears wet the paper, and my heart aches with pain...

Comparison to the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam

By Aharon Latt

Page 119: *Portrait of the Author*

Our synagogue was one of the most beautiful and oldest in Poland. The exact date of its construction is not known, but in accordance with the oral tradition of the elders of the town, it was built over 900 years ago. When I visited the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam, I saw a great similarity in the style of the windows of the two synagogues.

I remember the morning (*Shakharit*) prayers of an ordinary weekday in the synagogue. This was on a Monday, the day of the 'Full *Takhanun*' and reading of the Torah. It was a Fall day, in the period when Poland had gained its independence, Bad tidings of the depredations of Petlura's hordes against the Jews of the Ukraine reached us, and a depressed feeling ran through the town.

In those days, R' Nahum'cheh Twersky reached Szczebrzeszyn, from the dynasty of the Rabbis of Trisk, a pleasant Jewish man, a scholar, possessing a sweet voice, and an outstanding *Hazzan*. Even though my father was not one of the *Trisker* Hasidim, he had a special relationship to this Rabbinical leader. R' Nahum'cheh led services in front of the Ark, and when he read the part, '*Shomer Yisrael*' in the '*Takhanun*' be circled the *Bimah*, and implored in his sweet voice: 'Guardian of Israel, Guardian of the Remnant of Israel, Let Israel not be Lost, to those who recite, 'Shema Yisrael.' At this precise instant, I felt that in this complex – the synagogue full of worshipers, with R' Nahum'cheh at their head – lay an enormous reservoir of strength,.that contains within it a hope to survive the bad times.

In the Tractate, *Megillah 3*, it is written: 'Which is the great city, one that contains ten idlers.' *Rashi* offers the following explanation: Idlers, who are always to be found in the synagogue for the morning and evening prayers.

At the head of the group that recited the Psalms, stood R' Hirsch Netta's. Our home was close to the synagogue, and on the Sabbath, at an early hour, I would hear the thundering voice of R' Hirsch, who would stand before the Ark, and repeat the Psalms from the *Tehillim*. It was said of R' Hirsch, that he knew the entire Book of Psalms by heart. This was not only from the beginning to the end, but the opposite as well – from the end to the beginning.

Rehovot, 5741

Shabbat in My *Shtetl*

By Emanuel Chmielasz

I believe that the little *shtetl* was poor. Yet, we are poor even today. From that one-time *shtetl,* a higher greatness and rich spirituality shined forth. It is superfluous to draw a parallel between the small pleasures of that impoverished existence in that tiny Szczebrzeszyn, and the pleasures of the more prosperous existence n the larger world. Everyone will concede to me, that if any one of us still dreams, it is of the past of Szczebrzeszyn, and not of anything else...

We had a colorful life that was full of substance. This thought causes a series of images to be thrown across my field of vision, of the past (however, the hand which writes, lags behind...).

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Shabbat. But every *Shabbat* has its Sabbath Eve.

A hot summery Friday, afternoon, about 3-4 o'clock, I lived with my parents, sisters and brother, may their blood be avenged, in the Green *Gasse (*R' Mordechai Flajszer's street). I am decked out for the Sabbath, in Sabbath finery, having carefully scrutinized myself so that , God forbid, there should be no flaw in my dress. Having finished my work, I went out 'front' near the pharmacy store of Geschichter (years ago it belonged to Sznycer).

R' Zelig Getzel's and R' Moshe Pinia's, may their blood be avenged, sat on the stairs of the pharmacy store. Near the wall, in front of Mordechai Flajszer's house, Zelig Getzel's sons stood, like soldiers in front of a fort. At that time, they didn't look like peasants with a sack of grain . Very simply, after a week of hard work, they were desperately short of just a free breath of fresh air. All week long they had to draw their breath with great difficulty, under the yoke of making a living; on Friday, towards evening, the air was a bit more free.

The cement steps, in front of the closed door of Esther'sheh Flajszer's home, may her blood be avenged, were also occupied by seated individuals.

The *balabustas* from the street, and around the street were still very extensively occupied with preparations for the Sabbath. Some of them were carrying off the *cholent*, and beside them – girls with several pieces of wood, with which to provision the oven. The mitzvah of heating the ovens for the *cholents* of the neighbors, was the province of Chaya'leh Moshe Pinia's and Menucha Chana, the wagon driver's daughter-in-law, may God avenge their spilled blood. *Balabustas* would go running into the food businesses of Shimon Goldman and Faygl'eh Gedalia's, may God avenge their spilled blood, in order to quickly buy sugar and coffee that they had forgotten to put on their shopping list on Thursday.

In the wooden house of R' Mordechai Flajszer, where his daughter Nechama Gerenreich lived, one could see smoke coming out of the chimney. In a number of houses. The floors were still being washed. A number of *balabustas* were taking the dairy borscht and the *shalesh sudehs*[24] fare down into the cellars, where each had their own little stash. At Lejzor Sztyf, the floor was half-washed already; on the second half, the father and sons

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24 Literally 'the third meal' from the Hebrew, referring to the traditional late afternoon repast on the Sabbath.

were still seated at the machines, quickly finishing off a piece of work. It had to be ready to be taken on Sunday morning to the customer at his abode.

Closer to the Sabbath, the children of R' Mordechai came out of the large house. A Sabbath-like grace was splayed over their faces. Already dressed in their Sabbath clothing, they sat themselves on their steps. From time to time, one saw the grandchildren running out of their grandfather's house, right over to the diagonally opposite store of Shimon Goldman, where they bought all manner of snacks for the Sabbath.

In the distance, one began to hear the pounding of the hammer by R' Moshe the *Shammes*, reminding everyone about candle-lighting time. The sound of slamming doors began to resound, the clanging of keys – this was the Jews, locking up their places of business for the Sabbath. The streets began to grow more fluid. Soon, the windows of the Jewish houses glowed red, from the ever rising flames of the Sabbath candles – Sabbath!...

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With the arrival of the Sabbath the appearance of the street was entirely transformed. The business stores, with their iron gates shut; on the gates, were locks that hung with a sort of festiveness and pride, as if calling to one another: – we have the Sabbath!.... the road and sidewalk were swept clean of the weekday dust and dirt... the ditches bleached with white lime... the cobblestones called out haughtily to the bricks on the sidewalk: – the wheels of heavy peasant wagons will not pound our backs now! – and over us, Jews observing the Sabbath will soon stroll!...the bricks of the sidewalks replied.

Indeed, one did not hear the rumble of wheels, and young Jewish girls, full of grace, after a hard day's work on Friday, showed themselves to take a walk; Jews dressed in satin and linen *kapotes*, with prayer books under their arms rushed to the houses of prayer to participate in the Sabbath service.

In the small *Bet HaMedrash* of R' Mordechai Flajszer, in his yard, he would pray, his sons-in-law, his son, Dan, may God avenge his spilled blood, all the neighbors, the wood turners from the neighboring yard, and others. Zelig Balkhazh, may God avenge his spilled blood, was the *Gabbai* there, a fanatically religious man, but a very decent Jew. R' Mordechai Flajszer sat at the head; the eastern wall was taken up by his sons-in-law. In the first row – the Teacher, R' Yirmiyahu Rabinovich (the later-to-be Bialobrzegi Rabbi of the Ciepla *Gasse* in Warsaw). His presence truly lit up the *Bet HaMedrash* and the Jewish *shtetl.* The western bench was occupied by simple folk people with Dan'cheh Flajszer at their head. He, apparently, didn't want to sit next to his brothers-in-law.

A certain cheerfulness became evident among the worshipers even before the Friday evening service began. The faces – with the concerns of the weekday shed aside, of hard work – had a Sabbath-like appearance. Certain people were already looking for an opportunity to make a joke at someone else's expense. They would try to arrange for someone to conduct services who was mediocre at leading the singing, and the situation was, that when this was possible, they would do it. The initiative to do this would come from the western bench. In the middle of '*Lekhu Neranena*' they would direct the leader into the melodies of the High Holidays, and the congregation got a bit of pleasure out of it. However, R' Yirmiyahu would turn his face from the Holy Ark to the western bench, and just his stare caused everyone to become earnest again.

With the return of the worshipers to home from the *Batei Medrashim*, the young people went for a stroll, and the street became bare. From the open doors and windows, one could hear the clatter of tableware, intermingled with the tones of Sabbath melodies being sung.

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Saturday morning. One hears singing. Familiar words, homey tunes. The closer they get, the more meaningful they are – they are Hebrew songs. Curiosity pulls people out of the houses. From the distance – military ranks; the closer they get the more distinct is the brown reflection – these are the youth of *Betar*, returning from their military drills.

On the sidewalks, one encounters a number of young people already, out for a walk – some in new shoes, others dressed in a new suit. With a new suit, a young man had to submit himself on a Saturday to open scrutiny. Friends turned the person in the new suit around and looked at him from all angles. He was scrutinized from all directions, asked who was the tailor, and in the end, was the recipient of opinions.

The half-closed doors of the barbershops did not rest. Young people covered in growth went in, and came out with shaven faces.

The new road becomes more and more alive as time goes by. Groups of young people have heated discussions, while standing. Rows of young people stroll along casually, softly singing a labor hymn. One hears a strident march tune to '*El Adon*' coming from Gershon Cooper's house. Here, the *Gerrer* Hasidim worshiped their morning Sabbath service (their *Shakharit* was performed early, because between *Shakharit* and *Musaf*, they had a recess for study).

Fathers and their children, with their prayer shawls under their arms, stream – some going to synagogue, some to the great *Bet HaMedrash*. In that very *Bet HaMedrash*, Hasidim prayed, without attending a *shtibl*, Hasidim who had some grudge against their *shtibl*, *balebatim* who were Zionists, *balebatim* who were not Zionists, and just plain folk people. The left half of the eastern wall was Zionist. Moshe Hirsch Berger, Abraham Finkel, Yerakhmiel Ginzburg, Benjamin Chmielasz, Shia Wertman and Moshe Mantel sat on those benches.

The worshipers from the Zionist bench first began to arrive at the reading of the *Shema*. After the first *Shemona Esrei*, it first got lively on the half of the eastern side. There, important events were discussed, taken from the news of '*Heint*,' and '*Moment*.' Joassohn's words were repeated with relish, an article of Yitzhak Greenbaum was argued over, an essay of Hillel Zeitlin was enjoyed, or, a position in an article by V. Jabotinsky was critiqued. Banging on the table, or calling out '*Sha!*' could not interrupt the heated discussions. The only thing that could tear a heated debater away was when the *Gabbai* offered such an individual the honor of an *aliyah* to the Torah. It was first at the end of reciting the '*Keter*,'[25] prayer that people caught onto the fact that services were coming to an end, and they began to take off their prayer shawls. Conversations wound down, and a little at a time, people began to go home.

Leaving the *Bet HaMedrash*, one saw girls, boys that had worshiped in the *Bet HaMedrash*, who got in a little stroll, while their fathers in the *shtiblach* ended their prayer later. A little at a time, the promenading crowd began to leave the street. The sharp odor of the baked *cholent* was carried on the air: this was the women who were carrying their *cholent*.

After eating, one took up seats on the benches near the houses. The Sabbath fruit dessert was eaten there, and casual conversation was had with neighbors. A bit later, the older folks turned in for a nap. Young people

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25 This is the '*Kedusha*' prayer of the '*Musaf*' service, when the services are conducted in the Sephardic tradition. It would indicate that the worshipers were probably Hasidic in their orientation.

began to leave the *shtetl* for the entire afternoon. The heat of the *shtetl* burned. At Khatzkel's soda factory it was packed with people. Here, they slaked their thirst from the salty, fatty *cholent* with cold carbonated soda water...

Part of the people hid themselves on such a hot Saturday, in the shadow of the half closed doors of Yankl Yar's or Yossel'eh Warman's confectionery, where they took part in a friendly game of chess. Many young people went to the '*Plage,*' many into the blooming orchards, and many into the valleys, between the hills, around the cemetery.

On the *Plage,* the young people, girls and boys, on the grass by the meadow, would expose their half bare skin to the rays of the sun. Faces were smeared with cream, and noses were covered with green leaves, in order that they do not get sunburned. Young men would clown around in the water, teaching one another how to swim. Swimmers demonstrated their skill in the water.

In the orchards, groups of young men (former *shtibl* students) would meet with groups of girls, and together, they would eat fresh fruit right off the trees. With blankets spread out next to one another, or just simply putting down their jackets, declared their love for one another while lying there.

In the vales, between the hills, organizational meetings often took place of all the political parties: Zionists, '*Bund,*' and '*HeHalutz.*' There, several meetings of the 'Judenstadt Party' were set up and carried through. This was after the 'Putsch' of the Revisionist Party in the year 1933. Yankl Gewirtz, and Chaim Ber Bach were in the leadership. I was also a member of the Committee.

Young people left behind many secrets in the vales between the hills. Young people exposed their feelings of love, not transforming them into compromising acts. Not only once were these sweet dreams disrupted by a gentile hurrying along with a scythe or with a sickle.

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At about 5 o'clock in the afternoon, everyone from their resting places, meetings, and love-nests began to stream back into the *shtetl.* A large promenading movement began at about 6 o'clock, in and around the *shtetl.* Elegantly clothed girls, boys in presentable suits, prettily woven shirts with shining stiff collars – as if in a play.

The new road, the Zamoyski *Gasse* came to life, and the Rozolper Way and near the Flajszer's factory. Bride and groom promenaded, young boys and girls side by side, or rows of girls in the front, and following rows of young men behind them. Flirting took place over everyone's heads. From time-to-time, an embarrassed titter would be heard from a young lady, whose face would redden slightly... this promenade continued well into the far night.

When the stars appeared in the sky, the doors of businesses opened with a resounding thud of the weekday. This sound called out '*gut vokh.*'

Merchant partners would get together to do their weekly accounting. Many of those promenading also went off to their weekly jobs. Pairs of lovers remained yet on the promenade. Until the girl said: – It's time to go home. So the boy silently escorted her to her house, and behind the door, also quietly, stood with her for no small amount of time, until the girl would quickly say: – Yes, it is late. And quietly, not wanting to waken the members of the household, fled int the house...

Montreal, Canada

Illegal Activities in the 'Shtibl'

By Moshe Zissel

Page 125: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 126: *Picture of Synagogue with Double Mansard Roof*

My father, Lejzor Zalman ז"ל, was a *Radzyner* Hasid, who would spend the entire year studying at the *Radzyner shtibl.* His one source of income consisted of selling Kosher for Passover salt; he was the only one in the town that took this up as a business.

It was in the year 1904, when I was 8 years old. At that time, my father was already taking me into the *Radzyner shtibl* to learn. There, the older boys studied separately from the younger boys.

In the morning, and towards evening, it is understood that we studied and prayed. However, during the afternoon, the *Radzyner shtibl* served the clandestine activities of Zionism, because then, during Czarist times, Zionism was illegal.

From the outset, the older boys were wary of us. When we drew near to their table, they would hit us mercilessly, but later on, they would gradually draw us into their 'work.' We would stand watch, standing up to 20 meters from one another, and when we would espy the police guard or the watchman at a distance, we would begin to pass the signal from one to another, using a code word: '*Lekha Dodi*' or '*Brakh Dodi KaTzvi*' and the one standing close to the *shtibl* was supposed to shout inside: 'Fly like a lapwing'....[26]

When we stood on the watch outside, the older boys were perusing a variety of books, and read Hebrew newspapers, mostly, *'HaTzefira,'* whose editor was R' Nahum Sokolov. When the books and papers were being read, there was always a fire burning in the oven, in order – in the worst case – that it should be possible to throw everything into the fire and burn it all.

Illegal Even Amongst Our Own

One time, on a Friday, several prominent young people from the *shtetl* came into the *shtibl,* among them: the scholar, R' Abraham Mordechai – a son of Lejzor Papiroshnik, Leibusz Kreczysz, David Groiser, Yankl Gershtenblit – a son of Yisrael Milchiger, Leibusz Kiro, Abraham Itcheh Becher, Todres Nickelsberg and others. They brought a sack with them, and from it, they took out *pushkas* for *Keren Kayemet* and distributed them among the young men. In town, this *pushka* was considered to be a sacrilege by very observant Jews. When this 'great sin' became known, all of these young men were thrown out of the *shtibl,* and this was a huge embarrassment for their parents.

I remember that even in the time before I began to learn in the *Radzyner shtibl*, I once went to call my older

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26 The Yiddish phrase in question is '*Tchivchok geyt...*' The lapwing is a bird known for its erratic flight trajectory, making it hard to bring down or capture. Of equal interest, is the fact that this is very likely the source of the Israeli Hebrew slang expression '*Tchik-chak*' which is used to indicate that you want to get something done quickly and without delay.

brother home for a meal. In the *shtibl*, I found not one of the older students. Only R' Moshe Honigman, who said to me in the following manner: – Go, tell your father that Yossel os already among the 'Enlightened Ones!'....

It was in this fashion, that the nationalist concept began to spread, for a long time, in our *shtetl.*

Haifa

Dr. Herzl's Blue-White *Pushka*

By Faiga Ethel Boim

Page 127: Portrait of the Author

In great secrecy, 15 blue-white *pushkas*, with a Star of David in the middle, were brought into our town. My husband, a Hasid from the *Belzer* court, despite the fact that he was very observant, and a fluent Talmudist, took a great interest in the *Keren Kayemet pushkas.*

One time, on a Friday towards evening, he comes running to me, overheated, upset, and says as follows: – Faygl'eh see: this is Dr. Herzl's *pushka*. He is a great leader in this generation, and therefore, in God's name, every Friday, before candle-lighting, you should throw in a couple of *groschen,* and should you be torn between the options: either to buy wine for Kiddush or putting the money into the *pushka*, you should not buy the wine, because we can make Kiddush over the *challahs*. The mitzvah of building up the Land of Israel, speedily in out time, is greater than having wine for Kiddush.

You do understand, that I obeyed my decent husband ז"ל, and, indeed, immediately threw in the last two *groschen* that I had, and bought no wine for that Friday's Kiddush, and my husband made Kiddush over the *challahs.* But the Kiddush resonated in my ears differently this time from all other times, because tears of joy ran from my husband's eyes at the recitation of the Kiddush, because both of us were privileged to have lived to participate in taking part of the greater mitzvah of rebuilding the Land. And indeed, this very Sabbath, was the happiest of the Sabbaths.

But it was here that our tribulations began, that we had to withstand because of Dr. Herzl's blue-white *pushka.*

The entire *shtetl* became aware of it. My husband, along with other young people, were thrown out of all the '*shtiblach*' by the fanatics, and they had nowhere to go in order to pray. These were: Todres Nickelsberg, Yehoshua Waldman, Simcha Reifman, Yaakov Honigman, Ephraim Yehoshua Stern, Naphtali Hopp and others. They were the first adherents to the Zionist movement in the *shtetl.* Also, their wives were not permitted to worship in the women's synagogues.

My husband died at a very young age. He was one of the first of the young people in our *shtetl,* who adopted the blue-white *pushka*. I believe, that it is because of this Land of Israel pushka, God helped me to be rescued from Hitler, ימ"ש and together with my children, may they remain healthy and strong who – some earlier, and some later emigrated to Israel – all of whom are found with me here today.

Memories of the *Heder* and the *Shtibl*

By Aharon Lass

Page 129: Steel Rods for Reinforcing the Walls

Every time I hear about Szczebrzeszyn, the memories of my childhood rise in my mind. I only spent a few years consecutively in this town, [because] when I was 11, I went over to live with my grandfather in the city of Chelm, and I returned to Szczebrzeszyn as an 'overnight guest' on the festival days of Passover and *Sukkot*.

The home of my parents, Sarah Itta and David Lass, was extremely observant, Hasidic, and they observed all of the *mitzvot*, whether easy or difficult to fulfill. My mother made an effort to assure that the house was always clean and pleasant. The children were always orderly, and dressed in good taste. In addition to dealing with caring for her seven children, she excelled in her skill at needlepoint, making such things as covers for the Sabbath and Festivals. It was not for nothing, that my father, every Friday night after reciting 'Shalom Aleichem,' would recite '*A Woman of Valor Who Can Find?*' with special emphasis.

My father, R' David ben Ze'ev *HaKohen* Lass, was born in Chelm. He was an educated Jew, one of the more prominent of the *Radzyner* Hasidim in Szczebrzeszyn. In addition to my studies at the *Heder*, he would customarily wake me and my brother Lipman, twice a week at 5:00AM, and teach us the Tractate of *Sanhedrin*. To this day, I have not forgotten his explanations of the passages in this *Gemara*.

There was always merriment and joy in the house, especially on the evenings of the Sabbath and Festivals, when all the members of the family: my parents, my brothers Lipman and Mordechai, and my sisters, Yenta, Zlata, Tova and Chana (and occasionally a Sabbath house guest) sat around the set table, on which were the Sabbath candles, and sang the Sabbath melodies together – all of this remains engraved in my mind to this day.

Wrapped in a Prayer Shawl – To the *Heder*

My memories of the house of my parents begin from that very day, when I heard my father calling to me to leave the children with whom I was playing, and to come into the house. My parents were waiting for me with great joy, and they informed me that from this day forth, I begin to go to *Heder*. My mother dressed me in my Sabbath clothes, and my father wrapped me in his large prayer shawl, and carried me in his arms to my first *Melamed*, Shlomo Belfer.

In this *Heder*, I met many children my age, between three and four, but also some who were older. There were two long tables, and around the walls – low benches for children. At the side of one table, the Melamed Shlomo sat with the older children. At the side of the second table, his son Yitzhak sat, with the little children. Here I began to learn the alphabet, and I continued through the beginning of the study of the *Chumash*. I remember the Sabbath, at the time I was learning the *Chumash*. I was alarmed by the huge crowd that had assembled at our home. I stood on the table, decorated with a gold watch, and I then went through the examination: translating the portion of *Vayikra* from Hebrew into Yiddish.

From the *Heder* of Shlomo Belfer, I went over to the *Heder* of Abraham'eleh Binyomin's. There, I continued in the study of the *Chumash* with the *Rashi* commentaries. This was a small *Heder*, with few students. The *Rebbe* would eat his meager repast at the side of the table, around which the students were seated. He would mumble his blessings after the meal silently, but when he would reach the sentence, 'He will lead us to Our Land Presently,' he would call this out loudly and with a special tune. It is possible to say, that the first spark

of Zionism was ignited within me there.

From there, I went over to the Heder of Yankl Shlomo'leh's. This *Heder* was better organized, and the explanations of the study was clearer. I began the study of the *Gemara*. R' Yankl Shlomo'leh's knew how to convey the lesson not only in substance, but also with unique melodies for each and every portion. I remember well the '*Va'Ani*' from the portion of '*VaYekhi*' in the confession of Jacob to his son, Joseph, and the unique melody of '*Um Ani Khoma*' from the '*Hoshanot.*' My term of study with him was very interesting: apart from the studying, there was a great deal of interest in the news from the front of The First World War.

I then went over from the *Heder* of Yankl Shlomo'leh's to the *Heder* of Pinchas Grossbard, whose nickname was 'The Blind Pinchas.' The learning process under him was at a high level. Every Thursday, we would learn the weekly portion with *Rashi* commentaries. R' Pinchas was very fluent in Torah and Talmud, and we heard beautiful explanations from him during our studying.

The *Radzyner Shtibl*

The *Radzyner Hasidim* stood out among the *Hasidim* of the town. The *shtibl* was their building, and they did not tolerate people who strayed from the faith. Accordingly, it became a gathering place for the Jews of the town. Around the walls of the *shtibl,* were shelves that were filled with books, and the *Hasidim* would study *Mishnah, Eyn Yaakov, Gemara* and *Medrash*. I recall that R' Daniel Becher, the grandfather of the fruit farmers, would always be looking in a '*Yalkut Shimoni.*'

The *shtibl* would be open day and night, and there were always people in it: especially in the winter, the number was large, thanks to the warm oven. On the Sabbath, before prayers, there was a joint study group in *Gemara.* The participants were: R' Moshe David, R' David Alboim, Pinieh'leh Zisbrenner, the Torah Reader, my father, of blessed memory, and others. It was pleasing to hear the intonation of the Gemara from those people seated around the table.

It is my wish to describe the following from among those, who were regulars at the *shtibl*, who I would meet there almost every time:

R' Mottl'eh Maimon, a relative of the Maimon family of Szczebrzeszyn, a widower or a divorced man, without children, came to the town at an advanced age. He was a Torah scholar, fluent in the *Shas* and the *Poskim*, and always sat and studied. I learned the Tractate of *Berakhot* from him, with the commentary of [Rabbi Shlomo] Algazi – the Scholar and *Posek* from Izmir. The study was very instructive.

R' Moshe Honigman, short in stature, a widower, possessed of bulging eyes brought about by excessive reading of books without glasses. He never took part in conversation. He constantly was looking into the *Zohar,* or some other Kabbalistic book, bent over the book. He always either sat or stood in his designated place at the side of the table.

R' Meir Pinia, a widower. He id not have a designated place. He would move around from wall to wall. He always took part in conversation, and stood by his views. I recall one winter day in the *shtibl*, next to the warm oven, regarding the issue of relationships between gentiles and Jews. All the participants told of the destructive attitude they encountered on the part of gentiles. Suddenly, R' Meir Pinia leapt up and called out: – Incorrect! There are also gentiles who are good! And he told about an incident that occurred to him.

He was walking once to the village in the winter, darkness fell, and he was practically frozen from the cold. A gentile admitted him to his home, and immediately awakened his son, and asked him to quickly bring in some wood to stoke the oven, in order to warm him up. I remember how hie imitated the behest of the gentile in Polish: '*Pal, Pal!* ' (Light the Fire!).

Rehovot, 5741

On the Rabbinical Chair

By Yankl Lass

At the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery, there was a headstone for the *Gaon*, the author of the book, '*Nodah BiYehuda*' – in two volumes, which consists of 855 questions and answers, divided into four parts of the *'Shulkhan Arukh*': ''*Or HaKhayim, Yoreh Deyah, Evven HaEzer, and Hoshen Mishpat.*

In the 'General Encyclopedia,' published by Masada, Tel-Aviv, we find the following details about him.

Yekhezkiel HaLevi Landau – born in 1713, died – 1793.Among the prominent Torah scholars and exponent of the Rabbinate of his time. He was a Rabbi, the Head of a Yeshiva, and a *Posek* in Brody, Jampol, and Prague. He founded a great Yeshiva and educated thousands of students. He was authoritative in issues of *Halakha.* He was respected by the authorities and periodically made efforts on behalf of the good of the Jews. He opposed the Franckists, Hasidism and the *Haskala.* He came out sharply in opposition to Mendelssohn's interpretation of the *Tanakh.* His books: *Noda BiYehuda, Zion L'Nefesh Chaya, Ahavat Zion* (he wanted to make aliyah to the Land of Israel).?

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The Rabbinical Chair in the 70s and 80s was occupied by the *Bialer* Rabbi, R' Shmuel Levi ז"ל, a formidable *Gaon*, renown for his simplicity. It was told that he did not recognize the form of a coin. He was renown for hosting guests.

Later on, when he had been invited to go to Biala, the Rabbinical Chair was taken over by R' Simcha'leh Goldberg of Lublin. After his passing, approximately in 1909-1910, the Rabbinical Chair was taken by his son, R' Fishl'eh Goldberg. He was a sickly individual, and he passed away in mid-life, approximately in 1920-1921.

His place was taken by R' Yekhiel Blankman, a young man of 30 years of age. He is distinguished from all the others by the fact that he did not limit himself only by the strict boundaries of the Halakha, but interested himself also with the general economic and cultural life, also with the needs of the community. He has a good command of the *Shas* and *Poskim*, and also languages, especially the Polish language. He appears at public gatherings, presents himself to the authorities, and intervened at times of crisis and need.

In contrast to the Teacher-Seer, R' Herschel'eh Schenker, he would choose the less onerous interpretation of questions, and he would be one who ruled for 'ease.' I remember a fact, when a poor woman came on Friday to the Teacher-Seer R' Herschel'eh, to ask for a ruling regarding an odor from a chicken. The Teacher-Seer ruled: unclean. The woman became conflicted; it was the eve of the Sabbath. Malka, Pinchas the *Shokhet's* wife calmed the poor woman down, and advised her to go to R' Yekhiel. You can understand that the woman left the Rabbi's house satisfied: the bird is kosher. R' Yekhiel would leaf through the *Shas* for so long, and through the *Poskim,* until he would find a ruling that would render it permissible.

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The so-called '*Kozioner Rabbiner*' from olden days, R' Abraham Bronstein, comes traveling to the town, in the decade of the 90s. In those days, he was the official Jewish representative to the Czarist regime. He has complete command of the Russian language, as well as Polish.

He is one of the founders and co-workers, in the beginning of the 19th century, of the Savings and Loan Banks – a cooperative Jewish-Christian organization, which provided a great deal of support to the Jewish populace, merchants and craftsmen. In the last two decades, he occupies himself with the writing of applications, and is an adviser in legal disputations.

In the time of the establishment of independent Poland, there was a difficult economic situation. The 'White Cross' sent help, food and clothing. The distribution was often entrusted to the *Kozioner* Rabbi. He assisted helpers at organizing the distribution, and the Zionist organization came to his assistance. At that time, a children's kitchen was established, and a distribution center in the old inn.

Brooklyn, NY

The Rabbi Has Passed Away

By Joseph Boim

Page 133: Portrait of the Author

Bitter outcries of torn hearts burst forth from the dwellings of hundreds and thousands on that very Sabbath before daybreak. From every byway, and corner, the shrieks of the women burst forth. And especially, it was the weeping of the righteous women that grew strong, whose husbands were the important people in the *Bet HaMedrash*, Torah students of R' Fishl'eh Goldberg, ז"צ, and on whose shoulders the sustenance of their households fell .

– Our world has turned dark at midday! – A woman screams to her neighbor.

– The crown has fallen from our heads! – Another woman shouts and tears at the hair on her head.

– Woe unto us, for we are orphaned! – A wail is heard from a byway, without being able to see the face of the weeper.

The bitter crying and wailing penetrated speedily through the cracks in the shutters, and through the keyholes of locks in the doors. Upset people burst out of doors – some half-dressed, some, pity, in their winter underwear. And the question on each set of lips was: – What happened?

Upon hearing the awful news, that the Rabbi had died, the Jews, covered in beards and side locks, with yarmulkes on their heads, burst into bitter and choking tears. Speedily they vanished into their homes, and after a few minutes, dressed in their Sabbath clothing, they are walking with purpose towards the Rabbi's home. Outside it was freezing cold. The pure snow, that had fallen all night, crunched under the feet of the rushing people. Waves of tears are running from the eyes of the people, and are swallowed up by the snow, which is

melted by the effusive amount of wet tears.

Several were returning, saying for the entire way: 'Blessed be the Giver of True Justice,' and others sigh in difficulty and say: – The Holy One Blessed Be, He is punishing the righteous for our transgressions, we are the sinners, and the great ones of our generations are paying for it with their lives. In the town, atheists and apostates have arisen, young men have abandoned the *Bet HaMedrash* and the study of Torah for the unclean and the profane, women are walking around with their heads uncovered, and are not diligent in their observance of the rituals of purity, may the Lord save us....

And so they walk, reaching the home of the Rabbi, who lived in the home of R' Sholom Maimon, ז"ל – and we the children, run after them, when we emerged from the side street to the center of town, we saw adults streaming from all corners, women and children – all of them, all of them in the direction of the home of R' Shlomo Maimon.[27]

However, it is impossible to gain entrance into the dwelling of the Rabbi. Hundreds upon hundreds are shoved aside: some push inside, and others, who arrived early, push to get out.

Words of the calamity are passed from mouth to ear. R' Fishl'eh זצ"ל, was sitting and studying with two of his pupils. One was his firstborn son, Yankl'eh, the second was his good friend Leibl'eh, the son of Benjamin Kamashenshtepper.[28] Righteous women knew to tell that the Rabbi had paired up the second student to his son because of his intelligence, and sharp mind. The Rabbi loved Leibl'eh like his son Yankl'eh. The Rabbi taught these two students Torah up to the point that he gave up the ghost, in purity and sanctity.

As said, this was on the night of the holy Sabbath. The members of the Rabbi's household had already gone to bed for some time, and only the Rabbi and his two pupils were sitting and learning. The children grew tired, because the midnight hour had arrived, and the Rabbi sent them to bed, since Leibl'eh would live at the Rabbi's house as if he were one of his own children. The Rabbi, himself, continued to sit, and peer into a *Gemara.* He then kissed it, and himself went off to bed. Immediately, an internal blood vessel ruptured, and the blood spurted from his mouth like a burgeoning stream, and it was in this fashion that R' Fishl'eh returned his soul to his Creator.

Seeing as R' Sholom Maimon was one of the *Belzer Hasidim*, and the house of my grandfather was the *shtibl* of the *Belzer Hasidim,* and R' Sholom was able to first learn of the details of the calamity of the Rabbi's demise, therefore, on that very Sabbath, and for many days afterwards, I was the hero among the children of my age, because they could hear about the calamity from me in all of its detail, as they say: from the original source.

However, one does not mourn on the Sabbath, and Festivals, but on that Sabbath, the usual melodies were not heard in the streets of the town...

Saturday night – the snow stopped falling, but the cold was intense. The midnight hour arrived, and the moon in all its glory was high in the sky, literally over the center of the town, over the roof of the local municipal

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27 The writer uses both the name *Sholom* and *Shlomo* for the owner of the house.

28 A name derived from the trade of putting soles on boots.

building, as it if had been especially sent to escort this righteous man to the True World. On that night, not a single adult, nor a single child remained in their homes. Everyone went out of doors, and waited for the funeral procession, and the diligent quickly went off to the synagogue to secure a place for themselves.

I remember how I managed to get into the very center of the Great Synagogue. And what I saw and heard remained engraved in my heart all the days of my life...

When the Rabbis of the area arrived, it was already one o'clock after midnight. The coffin, over the thousands of heads, and the escorting Rabbis, was elevated to the *Bimah*. Along with the words of eulogy, were heard the cry of the thousands of people. Three huge wings were attached outside to three of the walls of the synagogues – giant structures for a women's gallery. The windows of the synagogue also served as windows for the women's wings, and the sounds of wailing from there only served to intensify the feelings of mourning. – That cry, that penetrated every fiber of my being, I will not be able to forget.

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It was said at the time, that were the two students of the Rabbi of a suitable age, for certain one of them would have assumed the Rabbinical Chair of the town. But it is questionable whether they were even Bar Mitzvah.

However, when these two students did grow up and attain maturity. They were among the founders of the '*HeHalutz HaMizrachi*' organization. Leibl'eh, the son of Benjamin Kamashenshtepper, this is none other than Leibl Licht, the activist in the town, who stood at the head of '*HeHalutz HaMizrachi*,' at the head of the library named for Mendele Mokher-Sforim, and among the founders of *Betar*. He was also an officer of the civilian advisory group of the town, and he made *aliyah* in 1933.

Stories of Legend and Mystery

Page 135: *An Abstract of the Town*

Why Szczebrzeszyn?

By Moshe Messinger

Why is our town called Szczebrzeszyn?

When the Enemy of the Jews, Chmielnicki entered our town with his formidable army, it was on a Sabbath many, many years ago. Because many very religious and observant Jews lived in our place, all of the stores were closed.

Chmielnicki and his Cossack men did not know where they were, or what the name of the place was. All the doors were locked. The Jews also were afraid to show themselves in the street.

Suddenly, the Cossacks came upon an elderly Jewish man, a very observant craftsman, who was on his way to pray at the synagogue. They detained him, and asked him for the name of the town. The Jew, who did not wish to utter anything secular on the Holy Sabbath, was silent. One of the soldiers grew angry, and slapped the old man on his cheek with his strong hand, and broke teeth in his mouth. Even then, the Jew did not want to profane the Sabbath, however out of great pain he blurted out: *shavar sheyn*![29]

The Cossacks replied with satisfaction: – Now we know the name of this place – Shebreshin. And from that time on, that was the name of the town.

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When I was a little boy, an old Jewish man would tell me all manner of stories. He loved to gather children around him and tell them lovely stories. This is one of them.

Zydowska Szkola

By Faiga Ethel Boim

After the Jews were expelled from Spain, part of them took up residence in Szczebrzeszyn. At that period in time, the authorities forbade the Jews to study.

Therefore, before daybreak, the Jews would quietly, at a pre-arranged secret signal, stealthily steal out of the *shtetl*, a specific distance to the village. In that village, Kaweczynek, there were high hills, deep valleys, and even deeper abandoned caves. In one of these very caves, the Jews would gather together and study the *Shas* and *Poskim*. When a Tractate was completed, the name of the Tractate was carved on a tree, in order to know which Tractate had already been studied, and which one had to be started.

The gentiles of the village would, not only once in that period, inform the Jews when they learned that the

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29 Hebrew for '*My tooth is broken*!'

regime that pursued them was coming on the scene.

The gentiles treated this location as very sacred, especially the hill, that had under it, the deep cave, in which the Jews studied Torah. They gave it the name, '*Zydowska Szkola* [30]'

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When I married my husband, R' Abraham Mordechai Boim ז"ל, and moved to Szczebrzeszyn, it was his mother – my mother-in-law, Rachel Leah'leh – who told me this story about ancient Szczebrzeszyn.

Regarding the Spanish Exiles in Poland

By Menashe Unger

A fragment of the series, 'From the Eternal Source,' by the writer Menashe Unger, appeared in the New York newspaper, '*Der Tog*' on 17.2.1954, which addresses itself to the book, 'The Triple Strands' by Abraham Stern, which appeared in Montreal, Canada. We cite the following excerpt from it.

The Elderly from Szczebrzeszyn (found in the Lublin Guberniya of Poland) had an oral tradition that in the middle of that forest, there was an open place where snow never held up. And the neighboring peasants called the place 'Zydowska Szkola' (The Jewish School). Also – on old, thick trees, there was carved the following: 'Here we completed [the study of] the Tractate of Shabbat,' etc.

This oral history said that this had been carved by a part of the Spanish Jews that had been driven out in the year 5252 (1492), 'who managed to reach Poland and established nine communities there, of which Szczebrzeszyn was one.'

'Among the exiles were prominent Kabbalists, and in one of the deep, long caves and cellars, that were to be found in that forest, they made use of Holy Names, and plastered the path to it with the Holy Name for traveling long distances, so that a person who was worthy, would be able to quickly and easily come to the Land of Israel.'

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30 The Jewish School

Bringing the Redemption Before its Time

By Ephraim Farber

It is winter. The entire *shtetl* is covered up with a thick blanket of snow. The *Radzyner shtibl* is located not far from the bridge that crosses the Wieprz, an old house made of wood, with a shingled roof full of holes. The windows – partly sunk deeply into the ground from age. But now it is winter, and the *shtibl* has a holiday look to it, because the snow has dressed it in a white *kittl.*

The tiny flames, of sputtering candles that are dying out, send their light out of the sunken windows into the early morning gray. The sound of late prayer is still carried aloft through the *shtetl.*

The winter would have passed through Szczebrzeszyn like all other winters. However, it happened that an itinerant beggar came through, or perhaps he was just a plain joker, who held himself out to be a *Radzyner* Hasid. He came into the *Radzyner shtibl.* He related that he had heard about the Cave of Kaweczynek which leads to the Land of Israel, and that he wishes to undertake the journey there.

Listen to this story. [Everyone] took a strong interest in this important guest. Everyone wanted this out-of-town guest to come and dine at his table. Imagine that! A Jew, who is prepared to go down into the mysterious Cave of Kaweczynek! And if he succeeds, and comes out in the Land of Israel? The thought alone, that it might actually be possible, suggested that the redemption is at hand: Kaweczynek – Israel. This was a longing, that gnawed subliminally, buried deeply in the heart of every Diaspora Jew.

Among us *Heder* boys, eavesdropping on such unfamiliar and mysterious talk from older people, gave free rein to our childish imaginations. In our conception, we saw the cave, full of snakes and 'bad things.' Also among the residents of Kaweczynek, many legends about the cave were pervasive. The peasants would tell, that on the day of '*Boze Cialo*[31]' the muffled tolling of church bells can be heard coming from the cave. They said that also, on other Christian holidays the mysterious bell ringing could be heard.

The entire place was shrouded in mystery. In the forest, that grew over the cave, the names of scholarly tractates were carved into the bark of pine trees that were centuries old, that Jews had studied, when they were homeless. In the caves of the mountains of Kaweczynek, the Jews found a hiding place in the time of the expulsion from Germany, not having the courage to immediately take up residence in the populated settlements. According to all of the evidence, most of the Szczebrzeszyn Jews are descended from these very same oppressed and pursued [peoples]. The Cave of Kaweczynek is shrouded in a fog of legend, which the Hasid that had arrived had prepared himself to descend into, and to reach the Land of Israel.

On an early, frosty morning, the guest prepared himself for the journey. He donned a pair of large boots with double leggings, wrapping the exterior of the boots in straw. Afterwards, he poured water on them, in order that it freeze on the straw, and thereby create a barrier to the external world. On his head, he put on a fur hat, covering the ears. He stuffed his nostrils with cotton, in order to prevent the internal body warmth from escaping. Over his Hasidic overcoat – a peasant's sheepskin coat, tightly secured with his Sabbath *gartel.* Do you think this was a small matter? The way to the Land of Our Fathers was going to be opened up!

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31 Corpus Christi Day

You can appreciate the fact that toasts were drunk. He took his leave of everyone, apart from those who were going to escort him to the cave. Horses were hitched to a wagon, and a mass of Jews with a clutch of children escorted this out-of-town guest. The gentiles of Szczebrzeszyn, taking note of the heightened activity prior to the departure, did not understand what this celebration was going on with the '*zydkehs*:' are they escorting a *Rebbe*, or an emissary who is going to meet the Messiah? The gentiles of Szczebrzeszyn had already seen how a *Rebbe* was received, when such a personage visited our *shtetl.* The fact that the *Rebbe* was not wearing a *shtrymel* – made them not understand what was going on. So they stood agape at the Jewish festivity.

After mutually wishing each other well, the wagon stirred from its spot. The wagon was escorted part of the way out of the *shtetl,* up to the mill. The wagon grew increasingly distant, went up onto the road, that leads to Blonie, until the eye lost sight of it among the thick orchards of the village.

The shtetl was left with bated breath, waiting for the good tidings that were to arrive. The escorts returned, who had assisted the Hasid to let himself down into the cave. Meanwhile, days went by, and weeks, and no news had yet been heard. The escorts, on meeting one another, talking about the incident, don't look each other in the eye. Everyone is blinded, as if during an eclipse of the sun. According to all calculations, the Hasid should already have been back from the Land of Israel to say: – Jews, pack your things, and come to the way!

However, the peasants of Kaweczynek carried bad tidings to the *shtetl.* They saw some sort of vagrant Jew blundering about in the snow-covered hills of the village. However, the winter had gone already, and the hills were covered in green, and the emissary had not returned. The entire incident had already been forgotten in the *shtetl.*

Suddenly, once, in the middle of the morning [*Shakharit*] prayers, the door to the *Radzyner shtibl* opened hastily, and the guest unexpectedly appeared. His exhausted look appalled everyone. The wanderer had rags on his feet. His hips were wrapped in torn clothing. None of the onlookers could open their mouths out of great astonishment. It appeared as if everyone had lost their tongues.

When the entire congregation had gathered around the guest, he told, in a broken voice, how, half way along the road, he was accosted by Elijah the Prophet. With his mild eyes, Elijah the Prophet looked him over, and extended his hand to him, saying '*Sholom Aleichem*' to him. Afterwards, he got very angry with him: – How does a Jew expect to bring the Redemption before its time?" Go, tell the sacred congregation of Szczebrzeszyn, that the time is not yet ready!...

Afterwards, the beggar sat down on the bench and put his face into his hands. It was then that it was observed that his overcoat was full of holes, his swollen feet caked in mud. He cried out in a loud voice: – Go home, Jews, for the time being, the end is postponed. We will yet be in the Land of Israel in our lifetime!

I heard this entire story in the *shtetl* while I was still a young boy going to *Heder.*

Kiryat Yam

"Angels Conveyed Him from Szczebrzeszyn to The Land of Israel"

By Abraham Stern

In my view, it is close to the truth, that the author of '*Mar'eh Kohen*[32]' is the one who prepared the commentary, '*Matanot Kehuna*' on the *Medrash Rabah*. In '*Seder HaDorot*,' he says in part of the books, that this took place in the year 5484 (1624).

When I asked the venerable Torah scholars of the town of Szczebrzeszyn (when I was dependent on the table of my father-in-law, R' Yisrael Hirsch, the *Shokhet*, from the year 5656 to 5660 [1895-1899]) concerning the holiness of the man: how is it possible that the headstone of the author , the Rabbi of Szczebrzeszyn ז"ל, should be standing in the cemetery of Szczebrzeszyn, for after all, the Rabbi ChID"A[33], ז"ל (Rabbi Chaim Joseph David Azulay) gave testimony in his book, "*Shem HaGedolim*," that he saw the headstone on his grave in the Land of Israel? Their reply to me was that it had been received orally, from individual to individual, that the heavenly angels transported him from his grave in Szczebrzeszyn and buried him in the Land of Israel.

Despite this, they decreed that respect was to be tendered at his grave in Szczebrzeszyn, and all who would pray there, he would assure that their requests would be answered. And, indeed, this was the custom until the last days, that they went to pray at his grave.

Additionally I saw that in a book by the Holy ShL"A.[34] Before the third section, that is called, *'Yesh Nokhalin*,' that there is a concurrence from one Rabbi of Szczebrzeszyn, R' Joseph ben Matityahu ז"ל, and his sanctified associates, who signed along with him, and are they not the masters of the *Kli Yakar*,[35] Our Teacher the

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32 A reference to this work is given in Yaakov Dov Mandelbaum's Bibliography of Rabbinical Writings in *Pinkas Zamość*, page 264 (Number 41). The author is identified there as R' Issachar ben R' David HaKohen of Zamość, with the subtitle: Kabbala in matters of the Holy Spirit, Prophecy, Angels, Devils and the Secret of Reincarnation. Zalkwo 5503 (17420

33 The Acronym of his Name in Hebrew. In 1753, at the age of 29, he traveled to Europe as an emissary of the communities of Eretz Yisrael and again in 1772 on behalf of Hebron. Each trip lasted in excess of 5 years. He completed his second trip in Leghorn (Livorno), where he remained for the rest of his life. Wherever he visited ChID"A made sure to inspect the important libraries and thus became familiar with many thousands of manuscripts. Out of these visits grew his remarkably compact and informative classic bibliographic and biographic work, *Shem HaGedolim*. In all he wrote about one hundred volumes in every field of scholarship.

34 Rabbi Isaiah ben Abraham Ha-Levi Horowitz (1565-1630), known as the ShL"A after the title of one of his major works *Shnei Lukhot Ha-Brit*, was a renowned halachist, Kabbalist and communal leader.

35 *Kli Yakar* (1550-1619) After serving as *Rosh Yeshiva* (dean) in Lemberg, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Lunszic became the spiritual leader in Prague. He was an inspiring speaker who electrified his audiences with his highly-charged and breathtaking sermons. Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim's most

MaHarSha[36] ז"ל, and the *B"Kh* ז"ל, and others, and as a result, it is contemporary with the author of *'Matanot Kehuna,'* ז"ל, who wrote, in *'Sefer HaDorot'* that it took place in the year 5484 (1624). And it is possible that it took place before the previously mentioned R' Joseph, but the book *'Matanot Kehuna'* was published after the year 5484 (1624).

One should not wonder at skeptics who do not believe in miracles for the sake of the righteous: how is it possible that angels should carry him to the Land of Israel, for the Wise King had already written: there is nothing new under the sun. And it has been accepted for eternity, that Elijah the Prophet ז"ל – a long time after he was taken up into heaven on a chariot – buried Rabbi Akiva (*Tosafot, Baba Metzia* D114, AB).

Montreal (Canada) 24Nissan 5714

Folk Tales

By Mendel Messinger

A) The Groom Makes Seven *Hakafot*....

Many wagons, making a great noise, would come riding in from Frampol, not far from Szczebrzeszyn, each hitched with a team of two horses, bringing a groom, escorted with music.

An old custom, from many years ago, was that a groom from out of town, coming into the *shtetl*, was required, along with escorts, to make seven *hakafot* around the municipal building...

In the year 1912-1913 this tradition was terminated because of the incitement by anti-Semitic peasants who, standing on the steps of the municipal building, incited the populace with cries for boycott, and to buy from 'our own':*'Suzy do Swieno.'*

The result of the anti-Semitic incitement was, that tens of Jewish families, who had lived in the vicinity for long years, were compelled to abandon their homes and places of business.

B) The Wedding Canopy of the Two Orphans[37]

In the old prayer book of the synagogue, where the historical events in the *shtetl* were recorded, the following

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important work is *Kli Yakar*, a classic commentary on the *Chumash* (Pentateuch) which is still published in every edition of *Mikraot Gedolot* (a compilation of classical commentaries whose writings are printed on the same page as is the text of the *Chumash* itself).

36 Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edels (MaHarSha) (1555 - 1631), who wrote one of the most incisive and keenly analytical commentaries on the Talmud, *Rashi* and *Tosafot*. A model of logic and terseness, it was quickly accepted and was printed in almost all editions of the Talmud.

37 The stratagem described in this anecdote was commonly adopted by Jewish communities throughout all of Eastern Europe. A similar story, set in the time of the First World War, is related by Mottl Steiner in *Pinkas Zamość* (se p. 783).

story is related.

In the year 1880, the so-called 'Black Plague' erupted in Szczebrzeszyn and its vicinity, which cut down masses of young and old alike, [taking] many lives. The elders of that generation in the shtetl, after a lengthy counsel, decided to erect a wedding canopy for two solitary orphans at the cemetery, to serve as an expiation that would halt the plague.

With great joy, and accompanied by the orchestra of the Blum family who were especially brought in from Zamość, the wedding canopy was erected for the two orphans, that the town then committed to support for their entire lives by giving them a means to make a living. The orphans were Mendel Ketzleleh's and his wife, to whom the exclusive franchise for sewing new burial shrouds was given.

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We find this same story described in the writings of Y a n k l L a m m (Brooklyn, New York), in the following more complete manner.

> Because of the plague there were many instances of death. The Bet-Din first called for a community-wide fast, and later when the plague did not abate, decided to erect a wedding canopy at the cemetery, a [so-called] 'black huppah,' for a poor bride to be married to a poor young man from the *shtetl.*
>
> All healthy residents took part in the wedding. Then, The Lord, Blessed be He, helped: the plague stopped, and the sick became healthy again.

C) The Revolutionaries are Honored

The great revolutionary waves, that broke out under the Czarist regime, came knocking at the gates of our *shtetl* in the year 1904.

On a foggy autumn day, when one could not even see the crucifix on the top of the church steeple, a portion of the youth from Szczebrzeszyn gathered in the wooden shtibl of Leibusz Schneider. News of the fighting between the revolutionaries and the Cossacks was passed secretly from mouth to mouth.

Overheated, and out of breath, one of the young people came running and related, in the name of Shlomo'leh Feldscher ('Shlomo'leh Rofeh') that they had just now brought wounded into the local hospital, and the bodies of three revolutionaries are to be found in the morgue, where they were subjected to autopsy.

The Czarist authorities granted permission to visit the dead. Those one-time revolutionaries took advantage of this opportunity, with hate and anger, marched around the dead bodies and in this manner they accorded last rites and respect to those that had sacrificed their lives for a better tomorrow.

D) The Synagogue Is Burning!

Before rising in the morning, it is still dark, and the elderly Shammes, R' David Hirsch, with his big boots, holding the lantern in his hand, goes around from house to house, banging on each ands every door with his

stick, and in his deep voice cries out: –'Get up for *Selikhot!*'

Suddenly it became light, in the yet sleeping shtetl, and the light came boring into the windows of the houses.

The bells of the Christian churches began to mournfully toll without stopping. The wind, whistling cruelly, scattered the burning shingles from the mansard roof of our old synagogue.

Young and old, Jews and Christians, ran to extinguish the blaze, part – to rescue their own homes. From mouth to mouth, it was secretly whispered, that the roof was deliberately set on fire, because the large ammunition dump of the revolutionaries was hidden in the attic – among the discarded old holy books, unfit for ritual use.

Legendary Figures

By Yehuda Kellner

I heard and absorbed a variety of legends from my childhood years onward, told by older people in the shtetl, to which I listened attentively. I carried them around in my imagination for many years of my life, until I documented them in this article. The first two legends are from the past century.

A) The Strange *Lamed-Vovnik*

Shlomo Frank – or as he was called: the Rebbe, R' Shlomo'leh – a great-uncle of Mekhl'eh Traeger's, was a village itinerant peddler: he dealt in fish, and apparently also would bring a calf, carrying it on his scrawny back. He was small, thin, with a short goatee. He would wear a coarse kaftan, and large boots. He made the impression of being an unlettered boor, that could not even say his prayers.

He was never seen in the streets. He was very careful not to engage in conversation with the neighbors. However, when he heard a baby crying in a neighbor's house, a small child in a cradle, when nobody was in the house, he would steal in, sit down next to the cradle, sing a song and rock the baby. When someone from the family would appear, he would pick himself up, without a single word, and leave. When they wanted to thank him, he would not accept the thanks. He insisted that The Eternal One in the heavens be offered the thanks.

– A peculiar person – the Jews of the shtetl would say to each other: a man that does not want to enjoy anything in this world, but rather saves everything up for the World to Come. He barely ate enough to sustain life. He would argue that it is not proper, and not Jewish to gorge one's self, that a Jew should be tall, stout and healthy.

When he would bring fish, carrying it from the village with which he dealt, he would sell the big ones, and keep only the very small ones for himself: 'with these small fish, we will have a very good *Oneg Shabbat*.' He would quietly make *Kiddush* and sing the Sabbath melodies.

On Friday night, after eating, he would go to sleep without a pillow in a short bench-bed, in order that he would not be able to stretch out his feet, so that he would not enjoy his sleep.

He would sit at the table covered in a tablecloth that consisted of coarse peasant linen. The Challah – from black flour, not baked and burned. He worshiped in the tiny synagogue. He would dress in his Sabbath clothing, a thin full-length coat, and since it had no buttons, he constantly waged a battle with the wind, because the corners of the overcoat would blow apart, and he was compelled to hold them close with his hands.

During the nights of the entire week, he would not sleep, because after 12 o'clock at night, ne sat himself down on the threshold and in this manner he would only grab a nap. Many nights he would spend at the cemetery.

So, the Jews in the *shtetl* asked themselves: – What does this peculiar Jew desire? To which sect does he belong – perhaps he is a *Breslover*? Perhaps to the Enlightenment movement, or altogether he is a disciple of Sabbatai Zevi? However, the Sabbateans are a dissolute sect, because according to the legends that had been distributed, they carried out orgies with naked women, and this sort of Jew does not seem oriented to undertake such things.

The Jews of the shtetl thought about this particular person for their entire lives, until one day, when he died. In his room, they found many books, and they began to say around the shtetl, that Shlomo Frank was one of the thirty-six righteous. And indeed, the women – perhaps even our very mothers and grandmothers – went to his grave and stuck small notes by it in order to plead for all good things in his name's sake.

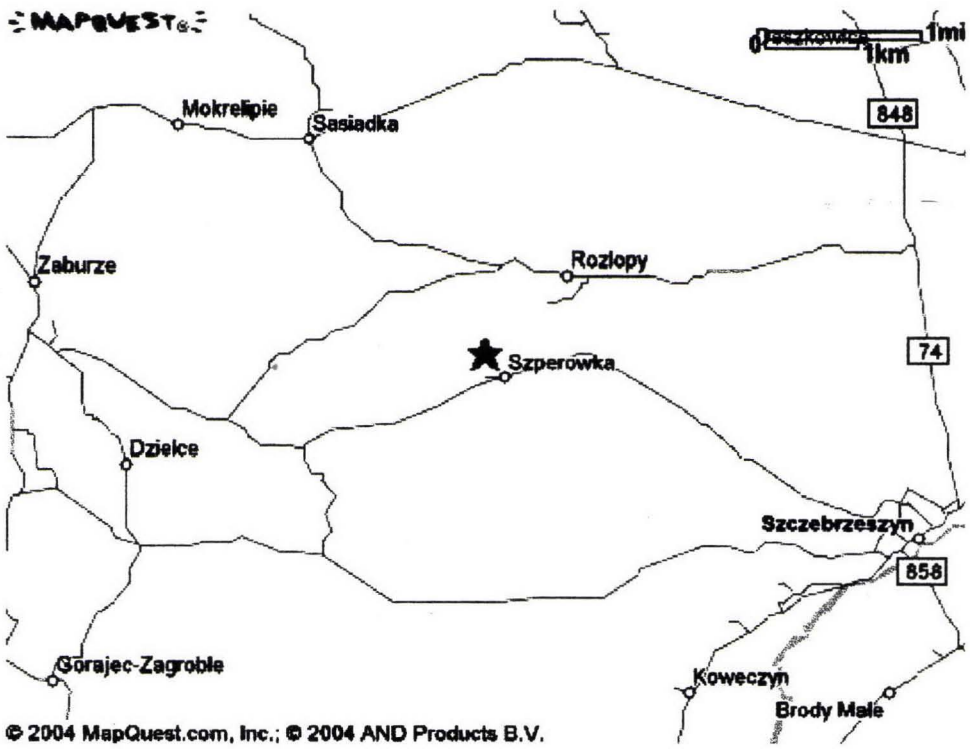
B) The Heroic Fighter

Everyone in the *shtetl* knew the Szper family, and above all, Itcheh Meir Szper, who carried around the affairs of the entire *Hevra-Kadisha* with the cemetery in his head, and perhaps also in his long, yellow beard. He constantly had the *Pinkas* of the cemetery on his person, and did not want to show it to anyone.

He made his living by running a tavern: he would sell the 'bitter drops.' On the Sabbath, after worship, I and my comrades would go into his place to get something to drink, and he would take a bottle out of the back pocket of his trousers and ask: – what are you drinking, my friends – 45 year or 95 year? On the Sabbath, he would not write down how much each person drank, and what he took as a snack – cookies or strudel, and always on Sunday, he recalled what each person owed him.

He certainly didn't know, not him, nor the members of his entire family, that they had a great hero in their family, who fought for freedom and Polish independence. There is no written history about this relationship, of this Szper and about the time when this happened, which is inferred to be during the Polish rebellion in the previous century (1863).

On the outskirts of Szczebrzeszyn, a great battle took place between those who rose up, the revolutionaries, with the conscripts of the Romanov regime. The commandant of these revolutionaries was this legendary Szper. Was he a Jew with a beard? – I believe that the answer is yes. This very legendary hero won the battle. As recognition for his heroism, the revolutionary command decided to name a village after him. This village is called Szperowka. All we scions of Szczebrzeszyn know this village.



C) The *Rebbetzin* and the Seven Sons

At the entrance to the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery, to the right, stands the first grave of a *Rebbetzin* and seven sons, Kohanim. The letters of the gravestone are eroded from age, and washed away by rain, and are no longer legible.

It is told that the *Rebbetzin* with the seven sons had renovated the cemetery. If so, there was no other cemetery in Szczebrzeszyn. Therefore this must have been shortly after the founding of Szczebrzeszyn, because a town with Jews cannot exist without a cemetery.

Something must have occurred at that time: a malevolent decree, an anti-Semitic law, or possibly a pogrom, and the murderers killed the *Rebbetzin* along with her sons, who dies as martyrs, in Sanctification of the Name, as did Hannah and her seven sons in the time of the Tyrant Antiochus. Or, is it possible that there was a plague, in which all of them died? I am more quick to believe that it was a pogrom.

Why did our elders not record this? Our Szczebrzeszyn cemetery is rich in undocumented history. The pain is great, that this sacred place began its history with a family grave, at the time when out *shtetl* was founded, and ended with a mass grave created by the modern Hitler bandits, who transformed our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters into mountains of corpses, casting them into the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery into mass graves and excised our hearty Jewish *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn.

Buenos Aires, December 1952

A Later Echo of King Solomon's Judgement

By Zanwel Aszenberg

Page 152: Portrait of the Author

Dedicated to My Mother, who was Exterminated

The little *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn has already been in place for many years, squeezed in this manner, between mountain and river, and cannot expand, because in order to do this, it must encompass the gentile streets, and 'they' do not want that to happen, and neither do 'we.' The 'Gorajecker Hills' were positioned head-to-head with the *shtetl*. They yield nothing to the *shtetl*, beyond the clay, with which the *cholent* boards can be cemented to the ovens for the Sabbath. The river, underfoot provides a bit more in the way of needs, because firstly: the bathhouse that was erected right beside the river, has enough water for the *mikva*, and therefore the possibility to rinse one's self off with buckets of water, as much as the heart desires.

One bridge over the river, and a large, clear meadow spreads out with endless poppies and forget-me-not flowers, which ripples like an ocean like an immature tree in the slightest breeze. This picture is completed by orchards with fruit produce that begins in the summer with red cherries, grapes, plums, and end in the fall with apples, which Jewish orchard pickers store in cellars for the winter, when God will send good merchants from the larger cities. After the summer, it gets listless again in the *shtetl*, which is sunk in drabness and sticky mud.

A bit closer to our time, that is, when we, the young people of the *shtetl* saw 'The World' before it, the *shtetl* began to acquire a different appearance. Awakened in 1918 from a long sleep, to a new life, it proceeded with giant steps, like water that bursts through a dam.... the first meeting in the *shtetl* for an 8-hour workday is held in the *Bet HaMedrash* by the '*Bundist* Group.' 'The Genteel Jews' are frightened and overwhelmed by the 'news,' but they keep silent.

From then, this very movement grows to achieve the name:'Szczebrzeszyn, the *Bundist* Fortress,' because during elections to the city council, the 'Bundists' appear to 'take over' all the councilman positions, leaving the entire 'citizen's bloc' one councilman. Under the influence of this very movement, can be found a school for children from the impoverished classes of the *shtetl*, professional unions, from all trades, and the best of the intelligentsia of young men and women. There are also Zionist organizations here, of all persuasions, religious Jews more than all, with their synagogues, Hasidic *shtiblach*, etc. In a word: a vibrant, beautiful community-oriented and observant Jewish life.

Overflowing with Superstition

I wish to recall an incident in the *shtetl,* that has given me no rest since the time that my mother told me about it.

In my earliest youth, I saw 'him' and did not stop thinking about him, until after a strong insistence to my mother, at which point I learned something about 'him.' I will do the right thing, by absolving from guilt, when I will, in the course of telling about 'him,' I will do even more than that, by raising up his mother's activity as she justly deserves.

It was approximately a hundred years ago, when the *shtetl*, like many other *shtetlach* in that time, was suffused

with piety, and more than that, full of superstition: belief in evil spirits and miracles was a normal part of daily life.

It was believed that the great fire in the *shtetl* consumed everything visible except the synagogue, because droves of pigeons had brought water in their beaks; that there have always been evil spirits in the attic of Tzirel the Lady Baker, who come, even late at night, mostly in the winter nights, down from the attic, and into the bakery to warm themselves, and even their appearance was known, 'Little Germans' and will do harm to whomever they like....if someone was late in crossing the *Schulhof*, it can happen that in the middle of the night he could be called to the Torah....such an individual, regrettably, has nothing left to be envied...before dawn, when the rooster crows, the synagogue again becomes empty, and it is possible to pray without fear.

Well, in that time life went on – according to what was told by the elderly Jews on winter nights beside the oven in the little synagogue – normally, with a well-trod path of piety and poverty, but despite this, without any added concerns.

But in this very time – and here, finally, we come to the central matter – a poor widow lived in the *shtetl*, with her only son, Yossel'eh. The mother, very careful in her religious observance, but also very poor, does all manner of work in the world, the hardest, you understand, in order to send her Yossel'eh to *Heder*, in order to leave behind someone capable of reciting a decent *Kaddish*, after a hundred years. She even performs *Mitzvot*, in keeping with her means, and the first is: seeing as she draws part of her sustenance from carrying milk around to the houses, which she purchases from the middlemen, she donates every day, free of charge, a small pot of milk for the Rabbi of the *shtetl*, for which she hopes to receive the reward of having her Yossel'eh succeed at his studies.

But misfortune decreed that it would keep its 'eye in its head' on her, and sought out bad companions, gentile ones, at that. There is no father before whom to have fear, and it goes from bad to worse. He is missing from *Heder*, he gets lost for hours at a time, and later on, for days. The more the mother weeps, and pleads with her son to return to the righteous path, the less and less impact it has. But before the misfortune falls, the mother does not stand by in silence, because her heart tells her something bad... she runs to the *Rebbetzin*, asking that she help and relate to the *Tzaddik*, her husband, what has happened to her only son. Let him 'move worlds.' She would have liked to approach the *Tzaddik*, the Rabbi, herself, with her complaints, but she didn't have the couple of groschen to have a note written, and for the fee... she believes however, that the Rebbetzin knows of her difficult situation, her trembling over the fate of her child. She does not sleep through the night, because her heart is heavy.

In a Bad Direction

Her heart did not deceive her regarding misfortune. On a day, when her child did not come home any longer, the mother becomes aware that he has gone off somewhere in a village with his friends. The bad premonition rises to a great fear. Days go by, and it is always the same. Her heart tells her only bad things... to whom has she already not run to plead for help in her need? Until the dark tidings reached the shtetl, and the mother fell ill in bed. From the looks of those around her, the mother understands that something terrible has happened. She learns that her only son, was persuaded by pious Christians, to convert and be sprinkled with holy water, in order that he get on the right path and secure a place in the World to Come...

Using the last of her strength, the mother gets up from her sick bed, runs like a wounded bird to the house of

the holy *Tzaddik*, with a heartrending wail. Her weakened heart does not hold out. In conveying the great misfortune to the Rabbi – she faints. The Rabbi knows about this already. He is silent. She throws herself at the Rabbi's feet – *Rebbe*! My only son has been taken from me!... The mother demands help in her time of greatest need.

The Holy Rabbi feels shattered, and out of great compassion and pity for the pious mother he orders that she be told: that he will pray that 'The Eternal One,' should take pity and wipe away the shame from the mother, together with the apostate. The mother does not initially apprehend the meaning of his words. She asks again, what does the *Rebbe* say? It is carefully explained to her, and at this point the mother begins to stammer: What? My child! No, great *Tzaddik*, that no! I beseech you! Everything in the world, yes, but don't wish him anything bad. Great, holy Rabbi! There are so many gentiles – let him be yet another!...

Strange: the elders of the *shtetl* tell, as if there were no observant Jews at that time, nobody held anything against the mother at all....

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At the Cemetery

By Mendel Farber

At the entrance to the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery, is the first headstone, which stood between two old, thick oak trees, sunken into the ground with age, and the lettering half erased and it was hard to read.

One of the old headstones was the grave marker of R' Shlomo'leh, who passed away about 150 years ago. It was told, that in his will, he wrote that whoever would come to his grave with a request, he will exert himself with the Master of the Universe, on behalf of the plea. And in fact, when someone, or in general, everyone, happened to find themselves at a time of distress, one would come to his grave site and recall his will.

Among the very important headstones was the marker of the renown Rabbi, R' Shlomo, or as he was called, R' Shlomo the Good, who passed away in the year 5600 (1840). It was told of him: On Yom Kippur, 'Kol Nidre Eve' when all the men and women were in synagogue, the good Rabbi Shlomo would go around to the Jewish homes, and lend an ear to hear if a child was crying. On 'Kol Nidre' night, mothers would leave their tiny infants at home under the supervision of older children. When the tiny infant would begin to cry, the older child also burst into tears. In such a circumstance, R' Shlomo arrived with great love and calmed the children down.

Among the old headstones there was also the marker of a mother and her 7 children, *Kohanim*. The populace believed that they were killed by the bands of Chmielnicki, ימ"ש.

Kiryat-Yam

The Glorious Way of the Seer of Lublin

By Aviezer Burstein

(Hasidic Tales)[38]

An estate manager usually implied a Jew who was unlettered, who could barely read his prayers from a prayer book and review the weekly portion, and sometimes not even this. An estate manager that could get through a chapter of the *Mishnah* was indeed a precious commodity, and that he could also study a page of the *Gemara* – such a person was not to be found.

Despite this, at one time, in Lukow near Tarnogrod, there was an estate manager in residence, who knew the *Shas* along with the *Poskim* as well as an ordinary Jew could recite the *Ashrei* prayer. They wanted to appoint his as a Rabbi in Amsterdam, but he did not want it. It appears that the Divine Oversight had ordained that he take up residence in a quiet corner of the country of Poland, in order that from him there should emerge the Great Personage in Israel, who would later establish Hasidism in Greater Poland and his name would be carried with glory and praise to this day.

He, himself, the estate manager from Lukow, R' Yaakov Koppel, was not a Hasid. Indeed, it was the opposite, he had instructed his first born son, Israel, that, God forbid, he should not say '*VeYatzmakh Purkonei*' in the Kaddish prayer after he passed away. And one time, when the Baal-Shem Tov entered his home through a door, he jumped out through a window. Because of this, he was also renown for his hospitality towards guests, a man of charity, and a profoundly God-fearing individual. He committed his life in order to fulfil each mitzah of the Torah, in accordance with the *Halakha.*

And just as he was a rightly observant Jew, so he fulfilled the commandment 'and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.' He retained the services of the best teachers for his son, Israel, and for his daughter, Shprinza-Mattl, he sought out a very special son-in-law, having distinguished pedigree, the Szczebrzeszyn genius R' Abraham Lejzor Horowitz, and promised him five years of subsidization for his studies.

A year after the wedding, R' Yaakov Koppel was rewarded with his first grandchild. His daughter, Shprinza-Mattl gave birth to a firstborn son, Yaakov-Yitzhak. The joy of the grandfather was indescribable. He loved that grandchild like the eye in his head. He called him Itzik'l and carried him around for days on end in his hands, like one carries around a Torah scroll. His lips murmured a prayer to the Creator, that the child, his first grandchild, should grow up to be God-fearing and a great personage among Jewry.

Unusual Intellectual Prowess

As is the usual case, the prayer of a decent Jew is always given consideration in Heaven. Itzik'l immediately began to exhibit unusual intellectual prowess. At the age of three, he read from the prayer book, and at five he already was learning a portion of the *Chumash* with *Rashi.*

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38 Yaakov Yitzhak HaLevi Horowitz *ha Hozeh* (1745-1815), who became known as the Seer of Lublin

When the son-in-law, R' Abraham Lejzor became the Rabbi of Jozefów, the grandfather continued to keep the grandchild with him at his home. He studied Torah with him by himself, up to his Bar Mitzvah. Afterwards, he was sent to study with the Gaon R' Hirsch Maiseles in Zlokow.

In those days, the Yeshiva of the Shinever Rabbi, R' Shmelkeh had become famous. Itzik'l was already a wondrous scholar, and the grandfather sent him to study in Shinevo. The Rabbi, R' Shmelkeh had, at that time, already adopted the ways of Hasidism. He immediately recognized that the student Itzik'l is marked for greater things. He therefore drew him closer than the other students.

Despite the fact that Itzik'l would ignore his studies, R' Shmelkeh gave him the honor to recite the morning blessings with him, each day. More important students, older and well-known scholars envied him. R' Shmelkeh said to them: 'When Itzik'l says the blessings, the entire heavenly host responds: Amen'...

Itzik'l grew up to be a handsome young man, radiant, like an *esrog*. He had large velvety eyes, like grapes, a long, white face with rosy spots of blood and milk, and grew tall as a palm in an oasis.

A Bride – 'Beautiful as All the World'

The process of arranging a marriage was begun. A marriage broker came from Krasnobrod and proposed a n ideal match with the very talented daughter of a rich 'possessor.' The proposed bride, by herself, directs all the businesses, talks with the nobility, and is as beautiful as all the world. The 'possessor' promises a very generous dowry, and after 120 years, wills all his assets to his son-in-law.

This match satisfied the grandfather a great deal, and also the father. Plates were broken at the signing of the *tena'im* and the time of the wedding was designated.

The wedding took place on a winter night in Krasnobrod. A large audience came – relatives and guests from both sides. On the groom's side, a table full of Rabbis and a couple of hundred guess were seated. When it comes to the review of the wedding contract, the groom remarks to his grandfather: – Before the *Huppah* ceremony, I wish to see the bride! The grandfather and father were stunned with wonder: how does it come for a young man to utter such nonsense? Itzik'l then reminded them what the *Gemara* said: it is forbidden for a man to take a woman to wife until he sees her. Well, if the *Gemara* says so, that's something else already.

So the bride was summoned, and Itzik'l threw her a side glance, and immediately went as pale as white lime. He quietly whispered in his grandfather's ear that he does not want this bride, because he does not see 'the Image of God' in her....

Fleeing from the Wedding

The grandfather became disassembled, and the father nearly fainted. They barely convinced him that one should not so shame a Jewish daughter; for the time being, he should go through with the wedding ceremony, and we will see afterwards....they thought that he was speaking childishly; he will get married, and he will see that everything will be good.

But it was not this way. Immediately after the Seven Blessings, while the gathering was dancing the mitzvah dance, unnoticed, he managed to steal out of doors, in his thin satin garment, and go on the road. It was night

lit by the full moon. There was a good frost that congealed the air. It was difficult to draw a breath. The blinding white snow crunched under the footfall like broken glass. The forest, cold and silent, was enveloped in a night darkness that instilled fear.

Itzik'l recalled that he had not recited the *Shema,* and with cramped lips he murmured some of the holy words. His thin overcoat became as stiff as metal, and the frost penetrated into him under his nails. It appears that he went along this way for a couple of hours, because it began to grow light in the east; signaling that it was already dawn.

In the distance, a village appeared. Here is a small Jewish shack with a mezuzah on the doorpost. Itzik'l knocked on it, because all the strength had gone out of him already. A Jewish woman of middle age opened it, looked sternly and astonished. She showed him to a couch to sit down on, and went off to light the samovar, to make a glass of something warm for this frozen guest. Until the tea was ready, Itzik's eyes close, and he grabbed a light nap.

Withstanding the Temptation

He awoke when he felt the hot penetrating gaze of curiosity and desire upon him. The woman, as she presented herself, a widow, in a shameless manner, proposed to entangle him in sin. Itzik'l was seized with a trembling. He wanted to run out of the house. So the widow, a strong woman, struggled with him. Itzik'l began to shout, the woman – also. Immediately neighbors came running. As once was the case with Potiphar's wife with the righteous Joseph, so did the widow repeat that ancient refrain, that this very intruder, whom she admitted out of pity, had accosted her, and wanted to coerce her...

The neighbors, coarsened Jewish peasants, began to beat him, and Itzik'l barely got out of the house. They pursued him into the street. A miracle occurred, when just at this time a Jewish wagon driver passed by, and he took him into his wagon, and lectured the peasants: Even if he had transgressed all the sins there were, he does not deserve to be beaten so murderously...

Initially, the wagon driver made sport of him; he was certain that he had committed the sin. However, after they had stopped in Daniel's inn, and he saw how Itzik'l prayed, he understood that this young man is on a higher level. He asked him to where he was going, and promised to take him as far as Rovno, to the Maggid of Mezritch. The wagon driver kept him for a couple of days with him in Hrubieszow, after which he brought him to the Maggid in Rovno.

When the wagon driver brought him into the home of the Maggid, the Rebbe, R' Ber embraced him with great affection and said the following to him:– Do not be sorrowful, Itzik'l! The Evil One had lost the game....

A Unique Soul

From Rovno, R' Itzik'l sent a *Get* to his wife in Krasnobrod, and immersed himself swimming like a fish in the sea of Torah and Hasidism. He took up companionship with R' Zisha Anipoler and R' Zalman Lozhner. The Maggid also loved him dearly, as he once expressed it, that R' Itzik'l has a soul that has not been seen in the world since the time of the Prophets...

R' Zalman Lozhner thought the world of him because of an incident that took place. One time, on a Friday,

he was present when R' Itzik'l went into the kitchen and stuffs a fish in honor of the Sabbath. So R' Zalman thought: how does he know that this specific piece of fish will be offered especially to him? So, R' Zalman went and tied a thin thread [to the fish] as an [identifying] sign. When it came to Friday night, at the table, this piece of fish was given to the person sitting at R' Itzik'l's side. Suddenly, this individual was seized with a stomach cramp, and the *Shammes* pushed the piece of fish over to R' Itzkeh...

One time, a Hasid came to the Maggid with a note. So the Maggid asked R' Itzik to read the note, and bestow the blessing. This was the sign, that he was now worthy to lead a congregation of Hasidim. But R' Itzik'l did not hold by this.

R' Itzik'l married his second wife, Tehilla-Shprinza and settled in the shtetl of Lanzut. He began to travel to the Rabbi, R' Elimelekh in Lezhensk. It did not take a long time, and he became the right hand of the Rabbi, and R' Elimelekh would send young Hasidim to Lanzut in order that R' Itzik'l should teach them, and show them the light of Hasidism.

The Evil One immediately injected himself. People began to bring aspersions to Lizhensk, that R' Itzik'l comports himself as if he was already the Rabbi in charge. Something of a controversy grew out of this. So, R' Itzik'l moved over to Rozwadow. But the Lezhensk Hasidim harassed him there, and he traveled back to Lancut and a substantial controversy broke out.

One time, a Hasid came to R' Itzik'l and told him of a dream, that in Heaven, it is desired that R' Itzik'l should take up residence in Wieniawa. Where is Wieniawa? – No one knew. On the same day, an inquiry arrived in Lancut regarding a *Get,* which had been written in Ciechow near Lublin, and it is noted in the *Get*, that Ciechow is also called Wieniawa...Is this the story? R' Itzik'l did not think long about it, and moved himself to Ciechow. There the Lizhensk Hasidim no longer had any control.

Honor and Glory in Lublin

Immediately, R' Itzik'l's name became famous, wide and far. Hundreds of Hasidim crammed themselves into his doors. The location in Ciechow became crowded, and the magnate, Ephraim Zalman Margaliot, the father-in-law of Ber and Tamar'l Bergson of Praga near Warsaw, bought a place for him on the Szeroka Gasse, in the heart of Lublin, and began to build a Bet HaMedrash and a manse for the Rabbi. Why did this rich man do this? Because, at the time of the uprising in Warsaw, his daughter was in Prague with her father-in-law, and R' Ephraim Zalman was greatly concerned. He went to the Rabbi to inquire for advice, and the Rabbi calmed him, and said to him as follows: – Your daughter is kneading noodles, and she is rocking a baby's cradle with her foot.... when R' Ephraim Zalman later verified, that all of this was correct 'to a hair' he made a vow to build the Rabbi a new spacious home, and a Bet HaMedrash in the middle of the city of Lublin.

On the day that the dedication of the house took place, it was a holiday in the city of Lublin. The streets were full of people. From all the windows and balconies, thousands of people looked down at the festive procession of the large host of Hasidim, who with song and resounding clapping, escorted the Rabbi with the Torah scrolls to their new abode.

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When the procession passed by an elegant gentile street, a frightening thing took place. A noblewoman threw herself down from the balcony, and was killed on the spot.

Who was this noblewoman? It was revealed that she was a convert, the wife of a Polish nobleman, the daughter of the Jewish 'possessor' in Krasnobrod, and indeed, the first wife of R' Itzik'l...

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R' Itzik'l was privileged to lay the cornerstone of Hasidism for the Polish country. He educated a generation of righteous people and Hasidim, which continues to this day, and his name is held sacred and praised as the *Tzaddik* of his generation, R' Yaakov, the *Hozeh* of Lublin.

"I Am Restrained by Heaven"

By Rabbi Menachem Gutman

Our Rabbi, the *BeSH"T*[39] heard, that in the town of Szczebrzeszyn in the Lublin District, there is an ancient oral tradition that exiles from Spain reached Poland, and founded the first of nine Sephardic communities in Szczebrzeszyn that were established by the exiles from Spain in 1492. In the midst of the forest that is beside Szczebrzeszyn, there is a small grove, on which snow never fell, and the gentiles refer to this as the Jewish place of worship, and an ancient legend tells that on the trees the Tractate of *Berakhot* is carved, and it was received from the Sephardic exiles that it was possible to reach the Land of Israel through this way as a short cut. Our Rabbi traveled to Szczebrzeszyn and asked was it was true, that there was a way to reach the Land of Israel? And they said that on the way there is a bandit who has dogs that literally devour people, and he knows the way to the Land of Israel. All the Jews were afraid to go along the road where the bandit lived.

Our Rabbi, the *BeSH"T* whose soul was enchanted by the thought of making *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, went by himself, as a Jew, and when the bandit saw him, he sent a large dog towards him to attack him, however the dog stood on two legs as if he was bowing down before him, and then the bandit went out and begged forgiveness and pardon from the holy Rabbi, and in the hands of the bandit were fruits that the Land of Israel was known for.

– Where did you get the fruit?
– From a nearby town.
– Can you take me to this town?
– Yes, but there is a body of water and over it is a narrow bridge of board that is necessary to cross.

The bandit went ahead, and he walked over the board, and when the Rabbi, the *BeSh"T* wanted to cross over, the waters stirred and rose, to the point that the *BeSh"T* rescued himself with difficulty, and he returned to the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn.

And it was then that the *BeSh"T* saw, that it was from Heaven that he was being restrained from making *aliyah* to the Land of Israel.

The Eve of the Holiday

Thursday, June 3, 1976 5 Sivan 5736

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39 The Hebrew acronym for *Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of Hasidism.

In the Days of Suffering and Annihilation

Page 162-3: *Sketch of Szczebrzeszyn by Chaim Aharonovitz, 8.10.82*

Page 164-5: *In the courtyard of the local municipal building in Szczebrzeszyn – The Nazis abuse elderly Jews.*

Between Life and Death

By Itcheh Shtemmer

25 Months in a Bunker

Page 179: *Itcheh Shtemmer and his wife, Rukhama*

When the Hitler cohorts marched into Szczebrzeszyn in the year 1939, we were outside of the city. [We were] in the fields. With me were: my wife, Rukhama, my daughter, Shanydel'eh, my mother, Min'cheh, and also my father-in-law, R' David Joseph; all of us lived in Szczebrzeszyn. In one house. But after a number of days, we returned to our home.

Several weeks later, a change took place. The Red Army entered the town, but not for long. Immediately, the Hitler cadres returned, and the somber days began. Cruel acts against the Jews took place in the town, and vicinity.

The Poles Incite and Inform

Our neighbors the Poles, began to assist the Germans, with even greater cruelty. During the initial period, life would have been much easier if the Poles had not resorted to incitement and informing.

In the winter, the Germans then established kitchens on the street, in the middle of the city, under open skies, and distributed food to the populace. When a Jew came, the Poles would point out, '*Ein Jude.*' The Germans would also give food to the Jew, and an individual stood by this process with a piece of photographic equipment...

Life for a Jew became very difficult, every day, worse and worse, they were impressed into labor, and sent away to those places from which one does not return.

Several months after the entry of the Germans, they began building an airfield near the Klemensow sugar factory, not far from the summer residence of Graf Zamoyski. Many Jews were engaged in the building of the air field, and also Christians. The conditions were very difficult. Not enough food was given to eat, only bread and a bit of warm water, which was called 'soup.'

Compared to the past, life became much worse, because apart from the devilish antics of the German murderers, the Poles, with greater enthusiastic and wild inspiration, implemented the acts of murder to a greater degree than was demanded of them. The *shtetl* found itself in a continuous state of uncivilized chaotic terror.

The '*Judenrat*'

The German authority put together a '*Judenrat*' of people, who occupied community positions. But these decent folks immediately fled, not wishing to cooperate in this dirty work.

So the authority then created a new '*Judenrat,*' of 6 people, which carried out a shameful set of activities (out of respect for their relatives, we do not record their names). In all of our lives, we could not imagine that this type of an individual could be found in our midst.

The members of the new '*Judenrat*' were very diligent and provided the German authority with more people than was demanded of them. They sent the poor people to do the work, without the means to sustain life. They took money from the rich to buy them off. The members of the '*Judenrat*' themselves, ate to excess and guzzled, at a time when others died of hunger. One of them became a '*Kommandant.*'

Especially on the Sabbath, these 'black sheep' elements would permit themselves to indulge, and make a 'Kiddush' in Piwniak's saloon. They would cook all of the best ingredients, and invited the German murderers to carry on with them.

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Only one of the members of the *Judenrat*, Hirsch Getzel Hochboim, exhibited dignity, greatness and patience.

All the time that Nazis constantly demanded Jewish money and assets from the *Judenrat,* he suffered and was silent, but the Germans began to demand people for the 'transport,' at the time when it was clear that they were being sent to an extermination camp.

Hirsch Getzel Hochboim stood against this, and did not want to cooperate with these humiliating *aktionen.* He attempted to get out of these activities and hide himself. However, in the end, when he was forced to carry out the German orders, and turn over his brother Jews into these murderous hands, he didn't see any way out. On an evening, he locked himself in his house, and hanging himself, he made an end to his life.

He came from a genteel family of means (a son-in-law of Baruch Hirsch Eisen). He was a leather merchant, a partner of Chaim Maimon. A self-effacing scholarly person. After his youth, he committed himself to community activity and was a representative of the community in the management of the People's Bank and in the City Council. In a political sense, he was a general Zionist.

Respect his memory!

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The '*Aktionen*'

Our entire family lay in bunkers, pressed together in a state of overcrowding. At every occasion, we had to change our hiding place, because we were constantly being informed upon. Not only once, did the bullets fly over us, and we had to dig ourselves even deeper into the ground.

The predations of the Germans, with the help of a large part of the Polish populace, began, and every day, Jewish victims fell – in the town, in the middle of the street, outside of the town. At every step, you run into and step on Jewish victims. If someone went out of the city to look for something to eat, he was immediately met by a bullet.

The first victim w3as Joseph Beitcher. Afterwards – both of the Remmer sisters (the daughters of Leibusz Shemaya). Death found them on the Rozlopyer Road, when they went to look for a few potatoes to sustain their lives. Also, Ben-Zion Becker's family was murdered. Ben-Zion himself became blind. His older daughter Aedl, with a child, was dragged out of a hiding place. Poles showed the Germans where they were, and the Germans shot them. The child was tossed into a pile of the dead by the Poles... these incidents were not the only ones.

Later on, the '*aktionen*' began to be carried out in an organized fashion. Three *aktionen* took place in the city. At the time of the first and second *aktion*, the members of the *Judenrat*, with the assistance of the Poles, brought the victims together, mostly older people. Thereby, being in a bunker, we heard the following events played out.

Abraham Hirsch Koyl's family also lived in our house(the parents of Beryl Koyl). They were not alive at this point in time, and their only daughter Gittl was left alone – poor, solitary, and ill, without anyone to look after her. At the time of the first *aktion,* 4 members of the *Judenrat* entered her living quarters. The woman had someone else's child in her hands. She was dragged, forcing her to go along with the members of the *Judenrat*, but she did not want to leave the child alone. Then, they ordered her to go with the child. But she would not comply with this. The members of the *Judenrat* tore the child from her arms. Leaving the child behind, they enveloped her, and sent her off to that place from which no one returns.

At the time of the second *aktion*, the following incident occurred: Zelig Gershtenstein was at work at the airfield. His wife and two children were pointed out, who were in a hiding place. From there, they were dragged out, and sent to their destruction. When the man returned from work, and learned of this calamity, he went to the *Judenrat,* and beat everyone there, and himself went out of his mind. At the last *aktion*, he, together with the members of the *Judenrat,* were exterminated.

There were many instances of this kind.

Then a depraved act came along to which we gave the name: The Bloody Friday.

On a given day, it was necessary to provide the Germans with a specific number of people in Kalikow for labor. Leibl Raz was supposed to have gone, but he did not appear. So they wanted to take Berish Markhovsky. A negotiation began. Others said: that the others don't want to go. So we will not go either. In total, 3-4 people were missing to make the quota of laborers. But the '*Kommandant*' of the *Judenrat* could not bear the fact that he was not being obeyed. He telegraphed Bilgoraj to the senior *Kommandant* and represented that he was not being obeyed. Two hours later, officials of the central labor office arrived, with several SS personnel. With the help of the '*Sonderdienst*' they opened fire on all the houses. On that day, 45 victims fell, among them also Jews from other places, who had come to live in Szczebrzeszyn.

The picture was sorrowful when the slain were gathered together. The pain was even greater, knowing that there was a Jewish hand involved in this.

The '*Judenrein Aktion*'

The so-called '*Judenrein Aktion*' was supposed to have occurred on a specific date, but it was postponed for two weeks.

On an evening, someone from the '*Zawiadowca Stacji*[40]' came and secretly conveyed the fact that 6 wagons were waiting for the Szczebrzeszyn Jews, to transport them. No amount of human imagination can conceive what then transpired in this half-destroyed little town.

They began to fast and plead with God, visiting the graves of ancestors.... the weeping, the fear was unbearable. People lost their minds. The result was already known from the first two *aktionen.*

Suddenly a miracle occurred. The same *Zawiadowca* came to inform that the wagons were taken away for military use, but not for long... the gruesome murder *aktionen* were postponed for two weeks, and then – woe unto our unfortunate souls!

Underground, in the bunkers, we heard the wiling cries of those being tortured. We were no more fortunate in the pits than our other brethren, whose suffering was brought to an end, because each day, you waited in fear that here they are coming to drag you out.

On the first day, they gathered up 2,000 victims and sent them to Belzec, to the crematoria, on the outside of which was written the messages: 'Bath Houses'... on another day, the murderers ran about like poisoned mice, and with the help of Poles, searched out the Jews who were in hideouts. They were taken away to the cemetery, and murdered there and buried in a larger mass grave... until the city became '*Judenrein.*'

On the first day, Wednesday, Ukrainian murderers were brought along to the *aktion*, dressed in German uniforms.

Before the liquidation, the '*Kommandant*' of the Judenrat came from Bilgoraj, and represented that they wanted to transform Szczebrzeszyn into a '*Juden-stadt,*' but this has to cost a great deal of money...the residue of the Jewish population brought their last *groschen.* What ever happened to that money, I do not know, because the first who were detained were the members of the *Judenrat*, who were the ones who made the representation, and the Jewish Police. Precious Jewish lives were sent away and exterminated.

The entire populace was taken off to the train before evening. At night, before they were sent away, they were held in the ammunition factory of Waligura (it had previously been a chemical factory). The location was fenced off, and a large, strong force stood guard stood all around. The guard consisted of Ukrainians and Poles.

Many children managed to sneak away in the dark through the windows and fled, scattering into the fields and forests. It is with great shame, that I must relate what the children told me later, when we met one another. Being crammed into the factory, together with all the others, the members of the *Judenrat* ימ"ש, poured salt on the wound, and took comfort that it was not them that they wanted, and that they, the members of the *Judenrat,* would be shortly set free.... – the children were also killed by the Poles.

We recorded these incidents while we were still in the bunkers, in the city, and during moments when we went outside to catch a breath of air and look for food.

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40 Railway station office

Fled the Bunker

Understandably, the life of our family was very sad. It was not only once, that we bemoaned the fact that we had not been killed along with everyone together: why did we need to remain alive, only to suffer so many tribulations?
I personally, lay in a pit with my brother-in-law, Yankl Morgenstern (today in Israel) with three cousins from the Goldgrobers (the grandchildren of Yekhezkiel Jonah'leh). On Thursday during the day, young gentiles discovered my hideout, and began to break in the entrance, I had the ability to break open an exit on the opposite side. I do not know with what boundless and inhuman energy I was able to do this after three days without eating and no sleep. All five of us saved ourselves, but everything we had was left in the pit.

After crawling out of the hiding place, we ran through orchards to the Gorajecker Hills. The Poles immediately informed the Germans about this, and the Germans being at a distance of only 50 meters, shot at us. Because of this, we lost one cousin. The remainder scattered, and one did not know where the other was. After a kilometer of running I was shot at yet again.

I then went into the water, where I lay for two hours, until it had gotten good and dark. I permitted myself to go into the village of Rozlopy in my wet clothing. I went for two kilometers this way, in my wet clothing. I wandered and made my way to a gentile that I knew. I was not allowed in, having fear of the Germans. But I pleaded fervently with the peasant, and seeing that it was a very dark night, the peasant covered the windows, and permitted me to spend the night. As morning approached, the gentile hid me in a stable.

I knew nothing of my kin. Several hours later, my two cousins arrived, and came into the stable with me, without the knowledge of the peasant. My brother-in-law Yankl, who was then 15 years old, not knowing where to go, went off to the city to his parents, wanting to die together with them. In the cellar, which served as a hiding place, he met up with my wife and child. A sister-in-law Miriam (a daughter of Moshe Zilberlicht) with a child, were sitting in another pit. Her parents were yet in another hiding place.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, my wife approached my bunker to call me. It was quiet in the city, '*Judenrein.*' When she got no answer from me, she began to shout more loudly out of fear: 'Itcheh, Itcheh!' until three young gentiles came running towards her. They grabbed her and began to drag her, demanding money from her. She led them into the house and with a considerable effort, tore herself away from them, leaving one of them with a large part of the hair from her head, by which he held her. She jumped out of the window and went into a bunker. The repulsive gentiles pursued her, but did not find her.

She decided to go look for me with the child. Looking out into the darkness, she heard that someone was walking, and heading directly for the bunker. She became terribly frightened, but she understood that this was a relative approaching, who knows where the bunker is. It was her brother, Yankl. He told her that he had lost everyone and no longer wants to go away. He wishes to die with his parents. They went into the pit, and took counsel with one another as to what they should do. I had previously agreed with my wife, that if we should flee and get lost, we should know where to meet one another. We had made signs in three villages. My wife persuaded her brother to go with her.

My wife took the child on her back, and together with her brother, who went barefoot, because his wooden sandals were wet and broken, set out along the road. The night was dark, and it began to rain, thunder and lightning, and soaked, they proceeded in the same direction that I had gone. It appeared that human instinct was working.

The Dispersed Ones Meet

Going a hundred meters, leaping over many corpses in the dark, suddenly a strong lightning bolt struck, and we espied the dead body of my murdered cousin Sarah'l Goldgrober. She was severely bound up. It looked like she was thoroughly searched... my wife took off her apron, and with weeping, covered the innocent victim. She retrieved the small soaked child from Yaakov onto her back, and went on further into the dark night – just heaven, earth and rain. She instinctively headed for the village of Rozlopy, to the peasant, that we had agreed upon. It was already very late. On the horizon, the dawn bringing the unknown of the next day, was beginning to appear.

They approached the house, but everything about them was still, only dogs barked. Fearing that someone might see them, all three of them together quietly squeezed themselves into a barn, up in the loft, where there lay hay and straw, there they lay down and fell asleep – wet, exhausted and hungry.

At 11 o'clock in the morning, the awoke. The child, who was then 4 years old, began to plead for food, because this was the fourth day already that she had taken no food in her mouth. – Mama, a piece of bread! – she pleaded. She wanted to cover her mouth, but suddenly the peasant, being in the yard, and he climbed up frightened: who is here? – '*Ola Boga, tyle Zydow*!' – he called out. My wife began to plead with him to provide a piece of bread for the child. He descended from the loft, brought a piece of bread and a bit of rice and milk. This revived the child a bit.

Then the gentile related that I, and my two cousins, are also with him. My wife begged the peasant that he should give the child to me, and she, my wife, with her brother Yankl, will descend to me at night. The peasant did as she desired.

Into the Village, Out of the Village

We were not permitted to show ourselves during the day, because the gentile and his family also could be made to pay with their lives. In the deep dark autumn night, we met with one another – with feelings of pain, oppression, tears and joy, more suffering than joy, because at this particular moment we were still alive, but later?...

The woman of the house immediately appeared, the wife of the peasant. She outlined her fear to us, and out of pity for them, she pleaded that we should leave them, because apart from them, it is possible that additionally the six neighbors from the houses on both sides could be shot. We had no choice, and we begged a bit of bread for the child from the peasant's wife, and an old rag in which to swaddle the child. For this, we gave our last gold watch to her... all five of us – barefoot and naked, because we could take nothing from our home – went out and headed for the village of Zrebce.

It took us several hours to cover the distance of 5 kilometers, because we had to drag ourselves on the by ways in order that we not be seen. In the distance, I saw the glow of a candle. We drew near, and saw that this was the home of a gentile whom we knew. Without asking, we went up into the attic of his horse stable, and spent the night there. When the peasant went up into the attic to obtain hay for the horses, he noticed us. Being frightened, he began to beg us th leave, and he promised to give us all food to eat. We said that we would leave at nightfall, but we stayed for a second night, when the peasant stood, and did not want to get out of our way.

We awoke on a second attic. Also, this peasant immediately took note of us in the morning. He began to weep about our fate, observing our appearance, and begged us not to cause his family any misfortune. The circumstances were such, that when a gentile saw a Jew in the village, they would make the sign of the Cross over themselves out of great fear – – –

We decided that we had to break up. The two cousins went off to another gentile, and we remained with this same gentile in the village.

At night, a great calamity took place in the village. A Jewish family had hidden themselves there, from Szczebrzeszyn, Simcha Limberg and four souls. They were informed upon, and they were taken to Silokhai to the municipal headquarters, and were shot there. Extracting them from the house was a frightening tragedy. We nearly went insane from fear. The members of the Limberg family pleaded and cried in such a manner, that the entire village came running. Many of the gentiles were shaken with spasms.

When it got quiet, the gentile no longer wanted to hide us in his place. Before dawn, we went off into the forest – my wife and I, the child, and my brother-in-law. The Gotlober cousins, at the frightening moment for Simcha Limberg and his family, fled to yet another village, and on the way, they were killed by German murderers. Their final resting place is in the village of Topolcza.

Entering the forest, we found the children, who had fled from the ammunition factory on that sorrowful night of the final *aktion*. The children would often run and beg for food from the peasants at Rozlopy, but didn't receive any. So they stole food from the chickens. There were about 40 children – boys and girls. As I later heard from the gentiles, about 40 Jews were captured in the forest, apparently together with the children, and everyone was put to death.

Help from Good-Hearted Peasants

Our gentile [friend], in the time that my family and I sat in the forest, dug out a bunker in the field, about a meter wide, and at around 12 at night, he led us there. It was about 2 kilometers from the village, in the middle of a field. At the start, he went out a substantial distance ahead of us, in order that it should not be noted that he is leading Jews. The pit was wet and very small. But the gentile had brought along a shovel, and a pail for water, a hoe and a bundle of straw. We carried all of the implements. The gentile also brought along a bit of bread, a pot of potatoes in their skins, and a bit of salt, a knife and some kindling wood. With these goods, we buried ourselves in the hiding place. With the implements, we enlarged the grave a little bit, and laid there for the entire winter until Passover.

When snow fell, one could no longer see anyone in the field. Often at night, we would sneak out of the grave, and look for stems of beets and rapeseed, which the peasants left in the field during winter. At night, we would also clean out the bunker a bit, and sit in the fresh air in the frosty winter of 1943. This is the way we sat, with out little child, in the dark pit, which was covered in snow. There was also snow and water in the pit. In the village of Zrebce, there were to be found yet additional peasants who hid Jewish families.

Our peasant came to us in the bunker unnoticed every two weeks, and threw in a roasted beet for the child, sometimes a pot of potatoes in their skins, a little cooked millet, etc. He would constantly cry about out fate. He said that our suffering is on his mind; if he had known that the war was going to last this long, he would not have hidden us: he cannot stand the fact that human beings lie buried alive, worms eating away at their

lives, because they didn't have any [other garments] to change into. – He talked himself out, cried himself out, and vanished yet again for a couple of weeks.

Once, a different gentile came from Rozlopy, and took note of our bunker. We, on the inside, spotted him. Making eye contact with me through a crack, he fled out of fear. I took note of the fact that his was a familiar face, and so I went out and stopped him. I cried in front of him, and begged that he should not reveal where we were. He swore to us that he had no intention of doing us harm. Had he known, that we were here, he would not have come near. He calmed us and promised, that on a dark night we will be able to enter his abode. He lived separated from the village itself, and he promised to let us know when we should come to him.

And this is actually what happened. On a certain night, he came and took us to his home, and he asked me, as a tailor, to sew a pair of pants for him. I could have remained there for a longer time, but immediately on the second night, there was an attack of bandits on the house. All the men were taken out of doors, and told to lie still on the ground. Three masked bandits robbed the peasant of foodstuffs and clothing, ordered the horses to be hitched, and to convey everything into the forest.... the men were ordered to go back into the house, but a revolver was put to my head, and they shouted: – '*Jude,* we must kill you!' I was ready to die. To my good fortune, one of the bandits called out: – 'Let him alone! Let him fall into the hands of others!...'

The Relationship of a Good Soul

From there we went back to the bunker. We found a great deal of water there, but we were compelled to go inside. The earth collapsed under us, and we had to dig out a new bunker, in a different location, without the gentile knowing. We had to carry away the earth that we had displaced to a very distant spot, so that it not be exposed, and in several nights, the bunker was complete.

As mentioned previously, we lived in the bunkers until Passover, because at that time, the owners of the fields no longer permitted it; field work was commenced, and each peasant was responsible for his own parcel. In the run of 9 months, we had to dig out 5 new bunkers, because each time, it was noticed by someone or another, and we were compelled to move to another place.

Unable to withstand to intense cold of the winter of February 1943, my wife took a risk with the child, who was already half dead, and she went out to a peasant in the village, named Bartnik. Coming into his house, everyone became alarmed, and began to tear hair out of their heads, looking at them. The peasant's wife, a very good person, cried and had spasms out of fear, and out of empathy. My wife said to them: – I do not want to cause you any anxiety, and I only beseech you to save the child; I will go back to the bunker.

But the woman didn't want to hear of this, that the mother should be parted from the child. Quickly, the woman made a corner in the house, and concealed it with a screen, in order that the neighbors take no note of it. There she arranged bedding on which to sleep. She gave the child warm milk. In a big vat, she washed off my wife and the child with warm water and soap, and gave them new, warm undergarments. My wife and child stayed with the Christian Bartnik for 6 weeks. The child improved, and once more began to walk on its own feet.

One time, the gentile woman came with my wife, and related that three wagons arrived in the village with German gendarmes; it was said that they were searching for Jews; information was provided that there was a person in the village concealing many Jews. In actuality, about ten Jews were then found in the village, among them – Berish Citron with his wife and two children, who today are found on the bloody earth, saturated with Jewish blood. They also went through a great deal.

Advice for the Weak

My wife and child, not wanting to create any suffering for the woman of the house, went off to the gentile in Horopata by a variety of back roads, but could not stay there any longer than nightfall, and then returned back to the bunker. We would go to the Horopatas for water – quite a distance, because we were afraid to let ourselves be seen by others. As we have said, we often were stuck in the bunkers. Our last bunker was with the Bartniks in the field, with their knowledge. That good-hearted gentile woman did everything for us. But we did not want to place them in danger. Without the knowledge of the Bartniks, we dug another bunker in their field, this time supported with boards. On the top we spread earth, so that it would be possible to till the soil above the bunker, sowing and planting potatoes. We made a sign – a small door 50 cm long and 30 cm wide, so that we could identify the location.

We idled about for six weeks in a variety of locations, until finally, the potatoes grew high. Then we looked for the sign, and went into the well-hidden bunker – a dark pit, without air, without light. My entire family got sick from the stuffy, humidity. It was not possible to breathe, and everyone felt heavy on the heart.

Every time one of us would go out to search for food, we did not know if they would return alive. At every time that we came out of the bunker for fresh air, the child burst out crying loudly, and wanted to come along, because there was no air to breathe. It was necessary to cover the child's mouth with a hand. In many frightening instances, the child, by itself, knew that it was forbidden to cry, and one must keep quiet and still.

We all became weakened, and were left with no means by which to sustain or cure ourselves. All of us had caught cold. In the middle of the winter, in the great frosts, a peasant offered us the advice, that we should lay down in the large horse manure compost heap in the yard. He led us to the horse stable at night, and left us there. We swept the horse manure together from all the sides, and my brother-in-law, Yankl'eh Morgenstern (today in Israel) and I lay down naked in the manure. This warmed us up through and through, and we began to sweat. It was in this manner that we came around, little by little.

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My brother-in-law Yankl lived through a most difficult experience. On a frosty night in the year 1943, he went out to search for food. A bandit took note of him and shot at him. Yankl fled and hid in the woods. He was barefoot, his feet swollen and full of wounds. He waited for an entire day in the woods, and at night, he came to the gentile, Bartnik. The Bartnik wife bemoaned him, she warmed his frozen hands and feet with snow, made bandages and gave him food. On the following morning, he returned to the bunker. On that same night, I had gone out with a stick, and looked in the snow for his dead body, because I thought that he had surely been killed.

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We lived this way in the bunkers for 25 months, of which 9 months was in the village of Zrebce. Until the time when all of the residents were driven out, and *Volksdeutsche* were brought in to take their place. Those who were driven out were re-settled in the Radecznicer district. Sitting in the bunker, we did not know about this. Once, on a Friday before nightfall, when I took myself to look for food at the peasant Bartnik, three strange men leapt out from behind the house. I became terribly frightened, and fled back to the bunker. Later, I emerged, and asked a peasant what had happened. He then told me what had happened. I got a bit of bread from him for my child. He also lent me a razor and a shaving brush to shave myself, because it had been several long months that I had gone without shaving, and I was quite grown over. I already had no one to whom I could return these implements, because this gentile, too, had been taken away.

'Let Whatever Be, Be Already!'

We stayed for yet another two days in the bunker. We already begged for death for ourselves, because the shooting that we heard created a great fear, and every time people ran into the fields over our bunker. We felt that every minute, they were getting ready to come and take us.

Not being able to hold out any longer, at night, we took all our belongings, shovels, pots and went into the outside world, with the child on our backs, taking various back roads to Czarnostok, taking a half-loaf of bread, from which 4 people lived for about 2 weeks. We blundered about for the entire night, until dawn, when we heard a peasant riding by. The peasant stopped not far from us, but because of the dark, he could not see us. My wife and I consulted as to whether we should approach the peasant. It appeared that he was not a robber, and also not any military personage, because there was a cow tethered to the wagon. Indeed, it looked to us that this was a peasant whom we knew from Rozlopy. He was transporting his valuables to the place to which he had been evacuated.

We could not go any further, because the gentile, Gedzasz told us, that a German command staff is billeted in Gorajec, which is sending the peasants all over to new residences. Immediately, not far from Szperowka, we dug a pit, and hid ourselves for the entire day. We were resigned to any fate, life had become unbearable to us. Feeling great hunger, I lit a fire in the forest – without fear, with the thought that whatever will be, let it be. I cooked a little bit of potato at the peasant's for us.

Seeing the fire, gentiles arrived. They became frightened. At that time, they told us that they also were being rounded up, and they are running to hide: I do not have to be afraid of them, and that I only need to beware of the Germans, because they could arrive at any minute. We managed to get through the day. At night, my Gentile acquaintance, Gedzasz came traveling back, and told me that the Germans had already gone away from Graetz. He advised us to wait until night, when he will return and take me and my wife to Graetz.

And this is how it actually happened. The peasants began to feel what was to be us... therefore, it was possible to get help from their side. In actuality, Gedzasz came that night. The child, and my brother-in-law Yankl'eh remained in the bunker. My wife and I disguised ourselves, and followed the wagon. In this manner, the peasant led us out from the woods, and by a variety of ways, we arrived at the village of Czarnostok. There was a peasant there whom we knew, Wojtowicz. However, he did not want to admit us to his place, because he was told, that we were long dead. To all out pleas and weeping, he complained that we were really not who we said we were. Until, in the end, I enumerated all the familiar names of his relatives, and the name of the peasant, who was sleeping with the horses. He was called out of the horse stable, and he recognized us.

Then we were let into the house, given something to eat, but we were not allowed to lodge out of fear, which I alone found as a justification... at night, we were taken out into the fields, and along with my wife was sent away for a full day.

The Joy of a Reunion

The gentile told me, that here, in Czarnostok, there is yet another Jew in a bunker. This was Shlomo Czarnostokek (Kappenboim). Our joy, upon hearing the news, was indescribable. But we had to wait until night in order to meet in the woods. For a variety of reasons, the awaited reunion first took place on the third night. We agreed that he should wait at a specific point, but to our disappointment, we did not meet him.

It later came out that he had come and waited, but as soon as the dawn began to break, he became frightened, and he went off to his bunker, where he lived with his wife.

When it became day, we hid ourselves under oak trees. Despite this we were reached and given to understand that the German police were told that 'bandits are hiding there.' Fortunately, I went to Wojtowicz to ask him where Shlomo's bunker was located. There we learned that the police were coming to apprehend us. Wojtowicz's son immediately conveyed us to our hiding place in the woods until night time.

The pen is inadequate to describe the moment when two Jews – nearly the last of their entire community – meet one another, alone, impoverished, abandoned, and rejected by everyone in the entire world. We cried ourselves out thoroughly in connection with the fate of our near and dear ones, and over what had become of the great Jewish host in Poland.

Shlomo's bunker was not badly laid out: large, with a kitchen and a small lamp for light. But there was an absence of air. We could not be together, because under such circumstances, we feared that a larger number of people could be discovered in one place. Therefore, we dug out a separate bunker for ourselves, at a distance from Shlomo's and camouflaged it very well.

On the same night, my wife and I returned to my child and brother-in-law, overcoming very difficult roads in great fear. All of us were compelled to remain there for the day. At night, all of us together returned to Czarnostok, taking all of our implements, and a small amount of potatoes as well.

In the village of Czarnostok there was a teacher named Bahan, who had previously worked in Szczebrzeszyn. He served as a commandant of the A.K. (*Armia Krajowa* – the Polish partisans, who were anti-Semites). He fought the Germans, and shot a number of them. However, later, he too was shot. This Bahan learned that we were Jews, and wanted to kill us. The Christians of my acquaintance in the village talked him out of it, with the argument that I was a tailor and I meet a need for them.

I put in a lot of energy, and worked without pay for them, only for food. This same Bahan later helped us, and I also tailored clothing for him.

Large snowfalls occurred in the winter of 1943-1944. Everything was weighed down, and also, our new bunker caved in. By myself, I was unable to help the situation, and on the Christian holiday of '*Trzech Kroli*'[41] I ran to the village, and asked for help from Wojtowicz's son. He came with a horse and wagon, and helped me set the bunker right. It is self-understood that I compensated him by tailoring a good suit for him.

The Final Convulsions

We could not go on living in the bunker much longer, because from time to time we were noticed. They even wanted to kill Shlomo and his wife, because he had a lot of money, and the disgusting gentiles demanded it from him. However, I intervened, and pleaded with these disgusting gentiles, and God helped me, and they let him live.

An incident also took place where a Christian wanted to lob a hand grenade on top of my bunker, but he himself

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41 The feast of 'The Three Kings,' referring to the Three Wise Men, or the Three Magi.

was killed when the grenade exploded. My Christian acquaintances said, that this was his reward for the evil intentions that he had.

Along with my father-in-law and brother-in-law, as well as Miriam Zilberlicht and her children, we separated when we went into the bunkers, because they did not want to leave Szczebrzeszyn after the final *aktion.* Later on, they were killed in the bunkers.

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We hid ourselves in the village of Czarnostok until the liberation, in August 1944. We lived through a variety of situations. Our living was risky, and our lives were at risk each and every moment, because the area was full of A.K troops and there were revisions and attacks. We survived frightening days of martyrdom, suffering in both the corporeal and emotional sense. Every day brought different obstacles, each day more cruel than the previous. Today we had to hide from the German police, tomorrow, fleeing from the Polish police, the day after tomorrow – from our own dogs....

In the end, the day of our liberation arrived. We lay for two days, stuck in the bunkers, not knowing of the news [of liberation].

The gentiles, who had previously assisted us, later wanted to kill us, fearing that we would inform on them.

Our luck began to improve. We went off to Zamość. There will lived for several months, and them emigrated from Poland, the [land] cursed by God.

Let the world know what they did to us, that world which stood at a distance and kept silent. Let the world become familiar with the phrase of our ancient sages: 'The end of those who bring you down, is to be brought down themselves...'

Let the hands be cut off, and let those be cut down, who aided in eradicating our innocent souls – sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers! Lord of Hosts, pour out thy wrath on the nations, and avenge our blood that has been spilled!

Recorded By: Moshe Messinger

Sui Generis – Hirsch Getzel Hochboim

By Emanuel Chmielasz

Hirsch Getzel Hochboim was 'unique in our time.' In the ambit of morals this kind of a Jewish giant could be found, a moral hero, who in the face of the demand of the German murderers to produce 500 Jews – placed himself against them. He refused to provide any Jews at all, and instead brought himself as a martyr, and hung himself.

I am not at that high a level, that I could bring out on paper even a limited number of lines about Hirsch Getzel Hochboim; I would have to immerse myself several times in a mikva before I could even begin.

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When the Germans occupied Poland, they also established themselves in Szczebrzeszyn. They immediately registered all of the Jewish men from age 16 to 60 years of age. On the second day after the registration they demanded of all those who were registered to gather at the municipal building. If someone from those registered was missing, the Germans, ימ"ש, would search him out, and forcibly bring him to the assembly place, from which all of the gathered Jews were taken away, under military guard, to be used for a variety of labor.

There were Jews, who did not register, and they did not present themselves for work and avoided contact with the Germans. They [sic: These Jews] were therefore limited in their ability to show themselves in the street.

The Jews, who at that time were the representatives of the community, were held responsible by the Germans to provide all that was required to satisfy their needs.

Forced Labor

I remember, that from our house, on a daily basis, my father ז"ל, my brother Elkanah ז"ל, myself, and my younger brother Noah went to work. Every group of laborers had two German soldiers watching over them.

The group, in which I was at that time, worked on the outskirts of the town – cleaning the roads. The two Germans stood on the sidewalk, near two young Polish gentile hooligans, known as the worst in the town. Suddenly, one of the Germans came over to us, and facing the hooligan gentiles, pointed to a different one of us each time, until he came to Yudel Sontag, who dealt in boots. After a nod from his head indicating 'Yes,' from the two Poles, he hauled off and gave Yudel a slap in the face. Out of fear, each of us did not raise his eyes to the other until the German went away.

At the same time, the Jewish dwellings were taken under control, confiscating a variety of items. The mothers, left behind in the houses, were full of fright.

Every day, young people began to vanish from the town. The Germans were short of people according to their list, and they ordered the remaining community leaders to set up a committee, whose goal was to provide people for work each day. The unregistered, cut off from communication, understandably looked for ways to make a living.

A young man named Elyeh lived with us in the yard, who traveled with Pinchas Zelig's Boyd. He had a wife

and small children. He went to forced labor every day, but had no bread for his family. On one day, I conversed with Elyeh in the morning, before work time, and along with several other comrades, we went to the committee members at the '*podcienie* ,[42]' and made a '*wiceko*:' who will provide bread for the children whose fathers are self-employed, and who is not taken to labor?

It was decided that those would had not registered themselves should pay for those days in which they were supposed to work, but didn't work. In this fashion, each individual worked every second day. In our house, I worked on one day, and my brother Noah worked the second day. Whoever wanted to buy himself out of a day's work, paid someone else in order that he work in his place. This is what was worked out by the Jewish committee with the Jews of the town.

The plight of the Jews grew worse and worse from day to day, and more Jews fled; either that, or ensconcing themselves in their hiding places, or crossing the border.

A '*Judenrat*' Is Created

At that point the Germans created – as they did in all cities and towns – the compulsory *Judenrat*. The Germans utilized the help of the local Poles in the selection of the members of the *Judenrat*, as well as in connection with all other Jewish matters.

I know several names from the Szczebrzeszyn *Judenrat,* among them – Hirsch Getzel Hochboim. When I mention the other names, I believe that we must make a distinction between 'purity and uncleanliness,' and then present: Hirsch Getzel Hochboim.

I am not old enough to evaluate and condemn even those members of the *Judenrat* who did bad things. I can only make use of 'Yizkor Books' that I have read from other cities and towns, and newspaper articles, which helped to verify facts.

Until the time that the Germans began to exterminate Jews *en masse*, they demanded money, goods, and slave labor. At the beginning they shot individual Jews, beat certain members of the *Judenrat.* They sharpened the egoism of the people. They even chose to flatter certain of the members of the *Judenrat,* who by comparison, they did not treat badly, and to certain of the *Judenrat* members, they perhaps even gave some money from what they gathered up from the Jews. In this manner, the Germans sowed enmity between the members of the *Judenrat,* and demoralized them, as they sought a smile from the Germans.

When the Germans began the *aktionen*; to deport the Jews *en masse*, or to shoot them on the spot, part of the members of the *Judenrat* believed that they will escape death. They even began to carry out the orders of the Germans with greater zeal. They simply lost their human emotions. All they were left with was their animal instinct: to want to stay alive.

Before the war, they were quite decent people, trustworthy, Hasidim, people who went to prayers, and now – assisting the Germans to kill Jews, their neighbors, their friends, the members of their own family.

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42 A *podcienie* in Polish, means a sideways covered walkway,, something like a porch. Called a *potchineh* in Yiddish.

Could we, those who remained living imagine this? Can we believe this? Regrettably, this is what happened.

It is said: there are all kinds of people – with weaker or stronger characters; the weaker characters immediately broke, the stronger took a little time before they broke.

I am certainly not the one who should judge. I see before me the line from our sages: 'don't judge your neighbor until you have arrived at his place.' Also, it is not the generation of those who suffered that can objectively assess the sorrowful chapter of the *Judenrat,* and certainly not for purposes of absolution. Perhaps the future generations will be able to objectively evaluate those who experienced a failure of morality and judge them accordingly, either that, or they will leave it to the Heavenly Court.

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In this kind of a void, in the midst of such impurity, a diamond was found, who illuminates future generations. His name is: Hirsch Getzel Hochboim. I can only add the words: May His Memory Be for a Blessing.

Montreal, Canada

From The Bunker To The Partisan Movement

By Yaakov Morgenstern

Page 198: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 199: *The Armband With The Yellow Star of David*

The Germans began to identify the Jews from 11 years of age [and up] with armbands and a yellow Star of David. Jews had to move out of the way for every German soldier. If the Jew did not see the soldier at a distance, the soldier had the right to beat him to death. – – –

The synagogue was burned down, after the Germans doused it with kerosene and torched it.

They drove out all of the Jews, gathered them all together near the municipal building, and from there, drove them into the *Halyeh.*[43]

The fire in the synagogue grew more intense. The *Halyeh* was closed, and an alarm was spread that the Germans were going to torch the *Halyeh,* full of people. Because of this, the gates to the *Halyeh* were broken open, but whoever went out through the gate was immediately shot. A large number of martyrs fell this way. The gates were again closed, and the people were kept there for two days without food or drink.

On the third day, only the women and little children were let out. The men were detained in the Halyeh, and a part were taken to prison. The Rabbi of the *shtetl* was there as well. It was said that they want to shoot and kill all of the Jews a little at a time. Accordingly, they ran to plead with the commandant, and he replied: – why did you Jews set fire to the synagogue?... for this, all of the men will be shot.

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43 While nominally translated as a 'Hall,' it appears from later context that this was a special 'Market Hall' that had stalls and booths in which merchandise was sold. Accordingly, we will use the original Yiddish wherever this reference occurs.

Then, they began to appoint a *Judenrat.* But those selected quickly abandoned their positions; most fled to the Russian side. Because of this, a second *Judenrat* was appointed. – – –

The *aktionen* began. The German police and the Jewish police, with the assistance of the *Judenrat*, ran about and dragged the Jews out of bunkers in order to have them sent to Belzec. Local Poles also took part in the *aktion*. The officials of the municipality also ran about with axes in their hands, and when they encountered a Jew, they murdered him. – – –

At night, I fled into a bunker with my parents, which was well-covered in potatoes. Late at night, I was sent out to observe the situation. All I saw before my eyes were dead bodies, piled in stacks. The Germans kept shooting continuously at the living people. Gentiles with high wagons, hitched with horses, transported the dead bodies to the cemetery. The hair stood on end on my head, and all I saw before my eyes were piles of corpses...

That night, together with my brother-in-law and my cousin, I abandoned the bunker. We were shot at along the way, and my cousin fell dead. Upon arriving at the forest, I was all alone. On the following morning I joined up with the partisan movement.

Hadera

In German Captivity

By Ephraim Farber

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Immediately after Hitler occupied the Sudetenland, one sensed gunpowder in the air. After a short while, he demands the Polish 'corridor.' Day by day, the situation became more tense. It was known that war with Hitler Germany was unavoidable. The response in Poland, in August 1939 was a partial mobilization.

It was precisely during this sorrowful time, that I was doing my compulsory service in the 27th Artillery Battalion, which was stationed in Ludomir (Volodymyr). Every morning we go out from the barracks to the gathering place, with hearty singing such as:

Maruśka, moja Maruśka,
Pódziesz ze mną spać do łóżka[44]

and similar songs of the same kind. These songs were meant to strengthen morale, the martial spirit of Polish recruits.

The officers, with their moustaches curled up, the boots polished to a mirror shine, the cracking of the riding crop, the empty 'dignity' – this is an accurate picture of the Polish officer. On the second side – the gray mass

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[44] The opening lines of a song of longing for home, typical of the airs sung by soldiers of that time and place:

Marunka, Marunka
Will you go sleep with me?

of recruits, downtrodden and under-manned. The purpose of the mocking speech of the officers was calculated to break the human will of the recruit, and to transform him into a robot, who carries out orders without any feeling.

We were weakly armed with outdated cannon from the Czarist era, with howitzers pulled by horses – a legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which for certain took part in the battles against Napoleon. A horse was groomed three times a day, guarded like a diamond. It was not only once, that the officers expressed the view that a horse was worth much more to them than a soldier. Not only once, did we observe how the officers brought lusty maidens into their canteen with whom to pass the time away. The plain hubris, the dissolution of the officers, made a negative impact on the soldiers.

The anti-Semitic attitude towards the Jewish soldier whether from the lower of the upper ranks, was reflected in the Jewish soldier's feelings about the military. When we were led out for roll call, the junior officers would shout at the Jewish soldiers: – Moshe Karabin, where are you going, what are you shooting at? They subverted us at every opportunity. We Jews suffered from the doubled military vocabulary. This was a language of profane expression, especially designed to break the spirit of the recruit. Paying no mind to this, the news coming from Hitler Germany unsettled us.

Mobilization in Poland

At the beginning of August 1939, standing guard at night, I suddenly felt there was movement. A pre-mobilization had commenced. The mobilization magazines were opened for the reserve troops, which had been called up in the night. In the staff headquarters a light burned in every room. When dawn began to break, and my turn on guard was over, and no food was given out, I left the watch.

Coming to my division, I no longer recognized the location. The newly mobilized recruits were sleeping on straw that had been thrown about. I wondered greatly: straw should be thrown about like this? If, God forbid, so much as a stick of straw was found in the barracks, the junior officers would wake the entire 'battery' out of their sleep and would take the straw to its burial place with great fanfare. Many of the recruits would carry the straw with song, as if it were, in contrast, a funeral. – and here, such a complete disarray...

The unit traveled from the barracks to the train station. The cannons were pulled with rope on the open platforms. A large part of the populace, Jews as well as Christians, came to escort the soldiers who were traveling away. Many leaders of the welfare organizations showered the soldiers with flowers, distributed cigarettes among them, chocolate, and other sweets, hoping by this means, to sweeten an otherwise bitter fate.

Heated patriotic speeches could be heard, which shouts: 'Strike the Swabian!....The orchestra played stirring marches, slogans were written on the wagons: 'Wolodzimierz – Berlin'; 'We will repeat Grunwald!' We hear a whistle, and the hymn, '*Jeszcze Polska*' was sung, and '*Rota.*' Tears well up in the eyes of the escorting public: mothers, sisters, brothers. With dumb stares they accompanied their dear ones, perhaps forever... the train began slowly to grow distant – – – on the way, in the small train stations, masses of people were gathered, who shouted out slogans such as: 'Strike the Swabian!' The enthusiasm rose up to the heart of heaven.

At night, a rain fell, that cooled of the overheated tired travelers. The shouters went off to sleep in warm beds. We traveled on, in open flatcars. The rain, together with the damp cold cut through to the bone. It didn't help to cover one's self up with a cape. – – –

At the beginning the sky began to lighten; the clouds began to dissipate. We approached Warsaw. At the Danzig train station – – again flowers, rousing shouts from the gathered throng. We were given coffee with saccharine and we warmed up a bit after a whole night of lying under the damp blankets. The echelon stirred in the direction of Pomerania. We disembarked at a small train station after Torun.

We rode off into a forest, set up tents, and set out the cannons 'howitzers,' with wooden wheels, which could recall Napoleon's era. – – – a monotonous soldierly life set in, under field conditions. Each person was sunk in thought: what will the morning bring? A yearning for home gnawed inside, for one's comrades.

"The Enemy Is Not Far!"

The political situation got worse day by day. From the little villages, where most of the residents were *Volksdeutsche*, we felt the animosity towards us. They also carried out small-scale acts of sabotage against us, with the help of German agents, who infiltrated from Pomerania.

On a Thursday in August 1939, a messenger arrived on horseback from the staff of the artillery regiment who relayed an order that we should immediately make ready to march. Movement began. The horses were quickly hitched up, and the battery moved from its location. – – –

Our path was through forest. The foot soldiers proceeded at the edges of the forest, moving like a gaggle of geese, weaving under the heavy loads [they carried]. Rivers of sweat poured off their faces. Spare shoes were in their rucksacks, underwear, shoe polishing implements, and over all of this, a rolled blanket, a small spade with which to dig trenches, and a ration to eat. On the shoulder – a rifle was thrown, a strap of cartridges, a gas mask, a tin cup for water, – At the same time, the entire transport of the German infantry was being carried out using transport trucks.

We artillery troops also had to be on foot, because the horses also stopped and sweated like the people did. We carried out our first advance without stopping, but we did not correctly appreciate the seriousness of the situation. – Approximately at midnight, the commander of the division came riding, and declared that the enemy is not far, and we need to load our guns. There was a cold shiver that ran through the body.

The Populace – In a Panic

We assumed a battle position in an empty location, near the edge of a forest. A beautiful day began to dawn, one of those days of the golden Polish autumn. Not far from our position, a road ran by, from which the sound of a commotion and the crying of little children was carried toward us. This was the populace that was fleeing in panic, abandoning villages and towns, to which the Germans were drawing near. They dragged along everything that they owned that they could take on the wagons: old wall clocks, pails, various cooking utensils, cupboards, benches. Cows and dogs were tethered to the wagons, and their were also cotes of fowl, pigs. – These were the first images of the war that we saw.

The bleating of the livestock, the baying of the dogs, the lamentation of the womenfolk along with the crying of the children – blended into a wailing reverberation regarding the fate, that the war had brought with it. The refugees related that the Germans were burning the villages, and is murdering the populace. It was a great pity for the little children, who were wrapped in all manner of rags, and only their little frozen red noses peeked

out.[45]

I thought to myself: What could the Jewish fate look like, if this is what the fate of the Polish populace is like?

On an early morning, when the sun appeared over the tips of the trees, and the red reflection of the rays cascaded over the horizon, we saw the first cadres of Messerschmitts. Loaded with bombs, they were delivering an early morning 'present' to the contented, sleeping populace.

From the distance, individual airplanes came flying, which had not been identified. Machine gun fire was opened, and we were able to shoot one down. It turned out that this was one of our own.... On the first of September, the commencement of the war, these were the only Polish airplanes, which had to protect us from the air, at the time when the skies, from the first hours before dawn were controlled by the German *Luftwaffe.*

The solutions devised by the Polish rulers were senseless and empty: *Nie damy ani jednego guzika* (We will not yield so much as a button). The Polish army was not capable of putting up and effective resistance to the Hitlerist army. We continued with changing our positions. Fear of the unknown lay in our bones: what will fate visit upon us in the next immediate hours?

Unfortunately, we did not have to wait very long. We saw the first wounded, being transported on horse-drawn wagons. – – – In the distance, on the horizon, villages were engulfed in smoke. Tongues of flame shot up to the heavens – – – in a short while thereafter, we saw our infantry running back in disarray, in great panic, in which one tried to overtake the other, leaving their materiel in the field – – –

Retreat

The commander of our division fell. Having no one over us, we soldiers took on the initiative, and decided to pull back, because the Germans could capture us at any minute. The panic was great, and the fire against us grew heavier. I ran, not looking at what was happening to our battery. The only salvation I saw, was in fleeing, while at the same time, not knowing where to. Villages were on fire in the entire area, a heavy pall of smoke curled skyward. Cows and horses ran around without owners: the mooing and barking of dogs mixed with the sound of exploding bombs, which carried death and destruction.

Following the bombers were reconnaissance aircraft, which fired at us with machine guns. I, along with my comrade, Beryl Babat (who came from Zamość)[46] hid ourselves under an old oak tree. The bullets cut down the leaves on the branches. The machine guns from our batteries opened fire, but literally without any result. We scampered around the tree like frightened rabbits. The German pilots flew literally over our heads. They leaned out and waved to us with their hands, and made sport of our helplessness.

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45 The choice of 'frozen,' as a metaphor, seems out of place in August 1939, at a time when the author describes how rivers of sweat poured off the Polish soldiers under the weight of their backpacks. While the idea of an infant having a red nose is reasonable, it doesn't seem likely that it was due to the cold temperature.

46 The name of the Babat family is mentioned in *Pinkas Zamość*, although not specifically this individual.

After the noon hour, we took up a position in a potato field, and pulled out the camouflage netting. Three regiments on foot from the 27th division went to engage the enemy, and the battery covered them with fire.

In a short time, we observed how our infantry was retreating in disorder, and in great panic, leaving their equipment in the field. Wagons crashed into one another. The panic was without bounds. Fear was mirrored in everyone's eyes, and they fled like poisoned mice. A number of those who were fleeing told that as advance scouts, they entered a village, and could not find a single German 'for a cure???' The 23rd infantry regiment followed them into the village. The regiment had no sooner entered, than German tanks burst out of the stables, which had been camouflaged there. It was not possible to put up even the most minimal resistance. The tanks opened up with a massive fire. Many soldiers fell and even more were wounded. Those left alive began to flee in panic.

Apart from the infantry, the cavalry divisions galloped in panic, cavalry armed only with swords, covered in dust and dirt. The horses were soaked in sweat, with foam running from their chins. It was a forest of glistening lances, with colored pennants affixed to the lances. A horde of people, horses, wagons, field kitchens with uncooked rations – everyone was fleeing, not knowing where...

The firing of ammunition grew stronger. Shrapnel fell near us. Our battery fired at a range of 2 kilometers, without cover from the infantry. We were left as the forward post on the battlefield. The bullets were flying over our heads. Contact with the forward observation post was lost. Later on, we learned that the commanders fell at their posts.

Quickly, we dug pits to protect ourselves from the whistling bullets. Having no orders, we soldiers decided, on our own, to pull back. A retreat began. The panic was very great. The shooting grew more intense. The little bridges, which in the morning were whole, were now damaged by saboteurs that had infiltrated all of Pomerania.

In Flight With No Purpose

I fled, not paying attention to what was happening to our battery. The one way out that I saw, was to flee. After running for a couple of kilometers, I entered into a forest path. Running further, the forest came to an end, and an open stretch appeared before me. Here, a large grouping of officers stood, of various rank, near them – soldiers with howitzers. They detained me, because they recognized me to be an artillery soldier from my boots. They detained only artillery soldiers and howitzers, believing that with this, they will be able to arrest the advancing march of the Germans. When the fire became heavier, the fresh news of the situation superseded their plan.

Once again, we began to flee. Wandering during the night, I, incidentally, was able to meet up with battle comrades. The two Jewish soldiers were especially happy: Beryl Babat (from Zamość) and Beryl Blum (from Tomaszow Lubelski). Shmuel Becker (from Hrubieszow) was a third. We exchanged information about what had happened during the day, and thought about what to do next. We proposed retreat. On a major road, divisions in spasms, from a variety of formations, hopelessly dragged themselves on. Soldiers, horses and cannons were intermingled. Wounded who received no medical help, moaned from their pain. Along the sides of the road, dead bodies lay strewn about. Horses, with swollen bellies – lay with their feet sticking out towards the sky like four columns. Masses of flies buzzed about the faces of the dead, and crows with their black beaks picked at the flesh and crowed with glee.

A shudder enveloped everyone who saw this picture, thinking about one's own fate.

With my comrade Babat, I found a hiding place in an abandoned pharmacy, not far from the road. Outside, one could hear the report of detonations from bombs, and the flash of fire. – – – Abandoning the pharmacy, along the way, we saw frightening pictures of the destruction. – – – Frightened and hungry, we fell on the wet ground.

Small German detachments remained in the vicinity in order to harass the retreating troops.

"Every Man for Himself"

Desiring to extract ourselves from this trap, the remnants of our battery decided to send ahead a scouting party of 4 soldiers on horseback. That lot also fell on me. After having ridden through a small woods, we went up on a highway. Drawing near to a strategic point – a railroad line, under which there was a tunnel – substantial machine gun fire opened up. We turned around, and began to gallop back. One of our group had been shot through the hand, and a horse was wounded. Riding back on field roads, we were shot at by civilian Germans.

Upon our return, we gave a report of the situation. The officers decided to let down the cannons in the nearby stream, in order that they do not fall into German hands. At this act, the Christian soldiers took off their hats, and crossed themselves, as if, by contrast, they were burying a human being. The officers declared to us that the situation was hopeless, and gave the advice that each individual should try and save himself according to his own common sense and opportunity.

I commandeered a horse from a junior officer that had been killed, and decided to ride off into the thickness of the Tucholskie forests. In taking my farewell with the battery, tears welled up in the eyes of my comrade Beryl Babat. Unfortunately, he did not know how to ride a horse, and I was compelled to take leave of him.

I rode alone along unfamiliar roads. Division after division were dragging themselves hopelessly and apathetically. I encountered great masses of equipment that the military had left behind: full boxes of saccharine, sacks of sugar, coffee and cigarettes. Tying the horse to a tree, I took myself to the feast. – – –

At night, I sought out an appropriate place, gathered up branches, and arranged a sleeping place under them. Because of the neighing of the horse, I was compelled to move by sleeping spot to a further location. After another short while, I heard the calling of German patrols. Apparently, they heard the neighing of my horse. I wrapped myself tighter in my military mantle, and held my breath. – – –

Anti-Semitism That Is Rooted

At daytime, I once again went out onto the road. From a great deal of riding, and not being accustomed to the saddle, my skin was rubbed raw, and blood ran from the sores. At a river, I washed off the clotted blood, and bandaged the wounds. On the road, I found rifled saccharine: so I cleaned it up a bit, ate, and also gave the horse something to eat.

Riding, I encountered two soldiers and carried on a conversation with them. They told me, that there still exist large groups of Polish military, who are hiding themselves in the forests. Discovering that I was a Jew, they said that it would go very badly with me, were I to fall into German hands. Nobody loves the '*Moshes*' – they

laughingly joked at my expense. The anti-Semitic hatred of generations was palpable in their speech. I advised them that they had better take care of themselves – and rode off quickly.

I thought about the hatred, which encircles the Jews from all sides. This is the attitude of my comrades in arms: what will the attitude of the Germans be, for whom hatred of the Jews is their prime mover?... Dark thoughts gnawed away in my mind: how will the Germans relate to me, if, God forbid, I should fall into their hands?...

The Result of Living in the Forest

Again – a place to sleep at night in a new location. Rain fell, and did not cease, and I became drenched to the bone. Towards daybreak, the clouds began to disperse, and the rain stopped. I took off my greatcoat and spread it out to dry on a wooden log. I ran here and there in order to warm myself up. Hearing the baying of a hound, I quickly got up on the horse, and rode off in the opposite direction.

I came upon a small orchard with ripe plums. Part of the trees were uprooted out of the ground by artillery shrapnel – a sign of battle that had taken place. I permitted the horse to eat freely from the apples, which were scattered about the little orchard. I filled the case of the gas mask with plums and satisfied my own hunger a bit. Not far from the little orchard, two dead soldiers lay in a foxhole: nearby – a shot up field kitchen with spilled rancid broth. And in addition, dead horses, with swollen bellies, picked apart by birds of prey and mice. The stench could be detected in the entire area. – – –

Potatoes were growing in a small field, which the owners did not have the time to harvest. I dug out a substantial amount of potatoes, gathered a bit of wood, built a small fire, and roasted them. The horse got raw potatoes, which were very tasty to him.

On one of the long nights, which I spent in the forests, I saw a structure that was half ruined, apparently belonging to a forest watchman. I decided to lodge under a roof, despite the fact that it placed me at risk.

From day to day, I slowly acquired the appearance of my forest great-grandfather, who also wandered about the forests. I was not shaven. I washed my face with rain water or with the early morning dew. Yet another enemy of war attacked me with vigor: the lice, and unbearable part of wars and life in the wild.

I decided to bathe in the river, leaving behind the underwear, and in this way, get rid of the blood suckers. At a low hill, under a bush, I undressed and went into the water. It was ice-cold, and when I emerged my teeth were chattering and it seized me like a fever. The lousy shirt and underpants I threw into the water. – – –

'A Guest' with a Peasant

I sought a living place in order to provision myself with foodstuffs for me and my four-footed friend. Riding along, the forest ended and in the distance, I saw a column of smoke, curling up to the sky. After riding a couple of kilometers, I saw small rural houses on whose roofs, white pennants flew, which the Poles had hung out: German flags hung on a portion of the houses – flown by the *Volksdeutsche.*

Approaching a small house flying a white flag, and old peasant came in my direction, who invited me into his house. He shaved off my beard, which had grown quite long already. He invited me to a '*kapusniak*' of potatoes and to drink – a red borscht. I had not had cooked food in my mouth for weeks already.

As the peasant told, I am located close to Chelmno, on the Vistula. The entire area is occupied by Germans. Guests such as myself, come to visit him every day, but the danger is great, because the Germans have publicized representations that whosoever will conceal a soldier of the Polish army in their home, will be shot. When the peasant's wife spied me, she cried out: '*Ola Boga*' and crossed herself. The fear looked out from her eyes.

The peasant proposed that I spend the night in the stable, and I happily agreed. In the evening, he invited me for an evening repast, and asked me, that as soon as dawn began to break, that I should leave the place. In the morning, the peasant, again, invited me for breakfast, and he told, that the German army is at the gates of Warsaw. At Modlin, there is bitter fighting: the defenders of the fort are demonstrating heroism. A small group of Polish military in Westerplatte, a fort near the Baltic Sea, are putting up an heroic resistance despite the fire from battleships and air bombardment. In the captured areas, the Germans are occupying the lands with cruelty to the populace, especially to the Jews, and each day, new decrees arrive from the Hitlerists.

I thanked the peasant. He showed me the way to the Vistula and I set out along the road, provisioned with a small package of food.

With a Fellow Traveler

A life in the forest awaited me yet again. I met up with a Polish soldier wandering aimlessly, and we were happy to see one another. I offered him a share of the bread that I had received from the peasant. We told each other what we had each lived through in the recent times, and decided to stick together, in partnership, and share fate in order to make our lives easier.

We created a plan to get to the other side of the Vistula. My new friend, Janek, had tried this a couple of times, but he did not succeed. We went to an abandoned small house and decided to lodge there for the night. Chickens were wandering about outside, and my friend promised me a regal repast for the evening consisting of roasted chicken. By looking, he also found eggs. Potatoes were growing in the garden, which the owners had not yet dug up. Janek prepared a fire and demonstrated his skills in the matter of cooking. The roasted food was very appetizing to us. In the cellar, we found a cask of apple juice and with completed our feast with that.

We decided to remain here for a couple of days, and accumulate strength in order to be able to get through the difficult days that lay ahead of us. Fear of the Germans did not let me sleep, and I envied my friend, who could sleep so soundly. In a stroll to familiarize ourselves with the surroundings, we bumped into the corpses of dead soldiers, the carcasses of dead horses, and broken up military wagons. We also found plundered supplies. We sorted through this treasure, and took part of it with us.

In the hours before dawn, light shooting awakened me, that grew stronger from minute to minute. We quickly saddled the horses, and took of on the road, leaving the little house behind that had given us protection in such a motherly fashion. It made no sense to come back here, because the German patrols control abandoned houses.

Our fate was to withstand superhuman suffering in the forests, under adverse weather, in rains and storms. Our skin was inflamed by dirt and dampness.

Riding further, we suddenly heard gunfire. Which was from German patrols. We quickly made our way in the opposite direction, and with a fast gallop put a greater distance between us and the shooting. In looking around, I saw that I was alone, hungry and thirsty.

With a Group of Polish Soldiers

I approached the small house of a forest watchman, and elderly Pole. He received me in a friendly manner and invited me to eat. I washed myself and shaved my beard. Because of the unhealed wound I could not use the horse to ride and I gave it as a gift to the watchman. After spending a couple of days with him, I had to get on the road because of the frequent searches of the Germans in the area.

My objective was to reach a settlement where there were Jews. On the way, I met up with a larger group of Polish soldiers, which was going in my direction, carrying a white flag at their head. The group consisted of about 17 soldiers, among them a Jew. Because of this Jew, I joined this group. It became apparent, that the Jew was the standard bearer, named Kobzianski. He came from Przemysl in Podolia, he was married and a father of two children.

I attempted to influence him that both of us should go on the road without the group, because they are not threatened by the same danger as we are, as Jews. But my words did not persuade him. He argued that by maintaining ourselves in a larger group, the danger is lessened. Not having a strong desire to go on alone on the road, I remained, left confronting a fate that was unknown.

In the meantime, night fell, and we decided to lodge at the side of the road under thickly wooded trees. They started to tell jokes about Jews. I thought: they, themselves are lying in mud, and 'curling their moustaches.' Jew hatred is deeply ingrained in their bones, a legacy of generations. To us, the two Jews, they said that we were good Jews. They solved all of their problems, as it were, and they were greatly concerned about us, '*Zydki*' should the Germans capture us. Even in their insecure circumstances, they did not forget their hatred of the Jews.

Days went by, dreary and rainy. When the rain stopped, we resumed our way. At the head, on a stick, a shirt full of lice served as a flag. On a certain day, the sergeants of the group decided to replace the Jewish standard bearer with a Pole. Such a great 'honor' such as carrying the lousy shirt – a symbol of surrender to the Germans – should only be given to a pure Pole, and not a Jew, who, they added, also looks like a communist...

I blundered about for days and nights with these 'friends,' looking for means not to fall into the hands of the Germans. My comrade Kozbianski held to his thought: stay with the group, because there is no better alternative.

In a subsequent day, when the sun was shining, we again resumed our march to the unknown. Not far away, a highway ran, separated from us by a sparse growth of trees. On the highway, columns of German Panzer tanks were rolling. When it got quiet, we continued our march.

I Am Captured

We entered a small woods and heard shouts in German: *Halt!* These were Germans shouting at entire columns of Polish soldiers, who were carrying white flags, with their weapons thrown over their shoulders, with the barrels down – a sign of surrender. The commanders of the 'proud' Polish army whose only concern was that their boots with the clinking spurs should shine like a mirror, those that proposed the solution: 'we will not yield even so much as a button!' with the commander-in-chief [Marshall Edward] Smigly-Rydz at their head, were long ago outside the borders of Poland.

The picture was sorrowful, of thousands of young soldiers, with white banners, giving themselves up into the hands of a bloody enemy such as the Germans. After spending the night in a small woods, by noontime, we began to move, When we entered onto a wide road, we immediately fell into the hands of the Germans. All raised their hands. That which had so frightened me, had happened. I became a prisoner of the Germans.

Two German soldiers with handcuffs ordered us, a group of 17 soldiers to sit on the ground and to lay down our arms. In the distance, we could see columns of hundreds of soldiers moving along, under their imprisonment. The white banners, made from torn sheets, from shirts made lousy from sweat that soaked them through, affixed to rifles, fluttered in the autumn breeze. This huge host of Polish soldiers had surrendered to two Hitlerist soldiers, from whose eyes the fear looked out from their well-fed fattened faces.

The Germans held the captives about 30 meters from them. Ordered that the weapons be put together on the stack. Hundreds of rifles, bayonets and hand grenades made a substantial mountain of weaponry. The captives sat on the ground, apathetic, unshaven, and exhausted.

Out of fear of such a large camp of captives, the Germans spoke to us in a gentle manner, and gave us cigarettes. Through their field telephone, they called out their field gendarmerie, which arrived riding in large transport trucks. A very strict inspection was carried out. Everything made of metal – pocket knives, spoons, forks – they took away from us, in order that we not utilize them as weapons.

With wild shouts: *'Lass, schneller, ihr scheiss-bande!'* they loaded us into the transport trucks. The curses and the abusive language spewed from their mouths. After a short while, we arrived in a small *shtetl.* Riding past the marketplace, we saw that it was overflowing with trophies of the defeated Polish army. Thousands of saddles of 'Uhlans' were scattered about, boxes of spilled coffee, cigarettes, conserved butter, saccharine. – – – This shtetl had become a concentration point for trophies that were to be found in the area.

We were taken up to the second floor of the theater hall. A Polish church was also crammed full of captives. The entire shtetl was decorated with white banners on the houses of the Poles. The Hitlerist banners, with the swastikas, on the houses of the *Volksdeutsche*, instilled fear in everyone.

Denigrated and Made to Suffer

There was a large number of Jews among those who were captured, from all parts of Poland. During the war, many criminals had fled from prisons that were broken open and the Germans rounded them up as prisoners of war. One of these criminal types, who had been sentenced to a life imprisonment term for murder, was my neighbor for sleeping on the stage of the theater, where the Germans had quartered us – – –

The Germans, all with fat, well-fed faces, like pigs, walked around like they had swallowed sticks, with their feet decorated with spring feathers – like well pastured robots, who were preparing themselves to rule the world, with the attitude of supermen.

One time, at night, when everyone was asleep, a wild shout awakened us. We were ordered to lie still on the spot, and we were illuminated with flashlights. –'You will all be shot, you disgusting Poles!' – the Germans shouted. It became apparent, that the prisoners who were concentrated in the Polish church, disarmed the Germans and began to flee. The Germans fired chaotically into the night. Many Poles were shot during the flight. The Germans, therefore, thought that we would also try the same stunt.

In the meantime, day followed day. In the final time, the Germans brought a large number of captured Poles and concentrated them in the marketplace, under the open sky. It was pathetic to look at them: filthy, with torn insignias, sunken cheeks from malnutrition, overgrown beards from weeks of not shaving, among whom there were many Jews, who suffered both from their fellow battle comrades, and from the Germans. Fortunately, the majority of the Poles did not speak German, and this did not permit them to communicate with the Germans. However, they learned the word, *Jude* very quickly, and began to single out the Jewish captives. They were eager to show their hatred for the Jews to the controlling authority.

On a rainy day, a disciplinary march began. We were driven with wild shouts and whoever lagged behind was shot. On the way, we suffered from being denigrated, and we were derided. In the evening, we stopped at a vacant field. Exhausted, in cold and wet, we laid down to sleep.

In the end, we were brought to a place which was ringed in barbed wire, and there, under the open sky, we were kept together. We were not the first here. The camp was already occupied by thousands of prisoners. We assembled a small group, four Jews, including my comrade Beryl Babat, and decided to stick together, and mutually assist one another, to the extent possible.

Hunger

We received one loaf of bread for every 4 people, which was supposed to suffice for 3 days. The water situation was much worse: we were led to drink from a small river once every 3 days... in the process, the Germans jokes over us. It rained continuously for whole days and nights, and cold winds howled about the sand hill of our camp. The constant hunger became the cause of fights among the prisoners. People went about with highly strung nerves. The hunger led to apathy and senselessness. Clothing hung from us as if from branches – from weeks of not eating properly. Eyes became red from lack of sleep. And can a man sleep all the time?...

Part of the time, the Germans took prisoners for labor. I secured a place for myself near the small door, through which the Germans would enter. After many days of watching the door, two armed soldiers came with an officer, to take 6 prisoners to work. The entire camp, numbering in the thousands, like a stormy sea, pushed to the door to be among the fortunate ones.. Full of murder, the Germans pushed against the mass of people. I remained among the 6 and thousands escorted us with envy.

We were taken to the train station in order to clean field kitchens that were among the trophies. When we opened the cover of the first kitchen, the stench of a soup emerged, which was cooked during the first days of September... we threw ourselves on this soup like hungry hyenas... When the officer saw us, he drove us away. He led us to the ramp of the station. Luck was on our side. The Jewish soldiers, who were there, had just ended their noonday meal, and they gave us the leftovers that remained in the pots. We kept on eating – we ate for all the days that we hungered, and for future days.

The Germans made a 'spectacle' out of us who had been starved. They brought us scraps from all directions, and were convulsed with laughter at it: 'Look how the Polish swine eat like horses.' Consequently they made us unique. They photographed us from all angles in all manner of comical positions.

The officer gave us each two loaves of bread, and also a mantle with a military insignia. Such also happened with the Germans. We took back a pot of soup to the camp. We hid the bread and soup under our clothing. We gave away the soup to my 3 comrades, and their joy was great. The four of us held ourselves together as a

group, a small 'commune.' On rainy nights we slept standing up, one leaning against the other, with a covering thrown over our heads. I saved the bread for the following day. However, very early in the morning, it appeared that the bread was gone....

"The Good Treatment"

On one morning, we were led out of the camp. At the train station, we were crammed into wagons, to the extent that it was possible. There, we were given newspapers in Polish, which contained agitation material for the German authorities: a picture of Polish war prisoners, who are standing in the open doorways of train wagons, with smiling faces and a cigar in their mouths; burned houses in Warsaw, Polish soldiers tossed about on the ground, dead horses; pictures of President Moscicki, Foreign Minister Beck, and Marshal Smigly-Rydz, who were accused of ordering the resistance to the unbeatable German army. – The logic of a wolf.

The newspaper described the 'treatment' of the prisoners – 'they lack for nothing' – and similar lies.

When the train stopped, we found ourselves on accursèd German soil. Going on foot, I felt weak, and it appears that I also had a high fever. I felt drunk, and lost my capacity to move. My two loyal comrades came to my assistance, who took me under the arms, and were it not for them, I would have suffered the fate of other hundreds, who had fallen behind, and lay abandoned on the road of suffering. Under such circumstances, the Germans would shoot those who were left behind.

We were led into half empty barracks of the German military. I got a little better. I did a foolish thing, and identified myself as a Jew. We were about 70 Jews. In reality, there were perhaps 10 times as many. In the Polish army, the proportion was about 10 percent. The average number of Jewish prisoners was 10,000.

Germans, *Volksdeutsche* and Poles took part in taking off our clothing. The Germans gave the orders, the *Volksdeutsche* carried out the orders, but the greater enthusiasm was exhibited by our 'war comrades' the Poles. We were left with only a shirt and trousers, and thereby took advantage of us.

A junior officer, a *Volksdeutsche*, assumed the command over us. His first order was: clean out the stable with bare hands, and thereby assaulted us with his heavy boots, and shouted curses and abusive language taken from his anti-Semitic lexicon. An elderly German from the reserves 'rationalized' our circumstances and said: 'You Jews wanted this war, therefore you must suffer. You will all be shot.' But he immediately retracted the statement: 'Shooting is too great a luxury for you, because bullets cost money. You will be hung' – – –

Jews – Set Apart

We were given the title of '*Juden Kompanie*' and were ordered to be the last row to enter the kitchen. After thousands of prisoners received their rations, came our row. We were segregated from the Poles and billeted in a small barracks. With 70 men, there was barely a place to sit down on the floor.

The German soldier, who was appointed to guard us, devised all manner of assaults in order to oppress us and make sport of us. Every half hour, he marched us out of the barracks in order to drill us. Wearing only our shirts, we had to stand in the rain and cold wind. Our suffering gave this sadist pleasure. He ordered us to stand on our heads, and laugh. Very few could do this. So he ordered that one should help the other: to hold him, so that he doesn't fall...

He ordered the cook that the Jews would not eat the flesh of swine because of their faith, and because of this, he was to put a piece of pig meat in the plate of each Jew, and he would watch to see if we would eat it. Among us were observant young men, that declared, under such circumstances, it may be eaten, because it is *'pikuakh nefesh'* {i.e. a matter of saving one's life].- - -

Prisoner 11022

In the end we were rid of this torture camp, and we were taken – under inhuman conditions – to another camp, in Hammerstein. To this day, a shiver goes over my skin when I recall the long wait in the cold, half-naked, standing by the gate of the prisoner camp until the guards would complete the formalities.

In Hammerstein, we were quartered in square tents. On the ground, straw was spread out, and here we were protected from the winds. We felt as if we were in the Garden of Eden... When the commandant of the camp saw us half-naked, he ordered that military clothing be distributed to us, from Czech spoils of war. We went through a registration and I received the number 11022. From that moment on, I was called 'Prisoner 11022.'

Despite the new conditions, it was very cold at night. We lay, with military mantles thrown over our heads. We warmed ourselves with our own breath, which did not get out from under our covering.

Hungry people are very irritable, and among the prisoners fights would be repeated because of the suspicion of thievery. Because of hunger, we looked for each and every thing that was edible, such as rotting bones of horses, which after scraping off the flesh, lay in pots near the kitchen. The bones would be stolen out of the pots at night, and the residue of meat would be gnawed off.

We were taken out to work every day – building barracks for ourselves and future prisoners from all of Europe, that Hitler Germany was preparing to conquer. The overseers were older Germans, who were not mobilized into the '*Wehrmacht*,' but as a labor company. Their relationship to us was correct. Among them, were many anti-Hitlerists, who saw in us victims of a war that they despised. They helped us not only once, despite the prohibition of the Hitlerist rule, which did not sanction human feeling, especially towards Jewish prisoners, 'who wanted to annihilate the Third Reich and precipitated the war, with the help of American Jews.'

This was in contrast to sadists, who were found here, and who harassed us and tortured us.

Part of the Polish prisoners were taken to the newly constructed barracks. The '*Juden Kompanie*' was held in tents to the last. We were relocated into barracks first in February.

A Night Roll Call

On a frosty night, when all the prisoners in our barracks were sleeping, we heard a wild shout, whose echo traveled far over the sleeping camp in the cold, dark night: '*Alles schnell raus, ihr scheiss-bande*!'... Everyone grabbed a blanket around the head, and quickly emerged from the tents.

Outside, on the snow, stood a group of German soldiers with bayonets affixed on their rifles. A cold winter moon reflected sharply off the bayonets. The officers. With flashlights in their hands, ordered, with shouts, that we were to move quickly and fall into rows of four men – and begin counting.

We shivered from the cold and fear: what does this mean?... After midnight, in a really intense frost, the *Juden Kompanie* is ordered to stand out, while the Polish prisoners sleep peacefully in the barracks. Have they not devised some sort of devilish plan against us? A variety of thoughts came up. We knew that the Germans were capable of all things. We learned the secret when they ordered us to re-enter the barracks. Then we heard how the officers spoke among themselves: Yes, the captured one comes from the *Juden Kompanie*, the one who stole the potatoes....

After ten days, the 'potato thief' was returned to us, and he told: being intensely hungry, and being unable to sleep, he let himself out to 'organize' a bit of potatoes (what the Germans called 'stealing', was in our camp parlance called – 'organizing'). To his misfortune, a patrol caught him, and he was placed under military arrest in the barracks. German soldiers were with him under arrest, whose portions were 4 times larger than that given to prisoners. Her was able to eat to satiety, and a good meat soup, cigarettes. He didn't have to go to work hungry, in the cold – literally, a Garden of Eden. He was prepared to sit under arrest until liberation... instead of punishment, it was a place to be healed.

'Stratagems'

We 'Organize' Wood for Heat

The cold became more intense toward nightfall. The single iron stove, which stood in our barracks, could not warm the long barracks. The principal objective of the guards, which circulated near the barracks, was to guard the wood, which had been set aside for construction purposes. At the changing of the guard, the relieved guard would announce the responsibilities of the new guard in a loud voice: *'Nicht lassen das bauholz von die kriegs-gefangene zu steilen.'* We had quite the opposite objective: to 'organize' the wood. Because the cold was unbearable. We felt the cold doubly because of bad nourishment.

The construction wood lay not far from the barracks. The 'organizing' took place in a variety of ways. When the guards had their backs turned to us, a board had to be snatched swiftly and made to vanish inside the barracks. Another method was the following. Two prisoners would engage the guards in conversation, about the weather, about the war; one remained with the watch, and continued to 'use up time in conversation.' the other would move off and at the sign of his comrade, would quickly grab a board and vanish.

We Lug Potatoes

The news flashed through the barracks like lightning, that three heavy transport trucks had arrived, loaded with potatoes, and people are needed to unload them. On the outside, the camp seethed with joy, like a bee's nest that had been stirred up. A mass of prisoners pressed to unload the potatoes. The Germans understood the designs of so many 'volunteers,' but it was difficult to drive them away. Like a pack of starved wolves, they threw themselves at the transport trucks.

The officers yelled at the soldiers to drive the '*scheiss-gesindel*' away, if not, the potatoes will be dragged away. The hit with their rifle butts, and shouted until they grew hoarse: 'Away, you band of shit!' My barrack commandant, tall and with a brown face, recognized me. For appearances sake, he shouted out loud 'get away' in order that the officer should hear, and gave me a wink in an eye that I should take potatoes....

With the Help of Bribery

We received pay of 24 marks every month in scrip that was negotiable only in the camp. This is what the construction company paid us for our work. We were therefore able to buy shoelaces for our shoes at the small canteen, postage stamps, cigarettes, shaving equipment and other non-food products.

The cigarettes that I bought, I sold to my guard for real money. Most of the prisoners disposed of their scrip in this way.

We were compelled to pay a part of the 24 marks in scrip as bribery, that was due the commandant of our barracks. Every Sunday, he came to collect the bribery, for whiskey, from our Jewish commandant, Yagoda. For this payoff, which he took from us, we had a variety of privileges.

He would alert us to inspections a day earlier, which were to take place by us, and we were prepared. We would hide the 'organized' potatoes; the clothing, which each person had was stuffed into the bed. For this reason, the *Juden Kompanie* had a good reputation with the camp administration as 'good working people,' that don't steal potatoes, clothing, wood, and other things...

An Incident: I Slipped....

The cold became more intense. Cold, icy winds blew, and we felt it worst of all on our way to work. Cold and hunger escorted us day and night. One didn't think so much about what would be our final fate, as much as where we would get another plate of soup from the kitchen. On receiving my plate of soup – the bit of warm water, which the Germans called soup – my hunger was aroused. It demanded more, and was displeased at being enticed.

I found a method – and I broke my plate. With a shard in my hand, I went to the officer of the day who was in the kitchen. I complained that I had slipped on the snow, and the plate with the soup got broken. He believed me, and ordered the cook: – Give the dog a plate of soup!... To me, he said: – The plate is the property of the Reich: if this happens again, you , swine, will catch it...

I gave up this strategy of slipping and devised a different strategy.

A Portion of Soup Under the Cape...

I was wearing a Czech cape with a cord around the throat. N the inside part, I fastened a wire, bend into the form of a hook, and on it I hung a container, so that nothing was visible from the outside. The pots in the barracks kitchen were arrayed in a long row and the steam from the pots filled half the kitchen because of the cold.

Looking about the kitchen, immediately at the first pot, I would take a portion into the container, and quickly hung it on the hook under the cape. Then with the plate, I took another portion.

This strategy worked for me for a longer time, until the weather became milder, and the steam from the pots became less dense. I used this strategy until a German officer, who was keeping watch over the kitchen, noticed not far from the exit, that steam was curling out of the collar of the cape...He became agitated: *Halt, Halt!*, and

a soldier barred my way. He opened up the cape and saw the container with the soup... with the wood that was used to stir the pots. So he hit me over the head, and I fell down.

I can remember yet to this day, how thousands of stars flashed by my eyes. How long I lay on the spot I do not know. A stream of cold water brought me back to my feet... in a couple of days later, the wound on my head healed, but the pain continued for a longer time.

A 'honey pot' was lost to me, and I began to think about a new strategy to assuage my hungry insides....

Oats in the Trousers...

On a frosty pre-dawn, we were taken to work in a large silo of oats in Hammerstein. The travel was difficult, and the frozen snow cracked under our wooden sandals, cracked like glass. The snow glistened under the sun like multi-colored diamonds, blinding our eyes.

The work consisted of transferring the loose grain from one location to another, with large wooden spades, in order that the oats not get impregnated with moisture. The gates to the silo were wide open, and the cold from the outside penetrated the interior. We were working fast, in order to warm ourselves up a bit. The dust, that rose up into the air, gets into the mouth and ears, and cuts off breath – a portion of dust instead of eating. The watch guard runs about, knocking one boot into the other in order to warm himself up.

Transferring the oats in this fashion was a very difficult job for us, who were starved. The cold and the dust burned us in the yes, and the hours dragged on interminably – 'an hour a year' – as we used to say in the *shtetl*: so many more hours until the end of the day...

When the watch guard finished drinking his coffee out of his thermos, and smoked a cigar, he acquired energy, and began to harass us. My best friend, Beryl Babat (a young man from Zamość) was working along side of me, and he began to describe to me, all the kinds of dishes one could prepare from oats. Now, the following problem confronted us: how can we take along some oats to the camp? It was impossible to put any into the pockets, because the watchman never took his eyes off of us.

The strategy consisted of the following: I buttoned up my pants and turned with my back to the soldier. My companion took up a shovel full of oats, and poured it into my pants. Understand, that previously, we had used cord to tie up the ends in order that the oats not run out the bottom...I [then] did the same with my comrade Babat.

During the course of the work, we took a long time to fill our pockets with oats. We also attempted to eat the oats while they were raw, however, this cut inside the mouth, and the watchman soldier took note of this, and shouted out: – Immediately stop with the swinish behavior. What are you, horses?...

Returning to the camp, we occupied ourselves with the oats. On an old piece of metal, we dried it, after warming up the metal surface. We then ground up the oats with two bricks, and in this manner, made an oat kasha. We cooked it in an old marmalade container. We added a couple of potatoes to the kasha, and it proved very delicious to us. The, we understood why horses love oats so much... and in a like manner, cannot someone who is hungry also find it tasty? We ate this together with discarded bread, which had been rifled from garbage cans...

Loading Coal...

In the morning, a watchman came to take us to work. He asked us, with a cunning smile: which of us was prepared to volunteer to load coal at the train station. Many refused. His proposal, accompanied by his secret little smile struck me as significant, and I, along with 5 additional prisoners agreed to volunteer for the work. The watchman then addressed himself to the others: – You didn't want to lade coal; these people, who presented themselves voluntarily will unload bread...

We believed, and did not believe his words. We did know that the Germans enjoyed amusing themselves at our expense. Drawing near to the train station, we saw a freight train standing on a rail siding. Our curiosity increased with every step: what awaits us in the cars that were locked – bread or coal?...

When the doors of the wagons were opened, to our astonishment, we saw bread. Bread! Wagons full of bread! Everyone of us feverishly thought: How to 'organize' a couple of loaves for one's self... Before starting the work, our watchman distributed a loaf of bread to each individual, and promised, that at the end of work, we will receive an additional loaf of bread.

We stood ourselves out in a line: 3 in the wagon, 3 on the ramp, and 2 soldiers in an automobile. We passed the bread from hand to hand. One of our group, who was deepest inside the wagon, took a bite out of each loaf. When the loaf that had been bitten into reached the Germans, they thought that mice had gnawed on it. Standing close to the two German soldiers, I heard the way they were arguing: one says that there are signs of the teeth of mice, the other says they are human teeth.

The ordered the work of unloading to stop, and called over an officer, who was to settle the question. After studying the bread for a lengthy amount of time, when the officer finally determined that the signs were from a human teeth, and fresh ones at that, he became angry and began to verbally abuse us. He ordered us '*eintritten*'(to arrange ourselves in a row), and gave us a lecture: – 'Why are you committing sabotage? The bread is earmarked for the victorious German army.' He then strenuously warned that this should not happen again, but he did order that all of us were to be given additional bread.

After this severe talk, we no longer bit from the bread. After unloading, the officer did an audit, and determined that 6 loaves of bread were missing. He addressed the soldiers in the following way: The bread had been accurately counted. The missing bread, was definitely stolen by the prisoners of war, it would seem. We were ordered to sit on the open freight trucks. In riding back from the train station, we were frozen.

We arrived at the barracks from Hammerstein, and unloaded the bread into the magazines. The German soldiers were in the magazine, and stored the bread in straight rows, and counted them. I, and a comrade decided to 'organize' two added loaves of bread for ourselves, and temporarily to stick them into the snow. Such an opportunity, to acquire bread – the dream of thousands of prisoners – should not be permitted to be lost... We covered the two loaves with snow, in order to extract them at our earliest opportunity.

At the end, the Germans could not believe that they were missing yet another 2 loaves of bread. The again counted them, and asked us if we had not appropriated the 2 loaves. Understandably, we lied. So they cursed loudly, and we attempted to persuade them that there was an error in counting in the station. His upset them even more, and they hollered: 'Shut up, you band of Jews!'...

My comrade and I plotted how to retrieve the two loaves of bread. The thought we had was unique. Every afternoon, under escort, two prisoners are taken to chop wood near the magazines, where we had hidden the bread. We told the two the story about the bread. They told the watch guard that they were not feeling good, and pointed to us as their replacements. The guard staff agreed.

Coming to the place, where we had hidden the bread, I his a glove in my pocket, and represented that I had lost it. I burrowed about in the snow on all sides, 'in order to find the glove,' but I did not find the bread....

Kiryat-Yam

Translator's Epilogue

Recent research by the Polish National Remembrance Institute (IPN) indicates, that after staging a number of false provocations (Operation Himmler), the first regular act of war took place on September 1, 1939, 04:40 local time, when the *Luftwaffe* attacked the town of Wielun. Five minutes later, on September 1, 1939, 04:45 local time, the German battleship Schleswig-Holstein opened fire on the Polish enclave of Westerplatte in Gdańsk by the Baltic Sea. At 08:00 local time, German troops attacked Poland near the town of Mokra. Later that day the front was opened along Poland's Western, Southern and Northern borders, while German aircraft started raids on Polish cities.

Despite some Polish successes in minor border battles, German technical and numerical superiority forced the Polish armies to withdraw towards Warsaw and Lwów. The Westerplatte garrison capitulated on September 7. The largest battle during this campaign (Battle of Bzura) took place near the Bzura river west of Warsaw from September 9 to September 18 - it was the Polish attempt at a counterattack, which failed after an initial success. Warsaw, under heavy aerial bombardment from the first hours of the war, was first attacked on September 9 and was put under siege from September 13 until its capitulation on September 28.

From September 17, 1939, the Red Army occupied the Eastern regions of Poland that had not yet been involved in military operations. The fortress Modlin north of Warsaw, capitulated on September 29.

Polish defenders on the Hel peninsula on the shore of the Baltic Sea held out until October 2. The capitulation of the town of Kock near Lublin on October 6, after a 4-day Battle of Kock, marked the end of the September Campaign.

Tanks and aircraft (particularly fighters and ground attack aircraft like the famous Junkers Ju 87 Stuka) played a major role in the fighting. Bomber aircraft also attacked cities and civilian targets causing huge losses amongst the civilian population in what became known as terror bombings

With Partisans in the Forest

By A. H.

When the Germans took the members of the *Judenrat* into custody, everyone in the *shtetl* then understood that this was the best indication that no one will be able to save themselves. Like many others, we, like many others, prepared a hideout in a cellar. Twelve people could be accommodated there, but we were forty.

The Gestapo recruited local Poles to assist them, and continuously dragged out fresh victims from hideouts. The streets were overflowing with the dead. Other Jewish residents were assembled in the jail, and at night led to the cemetery and buried alive.

All of these occurrences were noted by my father, who stole out at night to get a bit of water, after we were occupying the hiding place for five days. The events indicated that the situation was hopeless.

After the fifth day, at about three, we suddenly heard a movement. Everyone held their breath; the mothers stuffed the mouths of the small children in order to keep them from crying. Everyone was counting their last minutes. From above, a terrifying laughter was heard, and we were illuminated with a reflector through the cracks in the floor. Everyone saw the Angel of Death before them. For the rest of my life, I will never forget the moment when my father, who sat near me, pressed my mouth firmly against his heart, and quietly told me: my child, do not cry out! At the very same moment, we heard the exchange of words between the bandits, that there is no one to be found here.

For a number of minutes we did not want to believe that this great miracle had occurred to us. From death, we became alive. But what is to be done further? On that evening, my father said: – We have waited long enough for death; now we will attempt to do the opposite, and maybe we will be lucky enough to sneak away from the hands of the bandits, and flee to the forest.

We Fled to the Forest

While times were still good, we had arranged with a forest watchman, that when the critical moment would arrive, we will attempt to hide ourselves in the forest. Time was short: we had to decide and immediately carry out the decision. My mother was of the opinion, that 'whatever way God will lead, that is the way it will be.' However, my father was a man of strong energy, and explained to us that we really had no other alternative.

We quickly prepared ourselves for the journey: packages in hand, and out of the house. The night was well-lit as if it were day. From all the saloons and restaurants, we heard wild shouts of the SS men. The streets were overflowing with dead bodies, and covered in blood. May father was the first to go, to scout the way, and we followed after him. The worst part of the way was near the cemetery, because there, we found the murderers finishing their work of the entire day.

When we had gone a significant distance, we suddenly heard the barking of dogs. This was frightening to us, because the murderers heard it, and began to shoot automatic weapons and shout: – Hands high, do not move!... It was a miracle that we were already far enough away from them. Because of the danger, all of us exerted ourselves to the maximum, and ran without stopping. In this fashion, we ran for 3 kilometers. Then when there was no danger, we rested.

We then proceeded a little more calmly, and went in the vicinity of the Kaweczynek forest. There, the forest watchman immediately helped us find a suitable place and we were fortunate for having left the desolate hell.

The days went by slowly and sorrowfully. Regarding food, we had to make do with that which we received from the village, in exchange for good clothing.

Killing Germans, Blowing Up Rail Lines

On a certain morning, Polish partisans from the A. K. (Armia Krajowa) assaulted our hiding place. They drove everyone out, and chased them into the valley and shot them. By fortunate circumstance, I happened not to be at home, because the prior night, I had left to obtain produce in the village. When I returned, I saw the great calamity that had transpired. My first thought was to commit suicide, but the single means to do this was to starve myself to death, but one does not die from this very quickly.

After a day of living through frightful happenings, remaining alone, I came to the decision that I needed to continue living despite it all. I went to the village, took a peasant of my acquaintance with me, and gave my entire family a decent Jewish burial, in one grave.

Every time, when I would come to the village, I met with the partisans, and I decided to join the partisan movement.

It was very hard for me initially, but a little at a time, I got used to being with strange people, who were my counselors. From the outset, the group was not very large: about forty some Russians and a very small number of Poles and Jews. A great happiness was created within me, when unexpectedly I met Reizl Berger in this group. We both treated each other as sisters, because we no longer had any of our own family anymore; therefore, we found solace in being with one another.

Regrettably, it didn't last very long, because in a short while, we received an order to cross to the second side of the Bug [River], along with a group of 30 partisans. We had to break through to the large Russian divisions, that were based in Pinsk. The conditions were very severe, because the peasants would inform on us.

The way was a very difficult one. We forded the river, and immediately on reaching the other side, we were attacked by Ukrainian nationalists and two partisans from our group fell. When we arrived at the designated place, we were received like heroes, after we had survived the risky journey.

The partisan movement in White Russia was well-organized. Our objective was to unexpectedly attack and kill Germans, ruin bridges and train lines, blowing up military transports, etc.

This lasted until 1944. When the Russian Army arrived, we joined its ranks, ans together we retook Pinsk. Later, the partisan movement was liquidated. Many men were absorbed into the army. All the rest received good positions as civilians.

At the Scattered Destruction

My function was not yet over. I had an order to lead all of the sick soldiers deep into Russia. I carried out my mission, and brought everything in order. I, myself, became severely ill. I lay in the hospital for three months.

I emerged from there very broken, and in a strange city, to boot, where I had no acquaintances. However, in a short time, I got myself set up, and obtained employment, and remained in Russia for a whole year.

During this time, the Lublin District was liberated, and I decided to travel home.

However, the day was very sad when I came home: there was no trace of any family people. Not a drop of hope that anyone was still alive. Even my brother, whom I had hoped to find for the entire time, showed no sign of being alive. The entire *shtetl* was as if it had died, only the scattered wreckage was there to help me cry.

The Poles, who with their own hands had set fire, tried to comfort me. However, I quickly departed, because the ground now burned under my feet.

I came to Lublin, and there, already, a few individual people met me from our *shtetl*: Dora Flajszer, Yehuda Weinstock, and my comrade Reizl Berger, with whom I stayed for more than a year in Lublin. To this day, my greatest pleasure comes from being in the company of people from my *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn.

The Treasure is Hidden

By Shmuel Dreyer

It appears that the frightful war, and its outcome, was not a surprise to everyone. A short time before the outbreak of the Second World War, the leadership of the 'Joint' sent advice to the *Volksbank* in the *shtetl*, where I worked, to hide its valuable assets.

All the books were placed in a box, notes, money, silver, gold, and an audit was conducted. We placed one copy in the box, and the second – in an iron safe. We buried the box in the yard of Moshe Hirsch Berger together with the keys of the iron safe.

This was the way the assets of the Jewish *Volksbank* were liquidated. This secret was known only to Yerakhmiel Ginzburg, Moshe Hirsch Berger, and the writer of these lines. The only evidence that remained with me, was the passbook from the Polish Savings Bank for the Sick with the stamp of the bank.

There were two financial institutions in the *shtetl*, that served the Jewish populace, and to a certain extent the Christian as well. These were the *Volksbank*, and a *Gemilut-Hesed* Bank for manual trades. I worked in both institutions: in the bank for a salary, and for the *Gemilut-Hesed* Bank as a volunteer.

The capital of the bank consisted of the investments of the members, and loans from the 'Joint' (in Warsaw, Rymarska 6). The income to cover expenses came from the charges for loans distributed for members, and provision from cashiered notes. The loans, for constructive purposes, were in the amount of between 100 and 500 zlotys, paid back in instalments.

Thanks to the bank, in a certain measure, there was an amicable coexistence with the Polish populace, and with the organs of authority (the magistrate, judiciary, police).

Haifa, August 1983

I Took Part in Battle

By Zvi Traeger (Tal)

Page 231: Supply Inventory of the Judenrat

When the Russians abandoned our area, many Jewish residents moved in the direction of the Bug River in order not to fall into the hands of the Hitlerists. Our family went with them. The Russian Army, at that point, withdrew from our region, to the River Bug, which became the new border between the Soviet Union and Germany, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939.

We went to Volhyn and after a short time, we were sent to area of Ivanov-Voznezhensk, in a small *shtetl*, Privalsk, together with the Farber and Graeber families. We worked in the textile factories and lived according to the local standard. None of us died from hunger.

During the initial period, we – my brothers Shimon and Yerakhmiel and I – were there alone. Our parents, and the other members of the family were in the forests of Veligodzig. With a strenuous amount of energy, we were able to bring them to us. This happened already in 1941, when the Germans had already attacked the Soviet Union.

Hunger in Uzbekistan

We were all sent away to Uzbekistan to a collective farm. There, we literally expired from hunger. Not only us, but also the Uzbeks, starved. We were mobilized into a 'Labor Army,' in the Ural Mountains, where the conditions were frightful. We worked from darkness to darkness. Whoever could, fled.

Many of those mobilized in this way died, and among them – my brother, Yerakhmiel ל"ז, from malaria. The doctors gave him no attention because he had no fever. Whoever was in Russia during those times, knows very well that the sick did not receive any form of assistance. He was compelled to go to work along with everyone else.

I very quickly got the news, that those members of my family that had remained in Uzbekistan, were no longer alive. They starved to death. I was so mortified, and I could not react even when I was spoken to. The frightening news, the cold and the hunger raised the specter of death before my eyes.

Vengeance Against The Germans

When I regained a bit of strength, and returned from the Leningrad front to the Urals, I decided to voluntarily join the Red Army. We received news about how cruelly the German murderers were treating our brethren in Poland. Because of this, I wanted to take revenge against these murderers.

I fought against the Germans in the ranks of the Polish-Soviet military, and took part in battles in the outskirts of Kolberk, in the crossing of the Oder River, and in the capture of Berlin. I showed no heroism, but took vengeance to the extent that I could. I saw it as my sacred duty towards those who were murdered, and to my people.

Back in Poland

After the German surrender, we were brought to Chelm in order to fight against the Polish reactionary bands who opposed the Polish military and the Red Army. On a daily basis, we 'cleaned out' the area of Zamość and Tomaszow Lubelski. We had large battles with the Ukrainians in the area of Jaroslawiec, Reishe (Rzeszow). Many young Jewish boys fell in these battles with Ukrainians and with the Polish A.K. bandits.

I remember Chelm very well, because many Jews from the Soviet side came together there. These were the people who had hidden themselves in the bunkers and in the forests. We, the Jewish soldiers, despite the fact that we were few in number, did everything that we could to protect the Jews from the Polish hooligans. Despite this, they demonstrated that they could kill several Jewish families in Chelm, among them, a doctor and his wife.

I met my wife, Sima in Chelm, and we got married. My wife comes from the *shtetl* Maniewicz, near Kowel: she survived the difficult war years in the forests , among the Jewish partisan groups.

When I traveled as an emissary from Chelm to Lublin, for the first time – in the war years – I encountered *landsleit* from Szczebrzeszyn. The first, that I met in Lublin, were Yehuda Weinstock and Reizl Berger. I learned from him, that also Ephraim Farber, and Hirsch and Leibl Shtil are also located in Lublin. We all met that evening, at Yehuda's home, and toasted a good 'L'Chaim,' both for our salvation, and also for the vengeance we exacted for our brethren, that the Germans had killed out.

We traveled to the Land of Israel by way of Italy, where one of my three sons was born. Today, they are all fathers of children. They have followed in the footsteps of their father, and voluntarily joined the paratroops. Two of my sons took part on the Six Day War, and the Yom Kippur War.

Tel-Hanan

In the Hell of Belzec

By Ephraim Farber

During the period of the Hitler occupation, until the end of 1941, Belzec (the district of Tomaszow Lubelski) was a labor camp; in the years 1942-1943 – an extermination camp. Approximately 800,000 people were exterminated here, largely Jews – from Poland and other countries. Most of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn were killed in Belzec.

The following portrayal is from the time that Belzec was a labor camp.

Late in the summer of 1940. When I returned from German imprisonment to Szczebrzeszyn, the *shtetl* was not recognizable. Germans from all manner of formations circulated in the streets. Gendarmes had appropriated the city hall building. The Jews, who had not left the *shtetl* along with the withdrawing Russians, waited for the luck of the draw and the graces of the Germans.

Older Jews comforted themselves and others with the fact that the Germans were a cultured people. A portion yet remembered the Germans from the First World War as fine men. In order to comfort themselves, they forgot that in the interim years, dramatic changes had taken place on the world political scene: In Germany, Hitlerism had come into power, and among the political programs was a war against the Jewish people.

From the outset, all manner of decrees arrived, such as being impressed for forced labor, imposing demands on the *Judenrat* for large sums of money as contributions. Poverty reigned among Jewish families. Many families got separated. Most of the men found themselves on the Russian side. Women and small children had to concern themselves with making a living. Anti-Semitic decrees were implemented with German thoroughness. Bearded Jews that remained in the *shtetl* had to tie up their beards in rags, as if they were suffering from a toothache, believing that, in this fashion, they would protect themselves against the German beasts.

The Activities of the *Judenrat*

In the short time that I was in the *shtetl*, events came cascading one after another. A day did not go by, that some demand was not levied against the Jewish populace. The *Judenrat* stood by to assist the Germans, whether willingly or unwillingly, helped to carry out the German decrees against the Jews. The lot of the *Judenrat* was not easy, for those who were filled with concern for the suffering of their brethren.

In the *Judenrat,* there were members who put their own lives on the line for their brethren, but there were also those who believed, that to save themselves, and their families, the price was to fulfil everything that the German murderers ordered to be done. Part of the members, exercised their own initiative, and carried out the bestial orders against their own suffering brethren with great enthusiasm.

I remember the instance when the *Judenrat,* at the order of the Germans, were required to present 300 young men to be sent to Belzec. The Chairman of the *Judenrat,* a respectable Jew, one who observed the commandments, met me then in the street, and described the order to me. I answered him: – I am not presenting myself voluntarily in response to the German orders! So he said to me in the following language: – 'You will not act like a wise guy toward me! I will send the Gestapo to you!' (I do not wish to mention his name, because his relatives live in Israel).

I was left standing stunned, and could not believe that my ears were hearing this. I thought that this was a bad dream. Regrettably, this was reality. When I came around from the shock, I replied: – 'Whirlwind and woe unto you when the Gestapo takes itself to you. I know the Gestapo for a while already!'

The First Decrees

This was a short time after I had returned from imprisonment. The synagogue stood burned down, the walls were black from the fire. The old walls, which in the course of centuries, had absorbed Jewish prayers, stretched out to the sky, with the wind, blowing through the open windows. But heaven was locked to Jewish prayers. Not even the tears of mothers, whose only sons were taken away into the camps, had any impact on the heavens. On the contrary, the murderers looked on this with sport. On their harnesses were written with large letters: 'God Is With Us.'

The Rabbi of the *shtetl* went about with his beard bound up in order 'not to incite' the Germans. Stealthily, and one at a time, Jews, on the Sabbath, would come together in private houses for a *minyan*. Just as their brethren in Spain did in the time of Torquemada. The Jewish populace was forbidden to go out onto the streets from 6 PM until 7 AM in the morning. Places of business were half-opened: one door was closed, the second – half-open. The Gestapo constantly levied tribute requirements on the *Judenrat*, whether in the form of money, or merchandise. The Jewish residents were compelled to present themselves for all manner of work, for which the Germans did not pay.

I remember that the Germans discovered an old Polish flag in the booth of 'Tall Shlomo' which used to be hung out on Polish national holidays and the owners had forgotten to hide it. This gave Germans an excuse to arrest Jews, who happened to be found in 'Tall Shlomo's' booth, along with the owners. After extensive negotiations by the *Judenrat*, with the payment of large sums of money, those who had been arrested and beaten, were set free.

Gestapo staff arrived from Zamość with Jewish assistants, who led them to wealthy Jewish homes, and demanded that gold be turned over. A panic ensued in the *shtetl.* Germans were apprehending Jews, whichever ones came into their hands.

I flee along with another couple of young people from the city, and we hide out in peat meadows, where the Germans can't come to. The swampy meadows were familiar to me, from my earliest youth. We are lying under low-hanging bushes, between the village of Blonie and Brody Male . After noontime, when hunger began to gnaw at us, I, along with one of my companions took off in the direction of the *shtetl*, because after the forbidden hour, one was not allowed to show one's self in the street. Most of the Poles had become accomplices to the Germans in their agenda against the Jews. They learned the word, '*Jude*' quickly. Jews were simply grabbed for labor, whether the work was necessary or not, in order not to give them a free moment in their sorrowful lives.

The Germans fed the Jews a steady diet of decrees in order to break their will, and to drive them into apathy, a condition in which a person is not inclined to think rationally, an apathy that robs you of the will to put up any resistance. Placards were affixed in the streets for the entire Szczebrzeszyn populace: Tomorrow, from earliest on, into the evening, it is strongly forbidden to appear in the streets. The reason: the Governor General

Hans Frank[47] is traveling through the *shtetl.*

We Get Inured

A host of homeless Jews, who were evacuated from Pomerania and also from Bilgoraj, which had been put to the torch, became a burden to the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn. Yesterday, they were their own bosses, and today, they are loitering about the yards of strangers, homeless, no roof over their heads, and degraded. Everything is done for them, sharing domicile with them. Food is provided for those who are needy. A portion of the evacuated families consisted of women with small children, because a part of the men were taken away into the camps.

It takes a while, but we get used to the tribulations. Desire takes on sanctioned forms. Eventually, the Nuremberg Decrees are implemented. But not often: it is done quietly. All demands against the Jews are handed over from one Jew to the next: Jews are not allowed to engage in trade, not allowed to buy, to sell, not allowed to assume any public positions, not allowed to leave the city, they have to wear a yellow badge. Eventually, one became used to even this. In this bitterness, one felt that this is not yet the worst: worse can still come, and everyone was afraid.

Germans identified Jews not only by their armband or their documents, but simply as '*Jude.*' – '*Du bist Jude.*' This underscored for them that he is worthless in every respect. The Germans joke: On the Sabbath, they grab a Jew by the beard, shout: '*Mitze ab!*' They order him to kneel. A soldier goes along, who is carrying an open box of 'kielbasa,' and they force the Jew to eat the unkosher sausage. Officers stand about with photography equipment and take pictures. They order the Jew to carry the box of kielbasa into the marketplace, where they have their canteen. The soldier goes ahead, smiling. He orders the Jew, every few steps, to put the box down on the ground, kneel down, with a bare head, and to pray to the Jewish God.

However, this 'humor' was child's play in comparison with the acts of predation that followed, which were visited upon the Jews.

'Good Jews,' we learn how to act towards the Germans. My father's uncle, Zalman Kliski, who temporarily took me in, asked me to put on the yellow badge of shame, and not to be an exception. During the time that I was in the *shtetl,* the yellow badge lay in my wallet. I was offended and felt degraded by wearing this badge of shame. I would put it on only in exceptional circumstances.

Another person who was concerned that I should be 'ordinary' and should be registered at the municipal building, was a member of the *Judenrat,* because the Germans demanded registration. This gave them an accurate count of the Jewish population – how many victims were at their disposition: everything with German thoroughness. In the end, I decided that I cannot be an exception from the general [public], and I went to register.

On a Saturday morning, I went into the official Leszczynski to register myself. When he heard that I had taken

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47 Hans Frank was one of Hitler's top lieutenants, Governor-General of occupied Poland. A war criminal and a mass murderer, who was executed in Nuremberg for his presiding over the extermination of Poles and Jews.

part in the war as a Polish soldier, he advised me not to register. He praised my father highly, who had not cooperated, like other '*Zydki*,' with the Bolsheviks, who were in the *shtetl* for a short while. He said to me: – Do the Germans miss you, that they will notice that you are gone?' I thanked him for his good advice.

Descending the steps, I met the member of the *Judenrat*. He asked me if I had registered. When I answered him affirmatively with a smile, he understood this to be 'no.' Then Leszczynski called me back and said, that I must register, because the member of the *Judenrat* forced him to. The Germans had loyal servants in the *Judenrat*.

Torn Out of the Home

One could never know what could come into the mind of a crazy commandant, or some other crazy German. The *Judenrat* received an order to provide 300 young people for a transport to Belzec and began to diligently carry out the order. It didn't work out for them, because a larger part didn't want to go, knowing what awaited them.

The gathering place was in front of the municipal building. I observed the gathering place from very early in the morning from windows of the residence of my uncle Moshe Ledereich (Turbiner). The streets were empty. Only the *Judenrat* and the SS troops were there, and the Jews that had been assembled, who sat in front of the municipal building with their packages. The SS counted the assembled Jews. It appeared that half were missing of the required number. So, they began to beat the members of the *Judenrat*, ordering them to kneel. The curses of the SS echoed off the empty streets of the *shtetl*.

The SS, along with the *Judenrat* then went through the houses, with the direction by the *Judenrat*, to seize those who had not appeared. The picture in front of the municipal building was frightful. Jewish mothers poured out tears when the Germans did not permit them to approach their dearest. The Poles were gleeful that the '*Zydki*' were being tortured. The pious among them said: they are being repaid in this manner for the suffering of the beloved Jesus Christ.

I could not remain any longer, and I sneaked out of the city. I hid myself in the swampy meadows, where the Germans could not approach. Lying hidden, I espied a black mass after the noon hour, moving on the way to the train station. From time to time, I heard shots. This was the Germans, leading our dear ones to the train station on the way to Belzec.

I Take to the Road

It made no sense to remain in the *shtetl* for any longer, because from day to day the situation grew worse. My goal was to reach Tarnogrod. Not far from there, was a new border between the Germans and the Soviets. My march route was indirect, because the direct roads were full of Germans. In Bilgoraj, I spent the night with a Jewish family. Few Jews remained there. Most of the city had been consumed by fire.

After a day of marching on foot, I arrived in Tarnogrod in the evening. There I met a few people from Szczebrzeszyn, such as, 'Zalel of the butchers. The impression was that the shtetl was calm. Towards evening, I noticed a significant movement of Germans, who entered in transport trucks. This elicited a thought from me, that an *aktion* was being prepared.

My premonition did not deceive me. After midnight, I heard hard blows of rifle butts against the door, mixed

with wild shouting: *Auf!* An elderly Jew with whom I was spending the night, descended from his bed, and opened the door. SS troops entered with shouts and abusive language. They beat him murderously, and took him outside.

I was sleeping on the floor. The SS soldiers shone flashlights in my eyes, asking how old I was. Not thinking very long, I answered: – 14 years. One of the SS then said: The swine is still too young. The same happened with the son of the home owner, who actually was 13 years old. The SS troops left the house and I thought that I had been given the opportunity to avoid falling into their hands.

Captured

Regrettably, I made a mistake. A half hour later, I again heard the shouts of the Germans. The homeowner had said something in his Tarnogrod-accented Yiddish that the SS troops barely understood, about a document, that he had forgotten in the house. The SS staff – apparently other ones, not the previous ones – came over to me, and again asked how old I was. When I answered: 15 years, a hail of blows descended on me, and I heard their bellowing: – 'Get up quickly, you disgusting Jew!' In order to avoid further blows, I grabbed my clothing under my arm, and went out of the house as quickly as possible. It was dark outside. On the other side of the door, an SS trooper hit me in the face with his automatic rifle butt, in the teeth. Blood ran from my mouth.

I was thrown in with a group of Jews that had been dragged from the houses. In the night darkness, the shouting of the Germans could be heard, and the barking of dogs. From time to time, shots cut through the air.

Outside the city, in a training mill, the Germans concentrated all of the Jews in the *shtetl* that had been apprehended on that night. The mill was surrounded by a chain of gendarmes and Ukrainian police. It was not possible to flee. In the distance, women and children stood with packages of food, that they wanted to hand over to their nearest. The Ukrainian watchmen beat them murderously, and did not permit them to approach the fence. They kept on bringing Jews, who were not fortunate enough to escape. The *shtetl* was hermetically sealed with heavy watch by the *Wehrmacht* and the SS.

When the apprehension ended, a gendarme officer appeared. He ascended the hillock in the yard, and held forth with a speech in the Hitlerist mode: – 'You Jews have never worked, only engaging in devious behavior. You are coming to Belzec to work. You will be paid well, and you will eat well.' Many of the Jews cried out enthusiastically: – 'Long Live the Commandant!' It is sorrowful that a large part of our people wanted to believe the lies from the Germans.

After the speech, a German committee sat down at a small table, which consisted of members of the Gestapo with the head central man from Bilgoraj. Everyone had to pass by this so-called committee. They asked age. There was no medical examination, and the 'committee' did not let anyone go. Those who were most seriously ill, who complained of all manner of maladies, were shouted at and ordered to 'shut your mouth.'

To the Unknown Fate

The seized Jews of Tarnogrod arrayed themselves – at the order of the Germans, 6 to a row, the old and young intermingled. The columns marched through the *shtetl* to their unknown fate. Jews, who had inhabited this small *shtetl* for generations, now left it behind, not knowing if they will ever return. I marched along with all of them. The Germans kept on firing into the air – out of fear, and for courage. Poles stood on both sides of

the road, escorting their fellow residents, some with imprecation, some with lamentation. The relatives of the seized Jews: mothers, sisters, children, escorted their dearest, with tears in their eyes, on their unknown journey.

Outside the city, peasants waited from the nearby villages, with their wagons, to transport the Jews to Bilgoraj. The watch split up: after every third wagon – a wagon with two gendarmes, armed with automatic weapons. Some of the young people utilized moments when the gendarmerie was lagging behind, and the distance between the wagons was great, and attempted to flee. The wagon, in which I rode, was close to the wagon of the gendarmerie and attempting to flee would have met with certain failure.

At the small train station of Rapy we were loaded into small train cars – as many as could be put in. We all stood densely packed, one next to the other on each others' feet. The wagon cars were hermetically locked. Because of a lack of air, a number of people fainted. When we were unloaded in Zwierzyniec, the Germans ordered us to crawl on all fours. In this manner, they sought to sate their sadistic hearts with emotions of human misery. Exhausted and broken, we were compelled to sing and dance in order to entertain our escorts.

The evening took a long time to descend on God's world. We are sitting on the ground, near the train rails. The Polish railroad employees began to make sport of the '*zydkehs*.' This angered the Germans, and they said to us: What are these disgusting Poles happy about? Did they win the war? According to the simple logic of German thinking, only Germans were permitted to be glad... then the Germans ordered us to sing *'Jeszcze Polska nie zginela.*' We sang it with the paraphrase: '*Ale zginac musi...*' then all the Polish workers, who became embarrassed, went away.[48]

A shrill whistle cut through the air – a signal that we were moving. A sigh, full of pain, emerged from everyone's heart. Now, everyone felt that frightful pain of being torn out of their home. Religious Jews were reciting prayers for travel, as well as chapters from the Psalms; all the others listened attentively with a sense of respect for the Almighty. Entreaties are made to Him 'whose name we are not worthy of articulating' that He should help us. Young Christians stand along the road. They look up at the train windows, and move their hands across their throats...a fear grips everyone who saw that image.

The train stopped. We stopped breathing for a moment. Teeth began to chatter out of fear, like in a fever, and hearts beat more vigorously. The mass on the train waits with a deathlike anxiety for that which must arrive. Frightened faces look out of the small windows, tortured Jews from the people that has been sentenced to death. They are searching for a ray of light in the night darkness. Their hope is in vain, their searching. The wagons are, from time-to-time lit up by the German bandits. The time is after midnight. The whistle of the locomotive is heard, which is riding away.

"Anti-Panzer Ditches"

We had arrived in Belzec. The wagons were unlocked, and we were offloaded with blows. I made haste, and jumped off the wagon. In this manner, I managed to avoid a couple of blows to the head by a truncheon. This was the welcome, that the SS had prepared for the arriving detainees.

Day began to grow gray. The barbed wire appears along with the depot. In front of the kitchen, which is in the

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[48] This is the Polish National Anthem, whose first line translated is: 'Poland has not yet succumbed.' The paraphrase, meant to mock, says: 'But it has to perish.'

middle of the yard, tea is being distributed. Large masses are standing in rows, and a deathly silence reigns about us. A movement starts. – *'Stillstand, mitzen ab!'* Afterwards comes an order: '*Mitzen auf!*' The roll call is over.

Belzec is along the road from Tomaszow Lubelski to Lubycza Krolewska, on the principal train line Warsaw-Lemberg. The border ran through here before the First World War, that separated the two great empires: The Russian, and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchies. The small train station, far-flung from every larger center, was dreamily located between pine forests, surrounded by many villages. The location was suitable for curative purposes. In the year 1940, the Russian-German border ran by approximately 600 meters from the Belzec train station.

At the time of my arrival, Belzec was a labor camp. The work consisted of digging 'anti-Panzer ditches' 3 meters deep, along the Belzec frontier. On the German side, there was a mild depression with a buttressed rampart; on the Russian side – a sharp wall. For this purpose, the murderers brought tens of thousands of Jews from the entire 'General Gouvernment'; In the summer of 1940 – about 300 Jews from Szczebrzeszyn.

What was the purpose of these ditches? Were the murderers preparing for defense? They spread rumors that they were fortifying themselves against the Russians. At the same time, the secret plan 'Barbarossa' lay completed in Hitler's *Reichskanzlerei* – the attack against Russia. Were the Germans already preparing mass graves or their victims? – a short time later, these ditches were utilized for this purpose. The 'anti-Panzer ditches' served as the mass graves for Jews and among them, Jews from Szczebrzeszyn.

"Productivity" by German Standards

The depot, where I was, consisted of an old building, which had been transformed into a barracks. Rail lines ran through the middle of the *Halyeh*. We, the detainees, called this building '*Parowozownia.*[49]' Three tiered bunks filled the *Halyeh*. The open yard was surrounded by barbed wire. In the yard was a huge basin for water. On the second side of the road, the second side of the camp opened up – the mill. The highway, that led from Tomaszow Lubelski to Rawa Ruska, divided the camp into two parts. Most of the people from Szczebrzeszyn found themselves in the mill. In the '*Parowozownia,*' among the people from Szczebrzeszyn were: Mottl'eh Shokhet, David 'Leb,' Baruch Fink, 'The Menaker[50],' 'Zaler Beitcher (Big 'Zaler), Ephraim 'Bazhak' and I.

On the same day of my arrival in Belzec, the sadist and murderer from Lipowa [Gasse] 7 in Lublin (an entrepot-camp for the SS), SS Obersturmbannführer Dolps[51], came riding in on a white horse. The white horse was given to him by the *Judenrat* of Lublin. His face was as if frozen, the stares – unmoving, like a statue, not moving in any direction. He scanned the newly arrived victims, and with his degenerate mind gave orders about

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49 The locomotive stop.

50 A 'Menaker' was a Shokhet-specialist, who removed the veins and tendons from the hindquarters of slaughtered animals, so those hindquarters would be ritually fit for consumption.

51 In *Pinkas Zamość*, Memek Garfinkel, himself the reviled leader of the Zamość *Judenrat*, said the following about this German officer: *The commandant and leader of the camp was the familiar Sturmbannführer of the Lublin District, Dolps. To call him a beast in human form, would be a gross insult to beasts.*

torturing the unfortunate.

Lublin Jewry had already had the misfortune of previously having made the acquaintance of this beast in human form, from his activity on Lipowa [Gasse] 7. Among his 'beneficial deeds,' is included the shooting of those Jews 'set free,' those prisoners of war, who at his order in the winter of 1940, were driven from Lublin to Biala Podlaska and stained the road along the way with their blood. Most of the Jewish prisoners, who were on that march, were shot at his order.

Under the order of this beast in human form, the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn had to be 'made productive,' as the German executioners called the torture meted out in the camps. The assistants to Doles were: Burdock, SS divisions, and *Volksdeutsche*. We called Bedeck '*Bokser*' – with the build of a colossus, a large head with a broad face. His two fists were ready at any minute to knock out teeth. He did not know how to speak; his fists were for him part of the German language.

We called the *Volksdeutsche*, the so-called *'Sonderdienst,'* '*die shvartse*' – after their black uniforms. This [group] was a mixture of Slavic bandit's blood and German cruelty, which we felt very well in our bones. All the highways and byways leading to Belzec were soaked with rivers of the blood and tears of Jewish detainees from all of Poland.

The residents of Szczebrzeszyn in Belzec, during the entire time they were in the camp, kept themselves active, and comradely with everyone. We shared the last of our bread with the hungry.

The Dance of Death

We would leave for work by moonlight, accompanied by beating and verbal abuse. We also suffered from disease, from hunger, from lice. At night, on the hard beds, in the stench of filth, it was not possible to rest our weary bones after a hard day's labor. Shootings took place in the middle of the night.

During my time, there were about 300 gypsies in the camp, with their families. The SS troops would take the young gypsies out of the tents in the middle of the night, force them to strip off their clothes until they were naked and lead them to take a bath in the basin. Drunken SS troops would, by the light of the moon, carried on a spectacle with them. Wild orgies with cannibals with wild laughter cut through the silence of the night. – Tortured to the utmost from a full day of work, dead-tired, we were unable to rest ourselves appropriately because of the orgies.

A Jew from Lublin lost his mind from these depraved activities. To him, the barbed wire seemed to have disappeared, the SS, the entire camp with its sorrowful activities. In his mind, no danger existed. On a certain day, he took himself to the barbed wire, when a murderous bullet stopped him on his way.

The dead body of the person who was shot was laid out in the yard, next to the basin, as a way of frightening those who might contemplate escaping. On a specific night, the guard who stood at the entrance gate, took out Hirsch Greenberg (Retter) with another young man, and ordered them to pick up the corpse from the ground, take him by the hands and dance with him...

'When Do We Finally Get Rid of You!'

It is autumn. We, columns of slaves – accompanied by shouts, imprecations, and shots into the air – apply ourselves to the labor in the rain, and the feet are sinking into the clay-like mud. When one of the marchers pauses, the SS troops shoot him. It was on such a rainy day, that I went in the same row as the 'Menaker' and Mottl'eh Shokhet. *Obersturmbannführer* Dolps appeared on his white horse, and stopped beside us. He ordered my two companions to step out of line. – Jews must be happy – he shouted out, and ordered them to sing.

They sang a melody for the murderer with a Cantorial refrain: 'Woe, woe, you enemy of Israel, when do we finally get rid of you!' This melody echoed in the wet forest. The tortured Jews sang with heart and soul. In the process, they closed their eyes. It was as if they wanted to separate themselves from the impurity that stood near them.

To everyone's regret, the murderer Dolps shouted out: – 'Jew, well sung!' He then ordered Mottl'eh Shokhet to sing something by himself. Out of fear, Mottl'eh could not summon any melody. Dolps' eyes became red with blood. He yanked the horse in Mottl'eh's direction, wanting to trample him under the horse's hooves. He hit him with his riding crop until he drew blood, cursing him with substantive curses, yanked on the horse and vanished.

In times of anger, Dolps would pull out his truncheon and beat his own dog. When this did not assuage his murderous blood, he would hit a tree in the forest until if finally fell for lack of support. He would also satisfy his sadistic lust with the following game: he would put bottles on the heads of Jews, with water [in them], and from a distance, he would fire at them with his pistol. How many instances of the fear of death, did these suffering victims live through! It was not only once that instead of a split bottle of water – there was a smashed Jewish head.

Among his sadistic pleasures, he would incarcerate prisoners in the cellar of his house and give them no food. Only thanks to his wife, who under the strictest secrecy, would pass bread and water to those crammed into the cellar, did some of them come out of there alive.

A Means to Meet

From time to time I would visit the Szczebrzeszyn natives who were found in the mill. One time, in the evening, I helped drag the field kitchen from the '*Parowozownia*' to the mill – the one possibility that enabled us to meet. In the mill, I talked through with my townsfolk whatever we had to say. I made a decision to spend the night in their camp. When all those who had dragged the kitchen were preparing to return, the oldest of the group, seeing that one was missing, immediately reported this ti the SS. He did not need to report this, because nobody was counting the people.

Under the best of circumstances, I could no longer go back. Now, a game for life or death began. The SS immediately ordered a roll call. The reflectors were turned on, and an order was issued to fall out into rows, according to city and town, each group separately. Through the interpreter, the SS communicated: – The *shtetl* that does not turn over the extra man, will have 10 men shot from that group.

I stood myself with the group from Szczebrzeszyn. Not one of them objected. When the SS inquired whether everything was in order, the answer was: yes. The entire group stood and trembled as one, with taut nerves. When the SS performed their examination, and did not find the 'offender' that all of the groups had to pass by

the bloodthirsty *Obersturmbannführer* Dolps.

When my row came, I passed by the committee with forced confidence, illuminated by blinding light, when life or death lay on the scales of fate. When the person who was supposed to do the identification , when asked by the SS : –'is this the dog?' answered 'not him,' I felt that my life had been given to me as a gift.

Incomprehensible Acts of Cruelty

Apart from our two camps, Belzec was a complex of camps, which covered a significantly large area. The labor camps in the forests were sealed off, encircled with barbed wire and guarded by armed SS troops. When someone attempted to leave, he was shot on the spot. Young Jewish people were working in all areas of the camp – naked, barefoot, hungry, exhausted, half-skeletons.

In Belzec the acts of cruelty exceeded those in Auschwitz. On a daily basis, Jews were taken to dig out small deep pits and then forcing a man into it. Then, each of the prisoners were forced to evacuate their bowels on the pit, over the victims head. If someone refused to do this, he got 30 lashes with a cane. People evacuated themselves on the unfortunate victim for the entire day, until he was asphyxiated by the stench.

It is difficult to imaging the German acts of cruelty. Every Sunday, the SS brought cartons with old tomatoes and carrots. One at a time, they threw this into the place where the gypsies were concentrated. Hundreds of gypsies would throw themselves at a single tomato, and fights broke out because of this. The gypsies tore the hair out of their own heads; the gypsies hit each other with their fists; the children bit each other with their teeth. The screams penetrated to the heart of heaven. – And this gave the Germans pleasure.

Because of the inadequate diet, a large part of the young people from Szczebrzeszyn suffered from dysentery. From the prevailing filth, a larger part of them contracted skin eruptions (*'swiezb'*).

Over the Russian Border

It is autumn. It rains continuously. The forest that we pass on the way to work, is enveloped in a fog and one can see for only a short distance. On the second side of the barbed wire are the Soviets. We see the Russian side like in a dream: there Jews are not tortured... from time to time, shots are heard, with shouting: *'stoi!'* which reaches us. Every time, going by close to the border, I see the second side like a bright ray in the darkness. With impatience, I waited for the day when the people from Szczebrzeszyn will be liberated from the camp. It has been a long time that the *Judenrat* has been negotiating with the SS about this matter, wanting to buy our group out.

My plan was, that when the people from Szczebrzeszyn would leave Belzec, I will flee across the border. The day for putting my plan into action came. The catalyst to do this was given by the occasion when an SS trooper caught me telling stories to a group of Jews, with whom I worked. He loaded his weapon, and I thought that these were the last minutes of my life. Then, the SS trooper said to me: – 'Shut your mouth, you swine. If this happens once more, you will be immediately shot!' I answered him, that it will not happen a second time.

I decided to escape. On the evening of this event, I provided myself with bread, sugar, cigarettes, for the unknown journey that stood before me. At night, I no longer was able to sleep. With my comrade in this suffering, Beryl Zinger, who came from Piotrokow Trybunalski, I reviewed the final details of our plan to

escape.

In the day, after a sleepless night, when we went out to work, we waited for that longed-for moment, when the SS troops will be a bit distracted in looking in a different direction. That moment arrived, and we cast away the spades, and began to run quickly. When the SS took note of this, we were among the thickness of the barbed wire. Wounded, and with torn trousers, we freed ourselves from Belzec. We went off to the unknown, to the east.

*

Page 245: *The Survivors in Wroclaw After the War*

After years of destruction and extermination, it again became still in Belzec. Only part of the time, does one hear the sound of the peasant's iron plow in the detritus of our nearest, who were exterminated in the hell of Belzec.

My blood freezes within me to this day, when I hear the word Belzec. The earth of Belzec had forever ingested and covered the largest part of the martyrs from our unforgettable *shtetl*, with many from other cities and towns in Diaspora Poland.

Kiryat-Yam

In A Silent Weeping

By Sholom Stern

Elul, dear and beloved!
My footfall resounds
Between empty houses
With windows burst.

Elul, haunting and beloved,
To your heavens that are blue
Crows, from graves of ashes
Hungrily cackle.

Elul, sad and beloved
Tense and fevered
In the desert-like land.
And in the *shtetl* of desolation and emptiness
The earth turns to sand
And no one any longer sees in my eye
The tear swimming.

Elul, a silent heaven, lost in thought,
Swims across the earth that has been stabbed with thorns.
And in the pre-dawn twilight
To *Selikhot*, no longer rush
Any craftsmen, any storekeepers.

Only a peasant woman carries
From the babbling brook
Clear water in a full pail.

Elul haunting and beloved,
Around the brook that glistens
With the golden flecks of the sun
Peasant houses, village meadows,
With the odor of haystacks.
Only the rural desolation, that stretches far,
Ignites the sorrow in my eyes.

On the threshold and wall
The wild grass of the forest extends.
And my shadow is enveloped in a fog
Shuddering in the dimness
Of the little *Bet HaMedrash*.

Elul, sorrowful and beloved,
In the desecrated graves
For the dug up garden of the cemetery
Split open containers are strewn about
And from under sand and wire
Exposed skull fragments stick out.

Desolate and silent
Around and around.
There is nowhere to rush to.
Burned to the foundation
The *Schul* with the white columns
And walls covered in paintings.

Desolate and silent
Around and around.
Rotted kerchiefs.
Bloodied handkerchiefs.
The wind climbs through the desolation
And rustles the torn pages from prayer books and other volumes.

Silenced, is the joy
Of the swarm of children.
Parchment from Torah scrolls,
Copper capsules from menorahs
Turn yellow and rust
Under the silent, autumn sky.

Elul silent and beloved,
The shtetl of empty houses
Guards the deep thorn-covered graves.
Desolate and empty.
And no one any longer sees in my eye
The tear swimming.

The threshold ripped off.
The wrecked wall.
Under my tread
It turns to sand
The desert-like land.

Autumn

The windows are assaulted with darkness.
Heavy, autumn rains pound.
On the walls, there are swaying shadows.
The sad-plaintiff sound of the intonation of *Gemara* study
Shudders out of the cracks in the *Bet HaMedrash*.
What is the point!
To hide Jewish trust in these pages.

From the poor labor-union
The songs of struggle sing out
From the heroic labor-brethren.
What is the wonder?
The song of freedom spread out
Among simple hearts of the children of the common people.

The shadows show
Pictures of horror.
How can the hand of a human being,
Create such a great atrocity–
Be the perpetrator?
In the sorrowful autumn, in the cold,
They are driven to the old *Bet HaMedrash*.
Hands broken, heads split open.
Warm blood drips.
The Nazi-murderer is glad in his heart.

The boys and girls
From the library and the labor unions,
Always the first to appear in a struggle.
Their decent visages,
The enchanting Jewish gracefulness,
This poor, weakened shtetl,
They grace,
They are the ones who go, a measure bloodied
To the killing valley.
They go and weep –
Autumn, the windows are assaulted with darkness.
Wailing, heavy rains pound down.

Aleph-Bet

The *Schulhof* is burned,
The field and the grass.
It is, my child, already midnight.
Until the greening dawn,
Listen attentively, repeat after me, each letter:
My one remaining one, my firstborn,
You are not the last of your generation.
Say with assurance, with a high, resonating tone:
Our blood will not be left silenced.
God is with us, the enemies will fall like flies.
We arose together, and we will be victorious.

Listen carefully, and take in
The pure melody
Of that beautiful *aleph-bet.*
See how the letter light some beautifully.
They burn with our blood and suffering.

Say the *aleph-bet* for me.
Each letter pure, white.
Each dot has a meaning –
A comforting appearance.
You are a little boy, young and small.
You are preparing yourself to be a Jew.
Our Torah, whole and pure.
Stand fearlessly before death.
Rehearse, sing the melody again: *Aleph.*
God's word – a flashing reed.
Holam Bet – B, and after that an *Aleph*, makes *Bo.*
Komatz Yud – Y, *Holam Bet* – B, after that an *Aleph*, makes *Yavo*
Through your mouth, child of mine, God's word is like a dripping dew.
Holam Yud – *Yo*, after than a *Mem*, makes *Yom.*
Sanctify the Name each and every day.
Repeat yet again, anew:
Israel is a strong tree.
Bo Yavo Yom,
Rome will be destroyed.
God will eradicate Berlin like Sodom.
God has already carved out the retribution
On the black edges of the heavens.

Deep-night.
God watches over Jacob's tent.
God's ire has split open,
God has trodden out to give battle to our enemies.
Believe, you will grow large.

No one can burn down the House of Israel.
See the Halutz with the Blue-White flag,
Do to the murderers as he does.
Rise up
Little boy,
Filled with vengeance
And pay the murderers:
Tooth for tooth,
Eye for eye,
Hand for hand,

For the Jews who were killed
Behind the ghetto wall.
Draw yourself nigh,
Apply yourself to it,
Engage yourself
Little boy.
You are no longer alone.

You know the entire *aleph-bet* by heart.
You are a Jew already, know it, know.
Praise the Lord,
I have lived long enough to learn Torah with you.
Wash your little hands, as if to 'raise thy hands,'
With a radiant face, bid the remaining Jews
Sholom Aleichem.

The dawn has greened.
The first shot has thundered out.
The first bloody letter has sung out:
Aleph-bet – for the Jews who did not live for a *Bet*
Aleph – God's word over the enemies, a flashing reed.

Elyeh Meir

A

The hands behind him,
Bent to the thigh,
Murmurs quietly this way in the *shtibl*
Elyeh Meir, the Village itinerant:
God, you people are a frightened community.
Mother and child – both slaughtered on the same day.
Constantly with the packs
Trekking to strangers.
Always on the head
Ashes and sackcloth.
Fear and pain in other lands.
To where do you drive us, and to what purposes? – –

Blind Pinchas lies there
On the long table, like on an altar.
And he groans '*LaMenatzayakh*' from the Psalms.
Hunger smells bread on the air.
His face grows pale, quiet, soft.
The river washes clearly by the gardens.

B

From the smoking stable, horse and wagon
Lament the desolate destruction.
With bedding, Torah scrolls and volumes of *Gemara*
Lying on the cemetery
A half a shtetl is hidden.
The day grows dim between the spaces of the trees.
Behind gravestones –
Trembling in every body part.

The high grasses by the grave of the Messiah
Do not conceal the living, pleading bags of bones.
Nazis pursue, abuse, shoot.
Jewish blood is spilled over the streets – –
The hands behind him, Bent to the thigh,
Murmurs quietly this way in the *shtibl*
Elyeh Meir, the Village itinerant:
I am ready for death.
Let the tyrants, as with Rabbi Akiva,
Tear, with iron combs
My flesh, my skin –

In the severe contest,
There is the sharp ring of the metal of a knife,
An impact is heard against the door.
Elyeh Meir stares at the rifle, at the bloodied steel:
The valley of mud is full of Jews that have been killed.
God, pour thy wrath out on the murderers,
Take vengeance on the cruel ones,
For all the Jews, and my brother Ephraim.

The bayonet buries itself in him.
Frozen with pain, the world stands still...
The dripping blood soaks his skeleton.
Elyeh Meir, a complete sacrifice – whole and pure.
And the Holy Presence weeps in the destruction, in a silent weeping – – –

Montreal, Canada

The Torture and Extermination of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn

By Zygmunt Klukowski

(An Excerpt from a Diary of the Occupation Period)

From the Editors:

> These excerpts from a diary that we present here, were written in the time of the Hitlerist occupation from October 10, 1939 to March 23, 1943 by a Polish doctor in the shtetl of Szczebrzeszyn (the Lublin District), Zygmunt Klukowski.
>
> The diary, which gives a portrait of the extermination of the Szczebrzeszyn Jews by the German fascists and their hooligan conspirators, has the value of a [sic: primary] source, because it was written directly in the days of the extermination, and can therefore serve as material for further study about the annihilation of a Jewish-Polish shtetl during the time of the occupation.
>
> Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski's diary was written objectively. The writer does not modify the facts of conspiracy and collaboration on the part of the fascist-hooligan part of the Polish residents. However, he also supplies facts regarding incidents of self-sacrificial assistance, given by peasants for the harassed Jews. He accurately documents the German process of extermination, and he annotates also, facts regarding the Jewish participation in the partisan movement, from sabotage against Hitlerist residences, of passive resistance, etc.

13 October 1939.

... New orders were distributed. I record a number of important aspects from them:

"Men of the Mosaic faith between the ages of 15 and 60 years, must present themselves on 14 October at 8 o'clock in the morning, at the city hall, to do compulsory labor, taking brooms with them, to sweep the streets, pails and spades.

The residents of the Mosaic faith are required to transit the city from the day of the promulgation of these orders only during the hours from 6 in the morning to 18 (i.e. 6 in the evening). Their places of residence must be continuously accessi8ble for the security forces (the gendarmerie, and local organs of authority).

The Jews have hidden themselves in strongly hermetically sealed domiciles – one hardly sees any of them in the streets.

Translator's Note

The above sample from Dr. Klukowski's Diary is the first that is presented in the Szczebrzeszyn Yizkor Book. As indicated on page 290, this *Yiddish* excerpt was prepared by M. Melman. It is:

> Copied from *Bletter far Geshichte*, (Quarterly Edition), published by "The Yiddish Historical Institute in Poland," October-December 1951, Volume IV, Section 4, pp. 131-168.

We depart from a strict translation of the presented text, for the following reason:

The Szczebrzeszyn Yizkor Book was published in 1983, when an English translation of Dr. Klukowski's 'Diary' did not yet exist. Since that time, the family of Dr. Klukowski had arranged for his 'Diary' to be translated completely into English and published. In the interest of not duplicating work that is already accessible to the English reader, we have chosen to present English excerpts that have found their way into the public domain on the Internet. The following excerpts may be found at the following websites:

http://cla.calpoly.edu/~lcall/poland.html
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http://www.geocities.com/shebreshin/extermination.html

We reproduce these contents, put in chronological order, with the kind permission of Ibis Communications, Inc. and Tomasz Panczyk. Readers, interested in the full accounting by Dr. Klukowski, are referred to the following English sources:

Diary from the Years of Occupation
Zygmunt Klukowski
University of Illinois Press
Hardcover - March 1, 1993

Red Shadow: A Physician's Memoir of the Soviet Occupation of Eastern Poland, 1944-56
Zygmunt Klukowski, et al
McFarland & Co.,U.S.
Hardcover - July 24, 1997

Diary of a Polish Physician

Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski was the chief physician of a small hospital in the village of Szczebrzeszyn south of the city of Lublin. An enthusiastic diarist, the doctor daily chronicled the Nazi occupation as events unfolded outside the window of his residence at the hospital. Discovery of his observations would have meant instant death. He therefore carefully concealed his manuscripts often changing their hiding place during five years of Nazi occupation. His extraordinary diary was published in Poland in 1959 shortly before his death and subsequently translated into English.

October 11, 1939
The town is crowded with Germans. They are quartered in all the larger houses. Most of them are from Austria and some from Vienna. In general the Germans are trying to clean up the city. For this work they are using only Jews. Jews must sweep the streets, clean all the public latrines, and fill all the street trenches. Plastered everywhere are German notices giving an idea of what we can expect in the future.

We must return all arms. We must record all contagious diseases. The police curfew is from 10 P.M.

until 5:30 A.M. The restrictions applying to Jewish shops change from day to day. Sometimes the Jews are allowed to open their shops, and sometimes they are not. It seems that most of the orders are aimed at the Jews.

February 18, 1940
I met a woman, an official of the Zamoyski estate. She had just arrived from Chelmno. For some time I've been receiving alarming information about the execution of the mentally ill patients of the psychiatric ward at Chelmno Hospital. I asked her if this happened. She verified that it was true.

All the mentally ill were shot with machine guns, but under penalty of death the hospital personnel are forbidden to talk about this crime.

It is so hard to believe anything as terrible as this.

October 21, 1942
"Today I planned to try to go to Zamość again. I woke up very early to be ready, but around 6 A.M. I heard noise and through the window saw unusual movement. This was the beginning of the so-called German displacement of the Jews, in reality a liquidation of the entire Jewish population in Szczebrzeszyn.

"From early morning until late at night we witnessed indescribable events. Armed SS soldiers, gendarmes, and 'blue police' ran through the city looking for Jews. Jews were assembled in the marketplace. The Jews were taken from their houses, barns, cellars, attics, and other hiding places. Pistol and gun shots were heard throughout the entire day. Sometimes hand grenades were thrown into the cellars. Jews were beaten and kicked; it made no difference whether they were men, women, or small children.

"By 3 P.M. more than 900 Jews had been assembled. The Germans began moving them to the outskirts of the city. All had to walk except for members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish police; they were allowed to use horse-drawn wagons. The action didn't stop even after they were taken out of town. The Germans still carried on the search for Jews. It was posted that the penalty for hiding Jews is death, but for showing their hiding places special rewards will be given.

"All Jews will be shot. Between 400 and 500 have been killed. Poles were forced to begin digging graves in the Jewish cemetery. From information I received approximately 2,000 people are in hiding. The arrested Jews were loaded into a train at the railroad station to be moved to an unknown location.

"It was a terrifying day, I cannot describe everything that took place. You cannot imagine the barbarism of the Germans. I am completely broken and cannot seem to find myself.

"We received news of robberies increasing everywhere. During the last few weeks the incidence of rape has also increased. I have already examined many pregnancies. A few days ago the wife of a

well-known farmer and later a young schoolteacher came in for examination."

October 22, 1942
"The action against the Jews continues. The only difference is that the SS has moved out and the job is now in the hands of our local gendarmes and the 'blue police.' They received orders to kill all the Jews, and they are obeying them. At the Jewish cemetery huge trenches are being dug and Jews are being shot while lying in them. The most brutal were two gendarmes, Pryczing and Syring.

"The Jews that were moved yesterday out of Szczebrzeszyn were held at the Alwa plant. Around 9 P.M. another group of Jews from Zwierzyniec were brought in. Today around noon all were loaded into railroad cars, but by 4 P.M. the train had not moved. It is very cold and rainy. After the Jews were loaded into the cars, factory workers collected and brought to an assembly area money, gold, jewelry, and pearls.

"In town some of the Jewish houses were sealed by the gendarmes, but others were left completely open, so robberies took place. It is a shame to say it but some Polish people took part in that crime. Some people even helped the gendarmes look for hidden Jews. The Germans even killed small Jewish children. It is hard to describe.

"It is so terrible that it is almost impossible to comprehend. Legally the Jews don't exist in Szczebrzeszyn anymore, but still many Jews are in hiding. All will be killed sooner or later. I went to city hall today. The total number of Jews killed - they call them disabled - is unknown. Even the best specialists were exterminated. We can feel the shortage of good mechanics."

October 11, 1942
...We are shocked over execution of Lejzor Zero. He was our hospital butcher who over the last twenty years delivered meat to the hospital. He leased an orchard from me and was a part of hospital life. Lately he was officially employed at the hospital with a work card from the labor bureau. He was a wonderful man; everyone liked him. During the last few years he helped me and I helped his family. Every evening he would stop at my office with the latest news. This morning gendarme Syring called him to report to the gendarme station. Zero went without any hesitation because he delivered meat to the gendarmes. After half an hour he left the station with three gendarmes, and they stopped by the city jail to pick up another Jew, Tuchszneider. On a horse-drawn wagon, under escort, they were driven to Michalow, where in a small forest they were executed. Just yesterday I talked with Lejzor about the outcome of the war. He told me he thought the Germans had already lost the war, but he was not sure if we could survive. Everyone is very sad about his murder.

October 18, 1942
A few days ago the Germans finished off most of the Jews in Zamość. Only twenty or so good mechanics are left. The old people were shot and the younger ones transported to Izbica. The same thing happened in Turobin. I am sure that the same fate awaits the Jews in Szczebrzeszyn.

October 21 1942

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October 23, 1942

..... While I was gone, the Gestapo, local gendarmes, "blue police", and some street people in Szczebrzeszyn again started the hunt for Jews. Particularly active was Matysiak, a policeman from Sulow, and Skorzak, a city janitor. Skorzak had no gun, only an ax, and with the ax he killed several Jews. The whole day people hunted and killed Jews, while others brought corps to the cemetery for burial.

October 24, 1942

In Szczebrzeszyn the hunt for Jews is still on. Additional Gestapo agents came from Bilgoraj. With the help of gendarmes, "blue police", and some citizens they looked everywhere for Jews. All cellars, attics, and barns were searched. Most Jews were killed on the spot, but some were taken to the Jewish cemetery for public execution.

I witnessed a group of Jews being forced to march to the cemetery. On both sides of the prisoners marched gendarmes, "blue police", and so-called Polish guards dressed in black uniforms. To speed things up Jews were beaten on their heads and backs with wooden sticks. This was a terrible picture. Around noon the gestapo ordered that all men over the age of fifteen be ready by 2 P.M., with shovels, to start the burial for the Jews.

I went to gendarme post asking if hospital personnel would be excused from burial work. I was told that physicians would be but all other personnel must report.

Without interruption, Jews from nearby villages are being transported to the cemetery. The dead were brought by horse-drawn wagons.

March 2, 1943

"I was told about an occurrence in Jozefów. A young man, Konrad Bartoszewski, and officer of the Home Army known as 'Wir,' was arrested along with another officer, Hieronim Miac ('Kosarz'). Young Bartoszewski, the son of a veterinary doctor, was put in jail. But after a few hours people from the forest came and liberated both of them. After this happened a detachment of German gendarmes came to Jozefów and arrested the entire Bartoszewski family. The Germans assembled them near city hall, then in full view of thousands of people, the old veterinarian, his wife, and daughter were executed. Sixty more people were jailed.

"I was told by Mayor Kraus that during his visit to Bilgoraj he learned about a partisan raid in Huta Krzeszowska, where four policemen were killed and one was wounded in the head.

"In Szczebrzeszyn it was announced by the Germans that all traffic on the highway to Zwierzyniec will stop for three days because of military exercises in the nearby forest. People are now fearing new arrests and deportations to Germany."

March 20, 1943

"On Monday, March 15, during the late evening, between 7 P.M. and 8 P.M., a raid at Rapy took place. The lumber mill and railroad station were burned down. The car of *Treubander* Becker was shot at. In Rozaniec the new owner of a large farm, a German, was killed. The military barracks were burned down. In retaliation the Germans set the entire village of Rozaniec on fire. More than 800 people were arrested and taken to the barracks in Zwierzyniec, mostly women and children. There is talk of the possibility of freeing those jailed by armed action. We are sure the Germans will begin evacuation action against other villages very soon.

"The information from the Eastern Front does not give us too much hope for a quick end to the war. Tension is mounting, particularly among the young people."

Observation Concerning the Personality of Dr. Z. Klukowski

By Dwora Flajszer

We, 10 women, worked in the garden of the hospital in the year 1942, under the supervision of Dr. Klukowski, from 6 in the morning until 5 in the evening. We were not permitted to buy bread from Christians, and Jews, at that time, were not permitted to bake. We worked without pay, only to have a place of work, despite the fact that it gave no guarantee against being taken away at any minute from that location, by the Germans.

Dr. Klukowski, the Doctor-Historian, permitted us to work, not giving us even bread, during the time when the German murderers indeed did give bread and soup at work. Dr. Klukowski exploited our misfortune, and held us like slaves. When we finally waited for some greenery to grow in the garden, we literally stole a small carrot or a tomato and quickly consumed it, because we were being observed from the hospital windows. There was a sufficient amount of vegetables there; tomatoes alone grew on 800 bushes.

Do you know what it means to be hungry, and being forbidden to touch foodstuffs, working with it?...

Dr. Klukowski adopted Hitler's methods. In order to kill Jews, he degraded them, and this was worse than death.

We were not permitted to buy [produce] in the market. However, once in a while, before work, we would detain a Christian woman inside a gate, and quickly pay whatever she demanded, and even more quickly depart. One time, while going to work, we bought cucumbers and took them with us. When we went off to work, the hospital guard frisked us, and found the cucumbers. But he immediately saw that they were not from the hospital garden. Out of shame, that this had happened to us, we all began to cry. The guard excused himself

to us, and joined in crying with us... He pointed to the window, meaning that he was a descendant of the nobleman....

When I once came to ask about the condition of my husband, who lay in the hospital, Dr. Klukowski had me thrown out of the hospital corridor.

It was in this despicable manner, that he acted towards us.

Szczebrzeszyn Under the Hitler Occupation

By Dwora Flajszer

Page 291: *Author's Picture*

A shudder enveloped the entire *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn. Young and old, Christian and Jew, looked forward with sorrow and anxiety to the coming morning...

1 September 1939 – The cruel historical date when the war broke out with Hitler Germany. How overall, this news spread throughout our *shtetl* like a bolt of lightning.

Sanitary courses were begun to be created, even for Jewish women. We had barely been able to complete a few lectures, when airplanes already flew over our heads. Each and every person hid themselves where one could: in the orchards, gardens, meadows, villages.

8 September 1939 Shabbat. A large number of bombers came flying over, and they began to drop hundreds of bombs on this small *shtetl*. Immediately, we were face-to-face with the worst terror. There were many who were wounded that day, as well as victims [sic: killed]. On that same day, Yossel'eh Warman and his wife arrived, Shmuel Yankl Grant and a daughter of Benjamin Shmatcher.

The Torah Scrolls Burned by Our Own Hands

13 September 1939 Rosh Hashana. – The Germans entered. The first thing they did: They took Yekhezkiel Ehrlich, who worked in the soda-water factory, and under the threat of terror, they forced him to take out all of the Torah scrolls from the old, centuries-old existing synagogue, into the street, and burn them with his own hands.

This Jew, later told me, with bloodied tears, about his tribulations, his complicity. To this day, he cannot forgive himself for having done this.

Temporarily, the Germans held back from other actions, because... on the second day of Sukkot, the Soviets entered. We thought that salvation had arrived, and we were rescued from abuse and extermination. However, a few days went by, and suddenly we picked up the news through the radio, that the Soviets were pulling back from our shtetl, and the Hitler people were returning again.

At night, a large part of the Jewish populace abandoned the shtetl – some went away with the Russian military, and others who hid themselves outside of the town.

The Germans re-entered on the following morning, and immediately exhibited their blood-thirsty instinct. They grabbed people to do work, forced them to clean the streets, the garbage cans, and outhouses with their hands. Every day – screams of torture. Every day – human victims. During the day, it was compulsory to go to work, at night – one hid one's self where one could.

A Story Concerning a Ladder

26 September 1939. – In such a hiding place in an attic, Abraham Reichstein's son-in-law, going up into the

attic, wanted to take up the ladder. However, seeing an SS trooper below, out of fear, he let the ladder down on the German's hand, and injured him.

After this incident, an order was issued immediately, that Jews were not permitted to leave their homes. All of the Jews, men and women, were pursued like animals across the town, to the city hall, heavily guarded on all sides.

The lawyer, Popracki learned of this. He went off to the priest, Cieslicki and both went to the burgomaster Franczek. All three made their way to the German commandant, and declared to him, that the incident with the ladder was just an accident, and represented that such an incident will not happen again. The commandant went out to the people with a long speech, and warned, that if this ever happened again, or there was a similar incident, that every tenth Jew would be shot. Until the commandant appeared, the Rabbi, Yekhiel Blankman, and Shlomo Maimon had been beaten, among others.

30 October 1939. – The *shtetl* was made to tremble with fear from the news about the arrival of Gestapo staff, who ran about with a list of possible Jews. The beat murderously with a nickel truncheon from the *peitschen*[52] (a form of riding crop) under the heart, in such a manner, that the person immediately stopped talking. At that time they beat Baruch Schissel, Abraham Reichstein, and others.

That night, many people fled to the Soviet side of the border through the Green Line. My husband and son left at that time.

In October 1939, the Germans burned down the synagogue – – –

Refugees Arrive

Winter arrived. People grabbed rides on sleighs to Zamość. At one time, the following were detained at the agrarian school by the Gestapo command: Israel Popa, Yossel and Getzel Weinblatt (Zelig'l Fisher's son), Moshe Szpul's wife, Moshe Wolf, Miriam Zisser. Of all these, only Israel Popa came back, because he was taken for a Christian.

In December, on an intensely cold night, many wagons arrived from the train, with Jews that had been sent out of Greater Poland. Their cries reached the seventh heaven. Many of them were brought to the *Bet HaMedrash* in R' Mordechai Flajszer's yard. On the following morning, all of us – anyone who had the means – took in people. Later on, a kitchen was organized in the *Bet HaMedrash* for the homeless.

Several quiet months went by. A bit at a time, we took to the work. However, the conditions on the Soviet side became very bad: people slept in the train stations, and their was no means of sustenance. People began to return home, and along with many others, so did my husband. Thankfully, my son remained with my brother in Bialystok.

Trouble from the Members of the *Judenrat* and Poles

A *Judenrat* was created. Nobody wanted to become a member voluntarily. – – – They continuously caroused

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52 From the German word for a whip.

with the Hitler ranks, and compromised the Jews – – –

The Germans began to take Jews for road work and to Belzec – to dig open trenches. In order not to be sent away, everyone made an effort to get work at the airfield, near the sugar factory. My husband too, obtained work as a foreman of the qualified laborers. In order to ease the plight of the Jews, my husband also retained many people who were not qualified, whoever approached him. Because of this, he had to withstand a lot of trouble from the Judenrat, who wanted to profit from this as well by extorting money from the Jews.

There were other reasons why Jews wanted to work on the airfield. They wanted to have a Jewish overseer: it was also close to home; one received bread, soup, and a bit of produce.

Poles from the underworld aided the Germans to subvert and kill the Jews. They informed on Shimon Goldman, Hillel Eisen, and Leib'keleh Glejzer and his wife, indicating that they were communists. They were arrested and sent to Zamość. After two months, Shimon Goldman and Hillel Eisen returned, but Leib'keleh Glejzer and his wife were killed in prison.

The situation grew worse day by day. Stores and their contents were long ago confiscated from the Jews. It was only possible to conceal a small amount of merchandise with Christians: only a little at a time could be stealthily taken in order to sustain one's self. That is how time passed until 22 June 1941, when the war with Russia began.

For an entire month before that, we observed how the German military was on the move at night without a stop. The Jews became even further oppressed. It was forbidden to go to the village, and also forbidden to buy from the Christians in the town. For such an infraction, Itzik Mintzberg (my brother-in-law's boy) was sent off to Lublin to the well-known Lipowa Gasse 7, and from there, he never returned.

Driven Out of the Homes

At the time of the winter of 1941, each Jew was compelled to surrender whatever fur clothing he had. For not complying with this order, there was the threat of a death penalty. Because of one fur coat, that was found mortared between two walls, Chaim Maimon was taken away into the Zwierzyniec Forest, and Gershon Stadtfeld (Sholom Maimon's son-in-law) and they were killed there.

Jews were driven out of their homes, and all were concentrated in the side streets (*'hinterzoll'*). A small number of Jews remained living only on the Green *Gasse* where we lived, and in the marketplace near the church, and at the *treyf 'podcienie.'* The crowding, the inadequate nourishment, and also the bad clothing, brought the onset of the typhus disease.

Many people died at that time. Also, my husband became infected from the newcomers, who would come to the kitchen to eat. He could not bring himself not to help these unfortunates, and after two weeks of laying in the hospital, he died on 8 January 1942. Binem Rosenfeld died at the same time.

Two days after my calamity, I was also taken to the hospital. The doctors gave no hope for me as well. However, in order to suffer, one lives. I lay ill until Passover. By that time, it was forbidden to bake bread, not to mention matzos. A small ration was received on the basis of a card. At the risk of life, a couple of kilos of flour was procured from Christian bakers, and we baked by us stealthily at night.

Bad Tidings, Incidents of Atrocities

Before Passover 1942, we hear very bad news about the deportation of Jews from Lublin, and from all of the small towns. We anticipated with great fear, that this *aktion* would reach us as well.

The Rabbi, Yekhiel Blankman, at the risk of his life, along with a quorum of Jews, went to the grave of the Rabbi, Shlomo'leh and begged for mercy on behalf of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn. R' Shlomo'leh had left a will, that one was to come to his grave site, up to the tenth generation, when there should occur a time of great danger, and that he would intercede. It was the ninth generation. I do not know if a miracle occurred. However, the wagons were already standing at the train station. People walked about without spirit. Each person saw death before their eyes. And news arrived: the contingent for Szczebrzeszyn was already filled.

Our surcease did not last very long. Immediately after Passover, we heard that 'there is a list of 70 people.' I did not know if this also included women. However, I had a premonition that we would not be overlooked.

On a certain day, at 6 in the morning, we heard a disturbance. Through the window, I noted that the Bronsteins were being led away, the father with the son (the *Kozioner Rabbiner* with his son, the dentist). The thought occurred to me, that their house would no longer be approached, and I stole into Nathan Bronstein by way of Jurczykowski's orchard. Heartrending scenes took place there from both wives and children. I was immediately advised that I too, was being sought.

The murderers took away 13 persons: both Bronsteins, Baruch Leib'tcheh Weinberg, Moshe Aryeh Gelernter, Moshe'leh Fersht, Liebeh Itteh Berger, Shlomo Dyeless, etc. Shlomo Dyless fled, Liebeh Itteh Berger, Moshe Aryeh Gelernter and Moshe Fersht were shot near the City Hall. All the others were taken away to the Zwierzyniec Forest, and were killed there.

The following were also on the list: Abraham Finkel, Abraham Reichstein's wife, Baylah Berger, Esther Mantel, Heschel and Yitzhak Chaim Eisen, Itzeleh Fersht, Menachem Neitel, Shimon Reiss, David Sapir (my brother-in-law), and Saleh Danzinger. All of us hid ourselves. The Polish police took large sums of money to remain silent, but despite this, it was necessary to conceal one's self. I slept for four months in a small attic, with two other persons, in our wooden home.

Life, by that time, was consumed. People went around as if they were crazy, not knowing what to do with themselves. Everyone was tortured by the same thought: he must die. We had no rest, not by day and not by night.

Shootings began along the roads. In the sugar factory, it was already forbidden to enter, and one could only go to the airfield on a work card. Each individual had to create work for themselves. The unemployed were sent away. Half of the men and women of Szczebrzeszyn went to the Krasnobrod Forest, or to the train station each day to do work.

I, and 9 other women worked on the garden of the hospital. Among them: Hadass (Moshe Becker's daughter), Hadass (Leib Doctor's daughter), Tzivia Fersht and Rachel Szpul. We survived in the following manner: at night up in the attic, or in our hiding place, during the day on the garden – many times without a piece of bread.

The Poles exploited the Jewish workers severely. We were forced to work without any form of pay. It was as

if they were doing us a favor in providing us with something to do. Even Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski, the well-known doctor-historian, understood that Jews need to work without receiving any bread. The Poles looked upon us as slaves. We were abandoned, and had to withstand all manner of trouble and embarrassments...

The '*Aktionen*'

The first '*aktion*' took place at the time of *Shavuot* in 1942. The members of the Judenrat carried out the German orders, and seized people in order to have them sent to Belzec. Work cards offered no protection. 280 people were sent away at that time. On that day, many people were killed in Szczebrzeszyn. – – –

Every day we received gruesome news that the railroad employees brought to us: Every day, 5-6 trains filled with people, sealed with lead, pass through on their way to Belzec. Jews walked around in a state of agony, weakened, without any energy. Seeing that work offers no protection, they let their hands down, and forsook their work. There were also frightening incidents by those who worked.

A seizure of people took place in June 1942. 26 men were taken, among them: Herschel Ingber, Mordechai Frank, Baruch Frenkel, Yehoshua Glatman, Neta Shtibl, Chaim Neu. The Germans drove them in the bright of day, through the streets to the '*Wygon*' and killed them there.

Immediately afterwards, notification was given that Jews were not permitted to be in the village. The murderers shot Yankl and Etteh'leh Bricks in Deszkowice, Hadass (Moshe Bick's girl, who fled there to hide herself); also her uncle's family were killed there. Almost at the exact same time, Lejzor Zero and Leibusz Shimeleh's son Joseph (a hairdresser) were sent from Szczebrzeszyn to Michalow, and they were shot. People lost their minds. It was compulsory to go to work, and every day, new *aktionen* were anticipated.

A Hiding Place in the Attic

The word was out that it would become '*Judenrein.*' We saw no way out. What does one do with one's self? How does one vanish?

Every individual, in the still of the night (in order that the neighboring Poles would not take any notice) dug deep cellars, underground, under the garbage cans, or sought out hiding places in attics, well camouflaged. But all of the energy, and exertion, and everyone's cleverness, was of no avail. We envied the dead. An end came to our small number of Jews, who were cruelly put to death by the murderers.

This happened on 21 October 1942. Very early [sic: in the morning], we heard shooting. – – – I barely was able to enter the dwelling of Yisroel'keh Germanowicz. There no longer was anyone [living] there, only their little daughter Rachel'leh, 4 years old, who had been forgotten in the great rush. I took her to me, calmed her, and quickly entered the attic room. The mother of the child was there as well. We no longer wanted to show ourselves, in order to get into the hiding place that had been previously prepared in Germanowicz's house.

We lay for an entire day, in great fear. We heard how the houses were being demolished. The murderers ran about looking in every nook and cranny. They were by our little room a number of times. We heard the report of gunfire from all sides of the town, mingled with the cries of parents and with the weeping from the children, one could lose one's mind from listening to it.

I do not know what happened to my nearest in the final minutes. Baylah Berger, who lived together with me, was sick, and remained in bed. Reizl Berger tore herself out of the hands of the murderers and fled to the field, later to the forest. Previously, she had not wanted to hide herself with me, thinking that there was still time.

At night, I let myself down to my house, everything was demolished. The doors and windows were knocked out. I crawled on all fours in order that I not be noticed from the street. I took along a little bit of water and a small piece of bread and went up into the second hiding place, which was behind a separated wall in Germanowicz's house. We were 14 persons there. It was necessary to crawl in on one's belly, through an opening in the kitchen, which was then later camouflaged. We lay there in great fear, because the Germans came searching many times during the day. It was so crowded that we didn't have any air. The small lantern could not burn. At night, we went out in order to catch our breath.

'A Funeral March of the Living'

I saw that it was not possible to stay there. I went up to the previous hiding place, on the attic. Zelig Fisher's children lay on other attics, the Ketzelehs and the Shokhet's family. Through the spaces in the attic boards, we saw how they took down Moshe Ketzeleh to the yard, the Polish policeman, Gall, who assisted in this *aktion*, shot him. This was on 23 October 1942.

On the same day, we saw that they took out the entire yard of people from their places of incarceration. Most were being led under heavy guard, with guard dogs. Polish children ran after them. I will never forget that frightening tableau: the funeral march of the living! Exhausted, dirty from the hiding places where they lay hiding, resigned from everyone, pitifully, they went off to the slaughter.

Lying in the attic, all manner of thoughts ran through our minds, thoughts of suicide, seeing how people from other hiding places are expiring from thirst and hunger. I decided to flee into the forest. With me, Yitzhak Chaim Eisen and Leah'tcheh Eisen who were with me together, also fled.

Fled to the Forest

Very early, on 24 October 1942, we fled through the fields to the Klemensow station. From there we went into the forest. We were certain, that we would not remain alive, but if we catch a bullet, it is free.

We met many people in the forest. They came here by passing through the river. We figured that there were more than a thousand people in the forest. Regrettably, almost all of these were killed out by Polish hands.

Among others, the following were in the forest: Mottl Blatt, Israel Zirer, Lejzor Unzig, Benjamin Szak, Yankl and Shmuel Miller, Aharon Shia (Grishker's son). Hadass Beitcher(Leib Doctor's daughter), Faiga Reiber with the family, Zeftel Reiber with the family, Sarah and Breineh Schissel, both Hochgelernter sisters, the Diss family, Pessel Mabeh, Joseph Tuchszneider (Leibusz Shmaya'leh's grandson), the Eisen brothers with their sister, Herschel Bricks, the Klupas, the younger daughter of Yankl Luttwak, the Herring family.

From all of these, the following remained: Itkeh Herring, Reizl Berger, Itcheh Shtemmer with the family, Gershon Roizeleh Zhiletz, and Yankl'eh – the boy of the *Menaker*. One did not know of the other.

After two days, I left the forest. We met after the liberation.

A Few 'Righteous Gentiles'

I wish to add, that there were Christians, who sympathized with the Jews, and gave them help, and many times suffered themselves because of it.

Such a person was the Milliner Brylowski, whose garden bordered on the Hospital garden. He showed us a way. Where we could flee if an automobile full of Germans arrived to take us away: behind the stable he set aside the obstacles, and freed up the way for us, down to the river.

I also wish to mention Dr. Spoz, the Canon Cieslicki, the Vicar, the organist Stec and his daughter, the *Komornik*, and the Pharmacist, who helped Jews. At a number of these, hidden Jewish articles were found, and because of this they suffered greatly.

But people like these were few. Most local Polish residents declared themselves to be '*Volksdeutsche*,' and they aided the murderers in the '*aktionen*' against the Jews.

Bad Reichenhall, 15 June 1947

'Czacza Marisza'

Slowly, slowly they are gathering themselves together, and coming to us from the Vale of Tears, the courageous warriors, the anonymous rescuers. In these days, one of these reached our land, a women who placed her life in her hands, and did great deeds to rescue one soul after another, from the talons of extermination. She criss-crossed the length and breadth of Poland, as a Polish noblewoman, as a Christian woman offering her hand, as a trader, as a hunchback, as a someone who was lame – and she searched for children, downtrodden, lost and abandoned. In monasteries, in houses of worship, at the home of farmers, she groped, searched, and saved them from the hands of the non-believing peoples. The name of the woman – Dwora Flajszer. Among the gentiles, she was known as Maria Dowzynska. The daring task of rescuing Jewish children was carried out under the oversight of a member of Kibbutz Yagur, Leibel'eh Goldberg, an emissary from the Land of Israel that appeared under the name of Mosva Tuworek. 'Czacza Marisza,' or 'Pani Marisza' – that is, Dwora Flajszer, labored with unending commitment. Thanks to her knowledge of many languages, she earned access to the heads of the cloisters in the vicinity of Hrubieszow, Lublin, Czestochowa, and others. Children that had forgotten who they were, and their faith and roots, were returned to the bosom of Judaism, and even taken to the Land of Israel.

And now, Dwora Flajszer has reached the Land of Israel. And she has earned a blessing upon her arrival to establish a nest anew, that had been destroyed in diaspora Poland.

24 Children Rescued from Christian Hands

By Dwora Flajszer

Page 304: Accounting Report of the Assistance Committee for August 1940

In the year 1945, after the extermination of Polish Jewry, only single individuals from families remained, who wandered from city to city, in order to search out a trace of their kin. I, as well, among the few that remained, dragged myself around for long months on roads and byways, looking and asking: Is it possible, yet?... however, without any signs of my only child, of sisters, and brothers.

Strongly embittered by my fate, after long wanderings over the cities and towns, I settled down in Lodz, where there was a larger Jewish settlement, comprised of very few that had remained in Poland, and more people who had returned from Russia. The Jews looked terrifying at that point, marked by terror and fear, having emerged from the forests, from the pits, without a home, not having a place where to make their first steps, who to go to, where to go to.

It was only then, that everyone first felt the great calamity that had taken place, his great isolation. A dark fear enveloped everyone, when each individual entered the town of their birth: there was not a trace of any Jews in a place, where one thought that only yesterday thousands of Jews moved about in the streets. Dead... like a huge cemetery without grave sites.

It was only in the larger cities that there were a single numbers of Jews, who lived in fear, because it often happened that Christians – infected with the hate of Hitler – would attack Jews, without reason, and would shoot these single, surviving Jews solely because they were Jewish. After a couple of years of exhausting one's self in hiding places, when one's life was placed at risk every moment, many weeks would go by in the dark pits without bread and water – now, liberated finally, they fell from the bullets of the murderous Poles. Yet now, even after the liberation, those that had a typical Jewish appearance, feared to show themselves in the streets. And avoided traveling in the trains, where it was frequent, that the train would be stopped and Jews were taken out to be shot.

Influenced by an Emissary from the Land of Israel

Among the emissaries, who brought the first living greeting from the Land of Israel in November 1945, was Leibl'eh Goldberg (from Yagur), under the pseudonym Turek, with the objective of repatriating the Jewish child to the Jewish people.

My first meeting with him was in Lodz at the Bregman family, which later exhibited great concern for the repatriated children, keeping them for many weeks as if they were their own children, and also paying money when it concerned transacting the rescue of a child from Polish hands. It was Mr. Sheftel Dan who introduced me to Leibl'eh, who was the Chairman of the Central Historical Commission in Lodz.

Leibl, an intelligent young man, comported himself quite modestly, very energetically, skilled at imposing his agenda on others, and with great fervor, presented the task: to search out the Jewish children [held by] Christians, and repatriating them... without giving any thought to how great the danger was to simply travel about, I immediately agreed to assist him in the sacred, responsible endeavor.

He appraised me of the difficulties associated with the objective, which is conspiratorial, and not sanctioned. One must be prepared to be completely committed and lay one's life on the line, especially as these were turbulent times in the cities and on the trains. However, he so influenced me, that nothing restrained me. I thought to myself: he also has placed his life in danger, with such a characteristic Jewish appearance. I saw for myself at that time only one goal: to extract the Jewish children from Polish hands for any price, and simultaneously to assuage my own great pain.

This was on a Friday evening, and on Sunday morning, I was already on the way as a Christian, to the Lublin District, which was the one most familiar to me, but also dangerous at that time. This, after all, was the familiar region of Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Trawniki – in the time of the Germans, and later – the place of the greatest terror perpetrated against the Jews by the Poles and Ukrainians. My relatives and acquaintances tried to talk me out of this. My only remaining brother-in-law made a special trip from Chelm to Lodz (a long distance), who put his life in danger by traveling on the train, and pleaded with me: –'Why do you need this, you survived the war and now you want to risk your life?' My answer was: – 'Nothing restrains me, I have no one! Everything is as one: Past, Future... and if I remained alive, I want to do something!'

I was always in contact with Leibl'eh during the course of the year of my difficult, strenuous work in this area. I often encountered difficulties in contacting him. Often, he, himself, did not know exactly if he would be at a destination at an appointed time. He would be very restless when he would go off, and would neither write nor telephone along the way.

I recollect one time, coming back from the road, that Leibl was running around in the Zionist 'Coordination' very confusedly: 'Who knows what has happened to me?'... It nearly cost me my life to find him at that point. I ran to the organization on the Narutowicza Gasse, in the Historical Commission on Szrodmiejska, to his house, and in the end, finally, resigned not to find him, I returned to the 'Coordination' and ran into him there shut up in a room with the newly-created '*Aliyat-HaNoar*,' teaching them Israeli songs. He worked on all aspects of the endeavor.

Not only once did he place his life at risk by riding the trains. Once, on July 1, 1946, traveling with the emissary Nathan Blizovsky from Warsaw to Szczecin, the A.K. (The Polish underground organization) stopped the train at Malkinia, and killed 3 *Halutzim* (from the 'Gordonia' organization in Bialystok). They were badly shaken by the incident, as well as the news from the Land of Israel about the attack of the English military on Yagur on June 29, 1946, where they had left their wives and children.[53]

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53 The action against the organized Yishuv, which had been planned carefully and in great secrecy, began in the early hours of Saturday, June 29, 1946. A countrywide curfew was proclaimed, and 17,000 soldiers entered institutions and settlements in order to confiscate weapons and documents, and to arrest leaders of the Yishuv and Haganah activists.

Searches and arrests were also carried out in many kibbutzim, but the British had their greatest success at Kibbutz Yagur. The search there lasted a week, and the British apparently had prior information about the arms caches there. Their find included more than 300 rifles, some 100 2-inch mortars, more than 400,000 bullets, some 5,000 grenades and 78 revolvers. The loot was displayed at a press conference on the spot, and after arresting all the men of Yagur, the British withdrew.

Upon arrival in Warsaw, the emissaries agreed that if one of them was to fall, the other would convey his remains to the Land of Israel.

The well-known author Chaim Grade was present at the discussion, on whom this made a great impression. He asked to be familiarized with the work, for which families are left behind in the Land of Israel, who have their lives put at risk with the English, and coming by themselves to Poland and placing their own lives in danger. He later visited the children's home in Lodz (Piotrkowska 88), where he met with the children that had been rescued from Polish hands in this manner, innocent and carefree, sleeping on beds with white linens, clean, but solitary, round little orphans. Being deeply moved, Chaim Grade wrote the poem, '*Yossel from Yagur.*'

There were four such homes for children, which were set up with a great deal of effort, and much exertion, but also with much love, in which there were very good, special governesses and directors: At Piotrkowska 88 and Narutowicza 18 in Lodz, and in Pietrolesia and Kamieniec in Lower Silesia – closer to the border, from where the children were sent over to Germany and later to the Land of Israel.

With All Methods

During the period of the war, Jewish children were taken in by Poles through all manner of methods. For the most part, when parents saw that they were on the way to death, but still had the opportunity before the aktionen, which took place in 1942-1943, to save their children, turned them over into Christian hands; to do this, they gave up their entire worth. There were also instances when compassionate Christians seeing an abandoned Jewish child, wandering about in the forest, or in the village, they would take it in. But this sort of an instance was very rare, because peasants informed on, and turned in such people, so that one risked one's life to do this. A blond child with blue eyes that knew [to speak] Polish had more of a chance to be taken in by Christians.

Where Jewish children remained with Christians, it was mostly the case that these were Polish intelligentsia, good friends of the child's parents. Mostly, this was in the larger cities, because in the smaller towns, it was made more difficult: the surrounding neighbors knew one another too well, and would often inform – sometime out of animosity, sometime out of envy, thinking that perhaps the neighbor would be able to exploit the child, or that he would be able to deprive him of his assets.

Many Jewish children – I believe the greater portion of the remaining children after the war, in Poland – were rescued with the help of the Polish Catholic clergy, who took them into the cloisters, paying no mind to the fact that the religious, thereby, were putting their lives in danger.

Also, the 'Red Cross' helped. In the year 1943, when the ghetto in Warsaw was in flames, an auto from the 'Red Cross' rode around on the Polish side, and quickly snatched up – in order that the Germans not notice – the Jewish children wandering aimlessly, and later sent them over to the cloisters. There, the children found themselves among hundreds of Christian children, and were protected best of all against the murderous German hand.

The Polish Clergy Refuses to Turn Over

Regrettably, the major part of the children remains in the hands of these very cloisters to this day, because the clergy had converted them, and holds it as a great sin to return the children to the Jews.

Rabbi Herzog visited the Pope in Rome, in 1946, in order to intercede on behalf of the release of the Jewish children from the cloisters, but with no success.

There were great difficulties in repatriating the children from Christians, because none of them wanted to surrender the child. Every one of them had their own interest at heart in this.

Many saw, in the child, a source of income. The Jewish committees, which were created immediately after the liberation in the large cities, such as Warsaw, Lodz, Lublin, first gave out large sums of money, to the Christians who held Jewish children, almost every month, as well as clothing, food, etc. Each of the Christians also hoped that a rich uncle would arrive from America, and pay them thousands of dollars.

In the 10-12 year old Jewish lad, the peasant in the village again had a dedicated shepherd, without expenses, in place of a Christian shepherd, who in order to graze the cows or the geese, he would have to pay the parents 4-5 measures of grain per year, and to clothe him. The Jewish child-shepherd – without a protector, barefoot and naked – shepherded the cows late into the fall, in the bad rain weather and also on the frosty winter days. Such a child also carried out all the chores in the house of the peasant, even cooking. A child, a girl of 12 years, told me that she had cooked for the peasant's entire family of seven people during the harvest time.

There were also instances, mostly in the city, in which Christians became very attached to the child, and grew to love the child as if it were their own. Such people did not present themselves to the Jewish committees to identify the Jewish child that was staying with them, in order not to lose the child.

The Jewish committee, after the war in Poland, was pro-communist, and was not interested in repatriating the Jewish children from the Christians. If it was repatriated, let it remain in the Jewish children's homes in order to build a great Poland in the future. The committee was also absolutely opposed to transporting the children to the Land of Israel. Therefore there was no prospect that the committee would assist the created Zionist coordination to extract the children from Christian hands. They also did not want to release the lists of the Jewish children, that had been presented by the Christians. However, in the communist committee, we found interested people, who came to our assistance and released the lists to us.

Haifa, 14.12.1950

The Last Train

By Aharon Schrift

Page 305: *Portrait of the Author*

My father worked hard all the years of his life. [He worked] hard and said little; he 'worked with his body.' He would leave the house quite early and come back late in the night. Coming back in the winter nights, broken by the heavy work, he would eat his poor evening repast, and sit himself down near the oven to learn *Tanakh* with us. We, the children, would swallow his words like hot peas.

But everything does not go the way you want it to. One time, my father's right hand became swollen from the heavy labor, and he could not work. There was nothing to eat in the house. We were seven little children, and to boot, we had a very good appetite. It was not necessary to run after us with the food bowl, since we would have eaten even stones.

The entire burden of sustenance lay on my father alone. My mother also was not a particularly healthy woman, but she did everything in order that her children not run about hungry. There were a variety of times – sometimes better, sometimes worse, but more often worse than better. Until the age of 18 years, I was in Szczebrzeszyn, and I recall that even when the situation was bad, I did not see my father weep.

My mother would cry herself out from time to time. It is easier for women [to do so]. There were plenty of opportunities for this, for example: Friday, at candle-lighting time, Yom Kippur Eve, and part of the time, when the burden is heavy on the soul, it doesn't hurt to cry one's self out a bit. But it did not move my father, and he would not weep.

I believe that there was no one in the *shtetl* who did not know my father, Reuven Schrift (Spukh), a tall Jew, with a handsome copper beard already flecked with a bit of gray. A very smart man – he would always be able to provide another person with good counsel, but could not give himself good advice. He loved to tell jokes. For this purpose, he had his friends: Yoskeh Kandel, Itchik Schisser, and his brother Berakh and many others. He took on life lightly.

*

This is the way life dragged on until 1939, when the Second World War broke out. The troubles began immediately when the Germans entered Szczebrzeszyn. To begin with, Chaim Lejzor Shtrykher got hit. The gentiles immediately began to plunder. Seeing a gentile carrying out a pack of cut goods from Arish Maimon's business[54], I tore the package from his hands and took off running to the house where Simcha'leh Rofeh lived. Germans saw this, and shot at me. Fortunately, they didn't hit me.

It didn't take long, and the Germans went off and the Russians came in. Our joy was very great. Jews became

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54 We have determined that this is a maternal great-uncle to Faiga Englander, whose mother was born and raised in Szczebrzeczyn. Faiga's mother told her that this was her uncle, her mother's brother, and that his wife's name was Mirel. Linda Maiman Feinstein says that Arish Maimon was a cousin of her father, according to his brother, Irwin Maiman, who now lives in Milwaukee.

'important people:' arrests were made, people were incarcerated at a whim. But this festival didn't last long. After this great boon, came sorrow. Suddenly, we heard that the Russians were retreating and the Germans were coming again. There was an immediate sense of tension, and a panic ensued. Young people began to organize themselves to flee. The direction [of flight] was to Lemberg. There were many in the shtetl who were compelled to flee.

This took place after the festival of Sukkot. The nights were already cold: it had already begun to rain. I decided that I must leave. Along with me, the following also left: Yankl Miller, his brother Shmuel, Pinieh'leh Reiss, and many others. We left home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The direction was to Zamość.

Before we left, we heard that at midnight, the last train was leaving Szczebrzeszyn in the direction of Ludomir (Volodymyr-Volyns'kyj). We did not have any prospects of getting on this train, because it was arriving from Zwierzyniec and was already half full. Complete families with children were preparing themselves in Szczebrzeszyn who had to leave, because this was their last way out. Among the families was also my sister Chaya, and her husband Yankl Becher, who was in the militia that the communists had established during the time of the Russians [occupation]. Having no hope of going along on the ride, we went off on foot.

When my father came home from the *Mincha-Maariv* prayers, he was told that I had left, not taking my leave of him. He ordered that I should immediately be brought back to him. He was not opposed to my leaving, but how does one go away without even a '*Bon Voyage*?'

We were already far away. Suddenly, I see my little brother Shia running and shouting with a cry in his voice. So I stood standing, to see what had happened. – My brother relayed the message. Understandably, I didn't want to do it. He then fell to my feet and did not let me proceed any further. At that moment, a gentile woman passed by, and she said to me: your journey will not be a fortuitous one if you do not return. I didn't think for very long, said goodbye to my comrades, and turned back.

Coming home, my father was overjoyed to see me, but he knew that I had to leave. We took the decision that I would board the last train, which was to come through at midnight, along with my sister, brother-in-law, and their daughter Shayndl'eh. But the train did not arrive until it was already light outside.

I said my goodby to my mother, brother and sister in the house. My father decided to escort me. He stood standing on the way, pressed me to his bosom, and began to weep out loud!!! Today, after decades, the sound of my father's weeping still rings in my ears. I believe that he had felt that he was seeing me for the last time. That last train parted us forever.

*

After a short while, my brother Shia became the first victim. The Germans shot him. He was not yet 16 years old.

The Last Evening In My Home

By Sarah Fuchs (Ingber)

It was during a time of change. Every minute some other piece of news would arrive. A day earlier we had the Germans, later – the Russians. The joy we felt, when the Russians entered Szczebrzeszyn cannot be described, because we had been liberated from the Hitler-murderers, even if it was only for a day.

Suddenly a new piece of news arrives: we have to prepare to flee, because the Russians are retreating and the Germans are coming back again. What was left to us was that it was preferable to fall on the road rather than at German-Polish hands. Mother packs a loaf of bread, a little salt, the same portion for each of the children.

We go to the train. The dark street is full of people – women, men, children – all on foot. A question stands before everyone: Where to? In the meantime, all are headed in the same direction, to the train. A 'snake' of people wends its way along, driven by the will to live. A sea of tears is our escort. Only the young are going, because the older people – exhausted by hunger, from bombing and being in concealment – no longer have the strength to flee.

At the train there is a din of shouting and confusion – where does one go? – was the [central] question. Everyone has the bare minimum with them, at least a rag with which to cover one's skin. Suddenly – a new surprise: a couple of wagons are put on the train, and a long platform. There was insufficient place for everyone. One person piled on top of another. Also, Jews arrived from Zwierzyniec, with the local Rabbi. The weeping reached the Seventh Heaven.

Parents came to say goodbye to their children. My mother and my mother-in-law also came. They took off the last but of ragged clothing from themselves, and threw it over us. We cast our final glances at our near ones, and the train began to move away from the Szczebrzeszyn station.

All our nearest and dearest vanished, our hope to grow up together with everyone from our shtetl was lost, along with everything that was so near and dear.

I am reminded of the melodies of the '*Hasidim*' in the '*shtiblach.*' Who then does not remember Moshe Kliskeh Farber's banging with his hammer on Friday evening: – Children, *Shabbes*, close up, close up! – – – the babble of our young people along the highway on Friday evening, when each person went off to their own organization – some to '*HeHalutz*,' some to the '*Bund*,' each with the desire to learn something there.

Very early on the Sabbath morning, Isak Shmoyger Germanowicz wakened people to recite Psalms. A little later, the call was made: 'To *Schul*, to *Schul*!' And our fathers and mothers, with deeply ingrained faith went to prayer.

Our *shtetl* was consumed by fire, our beautiful large synagogue, together with our nearest, together with our hope that here, where we had been born, we will be able to grow up and derive the pleasure and satisfaction of being with our own kin and our friends.

Montreal, Canada

My Destroyed *Shtetl*

By Abraham Weinrib

A friend of mine wrote me a letter.
Told me everything on paper.
That not a single Jew remained in my *shtetl* –
A terror reigns there and hounds him...

The *shtetl* used to be full of Jews,
With Hasidim, Mitnagdim and Freethinkers. –
Empty streets and a bare marketplace
Can be seen today, like after a funeral procession.

A silent cemetery, houses – grave markers
Look out on the empty exterior –
The dead, without graves, rest somewhere or another,
After the Day of Slaughter, that [day], the huge one...

The stones, upon which the Jews trod
To trade, to work, to prayer –
Soaked in tears, spattered with blood,
Lie sorrowfully, hidden, silent...

They are ashamed to look the heavens in the eye,
To that which they witnessed,
How the Germans exterminated a city,
Of nursing infants and gray grandfathers...

The sacred houses – synagogues and study houses,
Where Jews poured out their hearts
In prayers, lie in ruins, desecrated,
Bullet-riddled by the enemy-murderer...

The *Bet HaMedrash* is no longer there, with books and *Gemaras*,
With a first and second prayer schedule,
With the chant of *Abaye* and *Rava*,[55]
Of the young men learning the Torah...

The *Heder* is gone, where the *Rebbe*, the *Chumash*,
The happy merrymakers – the children –
On the altar of the Teuton Moloch
Consumed like total burnt offerings, as if they were sheep...

And young people, from the library, the unions,
With books, theater, song. –
The Jewish sons and daughters are no more,
Who marched with banners.

And enveloped in ideals,
Not only about their personal concerns,
But fought and suffered for the Jewish people,
And a better tomorrow for all humanity...

My *shtetl* no longer has Jewish youth,
From the *Bet HaMedrash*, clubs, unions –
All went on the death-march as one,
Along with fathers and mothers together...

And the houses, where Jews used to live
For hundreds and hundreds of years,
[Where] Yiddish was spoken, dreamed, struggled,
Have become homes to the gentiles...

And Jewish assets: stores with merchandise,
Factories with machinery and processes –
Gone over to the hands of enemy Poles,
Who helped the Nazis...

Former neighbors, today's enemies,
They remained the heirs. –
Of my *shtetl*, which was destroyed,
That is what my friend wrote to me.

Santos, Brazil 1947

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55 Two of the great legal protagonists of the Babylonian Talmud.

In the Terrifying Night

By Bayl'cheh Millstein (Langbord)

Page 311: Portrait of the Author

The burden of caring for the family fell on me quite early, and forced me to assume the duties of mature girl. After a severe illness, my mother passed away, and being 9 years old, all of the household management fell to me to carry out.

Like many other Jews in the *shtetl*, my father engaged in commerce in the surrounding villages. We would see him on the Sabbath days, because for the entire week, he was engaged with finding a living among the peasants. Quite early on Monday, he would exchange kisses with us, and go off to the villages. Friday, worn out from the travel, he would come back. When my small sister and I would espy him, our joy would know no bounds.

At that time, there were no modern means of communication; no trains or passenger automobiles made the journey to the far distant villages of Szczebrzeszyn. Most of the time, one went on foot. When luck would have it, and one encountered a peasant of one's acquaintance, with a horse and wagon, he would give a lift part of the way. – Ignoring the fact that we were young, we understood how difficult our father worked in order that we might be able to eat to our satisfaction. For my little sister, I was a surrogate for both mother and father.

Pitiful Cries In The Night

When the Hitlerist plague descended on Polish Jewry, the denouement of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn also commenced.

I recall that, in the middle of the night, I heard pitiful cries. It woke all of us. I run to the window and look outside, and I see something is on fire. The reflection of the fire can be seen on the walls of the cloister and on the window panes of the hospital. The sky is ignited with red. People are running and shouting.

My little sister and I became frightened. My sister fainted. Our father was not at home. The Germans banged on the door and shouted that we should come out of the house. I wanted to save certain household items, as well as clothing for my father and for my sister. I reminded myself that my father had hidden a small amount of jewelry under the kitchen floor. However, finding the exact place where the jewelry was hidden was very difficult for me. So, I quickly packed up several things and immediately went out of the house.

I ran across the street and hoped to get help from the hospital doctor, who knew us as his neighbors. Standing near the hospital, our house began to burn. The Germans said that Jews themselves set the fire, and they will be brought to judgement. This was the proven provocation method of the Germans: for every crime accuse the innocent.

The Germans drove the Jewish residents together into the garden, near the brook, not far from Big Shlomo's booth. An intensive effort began to extinguish the fire in our house, because the priests feared that the fire could spread and threaten the cloister that could be found near our house.

Children In The Trap

It was very difficult for me to carry all the things that I had gotten together in a large sheet. My little sister kept on trembling and I calmed her down a bit. Not knowing what to do, I decided to go for help to the family of my future husband, in order that they should assist me in carrying the packages.

A hand grenade was thrown into the yard of the Shtrickdrayers, intended to hit the Rabbi, because they wished to punish him. The Germans made use of all manner of provocations, looking for ways to torture the Jews.

Looking for help, I met up with one of the daughters of the Shtrickdrayers, a mother of 4 children, of which one had gotten lost. I found the child and brought it to the confused mother.

On the way, a German detained me and forced me to go where the majority of the Jews were being gathered together. My little sister remained with part of the packages, near the hospital. Being separated from her, very unsettled about her fate, I suddenly saw how the Germans were leading my little sister with our packages to the gathering place where I was also. There was no bounds to my joy.

I saw how Jews were being driven out of their houses, part of them half naked in their underwear, a part of them carrying small packages in their hands, which they were able to grab in the moment of panic.

Crammed Into the *Halyeh*

After midnight, the Germans ordered all of the gathered Jews to leave everything that they had packed on the place, and everyone was led off to the *Halyeh*. They permitted everyone to take only a small package. I then agreed with my sister, like the last time, that she should remain behind and guard our things. When, again, I turn to go back, I am accosted by a German and he does not let me through. I tell him that I have left a child behind, but he did not believe it, and he told me he would shoot me if I was lying. He went back with me. When he saw my sister sitting on the packages, he then believed me. As evidence of his 'chivalry' he helped us carry the remaining packages to the *Halyeh*.

The threat of shooting, as well as displays of a spark of humanity, served the Germans as a management tool to play with our frayed nerves.

The majority of the Jews were concentrated in the *Halyeh*. The stalls were empty, because the merchandise had been plundered. It did not help to plead to be allowed permission to take in personal possessions into the *Halyeh*. Everything remained lying outside. The Germans promised not to allow the Poles to come close and to rob this. The put our guards, and did not permit the peasants from the surrounding villages to enter the city.

The Synagogue Is Set On Fire

Sitting in the *Halyeh*, we hear how the metal roof creaks from the intense heat of the surrounding fires.

The Germans searched for the Rabbi but could not find him. This inflamed their bestial instincts. To take revenge, they tossed an incendiary bomb into the synagogue. The fire brought down the entire structure of the synagogue. Tongues of flame shot out of the windows, and lit up the Schulhof and the *Halyeh*.

The Jews crammed into the *Halyeh* became aware that the synagogue was burning, and they wept and bemoaned the destruction. The flames in the synagogue consumed the Jewish prayers on the inside walls that had been there for centuries, which had been absorbed into the old walls. Many black crows circled the burning synagogue from the outside, and their crowing was carried into the night darkness. The Szczebrzeszyn Holy Temple no longer existed.

When it became light, the Germans accused the Jews of setting fire to the synagogue, and said that they must be punished for it. They detained 10 Jews and demanded a large sum of bail money. They released the remaining Jews. You may understand that the money was found, and the detainees were set free.

After the fire, a day did not go by without decrees against the Jewish population of Szczebrzeszyn.

11.6.82 Montreal, Canada

Wandering

By Shayndl Knabel (Stern)

The trajectory of my life for the 17 years that are counted from the time that I left my home, the place of my birth, until my coming to The Land – was a journey of difficult struggle for life and existence; that is, a war with death by hunger and extermination. To this day, the weeping voice of my mother echoes in my ears, with which she said to me, coming to me at my place of work , to Pesach Berger at his business: 'Shayndl'eh, leave the work, and come prepare yourself to leave home, because the danger is great; all young people are fleeing frm this place, and with Bracha'leh you will also go away.'

This was in the year 1939, when the Red Army could be found in our location, about whom it was said that they would be drawing back and give over the territory to the Germans, who had already been here. I obeyed her, took account with my employers, who paid me generously, and returned home to prepare myself for departure. On the following morning – it was *Hol HaMoed Sukkot* – my sister and I went off on foot for the long journey, following the wagons, which were loaded with Jewish refugees from Szczebrzeszyn.

I, and my sister Reizel'eh took leave of our parents with oppressed and broken hearts and with hot tears. They escorted us as far as the sugar factory, and after that, they turned back. They constantly looked back at us, and we to them, until we could no longer see each other. We went along, always stopping to rest, and out of great sorrow, we did not even exchange a single word. Along the way, Russian soldiers took us up on their freight truck, and we arrived at Ludomir in the evening.

We lodged the night in a synagogue, in which many such as us were found, and on the following morning, we met with our relatives who took us to their dwelling place, which was found in the barracks, outside of the city. I want to underscore that the family – these were refugees from Tyszowce, had been here already for several days, and had managed to obtain a place to live for themselves in the barracks. Apart from them, two additional families lived in the same room. We slept on the floor; some had a pillow under their head, some did not. In Ludomir, the streets were full of displaced, homeless people. It was difficult to obtain bread and other foodstuffs in the shops: the lines wee very, very long.

In A Siberian Labor Colony

Having no means of sustenance in Ludomir, we registered to travel deep into Russia for work. We were, already, three people, because in Ludomir I had married my present husband. As registered persons, we arrived with the echelon in a Siberian labor colony. Most of the populace consisted of exiled 'Kulaks' from the time of the revolution, and also exiled criminal offenders. We were allocated a room in a barrack, a pot, a blanket, and sent to work in a textile factory. My sister Bracha'leh organized her own living quarters, and made a living selling the allocated bit of black bread with a watery soup in the 'commissary,' where one had to wait in line for a long time to get a portion.

In our 'residence' there were also about twenty odd Jewish families. With the arrival of summer, the Jewish family set out on the road to the Ukraine, because we did not want to die here on the taigas from hunger and cold. We were also among these wanderers. Gathering up our few belongings, with a small child in arms, we sat ourselves on a locomotive, and set out to find a better fortune. We arrived in Kryukov. This is a little *shtetl*

on the Dniepr River.[56] There, we encountered Yankl and Leah Shtibl from Szczebrzeszyn, who helped us get a bit of a room with a Ukrainian family. It was very difficult for my husband to find a way to make a living. However, in the end, he found work for a rather small salary and we managed somehow to survive.

However, we didn't have very long to take pleasure in this Ukrainian 'Garden of Eden.' The Soviet-German War broke out immediately. Our shtetl was quickly taken under control by German commandos, and we barely had the time – as one says in one shirt – to ford the Dneiper on a raft and rescue ourselves. My great-aunt Itta-Riva Weinrib was also located in that area, with her two daughters, Etta'leh and Sarah'leh, and her sisters Shayndl-Gittl and Rivka Boim. Alas, they had not yet seen fit to save themselves. From that time on, we were fleeing, and the Germans destroyed our home each time.

In A Stone Quarry In Uzbekistan

After spending a number of weeks in this place, we were all compelled to flee further and further, until fate drove us into Middle Asia in Uzbekistan. Here we encountered a heartless population. We were on an Uzbek collective farm, where we were given the local baked good in place of bread (called '*Lepiashka*') as a ration once a week. It was here that our child died of hunger, and we nearly expired ourselves.

In those days, young people were recruited there to work in the Urals. We registered, and came to do stone quarrying. Here we were given cotton trousers, with a sort of belt, a pair of straw sandals, with leggings, and we extracted stone from the mountains, which had previously been blown out with dynamite. We were required to cut up the stones, load them on conveyances, and haul the conveyances onto the barge that stood in the water. The tally was a very high one. Whoever met the tally received a pot of soup with a supplement, and those that didn't receive only the soup. This is the way we lived until our repatriation, isolated from the world, from human existence, seeing only the stones and the water before our eyes.

When we signed up to travel home, to Poland, we knew nothing of the extent of the enormous destruction. In each individual, a spark of hope flickered that coming back to Poland he will find someone, that the Poles would have rescued at least a single child from our dear families, who had remained behind in Poland. Upon crossing the Polish border, we dissolved and became devastated, by the enormous calamity that had occurred regarding our kin in Poland. Many came off the stations to inspect the gas chambers, the containers of ashes, and brought back the sad tidings to the echelon.

Repatriated Individuals in Lower Silesia

Most of the repatriated people were settled in Lower Silesia, where Germans lived. We received good living quarters with nice furniture with clothing and dishes from the Germans, who had abandoned their homes. But all this frightened us, I could not bring myself to touch anything German, I felt that it is spattered with our Jewish blood. A feeling of terror and pain accompanied me in this dwelling. I found a great deal of anti-Semitic material in this dwelling, an illustrated journal that derided Jews, and also several pieces with the initials, R.J.F. (*Rein Juden Fett*[57]). I sent all of this over to the Yiddish Historical Institute.

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56 On the western side of the Dniepr River, opposite Kremenchuk.

57 The author's rendition of the German, *Reines Judisches Fett*, meaning 'Pure Jewish Fat.' This doubtlessly refers to the gruesome Nazi practice of making soap from the corporeal remains of

The measure of embitterment and terror was made complete by the pogrom in Kielce. The Poles thought that no more Jews remained in the world; in the end, they saw that a small number of Jews had been saved, so they wanted to complete what Hitler hadn't achieved. Many Jews left Poland illegally at that time, but immediately, it was made impossible to emigrate from Poland, and we remained in our place.

Life normalized itself a bit. We fought with the various bands [of thieves], and it became somewhat calmer after a while. The government assured that it would support the legal emigration of Jews to other countries, and we lived on that hope. Until the assurance was implemented, it took a long time. During those years, we went through difficult times, both in a material and a spiritual sense.

A heavy pall hung over Jewish circles during the process of the so-called 'Doctor's Plot' in the Soviet Union, at the time of the Slansky murder in Szczecin; the terrifying activities of the Russian N.K.V.D. directed against so many Jewish writers and artists became known in Poland.

Fortunate in Israel

After this, came the 20th conference of the Communist Party, which proclaimed freedom of speech and democracy. This was utilized, as it happens, by Polish anti-Semites to spread anti-Semitism in Poland. That which had been constrained, was now thrown open. However, the transformation also had its good sides, meaning, that it was permitted for the Jewish masses, who were registered for at least 6 years to emigrate to Israel.

I, and my family, obtained permission to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. On 20 November 1957, we crossed the border into the Land of Israel and with that, the rootless, dark epoch of my life comes to an end, and a bright, vital life begins for me and my family. I am fortunate that my children will be raised in their own country, which they will love and when they are prepared to sacrifice for it, they will not encounter any disappointment or deception in this regard.

Herzliya

Jews that they butchered.

In Armed Battle

By Ephraim Farber

Page 319: A Treasury Report from the Aid Committee of the Judenrat for September 1940

The following Szczebrzeszyn Jews served in the 27th Division of the Polish military, stationed in Ludomir Volyns'kyj and its environs: Joseph Tsoler, Leibusz Liebhaber, Ephraim Farber and others. In faraway Danzig, in the famous Westerplatte fortress by the Baltic Sea, where the Germans encountered a very strong resistance from the Polish Army, Moshe Hilf was among its heroic defenders. [Jews from] Szczebrzeszyn fought with the bloody enemy of our people, with Hitlerism, on all divisions of the front.

Joseph Tsoler fell in faraway Pomerania, in the battlefields of the Tucholskie Forests.

When the Polish Army broke apart after the first two to three days, the military leadership abandoned the battlefield using aircraft, and left the soldiers to their own fate. The fighting spirit became paralyzed, and desertion began to reach massive proportions.

Joseph Tsoler, along with other Jewish soldiers, entrenched themselves in a foxhole and put up a resistance to the bloody enemy, knowing fully well that with this battle, he will protect the lives of thousands of Jewish mothers and children. He fought continuously, until an enemy bullet put an end to his young life.

His grave is found not far from the shtetl of Tuchola, near a similarly named forest road. No memorial wreath or flowers decorate his grave, just withered leaves, that fall down in late autumn.

*

In Stalag A-1 in East Prussia, Beryl Koyl languished as a prisoner of war. After being released from the SS transit camp at Lipowa [Gasse] 7 in Lublin, I met Beryl Koyl ay Luba Gal.

A bitter pity enveloped me when I saw the man, who all of working Szczebrzeszyn knew. His belly was swollen from the inhuman conditions that Jews had to withstand in Stalag A-1.

Here I can see Beryl Koyl, as he is sitting at his shoemaker's bench, but his thoughts take him far, far to the Alpine mountains, where the last of the freedom fighters of the Austrian '*Schutzbund*' crunch through the snow. And, like a storm, he takes off his clinging apron. He thunders in his leonine voice in the *Bund* Local about the lost war of the Vienna '*Schutzbund.*' He enveloped the last battles of the Austrian '*Schutzbund*' in his mighty voice for the listeners. The listeners are moved along, and fists remain [raised] against the oppressors.

The great suggestive powers that Beryl Koyl possessed engendered inspiration.

This dreamer of the good fortune of humanity had to endure the entire extent of the black cloud of the Hitler years, until he gave up his noble spirit.

Kiryat-Yam

Do Not Forget The Dead!

By Mordechai Elboim

Page 320: *Portrait of the Author*
Page 321: *A Yahrzeit Service for the Martyrs – 9 Heshvan 5708 – 23.10.47 – In Haifa*

Yesterday I was a guest of the dead,
Listening to their complaints:
– So what if we complain,
Does this mean you will not recite *Kaddish*?

And what if you did not see our death rattle,
Did not hear our last behest,
Does this permit you to dance, tread on us,
On the bloodied, pulverized gray roads to the cemetery?

Do you think that the eyes glued together
Closed by mud
And believe that a sin can be expiated
By a minute's worth of tears of regret?

From every grain of sand, shard of stone and flower
We peer out like grave markers:
And you, ha-ha-ha,
You don't even take notice,
Sunk in lies and passions.

And their pain is carried to me again,
Their homeless, solitary suffering
And the scream cuts through me like a knife
And passes like a sorrowful wail.

We turn about in a wild gyration,
In winds and a snowstorm.
Will you possibly conceal us this way –
So that we might someday find surcease...?

It is bodies that have been desecrated, burned and ground into ash,
Only a tiny wick has remained.
Well, light the little wick, no matter how pale
The memory of life be ignited.
Bury somewhere deeply, in a corner of your heart
A *Yahrzeit* that will bind us together
So that in bonding
The sorrow will pass
And a small flame will be ignited.

This is how I blundered about as a guest among the dead
Until the Sun's rays turned red...
From the destroyed ruins comes the call:
–Do not forget, do not forget, the martyrs, the dead!

Ah, You *Shtetl* Mine!

By Pinchas Bibel

I remind myself, that years, years ago, when our hope was still young, when the world was still whole, in the magical city, Carmel By the Sea, not far from my San Francisco, the writer Peretz Hirshbein came to visit after a long trip around the world.

At the edge of the Pacific, where it is always stormy, and yet so calm, where the great Sierra Nevada mountains break apart into huge, broken boulders, a quiet little town lies. The sand is as white as snow, and the waves, already becalmed, wash the feet of those who have found this place and come to live out their years in a restless nature.

And I remember an evening, when the wise Hirshbein invited me to his home and after the evening meal, which he, and his lovely wife, the writer Esther Shumiatsher prepared in such a ritualized manner, we sat by the open fire – the forest was cool and foggy, the ocean rhythmically chased the foaming waves – and we read and talked.

Hirshbein told, that he is writing a great novel and a new piece. Esther read her lyrical poems and me – my modest prose.

Late in the evening, Peretz remarks: Bibel, tell me something about your *shtetl,* tell me about your first years! So I laugh: – About my little *shtetl*? What is there to tell? A little dot in Poland, a tiny yawn, one of hundreds – it is not important!

So Hirshbein looks at me with warm-sorrowful eyes: tell and record Bibel! Remember and write. Who knows want is to become of our warm nests!

At the time, I did not understand this. It appears that Hirshbein, at that time, already senses the coming of the storm. He foresaw the future.

I have told, but I have not recorded.

*

Now it is too late. Now, each recollection causes pain. Now, those events, which formed us, do not permit themselves to be touched. Now, it is not possible to write 'poetically,' to chant about our beginnings. Now, we can only look back and silently remember – and to sorrow – and to have regret.

And yet, yet now there is a demand, at this opportunity, to wipe away the accumulation of the years, to relive and reconstruct, at least for a minute, our home that was; to bring together the wrecked houses; reconstruct the streets, the booths, the fences, the people; to reduce one's self, become again a little boy, lost in dreams, in a small Polish *shtetl.*

The write insists that so long as we r e m e m b e r someone, that person is never dead, and lives within us; only when we f o r g e t , only then does that body turn to waste and ash.

Well now, let us recall – for one's self, for our children, for the martyred, for the vanished Jewish life in Poland.

I remember my home – an open door for Jews and gentiles. A simple home. My grandfather, my five uncles – unlettered, good Jews.

My father came from the outside, from Chelm. From the Brisk Yeshiva, from the *Bet HaMedrash* in Warsaw, and brought a big city influence with him.

The *shtetl* was tranquil. It lay asleep in a centuries-old dream. Nothing changes. It is a *shtetl* with good fortune. Despite a highway, a paved road, connected with Zamość, with Lublin, and stretches off to Bilgoraj, far-far away, as far as Rzeszow, to Lemberg, the tranquility is rarely disturbed.

*

The old, nine-hundred year-old synagogue dominates and influences life. It is rooted, baked into the good Polish soil. Even when Chmielnicki entered these areas, he left Szczebrzeszyn undisturbed. When the Polish masses revolted in 1863 (my grandfather told me that many Jews assisted) and when this was suppressed, the Russians attacked from the Topolcza forests to eradicate Szczebrzeszyn for helping the revolutionaries, a miracle occurred at the last minute, and the city was spared.

We even had good fortune in our times. During The First World War, we were not driven away. We were not bombed. Even Petlura respected us – yes, Szczebrzeszyn was a luck city. Or so it was until the arrival of the Germans, ימ"ש

We lived tranquilly. We managed to get along with the Poles. We managed to live alongside the Russians.

We had a 'City Magnate' (Mordechai Flajszer in our time), who always ran a household that was generous; he was the dream of every poor Jew. The craftsmen, who made a living, and worked out an existence and sustained a working class in Poland. The workers, who assumed their lot in life – the woodcutters, water carriers. The town deaf man, and even a Jewish thief.

*

The days and years passed with the quiet, long rhythm of our tranquil little river, the Wieprz, which divided itself so lovingly, and surrounded our town on three sides. Tranquil and rhythmic, rooted deeply in the past, dreaming, waiting for the Messiah.

I remember the smallish group to which my father belonged, which would gather late in the evenings at our home, the promenades on every Saturday during the day in the fields on the other side of the '*Cmentarz*,' the reading of the first newspapers, the forbidden books.

And the 'revolution,' the revolution of clothing. Up until that time, everyone (with the exception of Neta Shayner, and the Bronsteins) dressed traditionally: Foot-length black *kapotes,* flattish black hats with a small brim. Only at night, in the dark, when every upstanding man was already asleep, the young people – my father being the first – would gather near the hospital, putting on a European hat, and a short jacket, and go for a walk.

I remember, during the typhus epidemic, a lady vendor in a market stall yelled at my father, that children are dying because he is becoming a *goy*, and wearing a hat....

*

But the wheel turned more strongly and with greater certainty. We came out of the study house. We looked for

light. A library was established. A Zionist organization was set up in an attic apartment. A little later – a *Bundist* Union.

New people came in. The very young organized itself into a group of sections with green shirts, with long sticks; I hold Membership Card Number Four.

The *shtetl* shook itself. The door to the world opened itself a bit. Lecturers came. The laboring element put up demands to the ownership class, even threatening to strike. Mass assemblies took place even in the *Bet HaMedrash.* A tall ascetic man, called Lazar, came to live at my parent's. He had traveled the world, told us about the Land of Israel, where we fell sick with malaria, and, indeed, in our home, he founded the first Hebrew school. Later, others came, bringing worldliness, bringing knowledge, and brought unrest.

One senses that Szczebrzeszyn would no longer be able to rest in its long sleep. One wanted to know about justice and equity, one wanted a little tolerance. One pushed to get into the world. The Polish schools filled with Jewish children, even though my face didn't redden only once from my teachers – such as Pan Hartlieb, for example – who expressed himself not only once, that unfortunately Poland has to support the parasite Jews, that suck Polish blood.

We got older. We founded the '*HeHalutz*' organization. We prepared ourselves for a free socialist life, for physical labor, to a cultural consciousness, to the Hebrew language. Part of us went off into the free world, part of us remained behind and continued to prepare.

Others recognized their place in life in Poland, with great commitment to the rooted location, to their home in Szczebrzeszyn. They enveloped the town, cleaned it, set it up in European fashion, dried out the swamps, paved the streets, straightened out the old houses, built a systematic life, hoped for a better, more decent tomorrow.

*

That tomorrow, however, came on the wings of German airplanes, came as black as the uniforms of the SS troops – The Absolute Destruction, with authentic German precision. Not one of the heirs of the past walks the ancient earth of Szczebrzeszyn.

I often think, I think tranquilly. In the final minutes I wish to think into the cemetery, when the mass grave had already been dug.

– – – The Rabbi, the quiet wise Rabbi ended his final remarks. – – – For sure, his eyes must have been turned heavenward, to the far horizon. Did he see all the generations, the long, long rows of simple people, who over the course of 900 years lived in this *shtetl*, lived and came to their final rest in the loamy earth, and see not only the calamity of the reality, but also feel the pain and shame, that a band of barbarians can so devilishly exterminate the historic chain, that stretches from Kazimierz the Great to the first of the tortured Jews that found their resting place here?....

I think. Only sorrow and anger remain, and dumb helplessness.

San Francisco

My Home That Was Destroyed

By Shlomo Reiter

Page 326: Portrait of the Author

The melody of the study of Torah can no longer be heard coming from the study houses of Szczebrzeszyn. The tailors, shoemakers and carpenters no longer sing the folk songs that accompany the humming of the sewing machine, the saw and hammer. The Jewish merchants and the lady storekeepers no longer peer out of their places of business. The small playing Jewish children have been silenced, with their sweet squeaky little voices. The symbol of Jewish Szczebrzeczyn – the beautiful old synagogue – has also been wiped away from the surface of the earth... all that remains is the ground, which is soaked with Jewish blood and tears.

The painful groans of the innocent have remained floating on the air, the last weeping of the small children before death. The echo remains: why?!.....

*

An you, you accomplices to murder and sympathetic onlookers, you have spread yourselves into their possessions. You live in their houses, your children play with the toys of the small children, who were killed in the midst of their play. Does the blood which is reflected in your window panes not frighten you? Do you not see that the greenery that grows on the ground, is mixed with red blood? Are your eyes not stabbed by the roses and flowers that grow from this sacred blood? These are roses and flowers nourished by fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, cut down before their time, and brides who did not live long enough to be escorted to the wedding canopy!

Your hearts are bare, you active and passive accomplices in their downfall! Now you dress yourselves in their leathers from lambs, and pretend that everything is all right from a better world! May a curse strike you, that was hurled at you by my father, mother, my brothers, sisters, my aged grandfather, in the final convulsive spasm of their lives!

You, Germans, of a culture of murderer, who showed my aged ninety-year old grandfather Shmuel Zisha how you murdered his daughter Liebeh Sarah with her husband Berish, their children Malka, Itzik, Abraham, Fradel, Velvel'eh. How you sadistically strangled him in front of his daughter Matcheh with her husband and children. After which, you took their lives.

A large portion of the Polish populace danced along with you in your wild murder bacchanalia. Like hyenas, the Poles waited for plunder, how to inherit the Jewish assets all the more quickly. The Poles forgot that, even before their grain began to sprout, and before fruit began to ripen in the orchards, they took money from Jewish merchants for future gardening. Now they weep, the active and passive accomplices, in the Jewish houses and sleeping in Jewish beds – – –

*

You stand before me alive, you, my sacred and dear ones. I see my father, the simple, decent man of the people, who labored with sweat to support the family. And if it was too hard for him to pull the wagon of sustenance, you, my heroic mother, came towards him, and together, both dragged the heavy burden.

You worried and provided for everyone, my mother dear. First you assure that everyone was sated, and what was left over – you took for yourself. Yourself a woman made scrawny, and exhausted by hard work, you with your broad wing, like an eagle, guarded the well-being of your house. Always worried, always exerting yourself

to obtain all the needs of your husband and children. You looked on with joy when they received a new garment, a pair of new shoes, that you tore off only with hard exertion from your meager income.

You permitted your children to study in the *Heder* and in school. In order that they grow into educated people – you said. I see your brow prematurely knitted from worry. Your wise blue eyes will be a light to me forever, that looked with joy at your children who were growing up. I see the Sabbath table, the members of the household sitting around it, father makes Kiddush, your motherly face is illuminated with happiness and your lips mutter the prayer silently. – God, may this not be taken away from me! – you asked. You had only one demand of God: To live long enough to enjoy *nachas* from children, and that gave you strength and energy to break through all manner of difficulties.

But you did not live to see any sort of *nachas*. The German Nation of Murder didn't allow you to realize this. With wild sadism and beastly satisfaction, the threw themselves upon your innocent and unprotected lives. You struggled with your bitter fate; you wanted to hide yourselves up to the last minute from the gruesome death. You stuffed yourselves away in bunkers and in holes. In the dark nights you came slithering out like worms from their holes, in order not to be noticed by the eye of the murderer, in order to bring back a bit of meager food and water in order to sustain life.

In the most difficult moment, you, my mother, with your maternal wing, wanted to make the pain of your little one lighter, warmed and guarded. You hoped that God, in whose ways you went, will manifest a miracle, and protect you from the hands of murderers, but God did not show his miracle...

Instead of the sounds of musical instruments, which you hoped to hear in escorting your bride to the canopy, you heard the sounds of the jungle, from a wild revelry of devils in human form, when you were all being led to martyrdom. Your eyes had to behold the horror when your young son and daughter were led off to death. The mother's wings no longer were effective [protection]. Death swallowed them up with my father's life, with the lives of my brothers and sisters, my elderly grandfather, together with my dear, beloved Szczebrzeszyn...

*

All that remained was the echo of their last call for help. All that remained was their sacred blood, that demands justice for the murderers, blood of fathers, mothers, of brides and grooms that didn't live [to go to the canopy], of small children in their cradles, blood from broken lives, worlds that vanished. The only thing that remained was the huge sign reading: Why?

Why were we slaughtered and murdered? Why did the world look onto this blood bath approvingly? Where were the so-called 'Leagues for Human Rights' and the Red Cross? Where was the Jewish God when his nation, that had served him so loyally, was being slaughtered?

The heavens were locked to the final calls for help from a people, that was being led to the slaughter. The ears of the world were plugged up against their great cry of pain. No, the world cannot make a transition to the order of the [new] day so long as it has not answered the 'Why!'

And you, wild vandals, who spilled this innocent blood, who broke entire worlds! It is not important where you are to be found now: in Poland, in West Germany, or even in East Germany, take off the masks from your murderous faces! You wish to present yourselves as the creators of a better world. You make sport of the world, which decorates you again with medals for great chivalry. – Your punishment will yet arrive! You will drown in your own blood and tears! Your filthy hides will be consumed by hate and anger! You will be unable

to buy yourselves out with money for our blood, you will have to pay blood for blood!

*

My Jewish Szczebrzeszyn is no longer. My father, mother, my sisters and brothers are no more, only their groans remain, only a deep wound remains in my heart that cannot be healed. Only sweet dreams of my former home remain.

We will erect an eternal monument to you. We will remember you forever, dear ones! To the last breath that we pull, I will remember you, my dear shtetl, Szczebrzeczyn!

Netanya, October 1955

In the Nights of Pogroms

By Batya Bibel[58]

Page 329: *Portrait of the Author*

Pale countenances,
Frightened eyes,
Sunken bodies
Dragged themselves
In the night.

There is a tear in the heart
In everyone's step,
A throb in the head
At every movement.

With bated breath,
Eyes filled with sorrow
The hapless
Wended their way slowly
In the dark night.

Dried lips
Moved in prayer
And bony hands
Stretched themselves heavenward.

With bloodied hearts,
With heads bowed deeply,
They, the shamed
Dragged themselves along in fear
In the dark night – – –

My Friend's Shtetl

All the candles are already extinguished,
Only one little lamp sputters,
Like a Yahrzeit candle that flickers
And throws shadows on the wall.

And my fried, he tells me
With longing in his voice
About a *shtetl* where he was born,
From the far-far distant past.

---

58 Batia (or Bassya) Bibel was Philip Bibel's first wife. She was a poet and she published several books of poetry in English .She passed away in 1980.

The oldest *shtetl* in Poland,
A thousand year-old synagogue,
Hundreds of Torah scrolls
In his *shtetl* of yore.

Of gravestones on the cemetery,
Devils that dance in the night,
Of a sleepy young man,
That leaps from roof to roof.

At the old cemetery –
Seven graves, hand in hand
There are six sons and a mother
Thrown down from a high wall.

By the light of the burning little lamp
My friend writes a journal
About his old *shtetl* in Poland,
From the far-far distant past.

New martyrs – new wonder,
New Jewish strength and belief,
That the Nazi, may his name be erased,
Could not plunder from the Jews.

Hundreds of Torah scrolls burn
And Jews in prayer shawls praise their God in song.
Throwing themselves on the fire kindled with Torah scrolls
They die, dancing in a death-dance.

There are no more Torah scrolls,
There is no more thousand year-old synagogue,
There are no more thousands of Jews
And my friend's *shtetl* of yore [is gone].

All the lamps are extinguished,
Everything is deep in slumber.
Only I lay, with eyes open,
Thinking: Why this punishment on Szczebrzeszyn?

San Francisco

In the Maelstrom of War

By Sima Berger (Elboim)

Page 331: Portrait of the Author

We didn't live in any sort of wealthy circumstances, but our family was rich in terms of good upbringing. We were seven children, and a grandmother lived with us, with a son, Shlomo Dyless who had remained an orphan without a father.

Life was not easy, but the grandmother was shown respect. I cannot forget this. Now, I understand this better, because I am now of that age. In general, the entire conduct of that small dwelling, where each person had their place, was with love and respect. Every Sabbath, my father, of blessed memory, could not sit down to the table if we did not have a guest. There were plenty of poor people in our towns. That was the custom.

My father was a scholarly Jew. Everyone knew R' David Elboim of Szczebrzeszyn of the *Radzyner shtibl*. He would conduct Torah courts in the shtetl with great dignity, but not for any money, even though he needed it.

My mother, Basha and grandmother Hinde Baylah, did a great deal on behalf of the poor and the sick folk. On Thursday night, they would bake bread and challahs for the Sabbath, and in that process would not forget that there were people who had nothing for the Sabbath, despite the fact that we, ourselves, didn't have very much. On Friday, before dawn, my grandmother already was running to distribute the challahs to the needy for the Sabbath, but nobody needed to know to whom it was given, even not the children.

Salvation in Israel

My travel to Israel did not come easily to me. To my observant, Hasidic father, of blessed memory, this was as if, God forbid, I had converted...suddenly, a young girl from such a Hasidic family comes home, and says that she is traveling to a Kibbutz for training, because she wants to travel to the Land of Israel!...The struggle was very severe. I was able to achieve this only thanks to my uncle, Moshe Hirsch Berger, who later became my father-in-law, who being in the Zionist Organization in Szczebrzeszyn, assisted me, and gave me material support.

Being in Israel, I began to receive heartfelt letters very heavily laden with pain. My father, mother, and entire family envied me, because the ground in Europe was already burning under their feet, despite the fact that one didn't believe in so great a calamity. At that point, the members of my family pleaded with me to do something in order to help, because they long for me. Regrettably, I didn't know how to, and could not help them with the English regime in the Land.

Totally Committed

My eldest brother Abraham, of blessed memory, was ordained as a Rabbi from the Lublin Yeshiva.

During the time of the Hitler occupation, he was elected as a member in the *Judenrat*. I came to Israel in 1936, but as people from the town who live through those times tell, he risked his life. In the end, when he had an order that on a certain day he must assemble together all the Jews in the center of the *shtetl*, among them also his wife with 4 children, he – out of great sorrow and pity for the unfortunate Jews – approached the German officer and requested: – Shoot me!

For the Nazis, shooting a Jew was an easy thing. In the presence of all the people, also of his own family members, he was shot on the spot.

*

My second brother Mordechai, lives, Thank God, in Belgium. He was saved from Hitler's hands and spent the war years in Russia.

One of my younger brothers, Moshe'leh comported himself – as is the case in time of trial when children get wise – like an adult. I was told a great deal about him.

Before the Jews were taken to the crematoria, if they wanted to punish someone, they incarcerated him in an 'arrest house' which was called 'Die Kozeh,' where one suffered torture, hunger and cold. Moshe'leh wanted to help everyone. Feeling no fear, he would climb on the high fences, and carry food for the imprisoned.

He was able to do this for a longer period of time, until the murderous hand shot him on the fence.

Haifa, 1980

Memories

By Faiga Roitman

Page 333: Portrait of the Author

Where are you, sisters, brothers?
There is no memory, no skeleton...
My limbs grow stiff
With my wail and cry.

Beards were torn, burned in fire,
Tortured anyone who was a Jew.
Cut down everything that was dear to us
So cruel and barbarous.

Where is the youth, blossoming and beautiful,
With their bubbling song,
The *Schul*, the sacred prayers, pure,
With the echo of Jewish holiness?

That splendid synagogue and its books burned,
Our joy torn away.
Now we search for graves,
One wants to at least cast a glance.

So why, you dark night, do you remain silent,
With your angry storm winds?
You see how I sit and contemplate,
Recalling memories in an instant!

When your moon shone
And lit the way for us
In the night of great danger,
Which ended in dark days,
Memories of this small *shtetl* come to mind,
The Jewish mothers and their need,
I recall the melody of the Sabbath so beautiful,
The *mitzvahs* of preparation of bread for the poor.

I am reminded of the Fridays, mother in the kitchen,
With cheeks reddened, she is working with speed.
She is preparing for the Sabbath on behalf of the household members.
That *Yiddisheh Mameh* – where is she now?...

Appear in my dream, you beloved form,
Stretch out your hands, I will not be afraid.
Embrace me, you are not yet old.
I do not want the earth to cover your body.

Where are you, my Father, my constant friend,
Concerned for the morrow, worried for bread.
Now, you no longer see the sun, how it shines.
Oh, Father mine, why are you dead?

Here I write the words to the extent that I can.
My heart dictates what is written by the pen.
I see the buildings of the *shtetl* long gone,
The alleys, the orchards, the wooden house,
There where my friend spent his youth,
Playing, working, singing, laughing.
I see your artistic and splendid synagogue
Jews streamed their on the Sabbath in large numbers.
In the end that beauty vanished in flames
With thousands of Jews into the grave together.

New York

"Why Do The Survivors Remain Silent?"

By Shimon Kantz

Help to Bring the Murderers to Justice (4)
(An Article from "The Late News")

On May 3, 1942, several members of the Gestapo, arrived in the *shtetl* of Turobin, near Szczebrzeszyn, who together with their drivers, killed 107 Jews. Five days later, such a slaughter was repeated in Szczebrzeszyn, on May 8 at three o'clock in the afternoon, [when] three members of the Gestapo arrived in an auto and shot over one hundred Jews. A frightening panic broke out among the Jewish populace. Jewish wounded also came running to the hospital. The police however did not make it possible to allow anyone to enter. A little later, two Gestapo members arrived at the hospital with guns that were still smoking. They threatened the Polish doctors, that if they provided the Jewish wounded with medical assistance, that they also would be shot.

After carrying out the mass slaughter, the Gestapo demanded from the *Judenrat* in Szczebrzeszyn that they provide a kilo of coffee, and two thousand zlotys to cover the outlay for the bullets that were utilized in the slaughter of the Szczebrzeszyn Jews.

In the nearby *shtetl* of Jozefów, three members of the Gestapo shot a hundred and several tens of Jews. Scenes were played out that shook up even the appointees of the Germans, who were virulent anti-Semites. And even their hearts were shaken when they saw how their theory was being implemented.

For the Jews in Bilgoraj, the Germans created a labor camp in Turkowic. The Bilgoraj Jew, Moshe Shuldiner escaped from there once. He was caught on the road that leads to Zamość, and brought back to the camp severely beaten. The Germans rode on cycles, and the Jew was forced to run between them on foot. If the Jew should happen to stop to catch his breath, they immediately set the dogs on him, who bit and tore pieces of flesh from him. Barely alive, he was brought back to the camp and tied to a tree. When after twelve hours he was untied, he was swollen and unconscious. He was barely revived and set free, because he was no longer fit for any work. But he didn't get very far. He died in great agony.

The city of Tarnogrod is far from Bilgoraj. The first *aktion* took place there in August 1942. On a Friday towards evening, the Germans surrounded the Jewish houses and dragged out the people into the streets half naked, and drove them onto the road that leads to Bilgoraj into the nearby forest. They forced the Jews to dig a huge pit, and when the pit was completed, the German gendarme said that this was their grave, in which they would imminently be buried. Tevel Herbsman immediately stepped out of the row and called out: 'Murderers, others will come who will take vengeance for this innocent Jewish blood that you are spilling. The Day of Judgement will not pass you by!' Afterwards, he turned to the Jews and cried out: 'We will not fall at their feet and beg for our lives. Let us all die as one in Sanctification of The Name. A burst of machine gun fire interrupted his speech, and together with all of the martyrs, he fell into the grave that had just been dug.

Among those shot, was the young boy, Yankl Hochman, who got away only with wounds, and after the departure of the Germans, he extracted himself from among the dead, in the lightly covered pit, and losing blood, dragged himself to the city, and spent an entire twenty-four hour period hidden under a garbage can, and only first, on the second night, came home to his relatives. His wound was bandaged, and word for word, he related the heroic speech that the pious Jew R' Tevel gave at the round-up place of the mass grave.

In the Lublin Ghetto, the SS troops sent out their dogs out on the train station, where on a daily basis they would seize a number of Jewish victims, who were brought to Greyer's restaurant, and were murdered there. At that location,

once, the Szper family was murdered, that had founded the Jewish Gymnasium in Lublin. Their youngest daughter, Manya Levkovich, saw her seven year-old daughter shot dead before her eyes with a single bullet.

In that period, Jews were seized in the street, held for several days under arrest in the synagogue, until their relatives brought the required sum of money to the Gestapo to bail them.

Later on, the Germans hit upon a devilish scheme: On the highway from Lublin to Piaski there was found the small settlement of Majdan-Tatarski. It was designated as a location to which part of the Lublin Jews would be taken. After the pain of the re-settlement, came the second blow, a '*selektion*' along with all of the tribulations that accompany an *aktion* of this type. Afterwards, Warthoff held a speech, in which it was promised that such an *aktion* would not be repeated, because the *aktion* was ended. He spoke exactly in this manner later, on November 9, 1942, when the ghetto of Majdan-Tatarski was liquidated.

All of this slaughtering was nothing more than a prelude to the great calamity, which began in Szczebrzeszyn on August 8, 1942, when empty transports appeared at the train station, which had been prepared to take away all of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn. But, to where? Officially, this was described as 'somewhere in the Ukraine,' where the Jews would be settled for the duration of the war. German gendarmes passed through the town for the entire day, and together with Polish police, seized Jews. The Jews were led out of their hiding places, and taken off to the marketplace halls. Most of the Jews were dressed in rags, and their faces manifested an appearance of hopelessness and confusion. Women went along carrying children in their arms, and no crying was heard, no wailing. In the Jewish houses, all the doors were opened, and the authority from the magistrate carried out all manner of things and merchandise and loaded it onto wagons, which the Germans drove off in an unknown direction.

On October 18, 1942 the Jews of Zamość were brought to an end. Only ten manual laborers were left behind. The elderly Jews were shot on the spot, and the others were taken off to Izbica. A death camp was located there.

Was it over already? Apparently not. Because the third company of the special battalion for the Solution to the Jewish Question,' in the Lublin region, is still at work. A hunt is underway for the Jews who were yet remaining in the bunkers, in the forests. These Jews need to be found out. Also, hidden Jewish treasure needs to be uncovered. Every captured Jew, presumably hid a treasure somewhere, and certainly must know of the caches used by other Jews. Therefore, he is subjected to all manner of torture, in order that he talk, that he reveal [such whereabouts].

Now, after 20 years, the German procurator, H. Zeug, who directs the research against those murderers, and is preparing their trials, once said to the representative of the Israeli Police, Mr. Polishevsky:

... I am concerned by the death of witnesses.... which gets smaller, the number of those, who remember it. With each passing year, the number who can no longer remember grows larger, when I ride on the autobus, in the train, I shudder from the thought that my neighbor, possibly, was one of those murderers. But my children, they no longer understand that fear, because in the schools, they are not taught about that obloquy. Nothing is written in the newspapers either. Why are you silent? Why do not the surviving Jews agitate? How can they sit back tranquilly, in the various corners of the world and not assist in locating and accusing their murderers?'

This German procurator has already several times been asked to accept a high position in the Justice Ministry. He has declined, with the excuse that he cannot leave his work on researching the Hitlerist criminals which is not yet complete. He has declared: 'The materials that I have assembled, give me no rest.' Day and night, he searches for the criminals and calls on the victims, for them to help unmask them.

My Little *Shtetl* Szczebrzeszyn

By Bracha'leh Stern

My little *shtetl* Szczebrzeszyn,
The place of my youth and joy!
Where there were green meadows
Spread out about the *shtetl.*

Ringed by hills,
Filigreed by brooks,
With flowers and orchards
Richly endowed.

My little *shtetl* Szczebrzeszyn,
Where I spent my youth,
Where, with my friends,
I sang and laughed.

The sun shone so mildly,
Lighting [everything] with its rays.
One dreamed at that time
Of high ideals.

I did not know at that time.
That the sun will be lost to us,
That from the beautiful, clear day
A dark night can emerge.

The night came,
Dark, without stars.
The little *shtetl* became inundated
With Jewish blood and tears.

Our innocent fathers, mothers,
Sisters, brothers
Shot on the cemetery,
Buried alive in pits.

Neighbors told,
Who knew our near ones,
That going to death
They held each other by the hands.

Our mothers quietly asked themselves:
God! Why did we deserve this,
That from we Jews
The right to live shall be taken away?

Is it possible to imagine
The sorrow and pain
As mothers and children
Go to death?

Yes, this took place in the little *shtetl* of
Szczebrzeszyn,
Where fields and meadows were green.
The sun lit it up so clearly and beautifully
And suddenly everyone was turned into a mound.

Hallucination In The Siberian Taiga

By Velvel Ingber

Page 339: *Portrait of the author*
Page 341: *A List concerning Szczebrzeszyn (not titled)*

Little streets, little streets,
Little streets with walls,
Forever, little streets, will I
Eternally mourn for you.

Forever...forever, until the last day of my life, with every undertaking, and in all my travels, the great pain and sorrow regarding you will follow me, my little *shtetl*, the never-to-be-silenced longing, the sorrow without solace, for you, my little *shtetl*, for you the joy of my youth, for all your Jews – tailors, cobblers, storekeepers, wagon drivers, heartfelt mothers, fathers, bent under the heavy yoke of making a living.

I long for you, my young generation, the flower of my people, dreaming, and believing world improves, with a vision of a just world with the Jewish people rationalized within it. My shtetl is no more, my home is wrecked, my generation cut down, and a funereal silence lays over your streets.

But you live eternally in my imagination. And on the wing of that great longing, I fly back and I see you as before – with your total poverty and yet so wonderful; with your total modesty, and yet so proud; with your quietude, and yet so effervescent with impetus and storminess; choked off in the ghetto, and yet with such wide horizons. Surrounded by a sea of barbarity, by wild, bloody murder, you are like an island of love and faith in humanity standing and weaving your dreams – and were exterminated.

*

It is night. I look with my sleepless eyes through the window of the barrack. The Siberian Taiga murmurs, homelessly and frighteningly. Heaven, forest and ground are poured together in one mass of darkness. Only the sandy road stands lit apart from the surrounding darkness. It curls to me, and says to me: – Come, I will lead you back there.

Like a lunatic, drawn by an invisible force, it tears me off of my bunk bed, with one leap I am already outside. Enveloped by the night darkness, I am not noticed. Here, I am already on the way. My heart pounds rapidly. The road vanishes under my feet. Faster....faster....

... I reach the water. After a bit – and, now, I hear the first blast of the train whistle. How dear it is to me now, how much that call sounds like home! I look on to the gleaming steel of the rails. They have come through somewhere or another, united with my rails, that lay there, so far and wait for me to tread upon them again.

... I am traveling already. The wheels beat with the rhythm of my heart. Faster...faster....back.....to home!!! I arrive at the station, everything about is sleepy and as if intoxicated by the fresh scents of the forest and field and freshly hewn wood. I take the sandy trail to the road. Here, I am on the way, my pace quickens: not far now.

...I see the home panorama from afar, the roofs and shtiblach in the disarray caused by a neglectful hand. The odor of freshly cut hay envelopes me, which lies spread out on the meadows on both sides of the road.

... Here is the factory. Here in the alley way of the tall poplars, we would stroll, hand-in-hand. A gentle breeze lapped against our reddened faces, and we sang together into the night, into our dreams of youth. Here, in the stillness of the night, pressed together in a circle, the legendary forms of Gershuni and Wiera Finger[59] rose before us.

Here is the first little house, crushed and discarded by the road, where out of fear that the spring waters, that inundate the meadows should not drag it off to the faraway unknown. The Wieprz River flows calmly by, and reflects the willows at its shore, that stand bent and lost in thought, as if it were *Tashlikh.*

... I raise myself up onto the hill. I know each and every stone here, every little ditch, every clod of earth is measured out by my youthful tread. The synagogue with the three-cornered roof stands like a giant among the tiny little houses, as a monument to generations of Jews who came and left, stands bearing witness, and lost in thought. On the night of *Kol Nidre* – backs covered in prayer shawls, in repentance, bent before the Creator of the Universe – *Ashamnu*....

...At the table of the coterie of tailors, my father stands, bent and awash in tears. – With what did you commit any sin? Perhaps in rising before dawn to recite the Psalms? With the finding of winter wood for poor Jews? With what?....

... And when the synagogue was set on fire by unclean hands, burned and sputtered like a Yahrzeit candle, Moshe Shames stood on the hill of the orchard inn, dressed in white, and looked with dead eyes how the synagogue was burning, the discarded texts in the attic, the sacred books and the *Pinkas*, where the Yahrzeits were recorded. When is it Yahrzeit now?...

... The marketplace paved with stones, the green little garden with the booths on both sides as if guarded by sentries – it was this way that our martyrs went on their last way, and cast their last glance on the street of home, on the Jewish covered walkway, on the homey roofs – those silent witnesses of their tragic pain and extermination....

Montreal, Canada 11.3.1956

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59 There is apparently not anything convenient available in English about Wiera Finger, but she was a very interesting personality of her era, worth mentioning in greater detail. The following short biography appears in Polish, and was translated for us by Tomasz Panczyk:



Wiera Finger was born June 25, 1852 in Kazan into a rich Jewish family, the oldest of six children. In 1863 she started education in private school. After completion, and returning home, she came under influence of her uncle, who had very radical views. She decided she would become a physician. She went to study medicine in Zurich. In Geneva she met [Mark] Natanson and became Marxist revolutionary. After the completion of her studies, she returned home and worked as a physician in Samara and Saratov. She joined "Land and Liberty" and after its liquidation joined terrorist organization "People's Will". After most of its leaders were arrested she became the leader of the party in 1881. She planned many assassinations, including successful murder of Tsar Alexander II. In 1883, she was arrested and the next year sentenced to death. Later the sentence was changed to life imprisonment in Siberia. She was freed in 1904 and joined the "SR" organization. She left the party after disclosure of activities of Azef.

Despite being an opponent to "Bolsheviks", she died peacefully in 1943.

Posing As Aryans In Belgium

By Ephraim Farber

Page 342: Rivka Basha Messinger

Being 11 years old, a brother sent for and took in his sister, Rivka Basha Messinger (Kuten) to Belgium. Jews, at that time, sought ways from direct to indirect means to leave Poland, which was gorged on hatred for Jews. Her dream, in fact, was the Land of Israel, about which she had dreamed for her entire life, but this never came into being.

From her earliest youth, she was compelled to work hard for sustenance, helping her brother in his business. In the course of time, Belgium became her homeland. She settled into the Belgian culture, and with the way of life of the local population.

When she became older, she studied painting in the Belgian Art Academy, and was awarded the Louis-Smith Prize in the show of French artists... she also was privileged to receive an international prize.

She lived happily with her husband, Albert, but a black cloud darkened her life, not having any children.

In the 'Aryan Side'

However, hiding one's self among Christians, and living under an assumed name kept her in a permanent state of anxiety, and this has a fatal impact on her health situation. In order to pass a s a genuine Christian, she worked as a servant for a Christian family. She carried out all the hard labor, complied with all of the whims of her masters, and was kept in bondage, without complaining.

This was the cost exacted, what a Jewish woman had to undergo, in order to survive the bloody foe of the Jewish people. At night, on her bed, with choked back tears, she cried into her pillow. She had to control herself, and not to cry out her Jewish pain.

The Impact of Abnormal Conditions

The final months of fear for her life stretched out for a long time. The grating, full-throated song of the marching German soldiers penetrated from the street, which congealed the blood in the veins. There were days of great confusion, hopelessness, and abandonment, not seeing a single ray of hope to survive the Hitlerist overcast. Not only once, would she eavesdrop on the conversations of the Christian neighbors: ' They deserve this for killing our Holy Jesus'....

She covered her face – as a good artist would – with a mask of conformity, even while her heart was stopped out of pain. The smallest change in her appearance would have given away her Jewish origins, and placed her in danger of death.

Fortunately, only a small insignificant minority of the Belgian population acted this way. By contrast, others expressed their regret about Jewish persecution by the Hitlerists. The progressive part of the population helped the Jews to avoid the axe of the murderers, and carried on a struggle against the Nazi occupier.

After the liberation of Belgium by the Allied Armies, Basha, began to construct her ruined life anew, with her husband, who had come back from the camp. However, the suffering from the occupation period had a bad effect on her health situation. After a severe illness, she passed away in Brussels.

Kiryat-Yam, 1982

Disappointment from the Socialist Regime in Poland

By Bella Rosenblum (Scher)

Page 344: Picture of the Author

After the outbreak of the war between Germany and Poland, we left the country and crossed over to the land of The Ukraine, that had been captured by the Soviet Union. We reached Volodymyr-Volyns'kyj, and lived their under conditions of terrible hygiene. As people who had left Poland, we lived together with more than ten families in building that had been plundered of all its hygienic facilities, and necessities of life. This condition, which was literally tragic, lasted for a number of months.

The one consolation under these conditions was the knowledge that we were still free, not having the terror of the German Army upon us, that had already spread itself over all of Poland, sowing death in all the Jewish settlements.

After several months, we were able to cross into the Soviet Union. There we lived in the environs of Vologda, and a little at a time, we began to accustom ourselves to difficult conditions. My father and brothers began to work, and I went to school.

The war between Germany and The Soviet Union broke out, and our condition, like that of the remainder of the settlers deteriorated. It was especially difficult to come by the necessities of life during the period of the war.

When a partisan organization was established in the year 1943, a trace of improvement could be detected in our circumstances. From the announcements published in Polish newspapers that appeared in The Soviet Union, we leaned of the Holocaust that descended on Polish Jewry, despite the fact that it was difficult for us to believe it. Only upon our return to Poland, in 1946, was the Hell, that the Jews had gone through, exposed before our own eyes. This was a terrible nightmare to us.

Nevertheless, after six years of wandering, it fell to us to build our house anew, and the initial period was not an easy one. We sunk a great deal of energy in order to assure that the country was put on its feet, which had known so much tribulation at the hands of the Germans. We were partners in the building of a Socialist Poland. With a full heart, we believed that only in Poland, in which the workers will rule, will an effort be made on behalf of all of its citizens, that conditions for the development of community and culture would be guaranteed. Only in it, every citizen – with out regard to nationality, origin, and faith – will have equal opportunity.

However, after 11 years of residing in Poland, which was our birthplace, which we loved with a genuine love, we were compelled to leave her. During the final period of our stay, anti-Semitic outbursts increased, and a variety of community causes aroused the feeling within us, in a very clear manner, that we were not wanted in Poland.

Our only desire was to leave this country and make aliyah to Israel, where as Jews in our own country, we will be able to enjoy complete freedom.

Haifa, 25.3.57

Returned from the Red Army

By Yehuda Weinstock

Page 346: *Report from the Social Aid Program from January 1 - June 30, 1941*

Arriving in Lublin, after I was let go from the Red Army in the year 1944, I set off to locate *landsleit* from Szczebrzeszyn who remained alive. On the way from Koval to Lublin, I did not encounter a single Jew.

Lublin could be compared to a [prison] camp. The bombs fell on the side where the Nazis were. No people could be seen in the streets. I ran into single Jews and they told me about the terrifying fate that had befallen all the Jews of Poland.

As a soldier in the Red Army, they invited me to the 'Peretz House,' where there were several hundred Jews – men and women, mostly partisans from the forests, a large number from out of the country, who were dragged by the German fascists to the Polish camps to be executed.

The day was precisely on *Hoshana Rabbah*. The Jews made a pulpit out of stones in order to conduct services, and a Polish priest that had concealed 6 Torah scrolls, brought them to the 'Peretz House.' All of the several hundred Jews began to pray and prepare for the Festival Holiday. I did not come to pray and [instead] ran about in all the rooms of the 'Peretz House' and looked for people from Szczebrzeszyn.

I enter Room Number 1 and I see Jews lying on the floor. A young couple, who had lain hidden for the entire time by a peasant in a village, now lie, both with impaired feet, exhausted, and unable to move. There were many such couples.

From the second room, I hear how Jews are praying, and crying pitifully. I am not observant, but it drew me. I stand to recite the *Hosha Na* prayers. Women and men, all together are weeping. Seas of tears are spilled. My heart became clenched and I, also, began to cry.

I stand myself off to a side, and scrutinize this gathering of Jews. Are they giving thanks to God for the fact that they have remained alive, or perhaps, is this a demand for vengeance?... I stand and think about my parents, if they were still alive, and would see me praying and weeping, they would have rejoiced with me, that I managed to emerge intact after the heavy fighting with fascism! I think about my dear wife and my only son, who were killed in a murderous fashion. I then felt that I was unlucky for my entire life.

Suddenly, my glances fall on an unfamiliar person, who was looking at me as well. He swayed vigorously in his praying, and wept bitterly. I could not recall who this person was. He could no longer restrain himself, and came closer to me and asked: – Aren't you Yiddl Weinstock?... And I to him: – Aren't you Moshe Mendel Sternfeld?...

I did not get an answer. Only our hands clamored around each other. We did not utter a word. Rather each bathed the other with tears. Our hearts understood, that we were brothers in this Great Calamity, that had befallen the Jewish people.

Moshe Mendel Sternfeld had been sent back from Russia in the Polish military. The second person from Szczebrzeszyn that I encountered, Joseph Szpul, was a partisan in the forests, and saved himself this way.

In Szczebrzeszyn After The War

By Hanoch Becher

Page 349: *Portrait of the Author*

You come into you own quarters, where you used to live with your wife and children. Every corner tells you about that one time happiness, but simultaneously reminds you of the suffering of martyrs and the enormous super-human torture that they bore until merciful death took them away. You walk on the ground, which is saturated with the blood of your near and ear ones, and everything burns under your feet like glowing coals.

I am one of those, who visited our shtetl after the destruction. I do not wish any enemy to have to live through what I have lived through.

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The entrance from the Zamość side had not changed at all, apart from the silence, which gives the impression of a cemetery. When I began to walk along the side streets, the great, all-encompassing destruction began to unfold before me. Everything had been wrecked and razed, just as if one had wanted to tear out a tree and its roots together...

I could not recognize the place where my parents used to live. No trace remained of our old *Bet HaMedrash*. The centuries-old Synagogue, which was a piece of Jewish history, which had been visited by thousands of tourists from the larger world, Jews and Christians alike, stands laid to waste, and wrecked.

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During the time of the '*aktion*,' there were over 3,000 Jew in Szczebrzeszyn, not counting those who had traveled in from elsewhere, from the surrounding small towns. In August 1942, the Calamity commenced. The first 400 Jews were taken away by the Nazis to Belzec, packed in wagons, near Tomaszow Lubelski. They were incinerated there. At the same time, 200 elderly and infirm Jews were seized, marched out into the pasture fields, and shot and [then] buried in a common mass grave. Afterwards, 700 Jews were seized, led off to a camp outside of Chelm, and killed them all in a gruesome manner.

In the end, the Nazis rounded up all those who had hidden themselves, and took them to the cemetery, shot them on that spot and buried them there. Christians told me who were commandeered to carry out the burial, that in covering up the graves, many were still alive.

My heart was like stone as I stood by the five mass graves. In these graves, my wife and my children are also to be found. My lips muttered a curse on all those who murdered and who indirectly helped to kill our dearest. I swore to take revenge in the name of all of them.

*

Returning from the cemetery, I decided to enter the home where I once lived. Coming up to the door, my heart pulsed rapidly. I knocked on the door.

A woman opened it, you understand, a Christian, a former resident of Brod. After greeting her, I said: – I used to live here before you came to live here. She interrupted me immediately, and added, by saying: – But nothing remains here of your possessions...

Looking around, I saw, that my former home, with small changes, remained the same as when I left it. Especially the furniture in the bedroom, was exactly the same and even stood in the same spots.

I began to swoon. I sensed that I would immediately fall down, and I quickly sat on my own stool and asked for a glass of water. I rested for a couple of minutes, and then said: – Do not be afraid. This home is not my own, and I cannot use the furniture because I am going to Israel, to our own country, where such gruesome and murderous things cannot happen to Jews. I want nothing from you.

I left the residence, and Szczebrzeszyn as well, together with the Jewish blood soaked into the Polish soil, with a pain in my heart.

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Coming to Israel, I again reunited with those of my family who had remained alive: five brothers and a sister. Despite the difficult conditions in the immigrant housing, in a tent, I regained the strength and energy to live.

A special impression was made on me, when, for the first time, I took part in the *Yahrzeit* assembly in memory of the martyrs of Szczebrzeszyn, where I had the honor of opening the memorial service.

Multiple feelings dominated me at the introduction to the memorial service. Shall I weep out of pain? Or should I choke off the tears inside, deep in my heart, and [instead] rejoice with a deeply felt happiness, because – no matter how great that pain will be, with the loss of our nearest and dearest: fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children, my own wife and two children – it is a balm to the spirit to encounter with a heartfelt joy, this small portion of those who remained alive. We have not only remained alive, but also outlived them, Hitler and his accomplices.

The joy is that much more intense for having lived through so many tribulations and suffering – with the partisans in the forests, with the saved people in the various bunkers, in the camps by the Germans and in far away, wild Siberia, where at 40 degrees below zero one was compelled to work for 600 grams of bread as black as the earth itself, and a bit of watery soup. So we come together on this happy location in Israeli territory, in the Jewish home that we fought and won for ourselves, as free Israeli citizens, established free Jews, planted in our own soil.

That joy is all the stronger, seeing before us Jews, observant, communists, *Bundists* and members of a variety of Zionist groups. All have gathered together here, united in that sanctified Yahrzeit memorial day, to shoe respect to our unforgettable, beloved martyrs from Szczebrzeszyn.

We will do all that is possible to erect a monument, which will reflect, for coming generations, all that our landsleit created, making no difference as to which party or persuasion they followed, up to the time of the Great Calamity, including the suffering that the martyrs underwent, until death released them from their tribulations, from which the very few lived through, and who are spread all over the world.

Were I able to, I would take hold of the rotten pillars of today's world, and with the full hate and anger in my pained soul, I would shake them and call out: *let my soul perish together with thee!*[60]

Wroclaw 1946 – Kiryat Bialik 1982

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[60] The author borrows the biblical phrase attributed to Samson, who when pushing down the pillars of the temple of the Philistine idol Dagon, cried out, *'Let my soul perish with the Philistines!'*

The Belzec Camp

By Ephraim Farber

Page 355: *A Map of the Lublin District Showing Death Camps*

The description of the Belzec camp is the closing chapter of the section '*Leid un Unkum.*'

An the beginning, in 1940, it was a labor camp, later – from the beginning of November 1941 to the end of June 1943 – an extermination camp, where 600,000 martyrs were put to death, among them, most of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn.

Belzec is found in the Zamość district, southeast of Tomaszow Lubelski. The camp was set up in a wooded location and encompassed an area of 6 hectares. At that location, the trees were cut down, and the area was cordoned off with triple rows of barbed wire. The center of the camp was connected to the Belzec train station by means of a rail siding with a amp to offload the arrested people.

The construction of the camp began in November 1941 and ended in February 1942. The extermination camp existed until June 1943.

The camp was divided in two – functional and administrative. In the functional part, there were barracks for people, apart from those arrested, who temporarily worked, storage facilities, and other setups. In the center was an extermination building with gas chambers, and pits for the victims. In the beginning, 3 gas chambers were active, driven by the exhaust fumes from installed diesel motors. Later on, a pair of additional gas chambers were built onto these.

The camp was ruled by the '*Sonder Kommando Belzec.*' or the '*Dienststelle Belzec der Waffen SS.*' The manning consisted of 30 SS troops and 200 '*strazhnikehs*' (overseers), under the control of the Commandant. The name of the first commandant is not precisely known. The second, until September 1942, was Christian Wirth.[61] The last commandant – *Hauptsturmbanführer* Gottlieb Hering (The first commandant, Dolf[62], was

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[61] The historical record counts Wirth as the first of the commandants:

The first commandant appointed to Belzec was the *SS-Sturmbannführer* - SS Major Christian Wirth (from December 1941 to August 1942). He was succeeded by *SS-Obersturmfüührer* - SS 1st Lieutenant Gottlieb Hering (from August 1942 to December 1942). Christian Wirth, a former police officer who had played a leading role in implementing the T4 "euthanasiaprogram," developed his own ideas on the basis of the experience he had gained in the "Euthanasia" program and decided to supply the fixed gas chamber with gas produced by the internal-combustion engine of a motorcar. Later, exhaust gasses from an internal-combustion engine would make way for the more deadly, faster working Zyklon B. *SS Hauptscharfüührer* - SS Master Sergeant Lorenz Hackenholt was responsibe for the extermination and cremation block.

[62] Evidence of this perpetrator can be found in the account of a survivor originally from Piotrkow Trybunalski, as posted on the internet at:
http://migs.concordia.ca/memoirs/kotkowsky/kot_mem.html The item reads as follows:
A BAD TASTE OF SLAVE LABOUR

known to me personally as a prisoner; he is recalled in the portrait 'In the Hell of Belzec' P. 232 – E. F.). The organization of the extermination was thrown under the direction of the SS and the police of the district of Lublin, where the chief was O. Globocznik.[63]

The '*strazhnikehs*' carried out the function of guarding and the separation from worldly goods, etc. Approximately one thousand prisoners were allocated to help them in their work, mostly for the segregation of clothing from the victims, and for incinerating the corpses of the victims. This manpower was periodically changes over, absorbing newly arrived prisoners, after the prior ones had been murdered.

Those who were arrested, were brought to the camp primarily by train; from non-distant points – with automobiles. The limited capacity of the offloading ramp assured that for larger train transports, they would be directed to the station for up to 20 cars, which were then brought over to the camp.

It is difficult to precisely fix the number of prisoner transports that came to Belzec, because it was not given to us to acquire the relevant documents; also, the train documents were not under guard. the following serve as sources of information: the declarations of the Polish rail employees, who were employed by the train station; representations of the local populace; documents regarding the deportation of their Jewish population from the ghettoes from the former districts: Krakow, Lublin and Radom.

The first hundred people from Lubycza Krolewska, who worked at building the camp, were murdered in February 1942. The train transports arrived, with certain specific interruptions, from March 15 until the end of November 1942. In March and November there were 15 transports; in the other months (with the exception of May) – up to 20 transports. Each transport consisted of 40-60 freight cars, in which there were 100-130 people each.[64]

Those arrested, were driven to the place connected to the unloading ramp. The men were left at that location. The women and children were led to the '*Szatnia*'[65] (Disrobing Room), where they left their clothing, money,

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In the spring of 1940, the Jewish Council was ordered to provide all able bodied youth for slave labor camps in the Lublin district. With some maneuvering, my older brother and I got out of it. My younger brother was taken to Belzec, along with several hundred Piotrkover boys, to dig ditches at the new Russian border. We received disturbing news from those forced labor camps, that our boys had been badly mistreated by the SS men. A delegation of mothers and relatives raised their voices in the Jewish Council, when we talked about it with Mr. Tenenberg. He said that he had been sending food and clothing parcels for the boys regularly (so did we). He also promised to do everything in his power to bring the boys back home. He kept his promise. With the advice and help of our Rabbi Lau and others, he sent Salomon Gomberg with money to the Lublin district in order to take the "sick" boys out of those slave labor camps. After their return home, they related horror stories about the treatment of the SS men under the direction of Oberleutnant Dolf.

63 Odilo Globocznik (1904–1945), Nazi executioner of Polish Jewry. Born in Trieste, Italy, Globocznik joined the Nazi Party in Austria in 1922 and was nominated *Gauleiter* of Vienna in reward for his part in the preparation of Austria's annexation in 1938, but was later dismissed for embezzlement.

64 Simple arithmetic puts the death toll in the range of 0.48 - 2.2 Million people.

65 This name seems to be derived from the Russian word, шатать, which is to shake down.

jewelry, etc. After this – to the barbering hall, where their hair was cut off. Then the prisoners were driven into a not large courtyard, separated from the camp with a high wooden fence, and from there – into the gas chambers. When filled to the maximum, the chambers were hermetically sealed. The motors were started up, and after 15-20 minutes, the dead bodies were pulled out through special moveable doors, to the small field-railcar, that led to the mass graves.

All victims were subject to a 'dental inspection' in order to tear out gold teeth.

Among the group of men, who had been left behind at the place, the Nazi criminals selected the young and the strong for labor in the camp. the remainder, they drove to the barracks, where they had previously driven the women and children. The clothing, as well as possessions of the victims, that had been left behind, was later carried over outside the camp, near the station, and their it was suitably sorted and prepared for being sent away. The children were used to tie pairs of shoes together.

Sick prisoners, those who were broken and crippled, were forced to enter the gas chambers under their own strength. The most spent, were murdered by the SS on the spot.

The bodies of those who were killed were buried in long pits, which had been prepared as anti-tank fortifications when the war with the Russians began.

In October 1942, they began to cremate the stacks of bodies from the arriving transports, as well as those who had been buried previously. The ashes were poured into the emptied pits, and then covered. The cremation of the bodies continues without interruption until the spring of 1943.

In this time, a number of facilities were removed, and others (gas chambers) were obliterated. The place was smoothed over, and permitted to become grown over. The final prisoners, who worked on liquidating the camp. – were sent to the extermination camp in Sobibor.

Over 550,000 Polish citizens of Jewish origin were sent to the Belzec extermination camp. From them, approximately 300,000 from Galicia, also transports of Jewish populations from Soviet Russia, Austria, Holland, Germany, Norway, Romania, Hungary.

Poles [sic: non-Jews] were brought in from nearby areas, and from Lemberg, apparently for offering assistance to Jews, or those belonging to subversive organizations.

*

Approximately 600,000 people were killed at Belzec. The perpetrators of this crime at Belzec were not punished. So, for example, 7 criminals – former members of the staff of the camp – were not punished by West Germany, which in the year 1965, recognized that they were acting 'at the order of Germany's higher needs.'

At the former location of the camp of mass extermination, a monument has been erected, on which it is written: 'To the Memory of the 600,000 victims of Hitlerism, of the Belzec Extermination Camp, Murdered in the years 1942-1943.'

Translated from Polish

An Accounting of the Distribution of Midday Meals and Bread for Refugees, Quartered in the Szczebrzeszyn *Bet HaMedrash* During the War

Seq	Last Name	First Name(s)	People
4	Ackerat	Chana	1
2	Ackerfeld	Hirsch	4
3	Ackerflug	Golda	3
126	Arbesfeld	Yankl	6
1	Aszenberg	Sarah	4
77	Baumfeld	Mordechai Joseph	3
158	Beglaybter	Yaakov	7
90	Beitcher	Joseph	5
94	Beitcher	Joseph David	2
19	Bendler	Shlomo	4
71	Berger	Abraham Moshko	1
48	Berger	Leah	1
151	Blei	Shmuel	4
136	Bleiweiss	Roizeleh	1
50	Bleiweiss	Sarah	2
40	Borenstein	Joseph Lazar	2
156	Brafman	Leah	5
157	Brafman	Yitzhak	5
114	Braverman	Dwora	3
73	Bricks	Ephraim	3
106	Bronsberg	Tzivia	6
93	Bruner	Kayla	4
102	Cahan	Chaim	5
28	Cahan	Mordechai	5
122	Chesner	Yankl	5
46	Dreyer	Dwora	3
174	Eichenblatt	Leib	3
124	Elboim	Chana	4
55	Falik	David	4
159	Fass	Chaim	4
65	Feder	Joel	8
97	Feder	Rivka	2
72	Flakser	Mordko	4
66	Flajszer	Moshko David	2
45	Forter	Aharon	6
176	Frampoler	Joseph Aharon	6
172	Frampoler	Mendel	8
140	Frank	Baylah Itteh	1
74	Frenkel	Shmuel Zisha	5
37	Frier	Berko David	8
43	Frier	Etla	5
146	Frisch	Yaakov	3
54	Frost	Abraham	5
103	Frost	Benjamin	7
14	Fuchs	Fradleh	4
135	Garfinkel	Chana	4
63	Geier	Hirsch	7
161	Germanowicz	Isser	7
18	Germanowicz	Sarah'leh	1
58	Goldgrober	Gitla	3
62	Graber	Zalman	8
80	Greenspan	Mala	3
34	Grossbard	Pinchas	5
61	Halpern	Chana	5
56	Halpern	Mordko Wolf	2
67	Halpern	Moshko	5
137	Halpern	Nikha	5
98	Halpern	Hirsch	8
111	Harmelin	Hinde	4
27	Hartz	Sarah Perel'eh	4
116	Hilf	Leib	5
81	Hilf	Rivka	3
118	Hochman	Meir	5
165	Hochman	Yankl	5
100	Hoff	Wolf	5
184	Honigman	Sarah	4
170	Hoyf	Daniel	6
175	Hoyf	Hinde	4
168	Hoyf	Nahum	5
38	Hoylfer	Yisroel	3
13	Ingber	Itzig Ber	2
12	Ingber	Moshko	6
15	Ingber	Pesseleh	3
112	Ingber	Sarah	4
9	Kalbfeld	Aydeleh	5
68	Kalmanovich	Fishl	6
79	Kaufman	Itsko	5
29	Kaufman	Khemya	2
145	Kaufman	Mendel	5
83	Kaufman	Shimon	3
110	Kayl	Berko	5
5	Kayl	Bina	2
20	Kaytl	Sarah	1
139	Kinstlikh	Zanwel	5
183	Kislovich	Hanoch	4
22	Klayner	Berko	6
113	Klayner	Ella	6
23	Klayner	Joseph	4
179	Klayner	Kayla	3
82	Klieger	Menashe	2
57	Knaydl	David	1

Seq	Last Name	First Name(s)	People
138	Koenigswald	Chaya	7
84	Korn	Rasheh	6
121	Kotlazh	Shmuel Itsek	6
148	Kovershtock	Itsko	3
131	Koyl	Abraham	5
30	Koyl	Chana Dobreh	1
39	Kramer	Leah	2
64	Landau	Eliakim	7
155	Leffler	Joseph	5
53	Lehrman	Itzko	7
125	Lerner	Ella	3
85	Lerner	Shlomo	2
119	Lichtfeld	Hatzkel	1
47	Liebel	Perla	5
117	Maimon	Aharon	4
24	Mandeker	Charna	6
26	Mehl	Shmuel Zisha	5
134	Meldiner	Ephraim	5
150	Meller	Shmuel Ber	7
31	Messinger	Esther	1
32	Messinger	Faiga	1
173	Mildiner	Hirsch	5
86	Mintz	Yisroel Mendel	7
133	Mitzner	Rivka	1
16	Montog	Mendel Hirsch	4
105	Montog	Reizel'eh	4
109	Nadel	Mala	4
115	Nickelsberg	Moshko	4
186	Nobel	Yankl	5
8	Nuss	Moshko Naftali	2
130	Oberfersht	Yekhezkiel	5
95	Pekh	Blima	2
41	Pekh	Shia	4
171	Pekh	Shmuel	6
10	Pomerantz	Yekhezkiel	4
164	Ratt	Chaim Ber	5
152	Rayter	Berish	7
49	Richter	Yankl	5
123	Rieder	Braneh	4
128	Roitman	Abraham	2
52	Roitman	Faiga	4
163	Rosenberg	Shia	6
51	Rosenblatt	Itzko	7
70	Roseneil	Hadass	2
153	Rosengard	Leib	6
178	Rott	Tuvia	2
104	Schatzkammer	David	6
132	Schissel	Gitla	1
87	Schwartz	Benjamin	5
162	Shapiro	Bina	3
147	Shtibl	Chaya	3
144	Sobelman	Shmuel	8

Seq	Last Name	First Name(s)	People
35	Steinberg	Chana	3
36	Steinberg	Shia	5
76	Sternfeld	Shia	3
25	Scher	Sarah	1
60	Scher	Sholom	8
91	Shtemmer	Itsko Hirsch	3
101	Shtemmer	Mindel'eh	1
129	Szmyrer	Hadassah	3
59	Szper	Mirla	3
42	Szpringer	David	4
120	Szpringer	Leib	8
6	Szpringer	Pesha	1
99	Sztikh	Perla	3
169	Szyfer	Abraham	4
33	Taubenblatt	Yehuda Tuvia	4
149	Tenzer	Shmuel	4
21	Trenstein	Shlomo Shia	3
88	Wachs	Aharon Leib	3
143	Waldman	Esther	3
177	Waldman	Liebeh	3
167	Waldman	Shmuel	5
166	Walsman	Sarah	5
185	Weber	Joseph	5
7	Weinberg	Dwora	5
181	Weinberg	Frimet	3
141	Weinshelboim	Fruma	3
154	Weiss	Leah	1
160	Weisstukh	Mordechai	4
180	Wortman	Abraham Isser	6
182	Wortman	Moshe	4
96	Zamler	Raphael	5
142	Zaydweber	Pinchas	4
69	Zegerman	Mordko	3
17	Zelinger	Wolf	4
11	Zilber	Abraham	8
127	Zilber	Faiga Leah	3
78	Zimmerman	Yekhiel	5
92	Zisser	Mattes	5
89	Zisshonig	Nahum	7
75	Zucker	Chava	5
44	Zuckerstein	Tzivia	1

PORTRAITS

From the Gallery of Personalities

By Moshe Messinger

A) Personalities from the Little Synagogue

Near the Great Synagogue there was a little synagogue, where mostly laborers prayed. They would get there while it was still quite dark, in order to get in the recitation of a chapter of the Psalms. When it began to dawn, they would quickly complete their prayers, and have out an argument with the Master of the Universe before they began their daily struggle for their little bit of bread.

There were two nice personalities in this little synagogue. One of them – Hona the Wagon Driver, or, as he was called, Hona Bork, has one objective in his entire life: every winter, in the most intense cold, he would be the first one to arrive in the little synagogue and heat up the oven. – Jews need to argue with God not from the cold, but from warmth – he would say. And prayers were not begun without R' Hona's concurrence.

I recall, that his sons emigrated to America even before my time.

The second Jewish person – Yoskeh Kandel, or as he was called, Fat Yoskeh, had a beer saloon. Every Friday towards evening, he would bring wine for the *Kiddush*, and, indeed, it was he himself who would make *Kiddush* for the congregation.

B) A Young Singer and Lecturer

When the Zionist concept began to develop in our home, Shmuel Liger was among the first of the young people who took part in the movement of the right-wing *Poalei-Zion*. Very quickly, he became one of the attractive and few singers ans lecturers of our *shtetl*.

People from all the partisan groups and folk persuasions loved him. Even political opponents showed him respect. Because of his weak physiognomy, he seldom appeared in debates. However, at literary discussions and debates, he and his cohort, enriched the awareness of the youth. Everyone took account of his word. There was no community or political question that was not resolved without his concurrence.

His parents, R' Menashe Liger, and his wife, Faygel'eh, were called the Brooks. This name comes from the mother's side. David Brook, a rich man, married his daughter to David Liger; in those days, it was called a good-luck match. He was a considerable scholar, a musician, and a renown *baal-tefila*. I remember when Menashe Liger would lead prayers on the Festivals, people came from all around to hear him *daven*.

After David Brooks died, the entire fortune went over on Faygel'eh's name, however, the business was ruined, and the family became impoverished.

Shmuel Liger inherited the good nature of his mother, and the modesty of his father. He saw, not only once, how his mother did not eat properly, and shared with others. In his younger years, he learned, but because of the impoverishment, he was compelled to interrupt his studies and help the family with making a living.

C) Active in the American Assistance Committee

I wish to provide an overview, and characterize a few of our social activists, who raised themselves to a higher plane, and permitted others to also raise themselves from the depths. Of special note was the activity to develop the young people in the thrust for changing the way of life, for paving a way for better days, for a more attractive way to live.

In early youth, Pesach Bork (born in the year 1911) had to learn a trade to help his parents with providing sustenance. His parents, Hona and Rivka, were not people of means, very decent, always burdened and driven in order to enable the family to have a respectable existence.

Pesach was possessed of a great urge to learn and for knowledge. During the day, he would work, and late into the night, he would sit and learn and read. In worker circles. he gained the reputation as a man of note. For a long time, he was drawn into being a leader of the workers.

Being uncertain of his existence in Poland, Pesach emigrated to America at the age of 20 years. There, he married his wife, who comes from Jozefów, and lives the modest life of a worker in America. However, also in America, in the roiling turbulence of business, Pesach does not forget the old tradition, and takes part in many community activities.

After the world became aware of *The Calamity* that Hitler had brought upon European Jewry, under which also our *shtetl* Szczebrzeszyn was included, Pesach created – without much thought – together with others as well, such as Hirsch (Harry) Tulkop, David Waldman, Yaakov Gershtenblit, the Assistance Committee for our *landsleit*. Not only one time did Pesach supplement a given sum for social help out of his own pocket.

Someone who some day will document the archives of the Szczebrzeszyn Committee in America and in Israel, will see how much energy this man invested not only in the area of community help, but also in searching out and uniting those who were lost, those sown and spread to all corners of the world. Hundreds of requests about social help. but even more searching for relatives went through his hands, all without monetary compensation. Pesach dedicated his best leisure hours to his brethren across the sea.

*

In this sacred work, he is assisted, as we said, also by other friends, founders of the Assistance Committee, who did not forget their 'old home.'

Yaakov Gershtenblit was born in 1893. At the age of 17 years, he became a delegate to the Zionist regional conclave in Lublin. During the day, he works, and late in the nights, by the light of a wax candle, he studies science. In 1912, he leaves Poland, and comes to America, where he graduates an institute for architecture. As an architect, he assumes the responsible post in the New York Hospital. He marries in 1920.

Being occupied with the exigencies of his own life, he does not, though, forget his Szczebrzeszyn brethren. Since 1931, he is one of the founders of the Szczebrzeszyn Committee in America, and serves as Secretary during the years 1931-1946. Especially in the tragic moments of Jewry in Poland, Yaakov Gershtenblit applies his entire energy to the assistance of his *landsleit* from Szczebrzeszyn.

*

Hirsch (Harry) Tulkop is an interesting individual. Just as in the past, he stood in the ideological conflict to affect the development of the young people, so he works here in the arena of social assistance. Quiet and modest, he is for many years, active in a totally committed fashion in the Assistance Committee.

Personalities with Heart

By Yehuda Kellner

In writing this article, I cannot make peace with the thought that the personalities of the town no longer exist, but rather belong to history. It appears to me that I have just seen them, and just spoke with them.

I have the greatest respect for them, because from them, all of those who grew out of the old way of life into the new progressive one, came from them, all of the parties, the leading edge, the fresh youth of the *shtetl*. I will never forget all of these personalities with heart

My pain is great, because they could not live out their naturally allotted time, but were cut down by a bestial hand. I will attempt to portray them with my meager talents.

The Torah Scholar

Moshe Honigman was a Torah scholar of a Jew, a fanatic. He never had any time. He would always fly through the streets, his hat pulled down almost over the eyes, in order to prevent his glance from possibly falling on a woman.

Of medium height, scrawny, he never paid any attention to how he was dressed.

After midnight, it was possible to always find him in his Hasidim *shtibl* with a *Gemara* in hand. He would learn in this manner until dawn began to break. He would stand himself to recite his prayers with the first *minyan*. Having completed his prayers, taken a bite that would barely sustain him, he would then sit for the entire day at the Rabbi's, as a facilitator in legal disputes. He took umbrage at the young people who – according to his point of view – had strayed from the true and proper path.

Der Gorajecker

He was called '*Der Gorajecker*,' but nobody knew his name. He was a scholarly Jew, a profoundly wise man, tall, erect, and walked with a delicate stride, lost in thought, and always solitary.

If you ran into him, and then tell him something, he would not rush to reply, he would close an eye, smile and peer into your soul, then he would answer your question, and thereby give you his opinion, which was always substantive, calculated, and worthwhile. He was not any great [religious] fanatic.

He made his living as a teacher of *Gemara*. He would inculcate his students and elicit learning from them, and would peer deeply into the pupil's soul, and would simply compel him to speak his mind about specific disputations of the medieval sages. Not only one student would be on the receiving end of a fiery slap when he did not know what to answer.

He would bang on the table, and shout at the top of his lungs: – Rambam said as follows, and R' Pappa said

thus, and what do you have to say, you *goy gammur*?....[66]

His student thought of him as being bad, but despite this they loved him.

The Watchmaker

He was called Moshe David *Zaygermakher,*[67] and nobody knew his family name. Everyone in the *shtetl* had the greatest respect for him. He was very knowledgeable, and of exceptional intelligence, and had an ordination as a Rabbi, however, at a variety of opportunities he turned down proposals and did not want to be a Rabbi.

He was no fanatic. His demeanor was in accordance with the modern system, even though he never showed it. He was a truly decent person, and it was a pleasure to have a conversation with him.

He made a living from his own work. He repaired watches.

The Magnate

The big magnate of the *shtetl* was Mordechai Flajszer. He presided over a royal household with servants and assistants. Whoever came into his home hungry, left sated.

He was a great philanthropist. Being the owner of a factory, he would donate heating wood in the winter for the poor. For Passover, he would distribute potatoes for needy families. He also had a mill on his property.

He was able to work himself up to his level thanks to Graf Zamoyski, being the one who received the undertaking to erect the sugar factory, and he earned a fortune of money. Thereby, Mordechai Flajszer was also able to construct his own house. When Graf Zamoyski became aware that the contractor had built himself his own house out of these funds, Mordechai Flajszer was thereafter forbidden to step over the threshold of the Graf's palaces.

Being a very rich man, Mordechai Flajszer was able to purchase pedigree. He arranged good marriages for his children and had sons-in-law, such as Yankl'eh Mintzberg, Yirmiyahu Rabinovich, etc.

Teachers-Caterers

In those years, there were not any modern schools, only *Heders*, where teachers toiled. The 'top of the heap' of these was R' Motya Szpitz. When a student had already completed *Heder* with R' Yankl Shlomo'leh's, or at R' Shlomo'leh Itcheh Sholom's, he then went over to learn at R' Motya Szpitz.

He would say to the 'White Characters:' We are now attending university, we are learning at R' Moshe Szpitz.

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66 From the Hebrew, meaning 'complete gentile.' The implication being that the target of the question was totally bereft of any knowledge having to do with the question.

67 A Watchmaker. This is one of the many instances where a person's appellation was derived from a trade, or skill.

Apart from this, there were a coterie of elementary school teachers: in our parlance, these would be: *Volksschule.* They would learn the alphabet for years with Jewish children, *'Halb Trop.' 'Ganz Trop'* and '*Ivri,*' and a portion of the Pentateuch. These were: Shlomo Gall(Belfer), Itcheh Belfer, Yaakov Belfer. On *Hol HaMoed,* they would visit the parents and sign up the students for the coming 'period.'

This form of teaching did not provide sufficient income, and the elementary school teachers also would serve as caterers at Jewish weddings. These caterers would also have their cooks, that would prepare all manner of good things for the wedding guests. In total, there were three cooks: Chava Ethel, Itteh Ketzeleh's, Faiga, Itcheleh Bedder's. The were scared, literally to death, of the caterers.

*

I also wish to describe, in a couple of lines, another few personalities with heart from several walks of life in our *shtetl.*

- Velvel'eh *Bracha-Zoger*[68] who during prayers, would repeat a given word several times in our *shtibl.*
- El'tcheh Weiss never had anything to do, and lived in the greatest need. However, he never lost his sense of humor, and attitude, and was always joking.
- Nehemiah Anbrenn divorced and remarried the same wife several times.

Buenos Aires

68 Literally, a reciter of blessings.

Highly Productive Activists

By Yankl Lamm

Three people have much to their credit in the area of the education and enlightenment of the youth of the *shtetl.*

Joseph Szpringer, a teacher by profession, had a great influence on extracting youth from ignorance and darkness. He spread knowledge and culture among the students. He helped to found the general Zionist organization, '*HaTekhiya,*' and together with the teacher *Lazar*, from Chelm, and *Abraham Itcheh Becher*, founded the Library in the year 1917.

Later, in the year 1918, Szpringer founded the '*Bund*' organization, which took in practically the entire working class youth of the *shtetl.* He is also elected to the city council and a Jewish representative he commits himself to the good of the many. He takes a special interest in the needy, poorer, and sick Jewish populace. He defends the Jewish interest, which elicits an outcry from the Polish anti-Semites. However, thanks to his intrinsic decency, he is respected by the better elements among the Christian populace.

*

The Hebrew teacher, known by the name Lazar, had a special influence on the education of the youth in the area of culture.

Both having been products of the *Bet HaMedrash*, the previously mentioned persons knew how to attract the boys from the *Bet HaMedrash*, and a little at a time, draw them into the new community institutions such as '*HaTekhiya,*' Zionist get-togethers and into the city library.

*

Also, *Moshe Hirsch Berger* involved himself with organizing activities for Zionist purposes. Together with Hirsch Getzel Hochboim, and others, he helped to create the '*HaTekhiya*' organization. He was elected by the folk masses and small business people to be a councilman in the city council. He founded the People's Bank. Later, he helps to organize the unofficial [sic: illegal] *Betar.*

Yankl'eh Honigman takes up Zionist activity from his youngest years. Later, he works in the '**Bund,**' and primarily in the Tz. Sh. O.(The Central Yiddish School Organization). In the final years, he is active in the underground organization. In 1939, he flees from Szczebrzeszyn to Vilna, where he falls at the hands of German murderers in the first days of their march into Vilna in the year 1941.

Yerakhmiel Ginsberg was the director and bookkeeper of the People's Bank. He holds this position since the bank was founded until the end. As a venerable leader of the bank, he knows the poor clients very well: merchants and craftsmen. He always helps them in their need with all his resources. The bank stands on a higher level, and is recognized by the authorities.

Brooklyn, NY

Military in Appearance, Pioneering in Spirit

By Emanuel Chmielasz

Leibl Licht was the actual leader of *Brit HaTzahar* (the revisionist organization) and *Betar*, in Szczebrzeszyn. His political speeches and his political outlook were honest, literally 'palpable to the hand.' In a word, a brilliant speaker and organizer.

I go back to the years when I was 16-17 years old, opposite our house was the office of the two organizations. Leibl transferred the Yiddish Library there. It appears that the old library, which was found on the new road, fell apart because of political differences, and the books were divided up among the parties.

In the beginning, the library of *Betar* did not have many books, and Leibl Licht enriched the library. I was then a subscriber, and twice a week I would come to exchange the books. Because of this, I had the opportunity to have discussions with other young people, until I was drawn in as an active member of *Brit HaTzahar*.

Leibl Licht was interested in everyone's individual talents. During one evening, Leibl requested that I should come to the gathering, which was supposed to take place several days later. Upon arrival, I was seated next to Mordechai Jurpest and Berish Makharovsky, who was the secretary, and was writing the minutes. M. Makharovsky and I were also asked to write the minutes, each according to our capability. In a few days later, I was told that I was the official secretary of *Brit HaTzahar*. I became 'broader and taller' from my pride.

In a short time thereafter, the revisionist party split, and I was one of the first members – together with Gewitz and Kh. B. Bock – in the Grossman 'Judenstadt Party.'

I see before me the imposing reception of the one-time official of *Betar* in Poland, Aharon Propess. The *Betar* organizations from the *shtetl* communities around Szczebrzeszyn at that time took part in the reception. I remember the *Betar* Guard in the coach, in which Aharon Propess rode. The handsomest young men, like senior military officers. The march from the train station to the Betar office in Szczebrzeszyn was like a march of an entire battalion of army officers.

*

I know, that not only one of those who will read this, will say that I have forgotten, or deliberately omitted, the words, 'the brown uniforms.' Well, that was then, and by the standards of the present, both brown and red are disqualified. I merely wish to bring out that Leibl Licht had the 'nerve' to bring the official to our little *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn, the head of *Betar* in Poland, and to organize such an exemplary march of ordinary Jewish young men, who never had any sort of military training, and nevertheless, they looked like 'officers.'

Leibl Licht educated the young people in an idealistic Zionist fashion. Two from these ranks, who came from well-provided homes, went off to the Land of Israel: Nesha Hochgelernter and Pearl Mabeh. They were drawn politically to *Betar*, not to *HeHalutz*, despite the fact that they had a pioneering disposition, worked very hard in the Land of Israel, and not only once, went hungry, but they passed the test.

Leibl Licht also created a school for training in wood turning in Szczebrzeszyn, in Benjamin Hirsch's wood turning establishment. Thanks to him, the entire family of Benjamin Hirsch went off to the Land of Israel, as well as others, who worked in the wood turning establishment. This was a result of Leibl Licht's education process: In appearance – military, in spirit – pioneering, in the path of labor.

Montreal, Canada

The Leader and Teacher of the '*Bund*'

By David Fuchs

Page 372: *David Szpringer*

David Szpringer dedicated his entire life to the general community and the activity of the '*Bund.*' He was immediately elected as a councilman at the first municipal election in Szczebrzeszyn, and subsequently in each turn.

He elicited a great deal of recognition for his community work from the entire Jewish community. The religious Jews would vote for the '*Bund,*' arguing: we are not voting for the '*Bund,*' but for Yossel Szpringer.

Indeed, he helped the poorer element a great deal. People would come to his home in the morning and the evening. When the matter was urgent, and swift assistance was required, he would leave his meal, and run quickly to resolve the issue, and was always successful. Yossel Szpringer was active in all areas of Jewish community life: the city council, Jewish congregation, Jewish *Volksschule*, '*Volks Zeitung*,' etc. The Christian populace also respected him.

When the Germans, ימ"ש entered our *shtetl,* we were sitting in the '*Bund*' office and burned all the documents of the party, in order that they do not fall into the hands of the murderers. Shia Blei was also with us. Shia took the party seals and buried them. Very likely, they continue to be buried there to this day...

It was in this manner, that Yossel Szpringer served our *shtetl* up to the last minute of his life. With the outbreak of the war, everything ended. Hitler ימ"ש, turned the dreams of the young into naught, the dreams of *'Bund'* and *'HeHalutz.'*

*

Like a dream from bygone days, I see my *shtetl* like a dream through a fog and gray, the streets, the blue sky. It bloodies the heart, to lose the melody of the mothers, bent over the cradles of the children.

I see you my brethren, my Jewish of home, worried, harried, but always satisfied. I see you, young people, resolute, like one, the builders, the searchers, the perpetual dreamers.

Now, the wreckage of my *shtetl* stands burned out, and the ghosts of those whose lives were violated, weep.

Montreal, Canada, 24.12.52

Two Community Activists

By Zanwel Aszenberg

Page 373: *Beryl Koyl*

A) The Very Talented Public Speaker

My friendship with Beryl Koyl begins back in childhood. We played together. I saw how the son of Abraham Hirsch Traeger – the future public speaker, the best reader of modern poetry, lover of song, talented performer of L. Kobrin's '*Dorft Yung*', and other pieces – elicits wonder from everyone.

With what deep concentration he reads and immerses himself into the literary creations of Jews! With what joy he tells me that now, we will understand what Peretz Markish wants in his '*Kuppeh*' because the beloved writer Melekh Ravitch it is coming to our *shtetl.* Indeed, for the entire way that we went on foot from the train to the city, he truly 'opened our eyes.'

No one more than I did not cease to wonder about his capabilities. I could not stop thinking of how it is possible for such a multi-colored flower to bloom on such an inhospitable locale... hunger, dampness, smoke from the collapsed chimney – that was the environment of his house, where he was raised – and nevertheless, a great deal of lust for life. How much joy and refinement he possessed!

*

To the extent that I know, Beryl Koyl was among the first to be taken to slave labor, from which he returned, but already with ruined health, and a destroyed vitality. I did not receive any further regards from him while he was yet alive. In a somber written description about the martyrs, I found his name. That dear friend, who showered his youth and loving warmth on everyone, who committed all of his energies to his ideal, for his fellow companions, for his striving to achieve a better tomorrow, fell while still young.

B) The Provider for the Poor Class

Yossel Szpringer was born to poor parents. However, the children of the family – not the parents, not the sons: Yossel'eh, Leibl'eh, and Avromeh'leh – nobody complained. On the contrary, father and mother derived a great deal of satisfaction from their children.

Yossel'eh was the darling of the family. From childhood on, he demonstrated a good mind for study. In *Heder*, he overtook his partner, the Rabbi's son, in matters of study, and helped him out.

The city showed respect and love to this shoemaker's son, Yossel'eh, for his knowledge, which he acquired through self-education, his skills, his physical strength he gave away to the children of his level with the objective: helping the poor with knowledge, with understanding, with a will to fight for a better world.

Our great teacher, I. L. Peretz, showed us the greatness of the Rabbi of Nemirov by warming up the home of a sick woman, that this act is greater than trying to reach the heavens. Yossel Szpringer, in his day-to-day acts on behalf of the poor of Szczebrzeszyn, was without a doubt a disciple of Nemirov... His greatest joy was when he could show results with the help of his mandate in the city council, a clutch of wood for a poor family, a free

visit by a doctor for someone who was sick, but without means, creating a place to send someone to the city hospital, or sending them to a large city for healing. He fought with the Endekist majority in the city council for permitting a number of Jewish workers to access work that was available. Everything that hurt the poor was his own concern.

One single house, a poor one, which many times was very, very much in need of help, was for him out of the list. This was his own... He inherited this from his father. A greater fortune came to him that to his father. He was rich in his beautiful movement, in which he helped to create the '*Bund*,' the professional unions, the school, which actually diminished his meager bit of bread.

Indeed, here, in the creation of the school, which was the pride of the movement, his personality was revealed. With his boundless enthusiasm for it, he struggled with all the difficulties and infects others with his striving, that a division of the Tz. Sh. O. should be in Szczebrzeszyn.

His domain grows with the grown of all the branches of the *Bundist* movement in Szczebrzeszyn: The Bundist Youth movement, '*Zukunft;*' the doubling of the city council allocation; the election of a *Bundist Lavnik*. That was the greatest victory of his life. He created everything joyfully, and it was to this that he dedicated his life.

Hasidic Jews did not clandestinely call for voting on 'behalf of Yossel Szpringer' at the time of city council elections, because nobody but he would, without any fear of the Noble, ay what has to be said, and place himself at risk. 'Into the congregation we will send pious Jews, in the Magistrate – men with nerve, that's what they are'...

*

I had the good fortune to get to know him even better at the time we were arrested after the explosion at the Warsaw citadel. We were tossed in together with many other people who were arrested, in a small detention room, a 'cubicle' made up of several bare boards. It was necessary to arrange that each individual would sleep for two hours during the night. He was always among the last. But to take a part of a cigarette, of a piece of bread – the first. His ability to calm us, and cause us to laugh at 'them' at the investigators, with their idiotic attempts to extract a declaration about taking part in the attack, strengthened everyone.

As the youngest of the group I was beaten at the inquest. Woe, woe, what pain and sorrow that caused him. – 'Why did you not raise an alarm? We would have broken the door off its frame!' He yelled at me like a father, whose son had made himself look foolish... seeing his sorrow, that I had caused, I completely forgot the blows I had received, and regretted the fact that I had even spoken up.

For his entire life, Yossel Szpringer was prepared to sacrifice himself for others, for the general good. Along with the entire community, with all the martyrs of Szczebrzeszyn, he also went to his end.

Buenos Aires

The Good-Hearted Doctor

By Beryl Ettenberg

At the end of The First World War, the need in Szczebrzeszyn was extraordinarily large, and enveloped wide circles of the *shtetl.* However, a group of community activists did not let their hands fall to their sides in resignation, and searched for whatever means they could find to lighten the need.

They demonstrated their first activity at Passover, when the poor populace did not have the means to create matzos. A matzo bakery was put together, which not only distributed matzo for free, but also engaged poor Jews, who received a salary and thanks to that, were able to prepare for the Passover holiday.

The living spirit of this very bakery was Shlomo'leh Rofeh, who committed his entire energy and strength to this very action.

But apart from this, Shlomo'leh Rofeh (in actuality a *Feldscher*) was the Angel Raphael of the Szczebrzeszyn poor. No sooner had a poor person fallen ill, than Shlomo'leh sat at the side of the sick bed. Not only did he not require a fee, but he personally provided for medicines from his own home laboratory for the sick. When he personally was unable to create the medicaments, he would buy them at the pharmacy with his own money. In cases when he could not help the sick person by himself, he would send for other doctors, and paid their fee.

I remind myself of when the Germans took over out town in 1915, an epidemic of cholera and spotted typhus broke out. An epidemic hospital was then created, and the director was indeed, him, Shlomo'leh, because the entire poor population was at that time sick.

The relationship of the populace to this good-hearted doctor was expressed when Shlomo'leh Rofeh closed his eyed forever. The masses– the Jewish poor, craftsmen, and plain folk people – mourned the deceased with tears, and the entire *shtetl* bewailed this loyal friend of the needy. His casket was escorted by his son, and his wife Chaya'leh, who was a loyal life's companion to her husband, and as a midwife, she delivered the children of the poor mothers without charge.

Mohel and 'Doctor'

By Mendel Farber

R' Yankl Nickelsberg, or as he was called, R' Yankl Shimon's, was a Torah-educated Jew and a good *Mohel.* He did not pass up a single *Brit* in the city, especially among the poor, who had no means with which to celebrate a *Brit* in a festive manner.

While he was personally very tight-fisted, he would look for monies 'from under the ground' and provision the festivity with whiskey and *lekakh.* Personally, he would make do with the minimum, but at the home of a poor family that was celebrating a *Brit,* he would make merry right along with all the others.

For a set time, he was the head of the congregation, but unlike the others of that time, he did not take any remuneration.

When I was learning the Talmud and the *Poskim* in the *Belzer shtibl,* together with three other of my friends,

at the side of the Teacher and Director, R' Yankl Shimon's would sit by himself near the oven, and poor women would bring their small sick children to him for examination.

He would then take the small child from the woman's arms, strip it naked, put it down on the 'table,' where the Torah was laid for reading, and thumping with his finger over the little body, would ascertain the diagnosis. He would then take out a small bit of 'ink-metal' and on a small piece of paper – smoothed out from a cigarette that had been smoked down – write out his prescription. He would preface this by saying it would have to cost a 'sixer.'

When the poor woman complained that she did not have the money with which to buy the prescription, he would knock on the wall, where on the other side, his grandfather, R' Eliezer Papiroshnik lived, and was learning *Gemara* with the children, and shout to his grandmother, the righteous woman: '– Rachel Leah'leh, Rachel Leah'leh! Send me in a 'sixer!' Faster! It is a matter of life and death!'

His grandmother, ז"ל, hearing that it was a matter of life and death, would run out of the house in one breath, open the door of the *shtibl*, and throw in the 'sixer.'

This is how R' Yankl Shimon's healed the poor children of the *shtetl.*

Kiryat-Yam

Overly Zealous Fanatics

By Mendel Farber

The *shtetl* was religious.
Religious, religious, but what's the limit??...
True, one must fulfil the commandments, but it is possible to overdo it...
In this respect, there were many types.

A Strongman in Meting Out Punishment

R' Moshe Honigman was a great scholar, very religious, and very strict. As soon as he saw a Jew doing something that one should not do, he reacted with his mouth. When this did not help, he resorted to his hands, despite the fact that he was a weakling, but at times like this he became a formidable strongman.

It is interesting that he had a son, who was far removed from observance, but he did not act badly towards his son.

Not Speaking During Worship

On Shabbat, during worship, R' Yankl Getzel's would walk around the synagogue, and pay watch to assure that nobody should not speak out. And the result was that nobody dared to say a word. Before he would appear, actually, there was a lot of conversation going on during prayer.

Ready To Throw a Knife

R' Yisrael Hirsch, the *Shokhet*, was already a man in his seventies, though full of energy. He was still slaughtering even the most difficult of the oxen.

He would lead the *Musaf* prayers on the High Holidays. He had a voice like that of a lion. When there was an congregation of a thousand people in the synagogue, everyone could hear him, as if they were standing right next to him. He prayed with a full heart, and no one grew weary of hearing him.

He observed *kashruth* with great zeal. There was once an incident when he went to the matzo baker for Passover, at the time when his [sic: personal] matzos were being baked. He told a woman, who was rolling the dough, to scrape off the table where she was doing the rolling, and it appeared to him that it was not done the way he wanted it done. He then grabbed a knife, with which one cuts carrots, and threw it at the woman. Thanks to good fortune, it did not hit her in the eye, but near the eye.

This incident was discussed a great deal in the *shtetl*, and everyone was vexed that a person should display that kind of anger. Despite this, everyone forgave him, because he didn't so this for any personal reason, but rather in the Name of Heaven.

He lived to be over 80 years.

A Dybbuk in the Kasha ...

They were older men – two brothers. As shoemakers, they lived by the toil of their hands, not, God forbid, deriving anything from the largesse of other living beings.

In the morning, they would got to worship, and to learn a page of *Gemara* with *Tosafot*, and after that, they would work until time for afternoon and evening prayers, and then would return to the *shtibl* to pray and study, and after that, again back to work.

When a delegation from the community would go to collect donations, they always tried to skip them, not wanting to enter their place, because they were certainly not wealthy. But they would notice the *Gabbaim*, call them in, and give them the best donation.

One of the was childless. The other had children, and underwrote their weddings generously. One was a Hasid of *Kuzmir*, the other – of *Radzyn*. But this was not an obstacle for them to be able to live together harmoniously.

They were highly superstitious. It happened at one time, that one was cooking hominy grits. Sounds began to come out of the cooking kasha, like groaning. So the two brothers called together several religious men, in order to provide solace to the soul that had gone into the kasha...

The men said to them, that every pot does this when kasha is cooked. But this was to no avail. They argued that a human soul had come to them for rectification, because the groaning noise was exactly like that of a human being....

With Sacred Water from the Mikva

The *'shtetl* lunatic' was not always crazy. He also had normal periods during which he behaved quite normally.

When he was possessed by insanity, he would wrap himself in *tallit* and *tefillin*, and begin to recite all manner of prayers, mostly prayers from Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. On a fine Wednesday, he would recite the '*Kol Nidre*' prayer, and it was astonishing to hear such a pure, clean enchanting voice. People would stop to listen to him. He would recite prayers by heart, without the use of a prayer book. He would pray this way for three days consecutively, adding content from the books of the Kabbala.

He would say that he was the Messiah ben Joseph and he is paving a way for the Messiah ben David. At night, he would go, in *tallit* and *tefillin* to the river, even in the winter, to immerse himself. It didn't affect him adversely. He was always entirely healthy.

In the *Bet HaMedrash*, he loved to serve the wise scholars. He would bring them water, carry out water. They really didn't want to use him this way, because he was a very fine person, and also learned. But it was to no avail. He did everything for them.

It is told, that one Saturday night, after Sabbath, when the Hasidim prepared a repast for the *'Melaveh Malkeh'* he brought a jar, and ran to bring water. He filled the jar at the *mikva*... and with it, he prepared a red borscht...

After eating with good appetite, and before the final blessing for the meal, he blurts out: – today we had a good borscht, prepared from the sacred water of the *mikva!*....

What then transpired there is difficult to describe. Everyone who had swallowed the holy borscht immediately brought it up again.

From that time on, the Hasidim resolved that it is forbidden to utilize this person for any sort of mission...

Kiryat Yam

The Righteous Woman

By Chava Sapian

In the *Bet HaMedrash,* near the *Schulhof,* young people would learn Torah day and night. There were pious women who would bring food into the *Bet HaMedrash.*

Among these women was Rachel Leah'leh the Righteous Woman, Lejzor Papiroshnik's wife, who would fast every Monday and Thursday, and on days when *Selikhot* were recited. On a daily basis, she would bring hot peas to the young people who were learning in the *Bet HaMedrash.* She would also be concerned with those who did not have anything to eat, to see to it that they should not, God forbid, go hungry.

Most of all, on the eve of the Sabbath, she would go around from house to house, for the most part among the people with means. Each of them already was waiting impatiently for the Righteous Woman, and would donate to her from their best.

She also had those who helped her, her neighbors. One of them was Kayla Moshe Joseph's, Abraham Bernstein's mother, a very decent woman, and a pure soul.

Zenik the Partisan

Yankl Lamm

Page 383: Untitled portrait, presumably of the subject.

In 1946, I met Zindel Reiber in Ulm Germany, who was known in the partisan movement by the name Zenik, the youngest son of Yossel and Faiga Reiber, Yoskeh Kandel's daughter. In sorrow, he conveys to me merely drops from the cup of tears, suffering and degradation, from which he had imbibed.

Hundreds of Jews flee into the forests, principally the forest of Kosobudy, with the frail hope: perhaps they will be given the chance to save their lives there. Among those who fled, are found also Zenik and his family.

He tells: After days filled with hunger, without water, we were forced to seek food in the nearest village. when we returned with a little bit of food, we encountered our dear ones, almost my entire family, butchered, together with many other Jews.

With my brother, with a few young people, we fled deep into the forest, we found firearms – guns and bullets, and began an assault on the murderers, knowing that the game was not to win... we joined up with other partisans, and continued to attack, however, with time, our ranks diminished.

Together with my brother, we took vengeance for my parents... we conducted the war from two sides. After Mandzheh, Zeftel Reiber's daughter had already fallen in battle, my brother was wounded in the hand. Not wanting to be killed at the hand of the murderers, he puts an end to his own life with the last bullet remaining to him.

I wander endlessly through forests, until Izbica. My one living friend is the gun on my back, under my jacket. I get myself into the Izbica ghetto, and search for the Pelz family. I revive their spirits, and one at a time, I lead them out into the forest. In this manner, 12 persons remained alive after the liberation.

I spoke at great length with him, wanting to re-implant drive and hope. My view was focused on his genuinely good-spirited appearance, which were the bare outlines that remained from the vanished burgeoning youthfulness. There was no more joyful outlook, no remnant of the lustiness, no sign of initiative....

The abnormal life of his homelessness – spending the day, but not the night, at night not sleeping, during the day not eating – create organic complications in the stunted Zindel. In 1948, he undergoes an operation at the age of 22 and dies.

Brooklyn, New York

Rabbi Gaon R' Yekhiel Blankman, הי"ד

Rabbi R' Abraham Goldschmid
Son of R' Chaim, זצ"ל
Rabbi & Bet Din Senior of Zamość
Author of the Book, '*Zeykher Chaim*'

When The Rabbi, R' Yekhiel Blankman became Rabbi in Szczebrzeszyn, a letter came from the Senior Rabbi, the *Tzaddik* of Sokolov, in which he wrote that a light emanates from Szczebrzeszyn, with the declaration: Rejoice and sing, those who reside in Szczebrzeszyn, because a Great Personage is within thee.

My father, of blessed memory, would tell me, that Rabbi Blankman, coming to Zamość regarding community matters, would take lodging with us. He would amuse himself by engaging in Torah *pilpul*. My father underscored that he had a particularly sharp mind, and apart from this, to wonder, he was a genial rhetorician, both when it came to discourse on religious matters, or casuistry, as well as in the modern style.

In '*Sefer HaBe'er*' by the Rabbi, *Tzaddik* R' Zvi Hirsch Frieling זצ"ל, (The Rabbi of Byskowcze) his sayings were printed, and his Torah arguments, and also other monthly reviews. He exhibited a great deal of commitment to education in the spirit of the Torah and Judaism.

His son, Meir'l הי"ד, was already renown at the age of 15 years, and the young boy was recognized as some one who was destined for greatness. He studied at the Yeshiva *Khakhmei Lublin*, headed by The great Rabbi Shapiro, זצ"ל. When Rabbi Shapiro passed away, the son of Rabbi Blankman was at the head of the mourners.

When the Nazis had already besieged Szczebrzeszyn, before capturing the city in 1939, Rabbi Blankman gave a discourse, and among other things he said: 'The young lions, when hungry, roar for kill, and beseech God for their prey. And when the sun will shine, they conceal themselves with their deeds. But the Nazis do their deeds, without shame, in the middle of the bright clear day.'

Rabbi Yekhiel Blankman הי"ד, was killed along with the martyrs of Szczebrzeszyn.

The Jolly Grandfather

By Ephraim Farber

Szczebrzeszyn produced many illuminating personalities. One of these hundreds of folk people was my grandfather, Moshe Farber (Kliskeh) ז"ל. Neither the winds of the Enlightenment, nor the advent of modernity had any influence on these stubbornly unyielding Jews. The religious mode of thinking was rooted in them going back hundreds of years, and it did not diminish with the passage of time.

Grandfather was a simple Jew, very much one of the people. Suffused with folk wisdom, he trod with certainty along the path of our ancestors. He bubbled over with folk wisdom, and folk humor. He had a clear mind, and was capable of scholarship. In the fallen and the oppressed, he saw his soul brother. Quietly, without tumult and display, secretly, he loved being able to help the needy. The injustices of the community pained him, as well as the plain bloodsuckers, of which there was never any lack among Jews. His personal philosophy of life about many problems from day-to-day life was something to hold in wonder.

At *Sukkot* time, I would eat with my grandfather together in the *Sukkah*. It was then that his life's view was revealed to me. Like a bubbling spring, the wisdom of life would pour out from his lips, from the religious place. He was not in accord with the leadership of the *Rebbes*. His opinion was, that a genuine *Rebbe* should go on foot, and eat black bread with garlic! The obligation of the wealthy Hasidim was to immediately divide up their means among the poor. And since such a *Rebbe* was not to be found at hand, he was therefore not affiliated as a Hasid.

During Elul, when even the fish in the water would tremble, was the season of reckoning of the soul. On Yom Kippur Eve, grandfather would go immerse himself in the Wieprz River. It could be a rainy day, with strong, cold winds, as often occurs in the autumn in Poland; that did not deter my grandfather. Making an ablution on Yom Kippur Eve was a custom for him taken from antiquity.

His various sayings still lie in my mind, aphorisms and jokes, for example, a Jew from Szczebrzeszyn came to him with a question: R' Moshe, of what use are your swamps to you? (My grandfather owned a couple of hectares of '*bagnista*' meadows). So he answered: When the Messiah will come, these bogs will become floods of sugar, and the water will become transformed into Bacheyevsky-whiskey; this will enliven all the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn, with no distinction made between rich and poor...

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Going in the winter to unlock the *Schul,* shut closed by two heavy massive wooden doors, reinforced with iron, a peculiar picture unfolded before him: a person, with a prayer shawl drawn over his head, swaying in prayer in front of the Holy Ark...

My grandfather used to say, that he did not fear the dead, only the living. He then called out, that the personage that belongs to the Other World should return to his rest... it appeared, that this was a not normal Jew of Szczebrzeszyn, who, after completing the evening prayers, remained in the *Schul* overnight. – The *'Ani Ma'amin'* faith of my grandfather was not any primitive phantasm, but a belief that was palpable, and permitted itself to be felt.

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As a young boy, my grandfather studied in the *Bet HaMedrash*, and was exceptionally fluent in matters of the Halakha. He had a perfect command of Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and Russian. As my father would tell it, he

wrote verse in Hebrew as a young man. Regrettably, these compositions with his beautiful poems and prose creations were lost. My father remembers a few short lines: 'A threnody to David. What was your haste to flee from the place of joy and satisfaction, and you sought refuge in a pit full of dust and destruction.'

Grandfather became the *Shames* in the *schul*. He was the only one who took up this occupation. The Rabbi of Szczebrzeszyn would consult with him about a variety of laws, and also in instances that had to do with the cemetery. He was a brilliant Torah reader, with his bass voice. What a pleasure it was to hear my grandfather read the Haftarah!

He was beloved and praised by the entire *shtetl*, both by Jews and the Poles, from the poor to the rich. Everyone accorded him the greatest respect, because very few Jews were so exceptional. He was always jolly, lusty, satisfied with everything that God had created.

I dedicate these words to my grandfather, ז"ל, in place of the gravestone on the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery that was wrecked by the Hitlerist vandals.

Kiryat-Yam, 1958

Worked Hard, Comported One's Self Well

By Ephraim Farber

The Dreyer family was beloved by everyone in the *shtetl*. The grandfather, Moshe Chaim made a living by being a wood turner.[69] The grandmother, Malka, also was concerned with earning a living, and also brought help to those in need.

*

While it was still dark outside, and one can still hear the cawing of the black crows on the steeples of the Roman Catholic Church, a delicate rain drips in the autumn weather, the grandfather, Moshe Chaim rushes with his *tallit* and *tefillin* under his arm, to the first minyan. He cannot permit himself the luxury, like the idlers, who sit after the prayers, late into the day. The yoke of making a living forces him to conclude his worship.

He is also a member of the *Hevra Kadisha.* He takes no compensation for this sacred duty. He does this in the name of heaven. It is necessary to look after the gravestones of over 120 years. He will have much to speak about to the Heavenly Court above, when he will have to give an accounting of his deeds during his sojourn in the world of sin.

*

The grandmother sported a head covering, which covered her wig. Strands of hair hung out from the head covering, which gave her a gracious sort of appearance.

The bygone hard days lie hidden beneath the old creased face, the worry of a mother for her children, and many sleepless nights.

Most hours she is engaged in the small stall in the large trading *Halle*. In the stall can be found: buttons, thread,

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69 This is another case where a family name was derived from the occupation of its breadwinner.

needles, combs, in short, – 'a fashion business.' Most days of the week, she looks for a buyer, that shows up infrequently. 'The great redemption' is on the market day which comes out on Tuesday.

On the cold winter days, she warms herself with a fire pot with glowing coals, which she holds between her feet, covered with her long outer garment... the few pennies of earnings are an important supplement to the household income.

Apart from this 'big business' with the 'fashion store' the thing that deprives her of most of her time, is taking care of her 12 children.

In her free time, she helps the needy families, sick widows, of which there are many in the *shtetl.*

*

One of Malka's daughters, Mattl, followed in the way of her mother. She was 'goodness personified,' a feeling heart to her fellow human being and his travails.

She would gather Challahs secretly, fish and other edibles, from among the families with means in the *shtetl*, and silent as an angel, she would insinuate herself into the house, where poverty would peer out from every nook and cranny. With a mild, warm, cascading smile, she would place the package with the produce that she had gathered. She took care not to be noticed by anyone, in order not to embarrass those who were in need of help.

Her pay consisted of the joy in knowing that the Sabbath would not be ruined, and yet another poor family would have some pleasure in the Sabbath.

*

One of grandma Malka's sons, David, dealt in produce, which was a supplement to the household income.

Immediately after Purim, one began to bake matzos for Passover. This was also a task at the wood turning location. It was mostly women and girls who rolled the dough. This was a hard, tiring work. Involved in this also were a wheelwright, a baker, a water-carrier. The work day began with the first cock crow, and ended around midnight.

From these hard-earned groschen, money was saved for an item of clothing, a modest overcoat for the husband for the Festival Holiday.

*

After the Hitler plague, a very small part survived out of this multi-branched family. Single numbers made *aliyah* to Israel, even before the Second World War. Part were swept along by the flood into the Soviet Union. Remnants were scattered all over the world: in Austria, Canada, Argentina and Israel.

May these simple words be their memorial in place of the ruined gravestones at the Szczebrzeszyn cemetery!

Kiryat-Yam

Looked After the Needy

By Ruth Greenspan

My father, Herschel (Zvi) Ingber marked his ancestry from a generation of Rabbis. He personally had ordination, but he did not choose to make a living from it. He worked as an expediter for the railroad. When it became necessary for him to work on the Sabbath, he gave up his work, and opened a food store, in order not to violate the Sabbath.

He was a man of the spirit and of Torah, believing strongly in divine oversight. that the Eternal One was the Guardian of all Israel, who protects them from all manner of ills. His demeanor was not of a fanatic, but profound faith, laced with modernism, which at that time, had already begun to penetrate the Jewish street. He also had command of foreign languages.

The Zionist concept was not alien to him. He had a premonition about the storm, that is approaching Polish Jewry, seeing the signs in the domestic anti-Semites. The assaults on the Jews got stronger with each passing day. The conclusion was, that there was no future in Poland for Jews, especially for the young people.

Shortly after Hitler came to power in Germany, my father offered advice to we, his children, in 1934: Rachel, Moshe, and Dwora, that we should make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. After meeting my husband, a refugee from Berlin, we obtained a certificate from Germany and on the eve of Passover in the year 1935, we arrived in the Land of Israel.

*

My mother, Faiga, of the Weissfeld family, was a Righteous Woman. She had a feeling heart for all those who were needy, and helped the sick, orphans, widows, seeing all of this as a mission.

When the Holy Sabbath drew near, she would begin being concerned that no one, God forbid, should miss out on anything, and that it should be possible to celebrate the arrival of the Sabbath in an honorable fashion, as God had instructed – with meat, fish, and wine for *Kiddush.* she went out all over the *shtetl*, and gathered whatever she was permitted to take. She also encouraged those who were sated that they should not forget the hungry. She wanted this little bit of reward for The World to Come, like the one in the I. L. Peretz story, who is satisfied with being a footstool to her husband, the scholar, in the Garden of Eden.

The grandfather, Zalman, was a community person. he was elected as the '*Lavnik*' in the Szczebrzeszyn City Council, where he carried out his responsibility with great impact, that the Jewish populace expected from him.

After the First World War, when deprivation whistled through most Jewish homes, the grandfather Zalman made great efforts, both legally and illegally, to obtain help for the Szczebrzeszyn Jews from American Jewry. His life's goal was to lighten the need of those in want. The assistance consisted of necessities of living, clothing, and a good word of comfort from grandfather. He kept the gifts from America locked in his storage facility, and kept the keys himself. He was afraid of his wife, grandmother Faiga, who might get the idea of distributing a bit of flour, sugar or an item of clothing among her children, and he took great care to assure that his own hands were 'clean.'

A community kitchen was opened at that time. The work in the kitchen was carried out by volunteers. The food was distributed free to all the needy. My grandmother Faiga did a great deal in running the kitchen.

*

When a Rabbi was selected, among the candidates was also Rabbi Yekhiel Blankman, ל"ז. Bribery was employed during the election: voters were paid for their votes with money. My father wanted an eminent Rabbi in Szczebrzeszyn, with a command of the Polish language, and to be able to respectably represent the Jewish populace with the institutions of the regime. For this reason, he instituted the candidacy of Rabbi Blankman and brought him the Great Synagogue to give a sermon.

An opponent of the candidacy gave my father a blow, and his spectacles and prayer book fell to the floor. A couple of days later, the perpetrator – it was Chaim Einbern – cam in his stockinged feet, going through the marketplace in this manner, to beg for forgiveness and mercy. In the end, my father's candidate was elected, Rabbi Yekhiel Blankman. As it later became evident, it was an auspicious choice.

Herschel Ingber was one of the 10 prominent Jews, who were murdered by the Nazis on September 1, 1939 in the center of Szczebrzeszyn.

Jerusalem

Menachem Messinger – The Pleasant Octogenarian

By Ariela Reuveni

An article that appeared in *Davar*, Wednesday 1 Adar I 5738 (8 February, 1978)

Page 390: *Portrait of the painter amidst his pictures*

The genial artist, who has these days reached his eighties, chose to celebrate his birthday with two exhibitions: in the Goldman Gallery in Haifa, and in the 13½ Gallery in Tel-Aviv. The principal theme in both of these exhibitions was 'Peace,' whose symbol in Messinger's eyes is the pure white dove, and a white winged horse, on against the firmament of the environs of Jerusalem (incidentally, the dominant colors in the later drawings by Messinger are blue and royal purple, yellow, silver and gold).

Menachem Messinger was born in a little town in Poland to a family of metalworkers, Who for many generations were employed in the creation of sacramental ware for both synagogues and churches. Apparently, that is how the name of the family was set, Messinger – a coppersmith. During his childhood, he learned in the '*Heder*,' and already at the age of 11, he was compelled to provide support for the livelihood of his family. He did this by ornamenting walking sticks.

His friends tell, that while he was still a boy, he displayed a great interest in music and song, and was greatly moved by bucolic scenes. In the year 1932, he made aliyah to the Land of Israel, and supported himself mainly through building trades. He only began to draw at the age of 70, after he suffered a heart attack. In his early drawings, in which he paid great attention to the finest of the details, were reminiscent of Persian art. He was prolific in drawing winged creatures, flowers, angels and houses of worship. It was in this manner that he drew the stories of the *Tanakh*, and the stories of legends and folk tales, with palaces, kings, villas and sorceresses.

Several months after Messinger took a brush in hand, he had a one-man show in Haifa. His daughter Chana,

a past actress in the cinema, who switched over to become his impresario, organized it on his behalf, and who did not stint on effort and community connections in order to exhibit her father's artwork there. On the heels of the first show, came other shows, in Israel and abroad, and to help organize them, the various professional offices of community organizations began to participate. To date, the drawings of Messinger are to be found in specific [private] collections in Israel and abroad, and in museums in Israel, the Unite States, France and Brazil. Several months ago, the artist won the first prize in a country-wide competition for drawings of the sea.

When one inquires of the venerable artist to explain his drawings, visions and symbolism, he responds willingly. Part of his subject matter he draws, according to his words, from numerology. Here, for example, on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the State of Israel, he sees pronounced hints for the arrival of that magical peace, and he gives expression to this in his later works.

"If one adds ten years (a *minyan*) in the count, to the twenty years, that are also in the count, one gets the word '*Ki*' which is the opening of the prayer, '*Ki Le'Olam*,' Messinger explains. The letter, '*Lamed*' – the first in the word, '*Le'Olam*' – expresses the spiritual soul of the Jewish people. '*Lamed*, times *Yud* equals '*Shin*,' that is to say 300. I foresee, from this, that in the 30th year of the State of Israel the peace will arrive, and will continue for at least 300 years."

The image of an angel that appears many times in Messinger's drawings, symbolizes – according to his words – the spirit of Elijah the Prophet, who is the Prophet of Peace. The white horse is the horse of Elijah, who will come to us, if God wills it, in escorting the Messiah.

Several art critics, Israeli and foreign, praise Messinger's works, and there are those who compare him to Grandma Moses in the U.S. and to Rousseau in France. With this, they underscore, that he is not a nostalgic, on the contrary, he sees in drawing, a vehicle with which to improve and beautify the world in which we live. "Messinger utilizes a visual language, that expresses ideas that one generally fonds only in the written word, and this is his uniqueness," writes a Brazilian critic. an Israeli critic underscores that Messinger draws his inspiration from the *Tanakh,* from Jewish history, and the geography of the Land [of Israel], however also from secular material. His landscapes remind her of ancient pictures of the pilgrims who came to visit the Holy Land.

The pictures on exhibit at the present show, whose principal subject, as we said, is peace, differ from the original works of Messinger. Personally, I think he lost some of the authenticity of his geniality, from the joy of his youth, and from the marvelous imagery that manifest themselves in his earlier work. His liberal; use of golden tones, the purple, the silver and gold do violence to the beautiful legendary quality of his older works, to my way of thinking, and this is sad.

Ancient Szczebrzeszyn

About the Szczebrzeszyn of the Past

By Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski

The Polish physician, Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski, who lived in Szczebrzeszyn for 22 years, engaged himself extensively in the ancient and modern history of Szczebrzeszyn. We publish here, with condensation, a chapter of his writings, which are distinguished in their objectivity and with knowledgeable substance.

In many Polish archives, and first of all in the '*Ordinacja*' of the Zamoyskis, in Warsaw, in Zwierzyniec, and in the royal archive in Lublin, much historical material lies untouched. Among them are several Szczebrzeszyn Municipal Books. To research these books, goes beyond my capabilities. However, I would take note of every news item about Szczebrzeszyn, which would successfully reach me. In such a manner, I was able to assemble a bit of historical material and I acquainted myself with the history of Szczebrzeszyn better than others.

I would give lectures about Szczebrzeszyn and its history. I would have to prepare myself very well to do this. From the materials, which I had assembled, I also took advantage of others, which were published in historical proceedings, supporting myself by my own resources.

First Historical Dates

Szczebrzeszyn is a very old city. Its first historical date is traced to the year 1352. In that year, the King, Casimir the Great ruled[70]. However, the settlement of Szczebrzeszyn had already existed for several centuries before this.

The so-called *zamczysko* [71] was once a fortified city, to which the construction of the fort walls and dug out defenses, bear witness, in the first row – shards of loamy building material. Names from neighboring villages, from the eleventh century onwards, we already encounter in Nestor's chronicle of Rus. One can infer from this, that at that point in time, Szczebrzeszyn already existed, which lay beside a great commercial thoroughfare, that stretched from the south to the north.

During the time of Ludwik Wegierski, a large part of the region from Belz and Chelm, along with the expansive Szczebrzeszyn and Turobin estates, belonged to Dymitr of Goraj, to whom the king, Wladyslaw Jagiello granted these properties with extraordinary privileges. He installed him at the point of all the roads, that wound around Szczebrzeszyn, creating a sort of independent duchy. The 'Szczebrzeszyn Lord' had great power. During the time of war, he stood at the head of the entire system in the area. During peacetime, he was the judge, receiving the gentry in his Szczebrzeszyn residence. Here, he was accorded great respect, and he would distribute land generously. this was almost the only instance that an independent duchy should exist in Poland.

This same Dymitr of Goraj funded the construction of the first parish cloister in the year 1393. His heir, Jan Amor of Tarnow, looked after his estates and interests with great zeal. He instituted fairs, and in order to provide incentives to the merchants, he freed them from all levies. He founded a variety of guilds, investing the shoemaker's guild with a special privilege.

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70 Casimir the Great ruled from 1333-1370.

71 Castle keep

Industry and trade developed to such a degree in his time, that in the year 1492, the king, Jan Olbracht specified in a special act, what roads in Greater Poland the merchants of Szczebrzeszyn had to travel with their wares. Many merchants traveled through Szczebrzeszyn from south to north, paying the set tax, for example, for a wagon with merchandise – 2 groschen, for an ox – 1 groschen, for a wagon with salt from Drohobycz – a measure of salt, and similarly in other cases. This brought in a large income to the city.

After the death of Jan Amor of Tarnow in the year 1500, Szczebrzeszyn belonged to the Tarnowskis for an additional 20 years. Later, it passed over as a dowry to the Kmitas. At that time, long-running feuds broke out among the family members over the Szczebrzeszyn inheritance, when also, in other families of magnates, there were pretensions to it as well. King Zygmunt August issued a binding decree, regarding this dispute, in the year 1555, allocating the right over Szczebrzeszyn to the Górka family, from Great Poland.

The names of the Górka brothers, Andrzej and Stanislaw are preserved in legends to this day, which the oldest of the Szczebrzeszyn residents tell. The Górkas confirmed the many privileges that had been given to the city even years earlier. They renewed the 'Defense Keep' of which traces remained on the '*zamczysko.*' There stable residence was in Great Poland, and during the time that they would spend in Szczebrzeszyn, the keep would be turbulent and merry, as was the custom among the magnates. An extraordinary movement reigned here, because the Górkas were community-minded people.

The Górkas took a strong interest in religious matters. They granted freedom to all religious sects. They built a Greek Orthodox church, and they transformed the parish Roman-Catholic Cloister into a Calvinist one, and opened a synagogue near it. The well-known fighters for the Reformation, Stankar and Felix Kreutziger, whose origins were in Szczebrzeszyn, sought the protection and oversight of these local magnates. During this time, Szczebrzeszyn reached the highest levels of development.

Rise and Fall

Many reasons quickly caused the cessation of development and later – the steep decline. A great loss to the city was brought about by the terrifying fire that broke out in the castle keep at the beginning of September 1583. The keep was incinerated, and all of the documents relating to the privileges from the king were lost. The fire broke out so suddenly, that the residents of the keep barely got out with their lives.

In that same year, the king, [Stefan] Batory, as a result of the efforts of Andrzej Górka , renewed all the privileges. For the benefit of Szczebrzeszyn, the Górkas confirmed and even expanded the Magdeburg Laws, which were in force for a long time in Szczebrzeszyn, instituting thereby, specific changes for the benefit of the citizens. [72]

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72 The archbishops of Magdeburg ruled a large territory as princes of the Holy Roman Empire. The city of Magdeburg obtained from them (13th cent.) a charter that was the model for hundreds of medieval town charters in Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and Poland. Under this Magdeburg Law a town governed itself through an elected council, had its own courts of justice, and was exempt from all duties except the payment of rent to the prince of the land. Magdeburg prospered and became one of the chief members of the Hanseatic League. Usually, the Law was introduced into the Slavic countries at the instance and for the benefit of the German merchants and artisans, who formed the most important part of the population of many cities. Jews and Germans were always competitors in those cities, and as the Jews lived under special privileges and were not

The Górkas did not rule here for very long. Already in the year 1592, the last of the Górkas, Stanislaw, dies, after which, the Szczebrzeszyn estates are taken over by the Czarnkowski family. In the year 1593, Jan Zamoyski bought Szczebrzeszyn from them, along with the surrounding 35 villages, and integrated them into his *Ordinacja,* which was created in 1589. In this exact time, Zamoyski founded a new capital city on the territory of his estates – Zamość, and he was most concerned with the development of that city. From that time on, Szczebrzeszyn lost its significance, its specific character, and its decline began.

Szczebrzeszyn began to assume a place like all the other towns of the *Ordinacja,* which Zamoyski cared about to a lesser extent than his beloved Zamość. Despite this, he funded the Monastery of the Holy Franciscans and next to it, the Cloister of the Holy Trinity, the modern day Cloister of Saint Katarzyna[73] near the hospital. Apart from this, he liquidated the Catholic[74] Temple and returned the one-time parish Cloister to the Catholics.

In the 17th century, the people were greatly occupied with religious wars. The attitude towards the Arians was one of great animosity, and it led to excesses, for example, as was the case during funerals of the Arians. This compelled Tomasz Zamoyski to issue a decree in 1637 that the Arians must leave Szczebrzeszyn, 'Where Arians has arrived, as well as adherents of new Christian sects.'[75]

The city suffered greatly from the wars, and assaults by the Tatars, Turks, and Cossacks. The city suffered especially greatly in 1672, when Tatars torched and plundered it. Masses of people would die from a variety of epidemics. The victims of the Plague were taken to a separate cemetery outside of the city.

Periodically, Szczebrzeszyn was the site of historical occurrences. In the year 1672, the so-called Szczebrzeszyn Confederation was organized with the objective of blunting the power of the Hetmen. The conferences would take place in the Cloister of Saint Katarzyna and Jan Zamoyski would take part in them,

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considered a part of the native population, not only were they excluded from participating in the benefits of the Magdeburg law, but their condition usually was rendered worse wherever it was introduced.

73 Polish for Catherine

74 It would appear that the intent was to refer to the Calvinist house of worship, created by the Górkas (see above).

75 The Arians (also called Antitrinitians, or Socinians) was the name of a sect of Christian 'Polish Brethren' from the 16th century. The movement started around 1562, and ended with the expulsion of Arians from Poland in 1658. The Brethren never participated in the *agreement at Sandomierz* between different Polish Protestants. The Polish Brethren advocated the separation of church and state and taught the equality and brotherhood of all people; they opposed social privileges based on religious affiliation, and their adherents refused military service (they were known for carrying wooden swords instead of real sabers) and declined political office. They did not believe in private property, were against capital punishment, and did not believe in the Catholic doctrines of Hell or the Trinity (see Unitarianism).

Although never numerous, they had a significant impact on political thought in Poland. After being expelled from Poland, they emigrated to England and the Netherlands, where their works were widely published and influenced many the thinking of later philosophers such as John Locke and Pierre Bayle

when he was '*Hetman Wielki Koronny.*'

Despite everyone, many new guilds arose in the 17th century, which achieved the highest level of development: bakers, coopers, shoemakers, hat makers, felt workers, linen workers, smiths, wheelwrights, locksmiths, sword makers, harness makers, metal workers, goldsmiths, comb makers, rope turners, weavers, and butchers – just the names and the number of the guilds bear witness to how vigorous the manual trades and industry developed here.

The 18th century was not distinguished by any sort of special thing. The *shtetl* declined a bit at a time. At the time of the partition of Poland, Szczebrzeszyn fell into the hands of Austria. To this day, Austrian coins are unearthed from that period.

New Development

Szczebrzeszyn began to develop anew, beginning at the onset of the 19th century. We can ascribe this to the fact that Zamość had ceased to be the seat of the Zamoyskis, and they turned their attention to Szczebrzeszyn, which was closest to their residence.[76] In the year 1811, they transferred the provincial school here from Zamość, which was closed there in 1809. In 1812, the Holy Mercy Hospital was transferred here from Zamość, which was set up in the building of the former monastery.

The town came alive. New people appeared: teachers, students, guests. New school buildings were constructed, and smaller private houses.

The public health office of the *Ordinacja* decided that it would locate its Chief Physician here. An *Ordinacja* Hospital was created for peasants with venereal diseases, which the general hospitals did not want to take in because of the monks. The Lady, Teofilia Reder opened a higher private school of 3 classes, for well-to-do girls. A Sunday trade school was organized, etc. Commerce revived. Even more people would come to visit here. However, the principal role was played by the district school, which drew many enlightened teachers to it, and [like] tempered young people.

The district school found itself under the oversight of the protector, Stanislaw Zamoyski who was rich in his influence, a Senator and Voievode, to whom the school is thankful for its existence, along with the Holy Mercy Hospital. The extremely wealth family of the Zamoyskis, who lived for the most part in Klemensow, apart from the *Ordinacja* itself, which resided in Warsaw, had a good impact on the entire area. It is sufficient to recall the meeting of the distant, but familiar landholders, organized by Andrzej Zamoyski. For this January event, the most important landholders would travel to come together here, from almost the entirety of Poland, which certainly had a significance and an influence on the nearby *shtetl.*

The influence of Stanislaw Zamoyski was so great, that Szczebrzeszyn, together with its district school, suffered less from the politics of Russification than other settlements, after the November [sic: 1830] Uprising. Despite this, the school was liquidated in 1852, as a position that it was an obstacle to carrying out the policies of the Russian authorities. This was a hard blow for Szczebrzeszyn, and an incalculable loss.

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76 As the author later points out, the Zamoyskis resided principally in Klemensow, which was a scant two miles away from Szczebrzeszyn , but nearly 8-10 miles from Zamość.

The significant decline of the city was immediately noticeable. The city was unable to rebound from this plight, even after the liberation, when a Teacher's Seminary existed here, and later a Gymnasium. Szczebrzeszyn never again reclaimed its former significance.

During the Time of the Uprising

The peaceful way of life was disrupted by the November Uprising in 1831. I found a short writeup, of the events in Szczebrzeszyn at that time, in the memoirs of the well-known pedagogue Wincenty Dawid. I reproduce here excerpts from his recollections, written in the year 1887.

> "In the end, our tranquility and working lives were disrupted and the model order of the Szczebrzeszyn schools was wrecked. The news, that an uprising had broken out in Warsaw, and that the Russians had abandoned the capitol city, and also the borders of the kingdom, elicited an unheard of exhilaration among everyone. The quiet shtetl, which knew of no other politics other than making appeals to the nobility, immediately felt demands to step out into the political arena together with the entire land.
>
> In the course of one hour, the black eagles on top of the Magistrate Building were torn down and smashed, as well as from other institutions. The old swords were unearthed, and pistols, they were cleaned off, and made ready. In the smithies, the blacksmiths worked even on holidays. Agricultural implements were beaten into pikes. Scythes were mounted on long poles.
>
> The intelligentsia, the professors and the Rector himself, call the youth to arm themselves. A rededication of the flag was celebrated, praying in the courtyard of the school. The Rector, Zenkowski gave a speech to the lined up rows of citizens and students, armed with all sorts of ammunition, that each individual was able to make for himself. At the end of the ceremonies, *'Jeszcze Polska nie zginela'* was sung. This took place in the middle of December, and immediately, Prof. Kowalski, and many older students, went off with Zenkowski to the Polish military. Only a small number of students remained in the school, only children.
>
> After Christmas, a movement of the Russian military began. The first to enter Szczebrzeszyn were the Dragoons, whose wild, beard-covered physiognomies made a frightful impression on us. We looked with fear upon these huge men, who camped out on the same place where the battle-ready youth had stood.
>
> Immediately, news reached us about the decisive battles between the Polish military and its heroic leaders in the field, from Grochow, behind Wawer. Every bit of news was transmitted with great fervor from hand-to-hand, comments were made, and plans were made for the future, as is usual in a small *shtetl.* The joy became even greater in the spring, when our military [forces] entered Lithuania with Dembinski and Gieldung at their head, when [Wojciech] Chrzanowski and [Josef] Dwernicki entered the Lublin region, marching on Wolhyn, on the second side of the Bug [River], stopping along the way to conduct general battles outside of Czaczki, and Old-Zamość.
>
> On the same *Schulhof*, on that great Thursday, Dwernicki's Uhlans and the *Krakusi*[77]

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77 The *Pulk Krakusow* was a regiment created in 1813 by decree from 20 Dec 1812 in Kalisz, Krakow, Poznan and Radom Districts. Josef Dwernicki was one of its colonels.

billeted themselves, placing several cannons around the place, which it seems to me had been plundered from Czaczki. We spiritedly approached our riders, and played with their weaponry. For several days, food and drink was carried to them from the city. They were accepted as brothers.

When the spring and summer heat set in, a cholera epidemic spread through the city here for the first time. Horse manure was burned in the marketplace and in the streets as a remedy against the cholera, but it didn't help. Many families left the city for the surrounding forests. Prayers were offered in the cloisters to end the epidemic, or prayers of thanksgiving for those victories from the arresting of the disease. The young priest Nowakowski, a fiery orator, would tell the worshipers after prayers about the heroic deeds of our leaders. He punished and accused those young people, who withheld themselves from the military, calling each of them by their name...

Zamość, the nearby fortress, and other points, were threatened with encirclement. Many clashes took place in Szczebrzeszyn. The Cossacks would fall upon the city, plundered, beat the Jews, and the townsfolk. A minute later, the Uhlans or the Krakusi would arrive from the direction of Zamość. Once, the Cossacks, as a response to such an attack, decided to take revenge on the city, while the youth of the city took part in these clashed between the Polish military and the Cossacks. At night, the Cossacks drew near in order to torch the city and carry out a slaughter among its residents. A tumult arose in the city, and half the city's residents fled to the nearby forests. One could already hear the shooting from the direction of Janów.

However confusion elicits wonder. The aggressive people armed themselves. The municipal policeman, an older military man, together with the sexton of the cloister, raised an alarm. Banging on the cloister drum, they gave orders in a loud voice, and in doing so, gave the impression that there was a large military detachment present. The Cossacks and Dragoons, which were already positioned outside the city, decided to pull back. Later orders restrained them from acts of vengeance."

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When a national liberation movement developed a couple of years before the January Uprising in 1863, the greatest reaction in the entire Zamość *Powiat* (which today encompasses 4 *Powiats*) was in Szczebrzeszyn. Here, Szczebrzeszyn played a special role.

We have very limited details about the uprising itself. Many people joined the party. A civil organization existed here. As late as 1865, the owner of the local pharmacy, Antoni Topolski was arrested under suspicion that he stood at the head of the people in the city who rose up.

The first clash during the planned assault on the Cossack barracks on January 30, 1863, which was organized by the party by Leszczynski, from the *Ordinacja*, Henryk Granowski, ended in failure. Many wounded revolutionists lay in the local hospital for treatment. Part of them were buried in the Szczebrzeszyn parish [cemetery].

Russification Methods

After the failure of the Uprising, the Russian authorities began to implement a severe policy of Russification, making the effort to artfully implant everything that was Russian.[78]

I have asked elderly people to write down their recollections of that time, but they were, for the most part, illiterate. Part of related what happened to their children, who – benefitting from my directions – wrote down precise facts with dates and names. I had hoped that in this manner, it would be possible for me to gather important material, but the war interrupted this work.

That difficult time, is being forgotten, a little at a time, when the weak would eventually succumb, and the strong would resist the priests, gendarmes government officials, etc. In this respect, the women were stronger than the men.

The persecutions of the Uniates[79] took on dramatic forms. I will never forget the conversations with an elderly peasant from Zurawnica, who told me of a frightful scene, when one of his neighbors, a Uniate, agreed to accept the Russian Orthodox faith. The protests of his wife had no effect. When all of the formalities were already ready, and the peasant was required to approach the communion ceremony, his wife went mad from mental confusion, and attacked the priest. This had a fearful effect on her husband, who the refused to carry out the forthcoming ceremony.

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78 The war, in the course of which six hundred and fifty battles and skirmishes were fought and twenty-five thousand Poles killed, came to a speedy end in the latter half of 1864, having lasted for eighteen months. It is of interest to note that it persisted in Zmudz and Podlasie, where the Uniate population, outraged and persecuted for their religious convictions, clung longest to the revolutionary banner.

79 Uniate churches are Eastern Rite churches of the communities of eastern Christians in union with the Roman Catholic church. They retain their own distinctive spiritual, liturgical, and canonical traditions. In addition to differences from the Roman (Western) rite in liturgy, many of the Eastern Rite churches permit a married clergy.

Between 10 and 11 million Catholics are members of these churches. They often originated among Orthodox and other eastern Christian communities under the political influence of a Roman Catholic sovereign. The largest Eastern Rite church - the Ukrainian Catholic church - was formed when Ukrainian subjects of the king of Poland were united with Rome in 1596.

The Ukrainian Catholic church, with an estimated 4 to 5 million members, is concentrated in the western Ukraine, especially in the areas of Lwów (or Lvov or Lemberg) and Stanislawow (also Ivano - Frankovsk), which were under Austrian and Polish jurisdiction until World War II. After the war, when the region became part of the USSR, the church was outlawed and driven underground by the Soviet government. It was allowed to resume open activity in the freer atmosphere of the late 1980s.

Each of the Eastern Rite churches is headed by its own Patriarch, who has jurisdiction over the bishops, clergy, and people of that rite. All of the patriarchs are members of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, which governs the relations of the Vatican with the Eastern Rites.

Being much taken by these tales, I made the effort to assemble details about the Uniates in Szczebrzeszyn. A notice from the year 1843 announces that the parish of the Uniates was very poor, because it had 'a small number of adherents to the Szczebrzeszyn church (*tzerkva*).' In December 1877, the priest, Aleksander Górski, who, it appears, did not belong to the unyielding fighters, signed his letter as the 'Rector of the Szczebrzeszyn Orthodox Parish.' It was at that time that the Uniates and the Greek-Catholic church (*kosciol)* were liquidated, and was transformed into a Russian Orthodox church (*tserkva)*.

Later on, the priest Timofei Tracz came as Rector, and a sorrowful era was initiated for the Polish Catholics and especially for the Uniates. The Rector himself was once a Uniate priest, and voluntarily converted to the Russian Orthodox system of belief and became an ideological Russifier and disseminator of his new faith. He led an ascetic existence, and his activities had an ideological-fanatical character. With time, he worked himself into becoming visible to the highest institutional authorities, and became extremely influential.

Everyone in the Zamość region feared him. No one here stood up to him. It is necessary to say that he had considerable success in spreading the Russian Orthodox faith. He carried out this mission without being selective with regard to methods: with promises, chicanery, threats and violence.

Proceedings from the archive at Zwierzyniec confirm that there never were any Russian Orthodox faithful in Szczebrzeszyn, with the exception of officials, who would sometime spend time here. Apart from the Russian Orthodox church, which had been transformed, as previously mentioned, from a Greek-Catholic church, the Catholic Church near the hospital was remade asa Russian Orthodox church in 1883. The number of adherents to the Russian Orthodox parish grew quickly in proportion, and in that time totaled 486 individuals.

In the year 1905, in the first two months after the publication of the Tolerance Manifesto, 4,195 people in the Szczebrzeszyn parish went over from Russian Orthodoxy to the Roman Catholic faith, that is to say from Szczebrzeszyn itself, and 402 people from the outskirts of Zamość. Because of this, the Tolerance Declaration was a severe blow to the priest Tracz. All at once, his entire work was for naught. He could not stand this, and with his entire might attempted to resist the desertion, but without result. All these events had a strong impact on his health, and sped his death. He died in 1909.

In the time of The First World War, when the Muscovites left Szczebrzeszyn, both Orthodox churches were locked down. The entire Russian Orthodox parish vanished immediately. In order to erase any traces of their prior belief, part of the populace changed the spelling on the grave stones of their kin, from Russian to Polish. No trace remained even of the Tracz memorial on his grave stone. In accordance with an order from the bailiff, someone, during the night, broke down the monument. The coffin with the body of Tracz was transferred from the area near the church to the public cemetery.

The Rector of the Roman Catholic parish was at that time the priest Grabarski. He was very popular, and known for his philanthropic activities, even for the benefit of Jews. He was very much beloved by the Jews. Elderly Jews have told me that for many years, prayers were offered in synagogues on his behalf.

Life in Szczebrzeszyn during the time of the Russian rule was gray and sorrowful. The pressure of rule was felt heavily from the side of the Russian authorities. Community activity was minimal; there was no manner of spiritual movement. Despite this, a certain amount, a conspiratorial activity, was carried on, such as illegal study. Certain organizations did exist: Mlodziez Szkolna, N.D., P.P.S.

The external character of Szczebrzeszyn was set down by the military, a Cossack battalion, which was

stationed here. The World War broke out, and masses of military marched through the *shtetl*: Russian, Austrian, afterwards, more Russian and later – a long time of Austrian occupation. Many forms of orientation manifested themselves: pro-Moscow, pro-Austrian, initiatives for independence. Part of the young people went off to [military] legions.

I have heard many tales about living conditions at that time, about the cholera epidemic, about the quick organization of the Polish school system, about the first months of the existence of the Polish State. I have asked many people to write down their memories of the pre-War years and of the occupation period. I have, however, not met anyone that was able to do this. I have received only a few fragments, which contain an autobiographical character.

Translated: Abraham Wolfson

Geographic, Ethnic, and Historical

(Excerpt from *Slownik geograficzny zim polskich*)

Szczebrzeszyn, called 'Scebresinum' in documents – a city on the left bank of the Wieprz River, in the Zamość vicinity, at 50 ^{0} 41' Latitude North, and 40 ^{0} 37 ' Longitude East, on the Zawichost-Uscilug tract, on the flat land near the river, locked on the west by the so-called Szczebrzeszyn hills, with a sloping incline, and similarly cut valleys from the edges of the flat of the Lublin mountains, which reach a height of 1,000 to 1,500 feet above sea level, between Goraj and Szczebrzeszyn. The valley of the Wieprz rises up to 700 feet. The river, behind Krasnystaw becomes navigable to ships. Behind Szczebrzeszyn the Wieprz has a width of up to 7 klafter (*sążeń*). During the flood season, the water covers the meadows up to half their breadth.

Two bridges connect Szczebrzeszyn with the village of Brody. Szczebrzeszyn is at a distance of 20 *viorst* southwest of Zamość. It is 42.75 viorst from Janów Ordynacki, Bilgoraj – 32.5, Krasnystaw – 40. The station of the Nadwislanska railroad in Rejowiec – 59.50, Lublin – 105, Zwierzyniec – 12 *viorst.*[80]

It contains a stone-walled Catholic church, two Russian Orthodox churches, a synagogue, and two prayer houses, a hospital named after Saint Katarzyna, with a permanent physician, an asylum, an elementary school of three classes, a Magistrate building, a post office, and from the year 1887 onwards, a notary, a pharmacy, and 38 business establishments.

Among the industrial enterprises – an eight stone water mill, using the American cylinder system; a factory to make black and gray materials for the peasantry. The local people are occupied mainly in agricultural pursuits. The Jews – with commerce and jobbing. There are 18 shoemakers, 8 smiths, 2 dairymen, 2 turners, 1 harness maker, and several tailors, locksmiths, weavers, coopers, pot makers, and tanners whose production barely fills the local requirements.

From an artistic perspective, the town of Szczebrzeszyn lies amid lush greenery, built up mostly of wooden single story little houses. There is a portion that are concrete buildings, with little gardens, on the marketplace, which also created small side streets (Szkolna, Turobinska, Klasztorna, Cerkiewna, Parkowa, Zatylna and Bilgorajska), unpaved streets, apart from the Zamość street, through which the road passed that connected Zamość with Szczebrzeszyn and Zwierzyniec.

A large stone constructed municipal building stands beside the City Hall, called *Oberza*. Until 1876, part of this building housed the court of the Zamość district. From the castle keep that burned down in the year 1583, and from one-time city walls, only meaningless ruins remained. The remnants of the city wall were utilized in the year 1840 to build the new City Hall. From the former castle keep, only the tower remained. The city was ringed by ramparts. Szczebrzeszyn encompassed the outlying towns of: Blonie, Przedmiescie Zamoskie, which stretched themselves out along the Wieprz as far as the ranch at Batiks.

From 1876 onward, Szczebrzeszyn belongs to the free court in Zamość. The city grounds occupy 4,565 morg. Of this, 3,319 is arable land, meadows – 588 morg, unusable land – 104 morg, for building – 548 morg, and water – 5 morg. The land – is loamy, on a bed of rock and limestone. The meadows are full. there are no forests.

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80 This measure of distance is transliterated from the Russian, and is spelled *wiorst* in Polish. It is sometimes translated in English as verst, where 1 verst = 1.06 km.

In the year 1827, there were 459 houses in Szczebrzeszyn, 3,233 residents; in 1832 – 5,453 residents; in 1860 – 4,018 residents (2,162 Roman Catholics, 1,683 Jews); in the year 1875 – 4,753 residents; in 1878 – 433 houses (66 of stone) and 4,750 residents; in the year 1881 – 463 houses and 5,064 residents (2,667 Jews); in 1885 – 433 houses (39 of stone) and 5,129 residents (2381 Jews); in 1888 – 448 houses (54 stone) and 5,264 residents (2398 Jews); in 1890 – 5,418 residents (912 Russian Orthodox, 2429 Jews).

Szczebrzeszyn is a member of that group of the oldest settlements in the Chelm environs. Apparently, it belonged to the cohort of locksmiths, who protected the settlements in the Wieprz valley. It certainly reaches back to the time of Casimir the Great. In an act of lending to Krasnik and Goraj in 1377 by King Ludwik Dmitrov and Ivanov (Codex of Little Poland, III, 310) Szczebrzeszyn is not mentioned. Wladyslaw Jagiello, in certifying the old privileges in Krakow in 1388, given to Dymitr of Goraj, permanently ordered the entire Szczebrzeszyn area with all of its residents ('districtum ejusdem, super vassalos'). Propocki relates that he had seen documents provided by the same Dmytri that begin with the words, (...Nos Demetrius de Goraj et in Szczebrzeszyn haeres') and on the basis of this act, he turned over the villages of Gruszka and Zaporozhe to a certain Cezikow Pruchanski('ratione servitii in terra Chelmensi') (both towns in the Szczebrzeszyn area). After Dymitr's heirs passed on, the estate passed as a wedding dowry to the families of Leliwit from Tarnow, Rózyc from Krzepic, and Toporczyk from Tenczyn. Szczebrzeszyn passed to Jan Amor Tarnowski. Apparently, the rights of the city were allocated by the Duke Wladyslaw Opolczyk during the time of his reign in Russia.

Jagiello, in allocating the city to Dymitr, also added certain freedoms. In the year 1472, Jan Tarnowski implemented certain commercial days, freeing the merchants from taxes. This privilege was certified in the year 1520 by the estate landholders of Szczebrzeszyn, Piotr and Stanislaw Kmita, Count of Szerniawa.

After them, the rulers of Szczebrzeszyn were the Górkas . They built up the Russian Orthodox church, apparently on the place of the old one. They also transformed the Roman Catholic church into a Calvinist church and organized a school nearby. Andrzej Górka a privileged landholder since the year 1560, secured the lapsed use of the Magdeburg Laws for the outlying towns of Blonie and Zarzecze as an example for the city, which had long been on its way, as well as providing regulation of municipal incomes. Andrzej of Górka was the legitimate feudal baron for the entire area. In the Szczebrzeszyn castle keep there were trials, both local and municipal, for the entire populace, as well as for the district. The military, which had its estates here, was his vassal.

Feudalism reigned here in full force till the end of the 16th century. When Jan Zamoyski acquired a specific village in the Szczebrzeszyn district from Anna Niedzwiedzka, Count of Górka , she released him from her jurisdiction, taking into account the influence that Zamoyski had in the country.

In the first days of September 1583, a fire broke out in the Szczebrzeszyn castle keep. The fire was so great that the elder of the keep barely saved himself along with his family. All acts and documents were incinerated. Górka made a plea to the King Stefan [Batory] that he should renew the privileges with the jurisdiction over the vassals and supported his plea with legal documents. The king was persuaded of the validity of these requests, and on December 12, 1583, in Lublin, he renewed the old rights of Andrzej Górka and his heirs forever, to be the owner of the keep, of the city, and the entire district, with his own jurisdiction, exempting Szczebrzeszyn from all manner of laws, even from tribunal.

We have facts from the acts in the Magistrate about the following privileges:

1. The privilege of Andrzej Górka , the landholder of Szczebrzeszyn, issued in 1586, which renews the Magdeburg Laws for Szczebrzeszyn in place of the original document of the keep, burned down in 1583. Simultaneously, the residents are freed from the repair of the ramparts and from providing grain. In compensation, the taxes are raised, and the peasants are obligated to provide 6 days of harrowing and to convey into the stables of the nobility half of every produce of the land '*in natura.*' Simultaneously, Jews are prohibited from buying up goods in the villages, and the councilman is given full powers to try Jews for not coming to help extinguish fires, and for not paying debts. The most senior of the councilmen were obligated to give an accounting for the mill, of measures, weights used in stores. He released the officials of the town from payment '*in natura.*'

2. Stanislaw Górka, the son of Andrzej, with is privilege of January 9, 1595, certified the prior privilege with a promise to provide monetary compensation.

3. Zygmunt III, with the law of March 25, 1597, forbade Jews from collecting taxes and from occupying the position of collecting excise taxes on drink.

4. The privilege of Jan Zamoyski, Hetman and Chancellor, of August 27, 1598, certifies all the prior privileges of the city of Szczebrzeszyn, as well as permitting the harvesting of lumber from the forest of the Szczebrzeszyn landholder for building and heating, creating the compensation for the boiling of honey and other taxes.

5. The privilege of Tomasz Zamoyski of August 26, 1629 which confirmed all of the old privileges of the city of Szczebrzeszyn .

6. The privilege of the same Tomasz Zamoyski of July 26, 1643 which permits the residents to build on empty places.

7. The Privilege of King Michal Korybut [Wisniowiecki], of August 25, 1673 permits the residents to distill and sell whiskey for a small fee, and confirms all of the old privileges of the city of Szczebrzeszyn.

8. The privilege of Jan Zamoyski of May 21,1700 permits the residents to run saloons in private homes and to distill whiskey for a payment of 3 zlotys for a small barrel.

9. The privilege of King August II [Mocny] of July 12, 1729, instituted 3 new market fairs: In the name of John the Baptist, "The Ascension of Holy Mary the Virgin," and of Saint Mikolaj.

The guilds in Szczebrzeszyn also are holders of original privileges, given by Jan Zamoyski in 1661 and 1694 for tailors, shoemakers, and coopers, which set out in specific obligations for apprentices, associates, and masters, and set out the means by which one acquires the rank of master, the fee for this, meting out discipline for improper conduct and taking of bribes. It is also permitted, that during the time of the fairs, a small fee may be taken from those craftsmen who travel [to the fair] and related goods, as well as also from idlers. It is also forbidden to bring in alien goods and handwork from more than a mile away from Szczebrzeszyn.

The city of Szczebrzeszyn, which is governed by a system of German law, has its municipal statutes, which consisted of selected Land-statute and *Lavniks* and '*Jus Gladia*' (Sword Laws). The acts of these laws have been lost.

In the years between 1595 and 1598, Szczebrzeszyn was transferred from the Górkas to the possession of Jan Zamoyski, who integrated Szczebrzeszyn into his *Ordinacja.*

Szczebrzeszyn and the flat land, which is within walking distance, which is blocked by the hills from the southwest, which encompass it, is recalled in the following historical fact. When the Golomb[81] confederation was set up by the Lublin Agreement, transferring the deliberations to Warsaw in January 4, 1673, the military forces of the Hetman [Jan III] Sobieski, flush with victory over the Tatars[82], with the King at their head, united the Szczebrzeszyn confederation against the Golomb confederation in the prevention of the clouded Hetman rule and for freedom. The act was signed by the Field-Hetman and the brother-in-law of the king, in royal protocol.

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At the first partition of Poland, Szczebrzeszyn passed under the rule of Austria and at that time, the municipal privileges were removed and transferred to Lemberg (name under Austrian rule – JSB). The church, and the Roman Catholic parish was apparently erected here in 1397 by Dymitr of Goraj. The city of Szczebrzeszyn belongs to the Catholic parish along with the surrounding towns of : Blonie, Przedmiescie Zamoskie, and Zarzecze, and the villages: Brody, Czarnystok, Deszkowice, Koweczyn, Kaweczynek, Kulikow, Lipowiec, Michalow, Obrocz, Rudka, Sulow, Sulowek, Topolcza, Czenszyny, Wielacza, Zwierzyniec, Zurawnica, The ranch near Batiks, together with 9,307 people.

The Uspenia Orthodox church was renovated by the government in 1868 and later in 1876. The second Orthodox church, was rebuilt in 1888 out of the Catholic church with the name 'Holy Trinity,' underwritten by Jan Zamoyski, who also donated a large field with a garden. which simultaneous with the building of the cloister, was bounded up to the Wieprz River by a high wall. After the occupation of the church by the Franciscans, the cloister was transferred to the Franciscans from Zamość and this pristine temple was transformed by the Austrians into barracks.

The cloister existed for a short time, and in the year 1783, it was abandoned. The building was on the verge of collapse, and together with the Catholic church, it was given over in 1812 to the Sisters of Mercy, who were brought in from Zamość, who had come here in 1764, and took over the building and the church, after the Bonapartists (today – a municipal club).

The hospital, named for Saint Katarzyna was for 30 patients at the start, in 1812, and was not large. It was the Count Andrzej Zamoyski who first enlarged it in 1845, situating it in the cloister building's wide rooms – one in the front room and two in the corner. In the year 1870, the management of the hospital and oversight, passed to the council of the Zamość district, which established a Steward in residence. There, the sick should, from May 10, 1883 be transferred to the Elizabethan Sisters. In 1879, a clinic was organized for the visiting sick, which dispensed medicaments for the poor, free of charge. Having enlarged the hospital, the Count Zamoyski simultaneously founded a school in two rooms and set aside a room for the Steward.

The School-home for the poor elderly and the crippled, which exists since 1845 is also a boon from Count Andrzej Zamoyski. Poor Jewish people dedicated an area here, documented in 1880 in the names of Yitzhak and Berek Feldman, who pay an annual fee. The prominent people in his time, in the Szczebrzeszyn schools

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81 The town is actually named *Golab* in Polish, but pronounced Golomb.

82 This very likely refers to Jan III Sobieski's victory over the Turks at Chocim, in 1673.

were in a specific measure the representatives from the Zamość Academy.

In the year 1809, Zamość, was transformed into a fortress, and the buildings of the academy as well as the *Liceum*, were confiscated for military purposes. Count Stanislaw Zamoyski organized a school in Szczebrzeszyn, which went through all manner of phases and name changes: *Liceum*, Higher Faculty School, afterwards, Wojewodzka, and in the end, the Gymnasium named for Zamoyski. which existed until 1852. The building and its garden are the property of the government, and are used as barracks. Of the professors of the school that made themselves famous: Fanciszek Kowalski– Poet and Prosaic writer, Adolf Kudasiewicz – A grammarian, Bazyli Kukolnik, Ignacy Richter – A bibliographer, Teodozy Sieroczynski – a grammarian and pedagogue, Jan Zenkowski – Agronomist, Jozef Zachowski – Naturalist.

Thanks to the inexpensive costs, the inexpensive maintenance of these exceptional teachers, the schools were always more than full of students. The gymnasium published in print in Warsaw in the years 1834 to 1844, 'A Festive Act of Completion of the School Year.' At the same time, a four class private school existed, run by Teofil Reder. The liquidation of those institutions defamed the once high standing of the *shtetl.*

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Szczebrzeszyn is the birthplace of many educated people. Among the famous were: Wojciech Bazeusz – A Latin Grammarian of the 16th century, Josef Brandt – An Painter, Cohen (Issachar Ber) – An accomplished Talmudists of the 16th century and Jan Siestszynski – A doctor, philanthropist, pedagogue, and one of the first Polish lithographers.

The Surrounding Area

By Moshe Messinger

The little *shtetl* of Szczebrzeszyn was endowed with a lush surrounding, settled and dotted with villages, fields and forests. Jews were to be found in almost every village. The largest portion of the land in the area belonged to Count Zamoyski, who put the fields or 'yards' out under lease. In each village, there was a lessor who managed the assets of the Count. In each 'yard,' there were a number of Jewish families, who took over their residences by inheritance from their grandfathers.

The number of Jews in the surrounding villages grew a little at a time, until it reached a 'minyan,' or two 'minyans' of Jewish families whose sole occupation was land management. The largest village, where the largest number of Jews concentrated themselves, about three 'minyans,' was *Gryziec*. The Jews lived there freely and independently, alongside the Christian populace, working their parcels. With the natural growth of the Jewish families in the villages, there was the consequence of the shrinking of the unit size of the fields for each family, which served as the source of income. Part of the colonists, not having any possibilities for existence, sold their lease portions and moved to the city.

Among the Jewish families in Gryziec was a nice family with the name Mett, or as the head of household was called, R' Yankl *Gryziecker*. He was no ignoramus. He had a grasp of the 'small letters,' and served as an example to all of the Jewish families in the village.

In the village of Radecznica, there lived up to 30 Jewish families. However there, already, were of a different type, more progressive, almost urban.

Jews were also in the village of Zaklodzie. One of them, known by the name R' Dovidl Zaklodzier, kept his home open day and night for Jewish wayfarers and merchants. He excelled most of all in his giving of charity, not only for private, single individuals, but also for community institutions, you understand, religious ones. R' Dovidl was rich not only in fields and forests, but also with the doing of good deeds, His fortune passed over to Hirsch Zelig Weinblatt.

I was to R' Hirsch Zelig Weinblatt's a few times, on a visit. there, the household was run in a truly refined manner, and just like all of the village Jewish families, he stood out for his large donations. It may also be noted, that his wife, knew no limits to distributing donations. Apart from teachers for the children, in his house, one could find foreign language teachers. One of his children studied in Paris.

In the last years, when anti-Semitism grew stronger in Poland, Graf Zamoyski took away all the assets of the Jews. Many of the rural families went off to various villages. R' Hirsch Zelig Weinblatt went off to Lublin, where he remained up to the Second World War.

It is also worth mentioning the villages of Radzyncyn, Sulowek, Deszkowice, Sułów, Stanczask, where Jewish families lived.

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All of the previously mentioned village residents took part in community life in that time, especially after The First World War, when the period of development and political identity began in Szczebrzeszyn, the rural Jewish youth teamed up with the urban youth.

The library, named for *Mendele Mokher-Sforim* was the first mutually agreeable meeting place, where the young people quenched their thirst for knowledge.

The Zionist movement later provided for a more intimate relationship. It was here that the 'inner Jew' became revealed. The young people connected with the Zionist concept with love and soul, especially with proletarian Zionism. In the years 1932-1935 the economic conditions worsened because of the ascendancy of anti-Semitism, which was artfully exploited. Losing economic positions, Jewish youth nevertheless helped a great deal in shouldering the yoke of cultural development and progressive advance.

Szczebrzeszyn in the *Pinkas* of the '*Va'ad Arba Aratzot*

Va'ad Arba Aratzot – Great Poland, Little Poland, Reisen (White Russia) and Lithuania – was a sort of autonomous authority that encompassed the Jewish communities of Poland in the 16h to 18th centuries.[83] The *Va'ad* dealt with the issues of taxes, cultural life, community and religion. Each country selected 2-3 representatives for the *Va'ad*, except for the 3 large communities. In the aggregate, there were 25 representatives to the *Va'ad*. In the year 1764, the Polish Sejm disbanded this organization.

A collection of the reports, that have a connection to the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*, was made public under the title, 'The *Pinkas* of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*, a Collection of Amendments, Writings, Lists, Ordered and Footnoted by Israel Heilperin,' Jerusalem, Mossad Bialik, 5705 (1945) *(Acta congressum generalis Iudeorum regni Poloniae, 1580-1764)*.

Szczebrzeszyn is mentioned there 23 times (Zamość – 34 times). It is clear that Szczebrzeszyn occupied an important place there. In particular, the town is recalled there in connection with concurrences given for the publication of books (as understood, in keeping with the spirit of the times – sacred texts, and various commentaries).

Rabbi Chaim Rogovin, a resident of San Francisco was asked by his fellow townsman Baruch Bibel "to try and save from historical oblivion the Sages of Szczebrzeszyn, his birthplace, who worked in Poland." He prepared an encompassing brief that relies on '*Pinkas Va'ad Arba Aratzot* – a Collection of Amendments, Writings, Lists, Ordered and Footnoted by Israel Heilperin,' Jerusalem, 5705 (1945), and other sources. From this, we bring an excerpt written in the style of the writer, Rabbi Chaim Rogovin.

By Signs, An Important Community

The first substantive report of *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* that comes to us, is from the year 1579. However, there are theories that the *Va'ad* had already been established by 1570. The reports and lists in the *Pinkas* of *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* are reliable sources in the matter of the history of our people in those days in Poland. In them, are reflected the questions of the day, regarding relations with gentiles, and with internal Jewish affairs: we hear the reaction of the leaders of Israel to decrees and predations that were visited upon them. The images of the economic and spiritual questions that were unique to the Jews, that occupied their representatives, their sages, their Rabbis, in the Polish diaspora, are all found in the reports.

A fact that is not at all in doubt, is that the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn sent their representatives to the Va'ad Arba Aratzot at the beginning of the 17th century. This is indicative of the fact that it was already an important community. In total, there are 25 reports, on which some representative from Szczebrzeszyn affixed his signature.

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83 Here is an explanation of these somewhat obscure designations:" Great (north) Poland was founded in 966 by Mieszko I, who belonged to the Piast dynasty. The tribes of southern Poland then united to form Little Poland. In 1047, both Great Poland and Little Poland united under the rule of Casimir I the Restorer. Poland merged with Lithuania by royal marriage in 1386. The Polish-Lithuanian state reached the peak of its power between the 14th and 16th century, scoring military successes against the (Germanic) Knights of the Teutonic Order, the Russians, and the Ottoman Turks."

The first report, on which a signature of a Szczebrzeszyn representative may be found, is from the year 5377 – 1617. The issue in the report, as said above, was a concurrence to a book. Concurring to the publication of books was not restricted only to questions that were spiritual, but also bound up with economic questions. The economic question, that was raised alongside the spiritual one, was: the theft of words (what we call plagiarism). A person who had not striven and worked hard, prints and sells the spiritual fruit of the pen of a sage, who worked on his composition for many years and had not yet even seen so much as a penny for his labors, also loses the funds that he has invested in the paper for the printing. It is recognized that the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* mad an effort to correct this situation.

Charlatans would also make use of books whose style and content were in the public domain, such as prayer books, *mahzors*, despite the fact that the compiler had put in a great deal of work in correcting the style in accordance with the rules of grammar, and on occasion also wrote explanations for the words or an exposition about the style of the prayer, and the prohibition against the use of this material was for a specified time, in order to permit the composer of the work to obtain the benefit of his spiritual labor.

The books to which concurrences were given, fell into three categories. the first category was that of the commonly used books by ordinary people, such as prayer books, *mahzors*, to which explanations and commentaries were added. To the second category, belonged compositions – mostly original sources – that were written for intermediate level study. such as commentaries on the *Tanakh*, books of commentaries, tradition and religious faith. The third category included original works such as commentaries and novel new interpretations to the Talmud and its commentators, the *Shulkhan Arukh*, and its commentators, that were written for skilled sages, thoroughly grounded in the *Shas* and the *Poskim*, and were qualified to set *Halakha*, for Rabbis, to sharpen their skills.

Concurrences to Commonly Used Books

- One of the four signatures to the previously mentioned [concurrences] that appears to be the first which is signed by a representative of Szczebrzeszyn, is that of Joseph, son of Our Teacher, R' Matitya זצ"ל Dalkrot, who also was the author of a book on innovations in Halakha regarding the tractate of *Eruvin*. In the year in which the report is signed, 5377 (1617), the book '*Yesh Nokhalin*' was published in Prague, and on it is the concurrence of Joseph the son of Our Teacher, R' Matitya Dalkrot, the Bet-Din Senior and Headmaster of the Yeshiva of the Sacred Congregation of Szczebrzeszyn. The designation of a Bet-Din Senior shows that there were other *Dayanim* or providers of guidance on ritual, and that R' Joseph was at their head. From here, it is also clear that this was an important congregation, because small congregations were not generally privileged to have a Yeshiva.

- The father of the author, R' Matitya earned a reputation among the great minds of Poland. He was one of the original Kabbalists, who was a disseminator of the Sephardic Kabbala (not the Lurianic) in Poland. In the year 5310 (1550), he traveled to study in Italy, and visited the University in Bologna, and completed his studies of natural science. mathematics and astronomy. In Italy, he met the exiled sages from Spain, or their descendants, and learned the Sephardic Kabbala directly from them. R'Mordechai Jaffa is counted among his pupils, known in the world of the *Poskim* as the Master of '*The Garb*,' and he recalls his teacher, R' Matitya, in his book, '*Garbed in a Precious Stone*,' as a man of faith, and one of the greats of the Latter Kabbalists.

- On one report from the year 5378 (1618), also dealing with the issue of a concurrence to a prayer

book, the ninth signature among the reputable people is: Ephraim, son of my Master and my Father, Our Teacher, R' Naphtali, may his memory be for the world to come, called Zalman. He was the Bet-Din Senior of the Sacred Congregation of Lublin, however first, he occupied the rabbinical seat in Brisk, Hrodno[84] and Szczebrzeszyn. He was the son-in-law of the legendary Jewish king R' Saul Wohl ('king for a day' in Poland).

When he was the Rabbi of Szczebrzeszyn, he wrote a concurrence to R' Gedalia ben R' Shlomo Zalman for his book, '*Etz Shatul*' which is a commentary on the essentials of R' Joseph Albo of Spain, who lived about a century before him. R' Ephraim wrote a book called '*Tevuat Shor*.'

- In the year 5402 (16420 a book appeared called '*Eyn Yaakov*,' which included all of the legends of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, by Shlomo Ibn Habib, which was printed for the first time in the year 5276 (1516). One of the signatures on the report of concurrence was 'The Minor, Yaakov son of Our Master, my Father, Abraham *Rosh Yarkha*,[85]' The brother of R' Yaakov of Szczebrzeszyn was R' Yeshayahu son of Abraham HaLevi Hurwitz, renown under the acronym, The Holy ShL"H, for his book, '*The Two Tablets of the Covenant*.'

Concurrences for Writings Used by Scholars

There were also writings of the second kind, for which Rabbis or personalities from Szczebrzeszyn signed. These books were written for knowledgeable people, who had received knowledge from the Talmud and commentaries. These were condensations of famous books, which had already been printed, but did not have patronage because of style of their language, and similarly for books having to do with tradition, the faith, and sermons. In these books, there were not many concerns regarding the preemption of rights, and the concurrences were more for the purpose of providing traditional support.

The signatories on books of this kind are as follows:

- R' David son of R' Yaakov from Szczebrzeszyn – a signature of concurrence to an abridged version of a book by the famous Jewish minister of the State of Portugal, Don Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel, who was born in Lisbon in 1437. The abridged version appeared in 5363 (1603) prepared by R' Yaakov ben R' Eliakim Heilperin, under the name of 'The Concise Abarbanel on the Ethics of the Fathers and the Haggadah.'

- Joseph, son of Our Teacher, R' Matitya זצ"ל Dalkrot, (as mentioned above), signed on the composition 'Yesh Nokhalin,' by Abraham Shepsilesh, Deputy Levite, זצ"ל, to which his son, R' Yaakov added 'several number of issues, rulings, laws, and good words of traditional guidance.' The following great sages in Torah added their concurrence to this work: R' Yehoshua Falk, the author of *'Me'irat*

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84 An alternative, possible Belarusian spelling to Grodno.

85 Author's Footnote: The designation 'Minor' is a sign of modesty utilized by authors of the period. A '*Rosh Yarkha*,' literally 'Head for the Month,' designated the '*Gabbai* of the Month' a position that was normally rotated on a monthly basis.

Einayim,' and the renown *MaHarSh"a.*[86] This matter provides evidence that the signatory from Szczebrzeszyn was not from the lower [scholastic] ranks.

- R' Yehuda – 'The younger among the thousands of Judah, residing in the Sacred Congregation of Szczebrzeszyn, the arbitrator of nine communities – signed in the year 5424 (1664) on the book, *'Amudeha Shiva,*' – regarding the seven leaders of the people (from the Patriarch Abraham to King Solomon). The composition of 'Like our Teacher, R' Bezalel son of Rabbi Shlomo of Kobrin.' It is clear from the signature that the person who signed it was an heir to nine different communities, of which Szczebrzeszyn served as their metropolis.

- 'The younger Joel son of Our Master and my Father, the Great Rabbi Gad זצ"ל who resided in the Sacred Congregation of Szczebrzeszyn' was one of the signatories to the concurrence for the book, 'The Coat of Many Colors,' by Joseph of the city of Przemysl. Rabbi Joel, the Rabbi of Szczebrzeszyn wrote the book, '*Maginei Zahav,*' – to protect his grandfather, R' David ben R' Shmuel HaLevi, the author of the T"Z ('*Turei Zahav*' – having to do with the *Shulkhan Arukh*), because of the infringements of the Sh"Kh ('*Siftei Kohen*') R' Shabtai ben Meir HaKohen.

- 'The Minor, Aharon Shmuel son of the late Rabbi and *Gaon,* our Teacher, R' Azriel Lemel Kahanna Shapiro זצ"ל, for he is a resident of the Sacred Congregation of Szczebrzeszyn' – Signed on the book of the year 5473 (1713) by Rabbi R' Pinchas זצ"ל who previously had been the *Dayan* of Posen, and afterwards the Bet-Din Senior and the Headmaster of the Mesivta at Wlodawa, who left handwritten innovative interpretations, and casuistic arguments in connection with several tractates of the Talmud, especially the tractate of *Hulin.* Despite the fact that the signer styles himself as 'Minor,' he was most certainly a distinguished Torah Scholar, because at the end of the concurrence, it is written: 'An this is, indeed, the word of the great luminaries and the wondrous Rabbis.'

Concurrences to Reference Materials

Continuing – concurrences to books in the third category, intended not for the intermediate scholar, but rather for true outstanding sages and exceptional Rabbis. There are two here from Szczebrzeszyn, whose names have already been mentioned in the concurrences regarding the first two categories, however, their signatures here, underscore their greatness in Torah study, and their expertise in *Shas* and the *Poskim.*

- Our Teacher, Rabbi David son of Our Teacher, Rabbi Yaakov of Szczebrzeszyn, signed on the book, '*Bayuray Khelek HaLeun MaySm"G*' (*SM"G – Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*), which offers rulings on the law, and practical application of the Halakha, apparently in the year 5365 (1605). It's author was R' Moshe son of R' Yaakov Mkutzi, one of the masters of the *Tosafot* in France in the 13th century.

- R' Joel, the author of '*Maginay Zahav,*' who wrote for the purpose of providing protection for his grandfather, R' David son of R' Shmuel HaLevi, the author of the famous book, which earned him a

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86 Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edels (MaHarSha) (1555 - 1631), who wrote one of the most incisive and keenly analytical commentaries on the Talmud, *Rashi* and *Tosafot.* A model of logic and terseness it was quickly accepted and was printed in almost all editions of the Talmud. He also wrote an extensive commentary on the *aggadot* of the Talmud which reflects his wide knowledge of philosophy and Kabbalah.

world-wide reputation for all the parts of the *Shulkhan Arukh*, and especially for his commentary on '*Yoreh Deyah*,' which is [the book] '*Turay Zahav*' (Known by the acronym, T"Z).

In the introduction to his work, the author explains why he selected the name '*Turay Zahav*' for his work, and here are his words: "The name of this work is '*Turay Zahav*' in that the words of the column(s) itself, and the *Shulkhan Arukh* will become clarified with compelling observations. And the indirect reference is to the numerical value of the letters in my name, that has the same numerical value as the word, '*Zahav*.'" That is to say, he selected the name, ibn order that the first word, 'Tur' will emphasize that apart from a commentary on the 'Shulkhan Arukh' of Rabbi Joseph Caro, in passing, he also explains the words of the 'Tur' of R' Yaakov son of R'Asher; the second word, '*zahav*,' has the numerical value of 14, like the name David (14).

R' Shabtai ben R' Meir HaKohen, (in an acronym, Sh"Kh, and he became well-known by this name) who wrote a book called '*Siftei Kohen*,' took issue with the commentaries in the T"Z. He suspected that his words would get pushed to the side because of the significant support for the T"Z, and consequently he composed a book of extensions called '*Nekudot HaKesef*.' This book was completed in the year 5408 (1648, the year of the decrees of Chmielnicki) and remained only in handwritten form. The book was published 14 years after the death of the author, who passed away in the year 5427 (1667), by his son, R' Moshe, in fulfilling his father's will.

The dispute between the T"Z and the Sh"Kh was helpful in obtaining a great deal of recognition for the '*Shulkan Arukh*' that penetrated into all of the Yeshivas in Poland and Lithuania, and to the great scholars of the generations, and commentaries are being written about it even up to our own times.

Chapter Titles from the *'Pinkas'*

The Yaroslav Conclave [87]

Listen here, *Rabbotai,* here, the *Gaonim* and Heads of Yeshivas permit it to be called out, seeing that it has been fifty years, that we are here in this year, the *Gaonim* of the world, their peace be honored, have signed an amendment and there are thirty Rabbis who are signatories, righteous of the founder of the world, ז"ל .The honorable gentlemen, all recorded according to their names. The substance of their words is first and foremost for the year 5347 (1587) at the Gramniec fair in Lublin, it is established that no Rabbi will not retain his position as a result of a loan or a gift, wether on his own or on the part of others, he should not retain the Rabbinate, etc.

Here there are signatures of the thirty Rabbis ז"ל, here
[Among the Torah sages, R' David of Szczebrzeszyn also signed]

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87 The date given in this header is likely in error, deriving from a misinterpretation of the acronym ר"ש in Hebrew. This is not likely the year 5210 which converts to 1450. The text explicitly refers to the year 5347 (1587). The title to this section also does not follow the format of the rest of the titles, which probably means that it does not refer to a year date. A possibility, is that it is the acronym for *Roshei Yeshiva*, or Headmasters of Yeshivas. This would be consistent with the content. Curiously, the text is a peculiar admixture of Yiddish and Hebrew.

1597

Afterwards, at the Yaroslav fair, in the year 5357 (1597) all of the above was renewed, and Rabbis were there again, several who signed, and promulgated a separate decree(s) and these are: – – – – –

[Many Torah sages and the same R' David of Szczebrzeszyn among them].

The Year 5363 - 1603

We have gathered here in the city of Yaroslav in 5363 (1603) regarding the issues of the printing of the new books that have come from nearby, and we have agreed to give our permission to the printers, that they should print the work of the Gaon, Out Teacher, R' Yaakov Eliakim regarding the books that he had previously prepared, in which the respect for his Torah erudition has become known in all parts earning him a reputation and praise, regarding the mighty tree Our Teacher, the Rabbi, R' Isaac Abarbanel. And in general for his works that he prepared regarding 'The Legacy of Patriarchs, and the book on Passover Sacrifices.

[Among the signers, appears Yaakov, זי"ל who is from Szczebrzeszyn, who wrote a commentary on the *Targum Yonatan* and the *Targum Yerushalmi*, Prague, 5370 (1610)]

Before the Year 5365 - 1605

We spread a canopy over this most high leader, Out Teacher, R' Joseph נר"ו of Krzemieniec who listened to, and delved with a beautiful light and pleasant discernment into the SM"G – and had come to us to print this work with the concurrence of Gaonim and Heads of Yeshivas of the Country of Poland and Wolhyn, and when they, in fath sign in a letter of completion that he showed to us, and these are: The wondrous Gaon, Our Teacher the Rabbi who is the author of 'The Garb,' Mordechai Jaffa son of Abraham, Out Teacher R' David son of Our Teacher R' Yaakov from Szczebrzeszyn, etc.

Before the Year 5374 - 1614

A sage came before us of the type from whom [the wisdom of the] Torah is sought, whose work has become known among circles as praiseworthy and reputable, His Honor, Our Teacher, R' Yaakov, son of the Gaon and Elder, who was wondrous in his scholarship and piety, Our Teacher, R' Abraham Sheptilsh, סג"ל, זצ"ל, and in his hand is compiled and assembled all of these remarks, taken with sacrificial tongs from the [veritable] alter of the Almighty, and is not this work called *Yesh Nokhalin*, which the previously mentioned Gaon bequeathed to the admirers of this world. And after him, his son arose, who was previously mentioned, and added content of his own, in regards to several and several issues, rulings and laws, and words of guidance on tradition, and insight, and we, who know that there are no faults in his words, because we have read them, and for them to be just and true. Accordingly, all of the laws that he has promulgated, from the perspective of the onlookers, are sweet, pure, and clear, and it arouses cleansing thoughts in the heart, it was a privilege for the many to depend on them. Therefore, we give him a covenant in peace, and permission to print the above mentioned book, with his thoughts, and fortunate be the lot of those who will endeavor to utilize this in the name of *mitzvah*, that many might partake, because it is appropriate that all people should have this book at hand, and he would most certainly not be misled by what he might otherwise fall into, and he will do all in the name of heaven, with all of his heart, and all his might. And is this not our word at this gathering of Torah [– –].

Signature of Shlomo son of Our Teacher, R' Aharon זצ"ל the man of Luntszic, who is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Prague Sacred Congregation.

Signature from the one who is called Feivusz the son of my Lord and Father Israel Shmuel, may his memory be for the world to come, Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of Cracow.

Yehoshua son of Our Teacher, R' Alexander זצ"ל, from the Falk family of Kohanim, designated as Cohen, and he is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of Lvov.

Signature of Shmuel Eliezer son of Our Teacher, R' Yotzey HaLevi ז"ל, who is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of Lublin.

Signature of Shimon Wolf son of Our Teacher, R' David Tevla זצ"ל Avierbach, who is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of Przemysl.

Signature of The Minor Joel the son of Our Master and Father as Our Teacher, R' Shmuel Zal, who is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of Belz.

Signature of Joseph son of Our Teacher, R'Matitya זצ"ל, Delakrot, who is the Bet Din Senior and Headmaster of the Sacred Congregation of **Szczebrzeszyn.**

By R' Abraham son of R' Shabtai HaLevi Horowitz, Prague, 5377 - 1617

[All of the signatories here, also signed the concurrences and other writings of the fourth Va'ad, and it appears that what is before us is the concurrences of the Rabbis of the Va'ad].

The Year 5377 - 1617

Here, I step out on the heels of the primary and later scholars, to strengthen the hand of those who print the labors of wisdom and especially in the issue of the printing of the prayer book that was previously mentioned in the lines above, for the benefit of the Rabbi who is dependent upon it. And it is because of this, that I have concurred to issue a severe decree, that this book shall not be printed anew for six years, not in our land and kingdom, and not in the remaining lands, and al those who abide by our behest, may blessings be upon his head. Therefore, I have affixed my signature in concurrence. Joseph, son of Our Teacher, R' Matitya זצ"ל, Delakrot, who was the Bet Din Senior in the Sacred Congregation of Szczebrzeszyn.

The Year 5378 - 1618

Ephraim, son of Our Master and Father, Our Teacher, R' Naphtali, may his memory be for the world to come, called Zalman Shor, that signed on the printing of the General Prayer Book for the entire kingdom of Poland, along with the great sages of his generation who were the trustees of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot*.

The Year 5402 - 1642

Along with the other great Torah sages, in connection with the printing of Eyn-Yaakov, is the signature of a man from Szczebrzeszyn, and he signed as The Minor, Yaakov son of Our Master and Our Father Abraham, the Yeshiva Headmaster זצ"ל, who was from Szczebrzeszyn.

The Year 5402 - 1642

We request and beseech the dignity of the Gaonim and leaders of our lands, to hold our hands and to impose a great punishment on those people who will desire to contravene our words. And permission is given to the referenced people to proclaim by way of the sextons in all congregations, and all houses of worship , to implement these words of ours, and especially at the market fairs in a manner that this is what will be done to any man that those who engages in the work of heaven, move to rescue him from harm as was done by our predecessors, of blessed memory. And this is signed by the Minor, Yaakov, son of Our Master and Our Father Abraham, the Yeshiva Headmaster, ז"ל, who was from Szczebrzeszyn.

The Year 5479 - 1719

Peace unto the adherents and leaders and community heads of the Congregations and leaders of the Sacred Congregation of Przemysl, in conjunction with the Rabbis and Sages, together with the Bet Din Seniors, my their lights shine, together with the leaders of Iklum Sambrzyzno, and other outstanding individuals of the Valley. Along with other great Torah sages, in matters pertaining to penalties, or a warning about observing all manner of laws, which were adopted. Pinchas Zelig, the son of Our Master and Our Father, Our Teacher, R' Naphtali Ashkenazi, of Szczebrzeszyn is also a signatory.

The trustees of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* on September 9, 1727 (Elul 5487), sent a letter from Szczebrzeszyn by the Treasurer. On it, appeared the signatures of: Oszyia, Heszel, Marko, Helasz
Pisarze generalni Zydów koronnych w Szczebrzeszynie
The trustees of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* here in Szczebrzeszyn, and they requested a reduction in the head tax that they used to pay to the treasury.

A Great Jew and a Genial Man

By Yitzhak Warshawsky

Page 418: *Yaakov Reifman (a sketch)*

The Life Story of R' Yaakov Reifman

People, who acquire their education in a normal way, in a school, cannot grasp how many difficulties had to be withstood by observant, young Jewish people, in old times, who had a desire for education. All paths were closed to them.

First, such a young man did not know any other languages than Yiddish and Hebrew and there were practically no books in those languages available in those days, from which one could learn about secular subjects. Second, in the Jewish cities and towns of Poland, Galicia and Lithuania, each and every person, who was suspected of striving to learn something other than Torah, was bitterly persecuted. Such a young man was thrown out of the *Bet HaMedrash*, he was beaten, and very often sent away to the military. There was no question of making a wedding match with such an individual: what sort of a Jew would take an *apikores* as a son-in-law?

Nevertheless, in many pious Jewish cities and towns, there were many young men who literally risked their lives in order to acquire knowledge. This was their ideal. When such a young man would become aware of, let us say, a law of logic, of mathematics, or something from physics, or geography, this was a joyous day for him.

One such young man, who later became renown as a scholar, was Yaakov Reifman. A few decades after his death, many legends already circulated about him, and stories as if he were someone from antiquity.

"A Sharp Mind"

Yaakov Reifman was born in the year 1817 in the village of Logow, near Opatów, in the Radom Province. His father, R' Hirsch was a 'scribe' from all appearances a scribe in the forest.

In his short [auto] biography, Yaakov Reifman tells that when he was still a child of about 3 years age, his mother, Rachel, already would take him away before dawn to be taught by the *melamed.*

When Yaakov was 4 years old, his father's house was burned down. It appears that he also lost his job as a scribe as result of this. He moved to Opatów and became a melamed [himself].

Yaakov was first instructed by his father, afterwards by other *melamdim,* and quickly began to demonstrate that he had a sharp mind. In those times, boys were mainly taught the texts literally. Before a young lad could properly learn a page of the *Gemara*, he needed to be formidable in his ability to ask questions, provide responses, and build castles in the sky around the laws of the Talmud. However, despite the fact that Yaakov had an exceptionally good mind, and managed to 'tuck into his belt' all of the other boys, with is erudition and analytic mind, he nevertheless, did not like the literal readings. He wanted to study fundamentals, with an order to it. At the age of 15, Yaakov ceased learning with melamdim, and began to study on his own.

"What Is Written There in the Books!"

While sitting in the *Bet HaMedrash*, Yaakov learned that, apart from Torah, there are 'Other Sources of Knowledge.' It reached his ears, that somewhere, in the larger cities, there are educated people, universities, libraries. Yaakov was a curious young lad. He immediately acquired a strong desire to know:' what is written there in the books!' What are they learning, the professors? But in Opatów, (or Apta, as the Jews called the *shtetl*), he could not obtain any details at all about this. The one thing that he did hear, was that the leading scholars were also the leading *apikorsim*...

Apart from hearing this, Yaakov also read in books about people who were knowledgeable in matters of the world. For example, he saw in a book, that there are experts in mathematics, who are able to calculate in advance when there will be an eclipse of the sun, when the sun will be covered by the moon. It is occasionally mentioned in the books, that this, or that Rabbi had a conversation with an *apikores*. All of this awakens an intense curiosity in the young man, but there was no way at all for him to satisfy this curiosity.

At the age of 17, Yaakov Reifman became a groom. It is understood, that he had never seen his bride before. His *mekhutan*, R' Joseph Maimon lived in Szczebrzeszyn, very far from Opatów. However, marriage brokers often put together matches involving cities quite far from one another. Yaakov had a reputation as a scholar: his father-in-law was a man of considerable substance: he promised the son-in-law financial support in order that he be able to sit and learn. In 1836, Yaakov Reifman took up residence in Szczebrzeszyn.

New Possibilities in Szczebrzeszyn

Little is known about the life that the young married couple had together. However, it is known that Yaakov found a great 'treasure' in his father-in-law's house. The 'treasure' consisted of a number of books, about which Yaakov had heard for a long time, but were not to be found in Opatów. One of the books was 'A Guide to the Perplexed,' by the Rambam[88], a philosophical work, written in Arabic, and later translated into Hebrew. A second book, which Yaakov found in his father-in-law's house, was 'HaKuzari,' also a philosophical work, written by the great Hebrew poet and philosopher, R' Yehuda HaLevi.

It is from these very old books, that Yaakov began to acquire secular knowledge. He was attracted to these books with such ardor, that after several months, he knew them by heart. However, from them, his hunger for knowledge was not satisfied. It was exactly the opposite, the book only served to whet his appetite further with regard to matters of the mind.

In those days, *Maskilim* had only one path to Enlightenment: to teach themselves German. First, one could get all sorts of books in German, which were not available in Russian or Polish; second, it was easier to learn German, because it was similar to Yiddish. However, there was also a third reason why German was the language of the *Maskilim*. The renown Jewish philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn had translated the *Tanakh* into German (with a 'commentary'). On one side, it was printed in the Holy Tongue [sic: Hebrew], and on the second side – in German translation using Yiddish lettering. It was from such a translation that most of the

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88 The Maimons of Szczebrzeszyn, a family of Sephardic origin, pride themselves on a common ancestry with the Rambam, whose full Hebrew patronymic is Moses ben Maimon. It is therefore no surprise that a volume of the Rambam's work would be found in this household.

Maskilim learned to read and understand German, which, in this manner, became the language of the *Maskilim*, alongside Hebrew.

Szczebrzeszyn had a virtue that Opatów did not: it was close to Zamość, which had for a long time, been a city of *Maskilim*, of enlightened people. It is hard to know how Yaakov Reifman obtained a copy of Mendelssohn's translation of the *Tanakh* in Szczebrzeszyn. This was not an easy thing to do. It had to be kept secret most strenuously. When a young man was caught studying from Mendelssohn's *Tanakh*, he was slapped around, thrown out of the *Bet HaMedrash*, and very often was compelled to divorce his wife, because which father-in-law wanted to provide financial support to an *apikores*?

However, there is no thing that cannot be attained, if the desire is strong enough. Yaakov Reifman obtained Mendelssohn's *Tanakh*, and learned German quickly, and immediately obtained additional German books. He learned to write Hebrew mellifluously, in accordance with the style of the times.

"Caught In The Act"

Sooner or later, it became known in Szczebrzeszyn that Yaakov Reifman had been 'caught in the act.' However, for his father-in-law, it was too late to drive him out. He had already had a child with his wife. Apart from this, Yaakov Reifman conducted himself differently from other *Maskilim,* who would put on short jackets, and become *apikorsim.* Yaakov remained – in every respect – an observant Jew. He prayed, observed all of the *mitzvot,* and sat and studied.

Hasidim tell, that Yaakov Reifman's wife, traveled to the Old Rabbi of Belz, R' Sholom, to ask his advice, as to whether or not she should get divorced from her husband, the *apikores.* R' Sholom of Belz asked her if her husband makes use of washing his nails in water prior to retiring in the evening, because one is not supposed to walk so much as four measures in the morning before one washes off one's nails with water. She answered him affirmatively: that her husband avails himself of using water on his nails. – If so – the Rebbe answered – live with him, and you will have a good son with him.'

And Hasidim then indicate, that the Rabbi's promise came true. R' Yaakov Reifman's only son, R' Nathan, was a completely observant young man, and later became the spiritual leader and director in Lublin. Like other observant Jews, he took his father for something of an *apikores.* Despite this, he showered him with respect, because firstly, a father is a father; secondly, his father was a great scholar, one of the greatest scholars in all of Poland.

By nature, Yaakov Reifman was a rationalist, a man who believes in reason and not in secrets or any mysteries. More than anything, he loved clarity. However, this was not a deterrent to him writing poetry in Hebrew and Aramaic. From where did R' Yaakov Reifman learn Aramaic? – There is a '*Targum*' in every Pentateuch –in Aramaic, a language, which Jews in Babylon and in the Land of Israel spoke in ancient times, and a part of them did not understand Hebrew; because of this, the *Tanakh* was translated into Aramaic for them. Just as he had taught himself German from R' Moses Mendelssohn's German translation of the *Tanakh,* so he taught himself Aramaic fro the '*Targum.*' He had a great attraction to languages.

It did not take long, and R' Yaakov Reifman gained a reputation among the Jewish intelligentsia as a philologist. He wrote many books and publishes great studies in the Hebrew and German journals of that time. Among his famous books are: 'Bet Yaakov,' – a book about the *Tanakh*;: '*Pshar Davar*' – a book about the

history of the Talmud and the *Medrash*; '*Moadei Erev*' – A book about the logic of the Talmud; '*Sanhedrin*,' – a book in which the writer's circle in Israel is described. He also wrote a book about the large and multi-branched Jewish family, Rapaport: '*Avi Mishpakhat Rapaport*,' which appeared in the year 1872.

A Golden Goblet from Montefiore

What did Yaakov Reifman live from, in the later years, after his father-in-law dies? – We have no precise answer to this question. First, it appears that his many books brought him some income. Secondly, it appears that *Maskilim* from all over the world, sent him a little bit of support. Thirdly, he must have earned something from his writing of articles, which he would publish from time to time. Fourth, in those years, one didn't require any great sums to get by in Szczebrzeszyn; with a couple of tens of rubles a week, it was possible to get by already.

The famous English-Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, sent Yaakov Reifman a golden goblet in the year 1881, on which was engraved a Hebrew poem composed by Montefiore himself. In his short autobiography, R' Yaakov Reifman writes, that never in his life had he been as happy as he was then, when the golden goblet arrived from Moses Montefiore. If the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn still didn't believe that the '*apikores*' Yaakov Reifman was lauded in the world, they then had the opportunity to re-valuate their view.

R' Yaakov Reifman experienced his second great joy when he received from a supporter in Amsterdam, R' Abraham Chaim Wagna, a box full of rare books. Reifman carried on a correspondence with many educated people of his time, among others with the German-Jewish researcher Abraham Neiger, and Yitzhak Mordechai Jost. In the later years, Reifman taught himself Latin, Greek and Arabic. His books were published in Berlin, Vienna, Prague Warsaw, Vilna and St. Petersburg.

The Hebrew Poet I. L. Gordon 'thought the world' of R' Yaakov Reifman and composed a Hebrew poem about him, in which he said: Wherever I go, I see your spirit, that searches in the hidden corners of the Torah with the light of a flame... I have not forgotten you, brother, and who can forget you? How many Yaakov Reifmans are there in on the Jewish street?'....

I. L. Gordon was not one of those people who were particularly generous with their words of praise.

"Not to Repeat after Others"

In the year 1888, when the 70th birthday of R' Yaakov Reifman was being celebrated, a short autobiography was published in the Hebrew collection, '*Knesset Israel*.'[89] Among other things, he communicates about certain of his personal character traits. First, he loves for everything to be original – he says about himself. He does not like to repeat what others have said. He wants to think out and control everything for himself. Secondly, he intensely detests dishonesty, flattery, politics. More than everything, he loved correctness, and because of this, he mostly befriended young people, who had not yet manifested a tendency to be duplicitous, and were still free in their thought processes. Third, He loved solitude, and only from time to time, did he like social company. Fourth, he was a very committed friend, and if he could not suffer someone, he did not make a secret of it.

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89 The entire autobiography appears in *Pinkas Zamość*, and its English Translation, *The Zamość Memorial Book*.

R' Yaakov Reifman died on October 13, 1895 at the age of 78.

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R' Yaakov Reifman was very popular in the Lublin area. He was especially respected in Zamość , which as was previously mentioned, was an Enlightened city.

Without any doubt, R' Yaakov Reifman was a model for the writer I. L. Peretz, while he was still a young *Maskil* in Zamość. It appears that Peretz knew Reifman personally.

Hasidim thought of Reifman as an *apikores*, but they talked of him with more respect that they did about other *Maskilim.* He conducted himself as an observant Jew and also raised an observant son, a religious spiritual leader and interpreter of the Law; this was a rarity among *Maskilim.* Foremost, he apparently was indeed an observant Jew, and because of this, he remained living in small, observant Szczebrzeszyn, where he could remain observant, and simultaneously conduct his knowledge work.

The Great Szczebrzeszyn Ascetic and Scholar

By Yaakov Shatzky

The importance of the great researcher among the Jews, R' Yaakov Reifman (1818-1894), was very great in Zamość. He lived his entire life in neighboring Szczebrzeszyn under appalling material conditions. His father-in-law, Joseph Maimon was a well-known *Maskil.* Reifman's name occurs very often in the contributors to books of that era. He wanted to be active in the field of Jewish education. This so-styled '*apikores,*' and researcher in Jewry, whom Peretz recalls with respect, needed to withstand a great deal of trouble from *Hasidim.* They wanted to excommunicate him. This was because, in his very young years, he had been the cause for the establishment of Yiddish elementary schools in Lublin (in 1833) and later in Chelm (in 1862). The strong Hasidic opposition led to these schools being compelled to close down.

As previously said, in Zamość, Reifman was thought of highly. The *Maskilim* in that location were pleased with his approach to Jewish education, which sought to give equal weight to Torah study and the wisdom of external sources. Reifman dreamt of a modern Yeshiva, and in 1862, thanks to the help of Yehoshua Margolis, a close relative of Peretz,[90] it became possible for him to create such a kind of institution. It existed for all of one year, but it became an object of conversation in the circles of *Maskilim* throughout the land.

Each Saturday evening, young people would gather, and Reifman would hold a series of well-prepared lectures for them on issues pertaining to knowledge. He gave them good definitions for all issues that pertained to the wisdom of Jewry, and acquainted them with the newest achievements in this field. He severely criticized the Warsaw Teacher's Seminary for its negative attitude towards the Jewish past. He was very embittered that the Teacher's Seminary did not keep its word. It had promised him as early as 1854, to invite him to become a teacher of the Talmud. But for the Warsaw examiners around the Teacher's Seminary, Reifman was a bit too much on the religious side, at the same time when, in the eyes of the Hasidim, he was a dangerous *apikores.*

He held that Polish Jewry possessed a stronger intellectual-Jewish potential than the Jews in western Europe.

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90 *Pinkas Zamość* identifies this as the uncle of I. L. Peretz.

It is only necessary to find a middle way between the chaotic old-fashioned method of learning, and the modern methodology. The purpose of a Teacher's Seminary – he declared in his lectures for the pupils of Zamość – is not to enlarge the number of ordinary teachers, or bookkeepers and secretaries of merchant houses, but rather to educate a scholarly intelligentsia. He would use the following phrase playfully with his students:

'תַּחַת רַבָּנִים יֵצְאוּ אֲבָנִים, וְתַחַת מוֹרִים חֲמוֹרִים'[91]

A solid circle formed itself around Reifman in Zamość. Thanks to him, the *Hevra Shas* in that place had a good library. The essential fact, that he could give such an earnest course, bears testimony that there were young enlightened scholarly students in Zamość.

Yehoshua Margolis died in 1877, who was Reifman's patron and friend. He therefore spent his older years in frightful poverty, living in a 'chicken coop,' as he bemoaned his situation in a letter, and lived off of handouts, which were collected on his behalf through the Hebrew papers. The *Maskilim* of Zamość of the older generation had died out, and there were not many young and fresh forces to take their places.

Reifman's scholarly works (he was very productive) were largely created for the use of scholars, because he was no writer, only a researcher. The world of scholarship was awestruck by his discoveries. The world around him [however] helped him minimally, despite the fact that it took such pride in him. Among his students, there is the Hebrew writer, David Schiffman (1828-1903) a scion of Zamość, who was a private Hebrew teacher, and dealt in books, he was the only one, who from time to time, was helpful to his old mentor. For a certain period of time, Schiffman was a secretary to Peretz. He was the local correspondent to '*HaMelitz*,' which published the unpublished poetry of Yaakov Eichenbaum and did everything that he could do, to assure that the *Haskala* movement in Zamość would not become ossified.

I. L. Peretz tell about the Rabbi, R' Moshe Wohl, that this 'diminutive sweet Jewish man, with a little white silvery beard" and with eyes 'like those of a dove' was the gentlest Rabbinical Leader in a community, in which *Maskilim* played a very important role. He was a close friend of R' Yaakov Reifman, the '*apikores*,' and defended him vigorously. When there was a move to excommunicate the great ascetic and scholar of Szczebrzeszyn, R' Moshe Wohl said, that: 'Whosoever will excommunicate someone without the knowledge of the sitting Rabbi of the City in his own Bet Din, does so to himself.'

Copied from the 'YIVO Bleter,' Band XXXVI
Researched and submitted by Abraham Wolfson

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91 "In place of Rabbis, out came stones, and in place of teachers, asses."

"It Is Not Permitted To Hold That In One's Hand!"

By Abraham Bernstein

The *Kuzmer shtibl*, in which my father worshiped was located in the house of Yossel'eh Reifman. When we boys had a chance to climb up into the attic, we encountered boxes full of writing and letters, which had been written by Yaakov Reifman. He was then known by his extensively far-reaching correspondence with many Jewish philosophers and thinkers.

As small children, we did not understand the writings, but the pretty round handwriting interested us, and especially the hand printed words, which were to be found in many instances.

Our parents noticed a number of the writings with us, and became aware of where we had gotten them. They then ordered us to quickly throw them away, 'because it is not permitted to hold them in one's hand.'

This is how we related to the boxes full of writing, which was a treasure with many important thoughts and ideas. This lay for many years in the attic and nobody took an interest in it. It was in this manner that our little *shtetl*, with its deep swamps and poverty, lived for many years in fanaticism.

Brooklyn, New York, March 1948

How Many Yaakov Reifmans Are There in the Marketplace?

By Zvi Kramer

The researcher and critic Yaakov Reifman, a straight thinker, who combines and analyzes, was a prolific writer. He gave much of his energy to the emendation of various interpretations, minor amendments to commentaries, however, his small insights were periodically significant learnings. He is one of the fathers of scientific clarity in our modern literature. His substantial expertise was founded on ancient source material, and followed in the path of our early sages.

Among his many books: 1) "*Tavnit HaBayit*' which addresses 6 questions and responses to issues in the Talmud. This is a construct from his large work, '*Beyt Yaakov*' (Zalowka, 1843); 2) '*Phar. Davar*' – 22 commentaries from traditional legends. from a critical viewpoint (Warsaw, 1845); 3) *"Toledot Rabbeinu Zerakhya, Baal HaMaor*,' (Prague 1845); 4) '*Kol Mevaser*,' An announcement from the new publication of a book dealing with the major points of *Halakha* (Prague, 1853). The number of books that he put out – approximately twenty.[92]

The poet I. L. Gordon wrote about Yaakov Reifman in his book, in the section entitled, "*Shirim L'Ayt Matzu:*'

> Why do you say Yaakov: That Judah has forgotten you?
> And I with all the power of my soul am faithful [to you].

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92 In his autobiography, which is translated in its entirety in *The Zamość Memorial Book*, Yaakov Reifman identifies fifteen books already published (including the four cited in this text), and seven additional works to be published.

For wherever I turn, I see your force,
Searching in the depths of the Torah in a dusty light.

Your refrain pleases me
Your voice is the voice of Jacob, is your voice
Ringing like the gold of Ophir
From a voice of beaten silver.
If I have not written to you in many days
It is my impatience, overburdened with work and tedium.

I do not even have any words about Torah
To place before you
And my soul is full of loathing, like a barren, empty letter...
But I have not forgotten you, my brother
And who can forget you?
How many Yaakov Reifmans are there in the marketplace?

Rehovot, November 1980

In a Room Like a Cage...

By Solomon Lastik

Living in Szczebrzeszyn after his marriage, Yaakov Reifman became strongly involved with Zamość, which has a great impact on Szczebrzeszyn in the cultural arena. The winds of the Enlightenment found a receptive territory in Szczebrzeszyn.

Yaakov Reifman takes an interest in modern philosophy, and carries out research. Being 24 years old, he publishes his first scientific work about the Talmud, in the renown organ of the historians of Judaism, '*Zion.*' In the course of time, he becomes an authority in the area of knowledge. But this does not prevent him from living in need.

An excerpt from his letter to the researcher into Jewish knowledge Shlomo Zalman Chaim Halberstam bears witness to the way he lived:

> Regrettably, I must live in a room that is not larger than a cage, together with the small and larger children, as well as with the birds, who cackle day and night, disturbing me in my scientific work and not permitting me to grab even a little nap.

From the works of Chaim Zelig Slonimski he learned mathematics, Physics, Natural Science, and 'Wisdom of Heavens' [sic: Astronomy]. From the works of Yaakov Reifman, the expert on the ancient sacred texts, one could learn how to rationally analyze problems from the older Hebrew literature, recognize the esoteric methods of research, and to evaluate the worthiness of interpretations and commentaries, and to uncover circuitous and incorrect texts [sic: reasoning] in specific Midrashic texts in the Talmud.

At the death of this giant of labor, the modest acolyte of rectitude, the solo scholar of Szczebrzeszyn, the head of the world of Talmudic scholarship was bowed.

From Polish: Ephraim Farber

Three Letters of R' Yaakov Reifman

By Y. D. Wilhelm

***Ha'Aretz*, Culture & Literature Section, 30.10.1953**

"I am a Hebrew, and it is in Hebrew that I write, not an Arabic Hebrew, and not an Italian Hebrew, and not a German Hebrew, but rather, a Hebraic Hebrew.' This is the way R' Yaakov Reifman opens his introduction to '*Kan Tzippor, Mashal Ofi*' (Berlin 5630 [1870]). The style, is it not, that of a person, and if only for the sake of his pure Hebrew, it seems to me that it is more than worthy to publicize every line of this remarkable sage. The three letters that are presented here for publication provide evidence not only of the broad field of the interests of this *Maskil*, but also with regard to the poverty of his general description, since he was steeped in his studies and research during his residence in Szczebrzeszyn in Poland. It was of him, that Micah Joseph Bordichovsky wrote this tiny story: 'Yossi Ze'ira said that once time I was tossed into the city of Szczebrzeszyn and I heard a heavenly voice cooing like a dove: Literature has wasted away for many years for Reifman, my son, and now he contents himself with less than the bare necessities (*Bet Medrash*, Cracow, 5645, p. 111). Despite his bad circumstances, Reifman had no envy for the writers who were fortunate to make money, with whom he kept connections. It is possible to maintain this view even based on these letters, because he knew quite well what his value was as a researcher, which he expended with his own personal energies by himself, and who stood in an exchange of letters with erudite people of formidable reputation in western Europe. He was constantly drawn to add and recognize *Maskilim* of this type through the means of letter correspondence, and despite this, he did not refrain from applying the pressure of criticism to their words. The explanation to the Tractate of *Pesakhim* 112A that is found in the third letter, was published by Reifman in '*Kvutzat Khakhamim*' Vienna, 1861, p. 41; but it is difficult for me to specify if the insight in the second letter was published in one of his works, or in a speech among his many speeches.

I found these letters by accident in the library of the community of Stockholm in a packet, in which several pamphlets by Reifman were folded up. The packet is from the library of the recipient, Rabbi Yehuda Leib (Ludwig) Levinsohn, who was born in 1819 Swerzniec in Germany, and died in 1901 in Stockholm. The letters reached Levinsohn at the time he was a lecturer in Worms. Levinsohn, who during his youth drank from the fountain of R' Eliyahu Gutmacher, was one of the Rabbis of the Enlightenment. who had a beautiful command of the Hebrew language, and participated in many exchanges, and in almost all of the Hebrew publications of that era. It is difficult to say if these were the only letters that Levinsohn received from Reifman. From all appearances, they are from a single contiguous period. On the first letter, Rabbi Yitzhak Kabak of Lwów added regards to Levinsohn in German, using Hebrew letters, and lets him know about the monumentally difficult financial circumstances surrounding the publication of his own [book] '*Jeshurun.*'

Here is the text of the letters:

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With the Help of the Almighty

With respect to the Great Sage, the praiseworthy researcher, among the ranks of the many, Out Teacher, Rabbi L' Levinsohn, Peace be unto you for all eternity!

May I find favor in the eyes of my master! To take from me, with the goodness of my heart, my book: *'Toledot*

HaR"Z [93] which I place before him as a sign that I desire his proximity and yearn for his affection and to have him cast his penetrating gaze and to benefit from his opinion frankly, because it is the truth that is the epitome of my happiness, and only because of it will I rejoice, and I will remember his grace and honesty forever, and I will place their might on my arm.

May he honor me with a bit of the melody of his wisdom, which will be in my mouth like a sweet honey, and also it will be of assistance to me in my work in the history of the Hebrew literature through his own extensive expertise, and if he would advise me in his good grace, of the names of the books and speeches that he has had published to date. And perhaps, he has it within his hands to send me one of them, and the correct way to send it is to Lemberg, to the scholar, Our Teacher, R' Joseph Yitzhak Kabak, the author of the book: Jeshurun, and he will most certainly send it on to me.

The words of his servant, who yearns hopefully for his word, like an exhausted earth awaiting the rain

Yaakov Reifman
Szczebrzeszyn under the name of the writer, 5617 [1857]
My Address
Jakob Reifmann in Szebreszin
in Polen per Warszau

*****

With the Help of the Almighty

With respect to the Great Sage, the praiseworthy researcher, among the ranks of the many, Out Teacher, Rabbi Levi Levinsohn, Rabbi of Worms, Peace be unto you for all eternity!

Your precious letter of 17 Tammuz of the prior year, came to me on 7 Kislev of this year from Lvov through the hands of our [common] dear friend the *Maskil* Kabak, and I do not know why it was late in coming, and why it was delayed for such a substantial amount of time. And please do know, that if God be with me, I will be publishing addenda and amendments to my book: '*Toledot RZ"H.*' And now for you: a critique of the criticism of the book, 'Toledot RZ"H, ' please look into it with some thought, and give of your heart to dig out and discover with wisdom each and every issue in it, and should it find favor in your eyes, please copy it [sic: translate it] into the French language, and put into a letter that which you recall from your correspondence. I will delve into your comments on the interpretation of the tractate of *Mo'ed Katan* at my earliest opportunity, with my meager understanding, at the time that I am able to rest from my many labors. I hereby promise you, that I will send to you, from time to time, from the fruits of my efforts, and it is my hope that it will prove to be a joy to your heart. And now, my beloved man, my precious friend! Do a great and true boon for me, and honor me with your compositions, and send them by the post from you to my country. And do not depend on chance opportunities, because many years will go by, and they will not get to me, because I have already attempted this many times. And perhaps you have things from the olden days of your ancient city, in the archives of ancient sages that resided there, and in the history of the life of R' Eliezer the Pharmacist who lived there, I would ask you to place it before me in your good graces.

A matter has become known to me from a story:

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93 *"Toledot Rabbeinu Zerakhya, Baal HaMaor,'* (Prague 1845)

Translator's note: Reifman relates a matter here that is tied to specifics not readily translated without in-depth research into the source material. It is omitted in this text.

Be of good cheer and of good heart, and add succor and effort day by day, and gladden your soul, from your dear one, who crouches under the burden of life that has no bounds.

Yaakov Reifman
4, *Vayeshev*, 5618, Szczebrzeszyn

With the Help of the Almighty

My friend who is like a brother to me!

Your pleasant letter came to my through the hands of our friend, the wise and dear sage, the Rabbi, Our Teacher, R' A"L Zilberman.[94] But your book: *Die Zoologie das Talmuds* [95] after which my soul pines oh, so greatly, appears to still be in Warsaw, and I shall hope that it will come to me swiftly. And when I receive it, I will dedicate all my effort to it. And if it is satisfies me, and appeals to my logic, when I approach it, I will give you permission to your heart's content to disseminate my thoughts about it in the public domain, as the hand of God rests favorably upon me. And perhaps my time will permit me to copy [sic: translate] it into a clear, Hebrew language, in order that my countrymen become aware of what you have done in honor of the masters of the Talmud. From the introduction of my book: '*Phar. Davar*' you will be able to ascertain that I was first to open and mine the earth of the field that you extracted the actual fruit of grain, and this will be a sign to you that it was you that God chose to be the carrier of produce of that field, and bring them to home with joy and happiness. Congratulations and all good things to you!

Here, for you, are four pages[96] from this book of mine, that were lost to you, and know because I am fond of you, I ruined one copy in order to complete your store of information. That book of mine requires many more amendments, because not a small amount [of its content] was corrupted by the printers and also at the hands of the censors, and if God be with me, I will amend it, and I will add many things to it in time, such that I will hope that its fame will grow larger than the first part of the book. Your book: '*Nafshot Tzadikim*,'[97] is very valuable in my view, despite the fact that I found a few things in it that require fixing. And I always pray that there will be an increase in books like these on the face of the earth. And if my corrections are worthy in your eyes, as you have written, please let it be through your good graces that they be published. Please keep your

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94 Author's Footnote: Rabbi Dr. Eliezer Lipman Zilberman (1819-1882), author of '*HaMaggid*,' began from 1856.

95 Author's Footnote: Appeared 1858; Reifman critiques the book in '*Kvutzat Khakhamim*,' Vienna 1861, pp. 25-40.

96 Author's Footnote: Pages 29-36 of '*Pshar Davar*' in possession of the library, in a different format.

97 Author's Footnote: *Nafshot Tzadikim* (The Souls of the Righteous) Published in 1855 (in German), Sixty Ancient Grave Stones from the Cemetery in Worms.

word to cast a critical eye on my letter to the Bet Din Senior of your city.[98] And perhaps, you have the inclination to convince the sage Levy who is in Giessen[99] to put his mind to it, should he be up to it. In general, I am here approaching you before you leave Europe[100] to place me in contact with all your colleagues whom God has endowed with a wise and understanding heart. and to direct them to always honor me with the fruit of their labors. And I, also, am prepared to honor them with a bit of balsam and honey that I have been endowed with by He who endows all humanity with sapience. And to you, I hope that you will not forget me with the passage of time. And also, that islands and the sea will not place me distant from your heart. And that even from the ends of the earth, you will communicate your words to me. And do not hold back on account of any meager desire on my part. And even should your path be bathed in waves of joy, do not fail to remember that far away, you have a faithful admirer, in a brother who will bathe his endeavors in tears. May you gird your loins to provide succor to those who are poor, and wanting, imprisoned in the darkness of exhaustion and tiredness, and may you extend the counsel in your soul to give him surcease and a shelter of dignity, in all endeavor to which you put your hand. I will not sadden you any further, and I will not interdict your tongue in relating to you my own troubles and the bad state of my circumstances. Be of good cheer. Succeed, and ride on the heights of wealth and honor, and blessed be your way, and may your sign rise higher and higher, as well as the sign of him who asks for your well being and good fortune for all of your days.

Yaakov Reifman

I will not send my letter out from me, until I have put down an insight, and this is it: In *Psakhim* (112A), it is written:

> Translator's note: Reifman relates a matter here that is tied to an esoteric interpretation of a specific tract of the Gemara. It cannot be translated without in-depth research into the source material. It is omitted in this text.

9 Adar I 5619 Szczebrzeszyn

Please send quickly to me, or by way of our previously mentioned friend, a clear address of the place to which you are going. and I will be able to send you my new works. I hereby promise you, that I will be prepared to be at your disposal at all times that you will be so disposed to walk with me in the garden of research and guidance.

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98 Author's Footnote: R' Yaakov Koppel Bamberger; see the comments of M. Freudenthal about the community of Worms, in the *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Jude in Deutschland*, Volume V, 1934, p. 31

99 Author's Footnote: Dr. Indikt Levy, Rabbi of Giessen 1829-1899.

100 Author's Footnote: Levinsohn at that time had received an appointment as the Rabbi of Baltimore in the United States, and declined to accept the position after he had received the appointment in Stockholm at the same time. This is taken from remarks in the *Historia Juridica*, Volume XV, 1953, pp. 49-58.

German Translation of Hanukkah and Purim Poems from the Year 1555

Page 430: *Frontispiece of Deutsche Sprachdenkmäler I. The Poems of the Venetian Teacher, Gumprecht of Szczebrzeszyn (of 1555)*

In the *'Hebraica'* collection in Padua (Italy) of the Trieste brothers, a manuscript was discovered in the year 1892, in octave format, by Gumprecht of Szczebrzeszyn. With the intermediation of the Rabbi of Padua, Dr. Albert Zamatko, the discoverer was able to copy the original handwriting from the year 1555, written in the German-Gothic style, and thanks to the support of the Zunz Publishers, it became possible to print it in the year 1895.

Since that time, the Trieste collection passed into the hands of the lady, Rosa Gumprecht and Professor David Kaufman in Budapest. After his death, this collection, along with other books, were transferred to the library of the Hungarian Academy of Science in Budapest.

In the catalogue of the handwritten Hebrew manuscripts and books of Professor David Kaufman, written up by Dr. Max Weiss, Frankfurt-am-Main, in the year 1906, the handwritten [manuscripts] are cited under number 397.

The 'German Translation of Hanukkah and Purim Poems' is in reality a poetic rendition of the Hanukkah and Purim stories. The '*Yotzer*' of Hanukkah served as the source for the Hanukkah poem. The writer portrays the occurrences as they are described in the '*Yotzer*' of Hanukkah in 49 stanzas: the decrees of the King Antiochus (verses 2-4), the martyrdom of Eliezer (verses 5-7), the martyred death of Chana and her seven sons (verses 8-15), the marriage of the sister of Judah Maccabee and the murder of the city leader (verses 16-25), the story of Holofernes and Judith (verses 26-34) and to the end – the miracle of the oil (verses 44-46).

The poet rendered the story of the *Megilla* of Esther in the same form, in 76 verses. To round out the historical telling, he made use of the second *Targum* and the *Gemara*, the tractate *Megilla*, and the *Medrash, Esther Rabba.*

Gumprecht was a teacher in Venice in the years 1570-1571 (a contemporary relative was the Scribe Abraham ben Yitzhak of Szczebrzeszyn, who completed a copy of '*Assis Rimonim*' in the year 1542 (Catalogue Number 1808).

On October 19, 1553, the flames of the Inquisition began to burn, which incinerated the entirety of the Rabbinic literature of the Venetian Republic. The prohibition against the printing of Jewish books endured for ten years. It was first in the year 1563, that the activity of Jewish publication was renewed.

Gumprecht from Szczebrzeszyn then found it necessary to compose the two songs for observant women, in order that they know why Hanukkah and Purim are celebrated. He dedicated the poems to the daughter of the rich and renown Simcha of Venice – Sarah (*Zoorlein*). The melody that is used for the first of the two songs, was taken from the old German song, '*Die Schpinerin.*' The second song is sung with the melody of an old German song, '*Lid von Kalb und Landsknecht.*'

The entire manuscript is written by the same hand, and only single words are limned and altered by a different

hand. The name *Zoorlein* was changed to *Mestlein* and Simcha – to Kalman Azulay. On the last side of the manuscript, there is a notice with the date, 1579-80, with the name, Isaac. It is possible to deduce, that the Isaac referred to is the owner of the manuscript, or he copied and altered the names in order to give the manuscript to the daughter Mestlein of Kalman Azulay in Venice.

'Regarding the Decrees Against the Jews'

Page 432: *Frontispieces of Ancient Books, Acts and Documents*

Page 432: *'Regarding the Decrees Against the Jews' by Jonas Gurland*
Page 433: *'Tzuk Ha'Ittim'*

In the pamphlet, 'Regarding the Decrees Against the Jews,' which appeared in the year 5649 (1889) in Cracow, in the second and third notebook, by Kh"Y Gurland, we find several excerpts about personalities from Szczebrzeszyn. We reproduce these remarks as they were written in the original language, in the style of the times.

Tzuk Ha'Ittim

A long story in rhyme, regarding the Decrees of 1648-9 by *R' Meir son of R' Shmuel, a man from Szczebrzeszyn*, ז"ל: and it took nearly 238 years for this book to see the light of day (Cracow, 5410), nevertheless, its content is more precious than pearls, and its content must be considered as if it was rendered by hand: And the book, '*Tzuk Ha'Ittim*,' continues to circulate in the land, even if there is little in the way of new things to be found there, from R' Yehoshua son of R' David of Lvov (Venice, 5415), it is a forgery, from the beginning to the end, because this man took all of the words of R' Meir, and passed it off as his own, wrapping himself in the prayer shawl of a thief, and calling out in a loud voice, '*Shema Yisrael*,' in order that the deception of his heart not be uncovered in his inner recesses, to blind the eyes of his readers, in his introduction, and in the introduction of the [work] '*The Lawgiver*,' the shameful man did not even know to change the frontispiece on the book, and in place of the real author: *Meir ben Shmuel The Memory of a Righteous Man for a Blessing*, etc., he deceptively wrote: *Yehoshua son of the Gaon Our Teacher, R' David, The Memory of A Righteous Man for a Blessing*, etc., when I will reveal his forgery at length in my introduction to the book, which will be released for publication in a fourth notebook, with God's help.

At the end, I said today to alter and recapitulate my re-doubled request that I have already presented to the Rabbis, and Sages who reside and lecture in our land and outside of it, that they accord me, from their good graces, for are these not *bona fide* copies from the folios of their communities, from the memories of the life of their congregations, and from the grave stones of their cemeteries in the cities where they lived, which in the large or small were touched by the decrees described herein, and I will thank them from the bottom of my heart, and will even bestow upon them the triple blessing of our sacred and pure Torah, and may they remain so blessed. –

Odessa, This is Hanukkah of this year.

Kh"Y Gurland.

*

Cascades of tears will fall from my eyes on the gates of the Hebrews, how the sons of the sacred congregation

of *Busko*, who were dear to us, the honest sons of the sacred congregation of *Brehin*, and the pure sons of the sacred congregation of *Zalowka*, and the sons of the sacred congregation of *Szczebrzeszyn,* who were innocent of impurity, and the pure sons of the sacred congregation of *Jaworow*, and the sons of the sacred congregation of *Turobin,* and the glorious sons of the sacred congregation of *Tomaszow*, and all the vicinities into which the predators came, killing more than thirty thousand women and men, enlightened people, as pure and bright as the firmament lit up – – –

*

Szczebrzeszyn. A city with accomplished people and miracle workers, who were in this city, at one time, see the list in the commentaries of '*Ohel Issachar*' by the wonderful critic R' Yaakov Reifman (*Bet Otzar HaSefarot*, Commentary 3) and the supplements to them from Rabbi R' Nahum Brill (Page 18). – The reader from generations to come will continue to say: Be joyous and sing, daughter of Szczebrzeszyn, because in your midst was erected the tent of Torah, Our Teacher, R' Yaakov the Peaceful, whom we can truly award, with honor and praise, the title of: The Second Ibn Ezra, and so forth.

The two works included in this work by photocopy are:

A) '*Tzuk Ha'Ittim*' by R' Meir son of R' Shmuel from Szczebrzeszyn. First Edition, Cracow 5410.

B) *Yevayn Metzullah* by R' Nathan Neta Hannover, First Edition, Venice 5413.

'*Tzuk Ha'Ittim*' was reprinted in Salonika in 5412; in Venice, 5416 under the name of Yehoshua son of R' David of Lvov in the absence of the true author: in the middle of the book by Kh"Y Gurland, 'Regarding the Decrees Against the Jews,' fourth notebook, Cracow, 5649. A' Yaari (Kiryat-Sefer 5698 375-377) aligned the Salonika edition with the Cracow edition (according to Gurland) and to the Venice edition, and arrived at the following conclusions: 1) That the Salonika edition is more accurate than the Cracow edition (in the Gurland copying). Whoever will come afterwards to assess *Tzuk Ha'Ittim* from a scientific standpoint such a person should rely on the Salonika edition which is superior in its accuracy; 2) The Venice edition was not copied using the Cracow edition as a base, but rather from the second edition that was published in Salonika. Because of this, Y. Heilperin theorizes (Zion, 25 (5720) p. 17 commentary 3) that the Cracow copy possessed by Gurland was not an accurate one, and that there is room to return and examine the conclusions derived by A' Yaari – in connection with the goodness of the later editions and their physical interdependence – the introduction of the author of '*The Lawgiver*,' and some 'good viewpoints,' that Yaari found in two later editions, and were not found with Gurland, and that is why he concluded what he did conclude, that such and such can be found in the Cracow edition.

Yevayn Metzullah was reprinted and appeared in the original, and also in translation into several languages, in a number of styles.. In the year 5705 a simplified edition appeared , with vowels and explanations by Y. Heilperin and with a literary introduction by Y. Fikhman, put out by the United Kibbutz.

Excerpts and Frontispieces

The following pages contain excerpts and frontispieces as follows. They are not translated, since more complete primary sources are available to the interested reader.

P. 435: An excerpt in Rashi script not identified. The content appears to deal with the Chmielnicki pogroms, but it is not clear from which of the two volumes the text is excerpted. The photocopy is not of good quality.

P. 436-7: Kol Mevaser. The Introduction to Jonas Gurland's book, part of which is translated above.

P. 438 The Introduction to '*Tzuk Ha'Ittim*.'

P. 439: Frontispiece to the 'Stories of the Decrees of 1648-9, by R' Meir of Szczebrzeszyn and R' Nathan Netta Hannover.

P. 440: Frontispiece of the Book, '*Peninim*,' by R' Issachar Ber son of R' Naphtali Katz printed in Jerusalem 5720.

P. 441: Frontispiece of the Book, '*Mar'ey Kohen*,' Published during the reign of 'Our King Zygmunt III' by Yitzhak, son of R' Aharon, ז"ל, the Lawgiver from Prostyc.

P. 442: The Introduction of the author, זצ"ל (to *Peninim*)

P. 443: The Introduction to '*Mar'ey Kohen*.'

P. 444- 5: Frontispiece to an edition of *Medrash Rabba* on the Pentateuch and the Five *Megillot*, printed in Vilna in 5645 by The Widow and Brothers Rom, with a dedication by the Goldstein family of West New York, specifically the Rabbi, R' Shimshon Goldstein.

Szczebrzeszyn

The city of Szczebrzeszyn, which is close to Chelm, is one of the cities of Poland that was 'filled with sages and scribes' by the fourth century of the sixth millennium, and was a center of Torah. In Szczebrzeszyn, famous Torah scholars of great stature, who garnered great praise, sat in disputations. Even the *balebatim* were Torah scholars, among them were some who wrote books, who earned a reputation in the Torah literature and were distributed to all the far reaches of the Diaspora. As an example, we will present here the names of several authors and their books, who were from the city of Szczebrzeszyn. Customarily we call a *Kohen* first – and he is the Gaon, Our Teacher, R' Issachar HaKohen Berman, of the great sages of Szczebrzeszyn, who is known for his book, '*Matanot Kehuna*,' on the subject of *Medrash Rabba*. And after him – a Levite, and he is the Rabbi *Gaon* Our Teacher, R' Yaakov HaLevi, a man of [the] Horowitz [family], the brother of the Holy ShL"H, who published the book of his father, the Gaon, Mr. Abraham HaLevi with the embellishment of his own observations, with traditional insight ans in connection with the laws, '*Yesh Nokhalin*,'[101] He inculcated Torah into many in Szczebrzeszyn, "Torah was sought from his mouth, and his work became renown in a ll circles.'[102]

One of the sages of Szczebrzeszyn, was the *Gaon,* R' Mordechai son of Naphtali from Krzezmir, author of the books, '*Ketoret HaMizbeakh*,' and '*Ketoret HaSammim*,' and commentaries on the translations.[103] He was also the author of the book, '*Korot Ha'Ittim*,' on the killings and slaughtering that the Jews in the country of Poland underwent during the decrees of 1648 and 1649, and was a scion of Szczebrzeszyn.[104] The same is true for the *Gaon*, Our Teacher, R' Eliezer, son of the *Gaon* Our Teacher, R' Yehoshua, the author of '*Damascus Eliezer*.'[105]

And here are the Teachers of Righteousness and the Bet Din Seniors of Szczebrzeszyn that are known:

A. The Rabbi *Gaon,* Our Teacher, R' Yeshayahu son of Yitzhak, was known by the name R' Mendel R' Avigdor. In his youth, he served as the Rabbi and Bet-Din Senior in Szczebrzeszyn, and afterwards was appointed the Bet-Din Senior of Ludomir, and towards the end of his days, he was the Bet-Din Senior of Cracow and the valley.[106] He died there in the year 5359.

B. The Gaon, Our Teacher, R' David son of Yaakov. Who arrived and assumed his position from the year 5347,

[Translator's Note: The text in the Yizkor Book, inexplicably stops at this point abruptly.]

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101 Author's Footnote: Published in Prague 5377.

102 Author's Footnote: The name of the introduction to this book. See the concurrences to the book.

103 Author's Footnote: Amsterdam, 5420, 5431.

104 Author's Footnote: See the introduction to the book,

105 Author's Footnote: Published in Wilhelmsdorf, 5498.

106 Author's Footnote: See the book, 'Ir HaTzedek' and the writings of the history of the Rabbi *Gaon* Dembitzer, Page 10.

Szczebrzeszyn Capsule [107]

SZCZEBRZESZYN (Rus. Schebreschin; Yid. Shebreshin), a town in the Lublin province of Eastern Poland. An organized community existed there from the first half of the 16th century. Jews in Szczebrzeszyn traded in spices, and frequently did business at the Lublin fairs.

In 1583, King Stefan Batory renewed the rights formerly granted to the Jews there, to trade in the villages. In 1597, King Sigismund III Vasa, prohibited the Jews from leasing permits to do tax collection. At the end of the 16th century, a magnificent synagogue was built in the Renaissance style (It was put to the torch in 1939).

The Jews of the town suffered during the time of the Chmielnicki massacres in 1648-9. These were described by Meir the son of Shmuel in his book, '*Yatzuk Ha'Ittim*,' (Cracow, 1650). A century later, [in 1765] there were 444 Jews living in the city. After Szczebrzeszyn was incorporated into Congress Poland (1815), the restrictions on Jews that delineated the perimeter of the city were nullified. The Jewish population numbered 1,083 (31% of the total) in 1827; 1,605 (38% of the total) in 1857; and the settlement grew to 2,449 (44% of the total) in 1897, and 2,644 (42% of the total) in 1921.

In 1701, a session of the *Va'ad Arba Aratzot* was held in Szczebrzeszyn.

The influence of Hasidism was very strong in the place. The *Tzaddik* of Jaworow, R' Elimelech Hurwitz resided there in the 1880's. The Hebrew scholar, Yaakov Reifman lived in Szczebrzeszyn during the middle of the 19th century.

In the municipal elections of 1931, the General Zionists obtained three seats, Poalei Tzion one, Agudat Israel one, and the *Bund* five.

On the eve of the Second World War, there were approximately 3,200 Jews residing in Szczebrzeszyn . The Germans entered on September 13, 1939, drew back on the 27th, and then returned on October 9, in accordance with the [Molotov-Ribbentrop] Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union. Hundreds of young people left with the Red Army. In August 1940, 300 Jews were compelled to sign up for compulsory labor; most did not heed the call, and fled. In May 1942, 100 were killed by German police and the remainder of the Jews were transported to Belzec in two transports. In August and October of that same year, hundreds succeeded in fleeing to the forests and to set up combat units. However, only very few remained alive at the time of the liberation.

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107 In this section, we integrate a translation of the extract shown from the *Bet HaTefutzot* computer, found on page 447, and the English summary on page viii in the rear of the book.

From the Literature

The excerpts of work presented here is the product of two Nobel Prize-winning authors, whose works have been extensively translated into the English language. Accordingly, no effort was made to translate these excerpts, because more full texts are already available to the interested reader, and are readily available in the public domain.

1. S. Y. Agnon from the Eight Volumes of his writings, from '*Korot Bateinu.*'

2. Isaac Bashevis Singer 'Der Spiegel', a publication by J. L. Magnes in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 5735.

Personalities from the Past

Yaakov Zipper (October 10, 1900 -)

The adopted name of *Yaakov Stern*. – Born in Szczebrzeszyn, near Zamość, Poland. From earliest childhood, he lived in the shtetl of Tyszowce, near Lublin, where his father, an author of several Hebrew books, was located. He was a ritual slaughterer and a teacher of the law. He studied in Heder, and afterwards *Shas* and the *Poskim* from his father. He learned Polish and German from private teachers. In 1919 he left Tyszowce, and lived illegally in Wolhyn. During the time of the Bolshevist attack against Poland (summer of 1920), he was sentenced by the Poles to be shot, but was saved thanks to a ransom that the Jews of Hrubieszow paid on his behalf. He was an active member of '*HeHalutz*,' '*Tze'Irei Tzion*,' right-wing *Poalei Tzion*. An employee of the Tz.Sh.O. in Poland. Member of the culture committee of the professional unions in Ludomir, Wolhyn. Later – a member of the 'Yiddish National Labor Union' in America. Since 1925 – a Yiddish-Hebrew teacher in Montreal. – Debuts with a short picture, "To the Third Feast" in the *Polieser Stimme*, Brisk 1923. Afterwards, printed stories, poems, articles in '*Shprotzungen*' and in the Hebrew '*HaKokhav*' – Warsaw; *Unser Stimme*, Chelm; *Grininkeh Boimelakh*, *Der Khaver* – Vilna; *Brisker Vokhnblatt*; *Keneder Odler*, Montreal; *Dos Yiddishe Vort*, Winnipeg; A poem, 'Goblets' – Los Angeles; Culture, School folio, an appearance – Chicago; *Die Yiddishe Velt*, Vancouver; *Die Vokh*, *Yiddish. Zukunft*. Establishment. *Der Yiddisher Kempfer*, *Kinder-Journal*, *Kinder-Zeitung*, Further, *Oyfn Shvell*, In anger, etc. – N.Y. *HaOlam*, Jerusalem; *Tefutza*, Tel-Aviv; Argentine Saplings, B[uenos] Aires; Proletarian Thought, Toronto; Opening, Bucharest, etc. Published in book form: 'There Once Was a Man, Five Tales from the Life of the BeSH"T. 'Friends,' Montreal 1940, 167pp (Also published in Hebrew in Tel-Aviv); 'On the Other Side of the Bug,' a novel, published in Montreal, 1946, 283 pp (published in Hebrew in Tel-Aviv in 1957, 367pp.). Received a prize from Zukunft for his story, 'Plague.' Edited the Canadian Weekly in Montreal 1926-1927. Pseudonyms: Y. Shin, Alf, Yizhak Sternberg, Y. Nitels, etc. Was a delegate to the second Worldwide Yiddish Culture Congress in NY in 1959. Lives in Montreal, Canada.

[Various References to Source Material]

Lexicon of the New Yiddish Literature, New York, 1960.

An Unknown Commentator

In the 'Encyclopedia of the History of the Great Torah Sages' on page 388, we read the following intriguing note about 'an unknown commentator:' (Mentioned also in the list, Szczebrzeszyn in the Pinkas of the *'Va'ad Arba Aratzot'*).

R' David son of R' Yaakov of Szczebrzeszyn

An author, at then of the fourth century of the sixth millennium (the sixteenth century by secular enumeration). He put together a commentary on the *Targum Yonatan* and *Yerushalmi*, on the Torah, and the *Second Targum* of the Book of Esther. It was first printed in Prague in 5369, and after that several other times, and was even included in printings of the Pentateuch. Nothing is known of the details of his life.

Meir B. Samuel of Szczebrzeszyn

Hebrew Author of the seventeenth century. In the disastrous years of 1648-49 he lived at Szczebrzeszyn, Russian Poland, an honored member of the community, whence he escaped on its invasion by the Cossacks, to Cracow; there he published his '*Tzuk Ha'Ittim* (1650), an account in Hebrew verse, of Jewish persecution during the Cossack uprising. This book was afterwards published by Joshua David of Lemberg under his own name; Steinschneider was the first to discover this plagiarism. Meir wrote also '*Mizmor Shir*,' a Sabbath hymn, in Aramaic and Judeo-German (Venice 1639).

Bibliography: Gurland. Le-Korot ha-Gezerot, iv. 3; Steinschnieder, Cat. Bodl. No. 6324; Fürst, Uibl. Jud. H. 345. H. R.

A. S. W.

From the Jewish Encyclopedia

The Landsmanschaft Organizations

The Organization of the Émigrés of Szczebrzeszyn in Israel

P. 458: A Gathering at a Memorial Observance in Haifa

P. 459: The Committee of The Organization of the Émigrés of Szczebrzeszyn in Israel (Top – 1950) – Right to Left: Chaim Becher, Mendel Boim, Dwora Flajszer, Eliakim Kandel

(Bottom- 1952), Right to Left: Chaim Becher, Abraham Becher, Mendel Boim, Moshe Zisser, Eliakim Kandel[108]

The repercussions of the Holocaust in the lands of Europe during the days of the Second World War, a time when millions of Jews were murdered, and brought down by the Nazis and their accomplices, news of these repercussions were delayed in arriving to the Jewish *Yishuv* in the Land of Israel. And even after news arrived from the mouths of people who were reliable, and one could depend on their words concerning this awesome calamity, it was difficult to believe how large the scope of the Holocaust tragedy was. The possibility of saving the surviving remnant, and bringing it to the Land was minimal, because of the ruling regime of the British Mandate, which impeded the initiatives of the *Yishuv* and denied permissions for *aliyah*. However, as is known, during the days of the hegemony of the German 'Reich,' the underground movement, supported by emissaries from the *Yishuv*, managed to bring thousands to the *Yishuv*, who were fleeing the danger.

A feeling of somber mourning pervaded the *Yishuv*. With this, an initiative was started of aid and rescue from the side of the organized *Yishuv*. Organizations of those who had made aliyah from specific cities and towns began to be organized – '*Landsmanschaft*' organizations – with the objective of speeding assistance to those who were saved, and to erect works of memorialization to the Jewish settlements that were destroyed. In the heart of all the émigrés from each and every city and town, beat the desire to memorialize that which was dear to them, the memories of the past, the root of their origin, and the memory of their dear ones, who were sacrificed on the altar, the efforts of the survivors, and a revelation of the suffering and heroism. Among the first of the organizations was The Organization of the Émigrés of Szczebrzeszyn in Israel

The first meeting of the workings, as a result of the effort of Mendel Boim, was in the home of Rivka Dyless-Becher, and her husband, Benjamin Hirsch, in Haifa. Among the first of the workers were: Rivka Weinstock, Mendel Messinger, Shmuel Reichstein. A small amount of money was collected at the meeting, and it was decided to assemble material in writing and publish a memorial book, in order to preserve the memory of the Jewish community in the city. The task of assembling the material was delegated to Mendel Boim. Contributions arrived from various different comrades, who had long tenure in the Land. A central amount of support came from the Szczebrzeszyn émigrés of the United States, among whom, it was Pesach Borek who was most active.

The organization selected a committee that would be changed in several years, and every year, on the day of

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108 Caption details, not in this book, were found in the more detailed Szczebrzeszyn Journals, and subsequently confirmed by Mrs. Rosa Farber, wife of the late Ephraim Farber, in a letter to Tomasz Panczyk, of 15Feb05.

23 Heshvan, a memorial service would be held in memory of the sacred martyrs, the people of the town, and this represented an opportunity for meetings among those friends who come in from a variety of places in the Land, to exchange conversation among themselves in aa atmosphere of friendship and nostalgia.

Szczebrzeszyn , as is known, was one of the most ancient of the Jewish settlements in Poland. Fundamental elements of Jewish life bubbled away there. However, the assembly of comprehensive materials on the experience of the town, and with regard to the period of the Holocaust, was not easy. No newspaper was published in Szczebrzeszyn. Writers, whose work dealt with such matters did not dedicate their time to it [sic: the town]. Here and there, the town is mentioned – briefly and in a shortened manner – especially in ancient sources: in the minutes of the '*Va'ad Arba Aratzot*,' in national archives, in the books of various writers. It was necessary to look through all of these, to gather together, to prepare and to present it in an attractive manner. And it is understood, that this would be regarding the Jewish experience in the town, and the terrible events that put an end to this experience, that it was necessary to rescue from the mouths of people who were still alive and living with us.

Our friend Mendel Boim worked as a volunteer for many years, in the assembly of the material for a book, and he put a great deal of effort into this. During this time, Mendel Boim also published 5 folios (in Yiddish and in Hebrew) and in them is a portion of the material and minutes of the meetings of the committees and assemblies. these folios – with all the commentary in them – were harbingers of the appearance of book itself in the coming future.

A specific delay in the work came with the aliyah of Dwora Flajszer to the Land, who also organized the list of the martyrs who were scions of the city, and submitted it to *Yad VaShem* in Jerusalem.

After Ephraim Farber and Abraham Wolfson came to the Land, hey began to accelerate the matter of publishing the memorial book. They assumed the responsibility of concern for the securing of the means to publish the book, most of the content, and to complete the assembly of the material. From that time, the initiative was given a push. Many donations were collected. A publisher was selected. The structure of the book was given to a professional editor, who in fact found unsubstantiated and worthless material. Also, the participants were not directed to write on specific subjects, each one within a scope in which he was active, and it was possible to discern that the work of editing, and the filling in of the missing information, was uniquely difficult, and it is interesting to note, that important lists, in quality and quantity, were actually prepared towards the end, at the time that the book was already in the advanced stages of being finalized. Even the work of printing took an extended period of time, because of the unique character of the work, which is not the usual, until we finally got th the completion, and it seemed to us – a successful conclusion.

It is not an accident that the book was produced in Israel: not only because this is the center of the Jewish people, but also because it was here that the largest concentration of the émigrés from the city could be found, which had decided to take upon itself the execution of this work, which demanded a great deal of work, faith, meticulousness, attention, and an ability to overcome the pitfalls.

The *Landsmanschaft* in Montreal

Page 463: The Canada Committee of Émigrés from Szczebrzeszyn
From Right to Left: Emanuel Chmielasz, Wolf Ingber, Lejzor Borek, David Fuchs & Azriel Dreyer[109]

Page 446: The Szczebrzeszyn Landsleit of Montreal – 20.5.1954

Among other survivors, Jews from Szczebrzeszyn began to arrive in Montreal, Canada from the D.P. camps in Austria and Germany since 1949. We scions of Szczebrzeszyn numbered almost twenty by 1951. At that time, a small number of people from Szczebrzeszyn also came from Israel, who had lived there for a short while.

At the beginning of the fifties, we the people of Szczebrzeszyn in Montreal lived in the Jewish neighborhood in the streets around the Saint Lawrence, then the commercial center of the city. At that time we all lived not far from one another, and met one another nearly every day.

In 1949, our *landsman*, Pesach Borek ע"ה, the Secretary of the Szczebrzeszyn Society in New York, came to visit the local people from Szczebrzeszyn. The encounter took place at the home of Ephraim and Bayl'tcheh Millstein. For the new arrivals, it was particularly pleasing to enjoy the company of old friends in a new country. Every day off from work, that is to say Sunday, almost all of us would meet at the esplanade street, near the Jewish Library.

Together with P. Borek, at the home of the Millsteins, it was decided that the scions of Szczebrzeszyn in Montreal should organize themselves, and that we should meet frequently, and deal with problems that were real. The leadership then consisted of the Messrs. David Fuchs, Wolf Ingber and Ephraim Millstein. At the end of 1949 we called together a gathering of all the people of Szczebrzeszyn at the home of Lejzor Borek. We elected a committee of the people: David Fuchs, Wolf Ingber, Lejzor Borek, Emanuel Chmielasz, Azriel Dreyer and Chaim Unger ע"ה. At that time, we decided that everyone should pay membership dues of 50 cents a month.

At that point, we got ourselves in touch with the new *olim* – the scions of Szczebrzeszyn in Israel. From the few dollars that we had collected, we began to send help directly to the needy *landsleit*, new olim in Israel. When we became aware that in Israel there was a newly organized committee of people from Szczebrzeszyn, at whose head stood our important *landsman* Mendel Boim, we made contact with him in writing. We send the modest financial assistance to the address of the Szczebrzeszyn committee in Israel, that is, to M. Boim.

Our activity also consisted of observing the Yahrzeits of our nearest who were martyred in Sanctification fo the Name. We rented a hall, in the building of the Jewish Library, and retained a Cantor to chant *'El Moleh Rakhamim.'* All the scions of Szczebrzeszyn in Montreal, without exception, took part. After such a memorial service, we entertained and dealt with a variety of issues.

When M. Boim wrote to us, that they were collecting documents about the extermination of our dear Jews in Szczebrzeszyn, and that the Szczebrzeszyn scions in Israel are preparing to publish journals, in which the life

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109 Caption details, not in this book, were found in the more detailed Szczebrzeszyn Journals.

and times of the Jews of Szczebrzeszyn will be described, we sent over material: Dr. Klukowski's book about the extermination of the Jews, also writings of the poet Sholom Stern (who came from Szczebrzeszyn, Tyszowce, and lives today in Montreal). Others also sent specific writings from organizations, and about the way of life in Szczebrzeszyn.

Beginning with the journals, the Szczebrzeszyn committee in Israel had the ultimate goal of publishing a *Yizkor Book*. We, in Montreal, then put together a little bit of money for this purpose, and sent it off to the committee in Israel. Unfortunately, the arrival of new *olim* from Szczebrzeszyn brought many who were needy, and the committee in Israel saw fit to assist the needy with these funds.

With the publication of the *Yizkor Book* things quieted down. Documents about Szczebrzeszyn were already mostly in the possession of M. Boim. We, in Montreal, wrote to him often: his answers were full of hope, but nothing substantial ever came of it. At that time, we let our hands down, and not without and angry disappointment. We would just ask one another: all the cities and towns, even smaller than Szczebrzeszyn, already have a *Yizkor Book*, and Szczebrzeszyn is unable to achieve this. We talked for so long, and asked each other for so long, until it became an internal embarrassment and pain that each of us felt.

At this time, Montreal Jews from Lublin, new emigrants, advised us: they are going to erect a monument on the Jewish cemetery in memory of the murdered martyrs in Lublin, and other settlements in the Lublin district. They inquired of us as to whether we also wanted to memorialize our Szczebrzeszyn martyrs. We then called a general meeting of our *landsleit*. I personally was opposed to a stone monument; simply a stone, no matter how beautiful, wide and high it might be, is simply 'idol worship.' By contrast, a Yizkor Book is a living, moving monument, which each and every one of us can press to their heart, like a sacred text, and it will endure for generations to come, for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren – to tell them of their origins. After the discussion with the representatives of the Lublin landsmanschaft, we became aware, that they had sent a number of emissaries to Poland, and they brought a small container from Belzec, of the ashes of cremated Jews. As we know, Szczebrzeszyn Jews were martyred there. The monument was erected on the place where this container of ashes was buried. On the monument is carved the name of the exterminated Jewish community of Szczebrzeszyn. Every year, on one of the Ten Days of Awe, we hold a memorial service at the monument.

In time the city of Montreal grew; new suburbs were built. We, the scions of Szczebrzeszyn in Montreal spread out; we no longer live in compact neighborhoods close to one another. However we remain close among ourselves. The telephone conversations are frequent and lengthy. At every happy occasion that a Szczebrzeszyn scion celebrates, all the *landsleit* are present. And if we meet, we always ask: – Is there any news from the Szczebrzeszyn scions in Israel? What was meant, was the *Yizkor Book*. Until...

A couple of years ago, when we received a letter from the Szczebrzeszyn committee, written by Ephraim Farber. The committee in Montreal came together, and reading the letter, the despair dissipated, and hope shone in every face. I personally did not remember Ephraim Farber from home (he was much younger than I, and in the final years up to the war, I was in Warsaw). I only had heard that he was Moshe '*Kliskeh's*' grandson, and Mendel'eh '*Kliskeh's*' son. So I became filled with faith and hope that he would achieve the goal and put out the book. Just as every Friday, before nightfall, Ephraim's grandfather would bang with his hammer on the doors of the shops, reminding the Jews that the Holy Sabbath is at the threshold, so did his grandson, Ephraim, with his letter to us, 'sound the alarm.' He woke us from the lethargic sleep. The letter cried out to us: – A new committee has been formed by the Szczebrzeszyn scions in Israel – young people, they will make the publication of the *Yizkor Book* a reality.

The Israelis remember the phrase, 'From Zion shall come forth the Torah.' To this, they added three words: *Me'Amerika Yeytzey Mammon.*'[110] We had loyalty to the new resources. They awakened us and demanded: send money! We have a plethora of sentiments for our one-time Jewish city of Szczebrzeszyn; Our childhood source of emotional nurture is derived from the Jewish life there. From the not quite twenty Szczebrzeszyn families, we collected several thousand dollars. A number of us were on winter vacation in Miami, Florida, and there, in the house of a Szczebrzeszyn scion, Hirsch Fruchter, who – thanks to our dynamic president David Fuchs – had a gathering and money was put together even from people who were not from Szczebrzeszyn itself, but from nearby towns.

Thanks to our president David Fuchs, monies were also put together in Toronto. There is also a small group of Szczebrzeszyn scions there as well. not organized. David Fuchs traveled to Toronto, knocked on the doors of the people from Szczebrzeszyn, and collected money.

We are also in contact with the Szczebrzeszyn scions in New York, who were there after the Second World War. We also had a visit to us by Frieda and David Blatt from New York, at the behest of the committee from Israel about the expenditure of donations, for which we organized a committee meeting, together with the Canadian emissaries, who were the last to visit Israel, in the house of Leibl and Gittl Ackerfeld. Frieda'leh Blatt was also present. We the people from Montreal and Frieda'leh Blatt in the name of the New York committee, assumed the obligation of coming up with the sum that was still missing.

For this, we must offer a '*Yasher Koakh*' to our distinguished landsman Mendel Boim, who donated a larger amount of money, and thereby accelerated the work.

We Szczebrzeszyn scions in Montreal remain in written contact with landsleit, who live in a variety of cities in Canada and the United States. A number of families live in: Detroit – Yankl Miller, In Winnipeg – Yitzhak and Luba Gal, in Vancouver – Ontzik, Reizl Berger-Solbin, In Nova Scotia – Sapian.

We see as our responsibility to maintain contact with everyone from Szczebrzeszyn. Instead of writing congratulations for individuals or groups, I will end with the exclamation: '*Am Yisrael Chai* – in all corners of the world!'

Emanuel Chmielasz

In the name of the Szczebrzeszyn Committee
Chairman: **David Fuchs**
Secretary: **Emanuel Chmielasz**

Montreal, September 1982

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110 Three words in Hebrew translates to: Let the money come from America.

The *Landsmanschaft* in New York

Page 468: The Szczebrzeszyn Relief Committee

Right to Left (Sitting): Abraham Bernstein, Yankl Gershtenblit, Yehoshua Wildman, Pesach Borek, David Gandz
Right to Left (Standing): Lejzor Borek (a brother to Gershon Borek), Berish Tulkop, Yerakhmiel Schaffel, Hirsch Kandiel, Hirsch Fruchter, Yankl Bernstein[111]

The immigrants that came to America at the beginning of the [sic: twentieth] century were not titles as 'Rabbi,' 'Doctor,' or 'Professor.' However, they carried a large amount of religious and humanistic baggage. Not wanting to sunder their connection with the past, they immediately approached the need to organize a *landsmanschaft*, which became a model of solidarity and self-help.

The 'Independent Szczebrzeszyn Congregation' was founded on October 1, 1911. The simple folk, without diplomas from universities, and without Rabbinical ordination, put together a Constitution of 19 articles and every article had its own number of paragraphs. I will here describe some of the more important paragraphs, in order to bring out their novel and humanitarian approach to the problems which bruited about at that time: to preserve the Szczebrzeszyn identity, and to assist the membership and their economic dependents and from a social standpoint, to assure that one does not feel isolated. In other words: to give of one's own energies, in order not to be swallowed up in demoralization and disappointment.

As I found out from eye witness accounts, the society also send help to Szczebrzeszyn to individual people, as well as to the community for Passover, to be distributed among the needy.

Let it be said that the Constitution was written in German-Yiddish and I will convey it in that form.

- Article 1 concerns itself with: the name, language and purpose. In the first 5 paragraphs in Article 1, the name of the union is discussed. The language in the books must be only Yiddish, and cannot be altered or replaced so long as 7 members exist.

The most important paragraph of the article is 6: Brethren are obligated to exhibit fraternity, manifest a moral character, visit the sick, to exhibit the same loyal affection as is possible to show in need, and to provide support to the extent possible. To inter the deceased. In accordance with rules that are set down, to participate with brethren in the affairs of meetings so designated. Paragraph 10 concerns itself with the creation of a minyan and with Torah scrolls and other things, which are required in the service of God, for Sabbaths and Festivals, according to the Orthodox custom.

- Article 2, in 7 paragraphs, concerns itself with meetings, which must take place every 14 days and what the set time was, with at least 7 members present, with a written notice of the meeting 36 hours before.

- Article 3 – The approval of members – is comprised of 11 paragraphs. No brother of the

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[111] Caption details, not in this book, were found in the more detailed Szczebrzeszyn Journals.

Szczebrzeszyn congregation or a woman, can present themselves for membership if they are not of moral character, or does not observe the Jewish faith.

- Article 4 – Membership approval
- Article 5 – Dues
- Article 6 – A rule for changing two paragraphs.
- Article 7 – Reinstatement of former members.
- Article 8 – Guarding the sick. Paragraph 1: Watching, if God forbid a member or his wife falls sick, and there is a need for someone to sit up with them at night, let the finance secretary, with full knowledge select 2 such guardians to be sent to the sick person.
- Article 9 – Obligations surrounding death – 17 paragraphs. Paragraph 8: If God forbid it is necessary, all the brothers of this union are obligated to attend a funeral of a brother, and to pay a fine of one dollar if they fail to attend the funeral (we must not forget the value of a dollar in the year 1911).
- Article 10 – Election of the leadership – 11 paragraphs.
- Article 11 – The obligations and rights of the elected officials – 15 paragraphs. Paragraph 10: The *Gabbaim* are obligated to be present in synagogue for prayers on every Sabbath and all Festivals. They must assure, that during prayer, and the reading of the Torah, that the best decorum is observed. Their bearing should have an influence on others, who come into our synagogue to pray.
- Article 12 – Benefits – 5 Paragraphs. Paragraph 1: When the treasury account of this organization reached the sum of five hundred dollars in cash, a special meeting should be called and sick benefits should be initiated.
- Article 13 – Synagogue order. Paragraph 9: The members of this union, should always conduct themselves with dignity during the time of worship, and avoid any coarse observations or utilize insulting expressions. Paragraph 11: At the time of prayer, no member should curse or insult another member.
- Article 14 – The order of business – 9 paragraphs.
- Article 15 – Fines – 10 paragraphs.
- Article 16 – Those engaged in the *Hevra Kadisha*
- Article 17 – Peace and unity. Paragraph 1: Each member is given the obligation to show respect to the other. Paragraph 2: Each member is given the obligation to concern himself with assuring that harmony will always exist. When elections for the officials are held, the victorious party should not incite the opposition, who lose the election, and that they also be left satisfied, and no conflicts should arise. Paragraph 3: When a brother is in need, all the brothers must do what is possible to help him, both with advice and action. Only, there should be peace and unity.

- Article 18 - Names of the Officers.

Abraham Baglaybter –	Ex-President	Moshe Aharon Tulkop –	First *Gabbai*
Chaim Weinblatt –	Ex-President	Mendel Back –	Second *Gabbai*
Yehuda Diener –	President	Zindl Messinger –	Trustee 1
Leibusz Neider –	Vice President	Yitzhak Szaffer –	Trustee 2
David Kaveh –	Recording Secretary	Lejzor Borek –	Trustee 3
Nahum Borenstein –	Finance Secretary	Chaim Bronfenbrenner –	*Schul* Secretary
Chaim Mordechai Waldman –	Treasurer	Leibusz Waldman –	*Shammes*

Rules Committee

Moshe Mehl – Chairman	Mendel Hoff
David Eisen	Lejzor Borek
Chaim Weinblatt	Zindl Messinger
Yehuda Diener	Yaakov Shlomo Berger
Abraham Baglaybter	Moshe Diener (may he live)
David Kaveh	Chaim Mordechai Waldman
Moshe Aharon Tulkop	Meir Dinerstein

Seeing the declaration of the above mentioned people, we can proudly say: It is indeed fortunate, and good luck for the remaining people of Szczebrzeszyn that they had such predecessors.

Regrettably, the situation changed drastically. These few members passed on, and their children came into the leadership, who, as was the usually the case, had become Americanized, and the word, ' Szczebrzeszyn' became less sentimental to them. In addition to this, after the Great Destruction, the essence, along with the roots of where they had come from was torn out. Letters no longer came from the other side to always serve as a reminder of who was who. Everything went away with the smoke.

However, I must say, that despite this, there were to be found individual committed members, such as, for example, the gentle and good Pesach Borek ז"ל, who came to America a short time before the outbreak of the war. He organized a help committee to help the smoking embers of the remaining people from Szczebrzeszyn. It proved very difficult for him to win over the middle-aged, and even more difficult the younger generation, to follow in the footsteps of their elders. He gave a great deal of time and energy to the Society. He never grew tired. He helped all those who arrived in the country, with whatever means he only could. For a bit of time, he was also the president of the Society.

Regrettably, Pesach Borek fell as a victim of the terrible times, when no single individual's life plays a role. He was brought down by a murderous hand returning home from the hospital, where he had gone to visit someone who was ill; being truly a scion of Szczebrzeszyn.

Pesach embodied in himself, the finest, the best, the most beautiful that our *shtetl* Szczebrzeszyn could only produce. Those who knew him, like myself, will most assuredly never forget him. His death had a great deal to do with the weakening of the activity of the *Landsmanschaft*. It is also necessary to add, that the new arrivals bring too little to the flickering existence of what was created previously.

Seeing that we have etched the names of our elders, brothers and sisters in fire and blood on our hearts, so should the names of those we have mentioned above, who have inscribed a golden page in the history of Szczebrzeszyn, also be mentioned in this book, which must serve as a monument for our martyrs.

Frieda Blatt
Secretary of the Szczebrzeszyn Society
In New York

The 'Yizkor' Pages

Translation of the Stone Engraving

Surrounding the image of the tree, first cut, and then reborn:

A tree with many roots, cut down by the hand of the murderer, sprouts a new branch , tender but growing, and placed in our hands to raise.

The Roll of Extermination

A Monument of Remembrance A City and a Mother in Israel

To the Martyrs of our City

Szczebrzeszyn

(The Zamość District, Lublin Valley, Poland)

Who were sacrificed on the altar of anti-Semitism
The destined members of the generation, who were killed, slaughtered and burned alive
Innocent and Pure, Whole and Honest, Old and the Infants of the Home
Most of them, on the 23rd Day of Heshvan 5702 by Adolf Hitler
And his soldiers, the murderers of the nations (From among the Nation of the Germans)
May their Name and Memory be Erased
Their Memory will be etched in our hearts, and their pure souls be bound
In the bond of life.
Preserved by the Émigrés from Szczebrzeszyn in the Diaspora, in Israel

Szczebrzeszyn Memorial

(On Page 471)

In Perpetual Memory
Of the Souls of the Scared Martyrs
From the City of Szczebrzeszyn
Who Fell in Sanctification of the Name
In the years 1942-1945

The Szczebrzeszyn Survivors in Montreal

To Their Memory

Lord, full of compassion, He who is seeks justice for widows and is the Father of orphans, do not remain silent and restrain yourself for the blood of Israel, that has been spilled like water. Provide a proper resting place on the wings of your Holy Presence, in the place on high for the holy and pure, who shine like the lights in the firmament, to the souls of the six million Sons of Israel, among them the scions of the sacred community of Szczebrzeszyn, men, women, young boys and girls, that were killed, slaughtered, burned, suffocated and buried alive, at the hands of the monstrous predators, the Germans and their wicked servants – Poles, Ukrainians and others, in the European Diaspora (in the concentration camps of Belzec, Majdanek, Auschwitz, Treblinka).

All were holy and pure, and may their resting place be in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, let the Master of Mercy, bind their souls up in the bond of life, and the Lord is their legacy, and let Him remind us of their sacrifice, and let their worth stand for us and all of Israel. Let them arrive in peace, and let them rest on their places of repose, and let us say, Amen.

O, Earth, do not cover their blood, and let there be no place in which their cry will not be heard!

The List of the Martyrs

Translator's Note:

The order in which these names appear has been made to conform to English alphabetization, and therefore does not follow the same order as they appear in the original Yiddish text. To assist the interested reader, each entry has been given a serial number that corresponds to its place in the original Necrology in Yiddish, found on pp. 473-495

This Necrology contains many instances of names that appear to be duplicates. The editors are careful to point out that the appearance of duplication disguises the fact that 'many relatives had the same name.' Without the intimate knowledge of this community, it would be presumptuous for an uninformed third party to suggest that such duplications contain possible errors. Accordingly, special care has been taken to assure that all of the entries in the original document were carried over into the translated version. Additionally, special care was taken to preserve 'nicknames' or 'names of endearment,' that were used to help better identify individuals in that community. While such nomenclature may not serve future generations quite in the same way, it is undoubtedly a sacred obligation to assure that they are brought forward for posterity, as they were used during their lifetimes.

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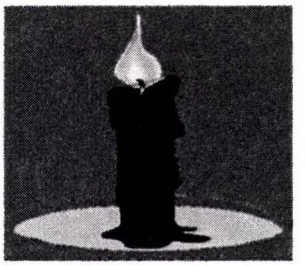
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Fell in Armed Combat Against Hitlerism

Yossel Bokovich

Avner Beitcher

Aharon Dreyer

Abraham Hochboim

Abraham Farber

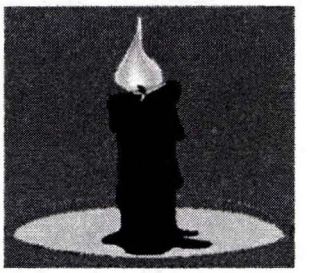
Baruch Fehlhendler

Joseph Zahler

Ephraim Yitzhak Schwartz

Mottl Sztarker

Hirsch Szpielzinger



They Fell in Campaigns in the Jewish Homeland

Yitzhak Lekhfeld

Yitzhak Lekhfeld fell in a battle that took place in Jenin on Tuesday, 27 Iyar 5727 (June 6, 1967).

> "Yitzhak ל"ז, was on his way to support the attacked when he himself was struck by the cannon fire of the enemy. He was loyal to his post and his comrades.
>
> The memory of Yitzhak ל"ז, is sacred to us, and is held in our hearts with pride. May his memory be for a blessing."

(From the notification by Moshe Dayan – Major General and Defense Minister)

Yitzhak Meir Messinger

Together with 3 other *Tzahal* officers, Yitzhak Meir Messinger fought on Yom Kippur Day of 5733 – 1973 with their tank, against 30 Syrian tanks. Regrettably, they were hit, and were burned up with their tank. He was 26 years old.

He left behind a wife with two small children, who mourn for their father to this day.

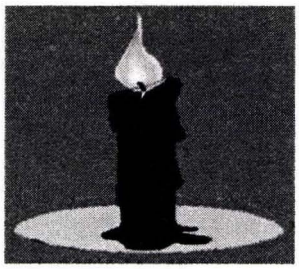
Yitzhak Meir is a son of Hirsch Messinger (ben Yitzhak Meir) from Szczebrzeszyn. He survived the Russian camps, helped many comrades in their time of need, but regrettably lost his wife, Chaya Kellner. Coming back to Poland, he built up his new life with his wife Shayndl, who had also gotten through the difficult road of the war and suffering. They had two children – one of them was Yitzhak Meir, who fell heroically in battle.

Moshe Scher

Moshe Scher, the son of Shimon and Halina, was three years old when he made aliyah to The Land with his parents in 1950. He was born on 14 Tevet 5704 (December 27, 1947) in Reichenbach, Germany.

He studied at the 'Moriah' elementary school in Haifa. After studying for a year at the high school he committed himself to specialize in carpentry. He was a carpenter-welder. He joined the '*HaNoar HaOved*' movement, and was a leader in it. Among youth, he worked a great deal in community affairs.

In July 1965, he was drafted into *Tzahal,* and he volunteered for *Nahal.* But while he was still in obligatory service, he met his death in the capsizing of a vehicle that he was driving on the Arava road. This was on 4 Sivan 5728 (May 31, 1968). He was buried in the military cemetery in Haifa.



Moshe Zisbrenner

(Killed in Haifa on 9 Tishri 5699 – October 4, 1938)

Page 498: *Moshe Zisbrenner*

A

He was a Jewish policeman, and fell at his post. On Yom Kippur Eve, as he was standing guard on the roads in Haifa, a sniper's bullet hit him in the heart, and he fell on the spot. He is no longer with us. This good friend, with the expressive face that was always happy, s if saying: there is a purpose to life, it is worth living.

He was 24 years old when he died, and was from Szczebrzeszyn, beside Lublin in Poland, that little town which on the evenings of Zionist congresses had great enthusiasm in it, and its streets were filled with discussions and arguments, and hundreds of diverse considerations, above the normal average. And he, Moshe, was at the head of the endeavor. He did his work in an alert fashion and with the commitment of a considerable amount of his energy, and if you only knew the man, you knew that this work was the center of his life. For many years, his place was in the ranks of '*HeHalutz*' and even here he revealed aggressiveness and capability, and he was the living spirit of the branch.

1932. The large conquering movement of '*HeHalutz*' in training, the stormy revolutionary movement of the young people. Comrades flee from home, with their jackets on their shoulders, some on foot, others in vehicles, and wander in hordes all over Poland, taking in cities and remote towns – to the work, to communal life, and a powerful song of life is in their souls: The Land of Israel. And Moshe is among the first. He finds his way to the remote village of Borkow beside Kielce. There, a new 'conquest' was made – a training division. Moshe worked (?) in carpentry, and under adverse conditions, the effort was completed in a month, a training kibbutz, "*Gush Borkow.*'

In 1933, he was fortunate to leave home to begin preparations. The situation with Zionism was clouded and difficult. He was compelled to wait. I met him in his home town and Szczebrzeszyn no longer seethed. The enthusiasm had became altered, and everything was blown away on the wind. They had given up. He was going about alone, there was no branch, and no comrades. And he was as always – eager to go to the Land, he fate, to only be in The Land of Israel. His friends are a sport to him, 'getting settled.' He had no use for this. 'It is necessary to return to training, and to begin anew, to gather strength.'

When a week had passed, he came to the training kibbutz in Kielce and said: 'I have completed my accounting there, and there is no way from here, but to go to the Land of Israel. In 1935, he prepares himself to make *aliyah*. His face is shining: the aspirations of years are being fulfilled. He is making *aliyah*! In the meantime, he fell ill with a lung inflammation. Friends look after him with considerable commitment, and he arises from the bed, and on the following day he is in Warsaw, and from there to *aliyah.*

He put in close to three years in the Land, on roads and in various places of labor. A call goes out for draft into the police – and he responds. He is working in the Haifa police for over a year. A while ago, comrades of his from training met with him, and he was happy to see them, and received them in his home, and to his community of friends. And his first words were: 'I am alive, I am in the Land of Israel, and protecting the land of our birth gives meaning to life.'

Yitzhak

B

I did not get to meet Moshe Zisbrenner in the Land, who was a scion of my birthplace. He came several months after me, and I was happy for his arrival. We were not members of the same group, and not only once did we get into arguments there in our *shtetl*. But I knew well what he had endured before he obtained the privilege of making *aliyah* to the Land. I knew the life he led in the training kibbutzim very well, the permanent 'wanderer' from one location to the next, from kibbutz to kibbutz, and I knew of his deeds after he had returned from the kibbutz – he was the only one among his comrades who did not lose heart and lay down his Zionist obligations as a *Halutz.* Because of this, I was happy at his arrival.

But the Eve of Yom Kippur 5693 arrived, and put an end to my joy. When I became aware that my friend, and scion of my birthplace fell at his post, I prayed in my heart: If my fate is to fall, let me also fall at my post, like my comrade.'

Y. B.
A Watchman on the Jordan Guard

Pictures of the Martyrs

Page 499:

Top: Left: Abraham Eisen Right: Herschel Ingber

Bottom Left: Moshe Beitcher & Daughter Yehudit Right: Baruch Boim

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Page 500:

Top: Left: Yossel'eh Burstein Right: Leibl Burstein and wife Sarah (Blatt)

Bottom Center: Yaakov Moshe Blatt

Page 501:

Top: Left: Shayndl Lerner – His Wife Right: Ben-Zion Bleiwiess

Bottom Center: Their Son (no name given)

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Top: Left: Simcha & Sarah Becher Children of Hanoch Becher Right: Pinchas Becher & Wife, Chaya Rivka

Bottom Center: The Becher & Limoni (Citrin) Families
(Rear fourth from right marked as a survivor)

Page 503:

Top Right: Eliezer Becher & Family

Bottom Left: Moshe Becher & Family

Page 504:

Top: Left: Manzhi Hochboim – Hirsch Getzel's Daughter Right: Dreyzl Gelernter

Bottom: Left: Pearl Weinblatt Right The Children of Berish Dreyer

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Page 505:

Abraham Wolfson

Dedicated to my sister Deborah ז"ל

Left: The Wolfson Family
(The left seated and standing young men are marked as survivors)

Right: [sic: Sister of] Abraham Wolfson

Clouds roll over,
The sky gets dark,
Extinguished in the window
Is the golden shine,
A call trembles
From a solitary bird,
And penetrates the heart
With his sorrow.
My window darkens
Covered in blue,
The shadows grow
On my walls:
They weave dreams,
They run together.
I remain in my corner
Alone and choked up.

To my teacher and friend
Abraham-Itcheh Weinrib ז"ל

Gray swollen dark clouds
Descended on my yard
And extinguished to last bit of light from my present.
A cloud burst out and cascaded with tears on my window...
I reminded myself of an old forgotten friend.

Page 506:

Top:	Left:	Aryeh Weinblatt	Right: Shia Wachs
Bottom:	Left	(Presumed from R to L):	Right: Tenenboim Family
	Memel Tenenboim, Rekhl Kulpes		
	Ethel Fehlhendler		

Page 507:

Top: Weinstock Family
(Top left standing, marked as a survivor)

Bottom: Traeger Family

Page 508:

Top: Left: Feiga'leh Chmielasz Right: Shayndl Zaydl

Bottom: Left: Moshe Ledereich Right: David Lass

Page 509:

Top Center: Moshe Millstein & Family

Bottom: Left: Rachel'leh Zimmerman Right: Shmuel Zisha Mehl

Page 510:

Top: Left: Moshe Zucker & Joseph Sternfeld Right: Feivl Feiler & Yohanan Borek

Bottom: Left: Bat-Tziona Chesner and her children: Abraham, Mordechai and Joseph Boim Right: The Lass Family

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Page 511:

Top: Makharovsky Family

Bottom: Fruchter Family

Page 512:

Top: Left: Joseph Kopf Right: Yekhiel Lerner

Bottom Center: Rivka Kandel

Page 513:

Top: Rojtman Family

Bottom: Kawerchok Family

Page 514:

Top (Right): Reiber Family

Bottom (Left): Faiga Reiber with Partisan Children

Page 515:

Top: Left: The two children of Bayless Szper Right: Henoch Szuk & Family

Bottom: Left: Chaim Lejzor Streicher Right: Pesach Steinkeller

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Page 516:

Top: Left: Mirkeh & Munik Streicher Right: Chaya Itteh Shtibl

Bottom: Left: Gultsha Szper, Leon and Etkeh Right: Baylah Szper

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Page 517:

Top Center: Chana Schitz and her sons, David and Shmuel

Bottom: Left: Rivka Schitz – The Grandmother Right: Yaakov & David Schitz

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Page 518:

Top: Left: Yaakov Scher Right: Shmuel Chaim

Bottom: Left: Chaya Szpringer Right: Hessa Scher
