ספר זכרון וואלקוביסק

The Volkovysk Memorial Book

A Trilogy Comprised of

Wolkovisker Yizkor Book - Edited by Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York 1949
Hurban Volkovysk - Published by the Committee of Volkovysk Émigrés, Tel-Aviv 1946
Volkovysk - Published by Katriel Lashowitz, Tel-Aviv 1988

English Translation Prepared and Published by

Jacob Solomon Berger

Mahwah, New Jersey, USA
2002

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Second Edition, 2011

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2002090794

Other Books by Jacob Solomon Berger

The Zelva Memorial Book
The Book of Remembrances
The Dereczin Memorial Book

Published in the United States
by Jacob Solomon Berger
Mahwah, New Jersey

Printed in the United States of America

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Ten years ago, when I published the Zelva Memorial Book, this page bore the name of my children. In the elapsed decade, I have been blessed to see the arrival of a new generation. With God's good graces, this list will continue to grow.

The sentiment I wrote then continues to be appropriate. It is my hope that they, too, will come to read this book, with their parents, along with the other books, and come to understand the proud people from whom they stem, and the noble tradition to which they are heirs. For truly, they too, are now part of my most important legacy.

Added at the time of the Third Printing

Gabriel Jared Berger	גבריאל ירד
Lily Symone Greenbaum	סימה מאיה
Marley Jade Greenbaum	מאירה אראלה

Corrigenda

In the preparation of a new printing, requested by interested *landsleit* and friends, a number of changes have been made to the text as a result of reading over the past decade.

These are:

On page 265, of Part I, a misreading of parcel distribution (was thought to have been something to do with porcelain) had been corrected.

The following family names have been modified at the advice of relevant *landsleit:*

Current Rendering	Used to be Shown As
Ain	Ein
Loev	Lowe
Shiff	Schiff
Shaikevitz	Shykevich

Spring 2011

The Translator's Foreword

The publication of ***The Volkovysk Memorial Book - A Trilogy***, is an important landmark in a cycle of personal endeavor that began with the translation of the ***Zelva Memorial Book***, followed by the ***Dereczin Memorial Book***. This importance stems from adding to the English record, writings about a prominent city in the European Pale of Settlement, as opposed to a more rural town, or *shtetl.* During the early twentieth century, the population of Volkovysk exceeded 15,000, of which more than half was Jewish. Because of this, the Jewish community had a critical mass of human resources, intellectual capital and financial wherewithal, to create and sustain significant institutions of health, education and welfare. As a result, Volkovysk emerged as an important magnet city, and role model, for the many Jewish communities in smaller surrounding towns, that looked to it for both support and leadership. Therefore, it had a signal impact on the development of Jewish life and culture, and the Zionist Movement, in what is today Eastern Poland and Western Belarus.

A study of the social infrastructure in Volkovysk is very instructive, in large part, because it was very typical of Jewish communities of the Pale in the two centuries or so leading up to the Holocaust. That the Jews fell back on their own means to create institutions of health, education and welfare, reflects on both the backwardness of the extant autocratic regimes, and overt policies of anti-Semitism. What is equally of interest, is that in many instances, the Jewish institutions were harbingers of more general social change that emerged afterwards, as governments attempted to modernize themselves, and better address the needs of their people. Additionally, these institutions, because of their excellence, wrought changes in the way of life of the Jews themselves. To wit:

- The advent of a modern school system gradually displaced the very traditional *Heder* system of lower level religious schooling that had been a mainstay for centuries.

- The creation of a modern Jewish hospital at the end of the 19th century convinced even the wealthiest Jews, that medical care during illness was better gotten at that hospital, rather than at home.

- The availability of an Old Age Home created a means to provide the old and infirm with compassionate care outside of the framework of the individual family. This was especially important for those elderly with no immediate next of kin to care for them.

Volkovysk was a sufficiently sophisticated city to possess a well-developed, modern social hierarchy. At the very top were the *balebatim*, independent entrepreneurs and homeowners, some of whom were fabulously wealthy people and cherished philanthropists. The middle strata were composed of small-scale retail shopkeepers, tradesmen and artisans. The lower strata were composed of a complete spectrum of laborers, who either worked independently, or for a salary in a factory or office. The social differentiation is too readily recognizable, since human nature has really changed very little since the early hominids first began walking upright. A noteworthy exception to modern life was that rabbis, scholars and teachers were treated as a special class. Even though they were not materially wealthy, their intellectual and spiritual capabilities earned them special regard.

Volkovysk was a place of great intellectual and entrepreneurial vitality. An understanding of the achievements of this Jewish community is, therefore, an important element in creating a fuller portrait, of how cataclysmic the Holocaust was to the fabric of Eastern European Jewry.

It is interesting to note, that not one, but *three* books, were created to memorialize the Jewish community of Volkovysk. In general, only one such book was prepared for a town, or city, in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In fact, many towns were so completely decimated, that no one remained to create such a record, and the memory of those martyrs could not even be preserved in the form of a written word. All three of these books have been translated and presented here as a Trilogy. The components of the Trilogy are:

- ***Wolkovisker Yizkor Book - Edited by Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York 1949 (Yiddish)***
- ***Hurban Volkovysk - Published by the Committee of Volkovysk Émigrés, Tel-Aviv 1946 (Hebrew)***
- ***Volkovysk - Published by Katriel Lashowitz, Tel-Aviv 1988 (Hebrew)***

Dr. Einhorn's book is the definitive history of the Jewish Community, and from a structural point of view, it constitutes a classic 'Holocaust Memorial Book.' For this reason, even though it came chronologically second, it is presented in this Trilogy first. This book follows the familiar pattern of tracing the history of the city from its antiquarian roots, through modern times. It then portrays the evolution of the Jewish community, its prominent personalities and institutions. It finishes with important accounts of the Holocaust experience. This latter part contains a remarkable and perhaps unique necrology, created by *Yitzhak Tchopper*. In that necrology, he literally goes street by street through the city, enumerating every family that lived on that street, and giving an accounting of their fate.

The earlier volume, *Hurban Volkovysk*, had a more limited and immediate objective. It is mainly a repository of a half-dozen critical eye-witness accounts by survivors who were impelled to record their recollections while the horror was still fresh in their minds. One sees this urgency in the sharp, staccato-like impact of their clipped sentences, where setting down dates, facts, and events superseded the need for literary style or structure.

The final volume, *Volkovysk*, coming more than forty years later, is a testament to the need for the very cycle of endeavor that led to the creation of this Trilogy. In his foreword, the publisher *Katriel Lashowitz*, a survivor who fought as a partisan, tells of the insistent pressure from his granddaughter *Yael* for a more complete record of his background that she could read. For the younger Israeli generation, the facility in Yiddish is waning, and therefore, a useful reference like *Dr. Einhorn's* book remains behind an impenetrable language barrier. Like *Yerachmiel Moorstein* ע"ה before him, *Katriel Lashowitz* undertook the creation of a meaningful history in Hebrew. In doing so, he relied heavily on the material in *Dr. Einhorn's* book. However, there is sufficient original material here to merit its inclusion as part of the basic telling of the life and times of the Jewish community of Volkovysk.

More importantly, the work of *Katriel Lashowitz* delineates the need to make these histories available in a language that can be understood, as we move into future generations. Indeed, *Katriel Lashowitz* expresses his desire to see his work rendered in English, so that Jews, and other interested readers in the English-speaking world, can have access to this record. It is my great satisfaction to have been able to render his work, along with the other two volumes, in English, and thereby create this Trilogy.

The task of translating from Yiddish into English is as formidable today as it was nearly twenty years ago, when I first undertook this duty. By having to deal with three independently written books, the task of creating a consistent, integrated whole has been made more complex.

The reader will be challenged by my use of italics. It has been my custom to utilize italics for setting off foreign words only. However, *Dr. Einhorn*, in particular, has made extensive use of italics to set off names of people and places when they first appear. I have not found a ready solution to this overlap, and so I ask the reader to be patient as both uses are to be encountered.

Nomenclature for *places* and *people* are a vexing problem. This was not as evident in prior works, because the frame of reference was a single *shtetl*. In dealing with a prominent city, there is continuous reference to a panoply of places. However, because of changes in hegemony over the course of centuries, there are at least four different equivalent names for most of the locations in the Pale: Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian. Almost inevitably, the Jews had their own Yiddish variant, and there are instances of Ukranian and German equivalents as well. In this, I have attempted to always use one that was correct in its own language, and footnote the name in other languages, when I felt it helped clarify the location.

Names are a special challenge in Yiddish. There often are several ways to render the Yiddish into English (Shykevich, Shykovich). I have settled on being *consistent*, rather than chase after the chimera of being *correct*

(whatever that means!). First names are a special pitfall. In addition to a base name, there are all of the diminutive and affectionate forms that need to be catered for. So that the uninformed reader not be misled, these suffixes are set off from the root of the name with an apostrophe. For example, the choice for a girl's name in this volume is *Chana* (rather than Chaneh, Hannah, or Khana). However, the reader will see *Chana'leh, Chan'tsheh, Chan'keh* as well. The purpose of this approach is to make it easier to identify the *same person,* who might be addressed differently in different parts of the text.

Two specific usages are worthy of mention. In apposition to the formal title of *Rabbi*, there is a Yiddish honorific of *Reb*. This honorific was often accorded to people without rabbinic ordination, out of respect for their personages. It is possible that someone in the text is referred to as *Reb,* but indeed was a fully ordained Rabbi. There is often no way to know this, and consequently, I accept responsibility for any inaccuracy in characterization that may have arisen in this fashion.

The second has to do with reference to 'Israel,' the place. In Hebrew and Yiddish, the appellation *Eretz Yisrael* is free of political context. In English, one needs a bit of care, since the name 'Israel' standing alone, generally is used to identify the modern political state. Since much of the writing in this Trilogy is of times before the establishment of the modern state, I have resorted to two forms of nomenclature. I use 'The Land of Israel,' and also 'The Holy Land,' when I need to communicate about the Jewish presence in (what is today) Israel, before 1948.

It is in grappling with nomenclature that one is again reminded of the closeness of the bonds that tie together Jewish people with roots in this part of the world. It is not more than 10-15 miles from Volkovysk to Zelva and Dereczin, a distance that could be, and occasionally would be, walked on a long summer *Shabbos* day. That families married between these Jewish communities seems to go without saying. As a scion of a Zelva family, I am thrilled to see names like *Freidin, Ogulnick, Lantzevitzky, Bereshkovsky,* and *Salutsky* appear in the roster of Volkovysk residents. This record is also enriched by the names of people that created a major impact on Jewish life on a global level:

- ***Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor*** - Born in the shtetl of Rosh (about five miles from Volkovysk), he received his early religious training in Volkovysk. He eventually married *Sarah Raizeh Jesierski*, the daughter of a prominent Volkovysk family, and rose to become the leading exponent of the Lithuanian Rabbinate from his position as Chief Rabbi of Kovno. The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University (RIETS) is named after him.

- ***Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky*** - The last Chief Rabbi of Vilna, and acknowledged spiritual leader of Eastern European Jewry up to the time of the Holocaust. His mother was from the Einhorn family of Volkovysk, and he is named for his maternal grandfather, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn*.

- ***Dr. Samuel Belkin*** - Born in Svislucz, outside of Volkovysk, he went on to become the first President of Yeshiva College (now Yeshiva University).

- ***Yitzhak Shamir*** - Born *Yitzhak Yazhernitsky* in Ruzhany, he received his Gymnasium education in Volkovysk prior to making *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. He rose to become Prime Minister of the State of Israel.

- ***Abraham Makov*** - Son of a prosperous Volkovysk merchant family that was killed in the Holocaust, he survived to come to the Land of Israel. A uniquely skilled engineer, he was recognized as the 'Father of the Israeli Defense Industry.'

- ***Moshe Saroka*** - Born in Volkovysk and emigrated to Israel, where he is credited with the creation of the modern Israeli Hospital System.

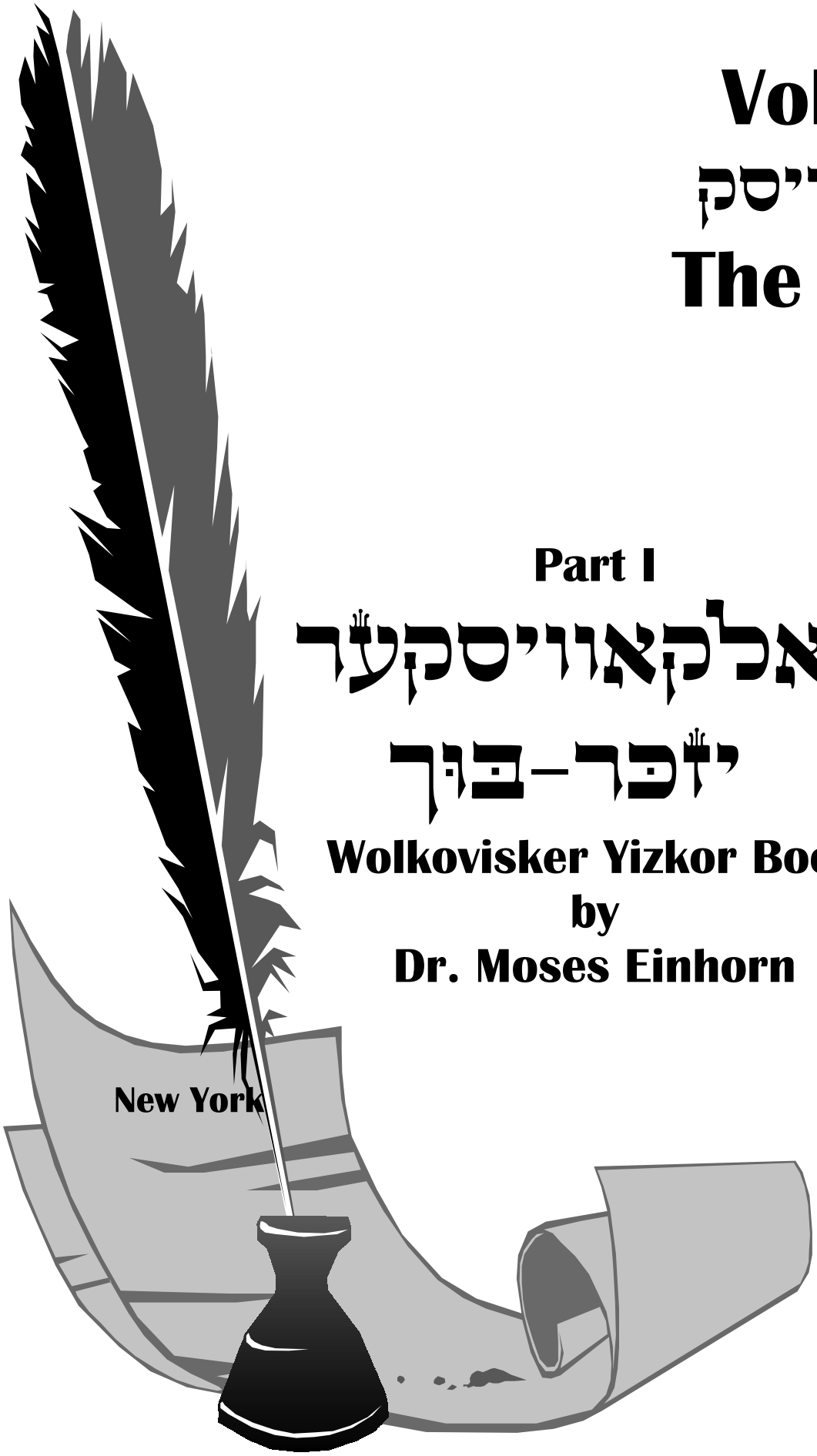
I wish to extend thanks here, to a number of people, for helping to make this work possible. First, my thanks go to *Aviva Astrinsky,* Head Librarian of YIVO in New York City, who made a copy of Dr. Einhorn's *Wolkovisker Yizkor Book* available to me. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of her colleague, Yeshaya Metal, Librarian at YIVO, for his help in classifying Yiddish nicknames. A similar vote of thanks goes to my cousin *Shoshana Freidin*, of Tel-Aviv, and the Volkovysk scions *Rosa Rimon* and *Katriel Lashowitz,* in Israel, for providing me with the two Hebrew volumes. Hebrew is less of a problem, but every now and then, a modern Israeli writer will resort to an abbreviation that is perfectly understood by Israelis, but is a total mystery to an American. In this regard, I thank Shoshana's son, my cousin *Zvika Freidin,* for his patience in shepherding me through the nomenclature of the Israeli bureaucracy and military establishment. I am also indebted to Yale J. Reisner of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in Warsaw, Poland for helping me verify some of the more obscure locations and older historical facts documented by Dr. Einhorn. I also wish to acknowledge my loyal band of Yiddish linguists who help bail me out of tough spots. Once again, *Feygl Garber York* of Monsey, NY, and *Mildred Shapiro Ragosin* of Edmonton, Alberta, are mainstays to me in clarifying arcane Yiddish words. I found this especially true in this instance, where I needed clarification of the names of various trades and crafts that flourished in the 19th century, but became obsolete by the mid-20th century. A special vote of thanks also goes to my wife's cousin, *Oskar Kleinberg* of Toronto, Ontario, and my good friend and kindred spirit *Murray ("Muz") Prawer*, for their timely and thoughtful contributions. I also wish to thank *Mark Swiatlo*, the Judaica Curator of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida, and *Tomasz Panczyk* of Warsaw, for their peerless command of Polish, that proved indispensable in many key areas of the text.

Spring 2002

Jacob Solomon Berger

DRM Software Review

Volkovysk
וואלקאוויסק
The Trilogy



Part I
וואלקאוויסקער
יזכר-בוך

Wolkovisker Yizkor Book

by

Dr. Moses Einhorn

New York **1949**

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Foreword

The first news that reached us at the end of the last [sic: Second] World War about the gruesome uprooting and extermination of millions of Jews in Europe, understandably, crushed each and every one of us, and at the same time dulled all of our senses. So great was the destruction, and so widespread was the wrath poured out upon our hapless brothers and sisters in the Old Country, that it literally left many among us speechless, and we were left as if paralyzed in our senses from the frightful and hellish suffering that our nearest and dearest were compelled to undergo, and in reaction to the terrifying cruelty that the German murderers, together with their accomplices from other nations, exhibited toward the defenseless and oppressed Jewish populace. But together with the profound sorrow that gripped us all regarding our national calamity – the extermination of a third of our nation's peoplehood – a personal pain began to emerge among many of us, a sorrow regarding the annihilation of our relatives and friends, and *landsleit.* A persistent longing was awakened in us, and a desire to discover all the details concerning the death of our loved ones, and the issues they had to deal with in their final years.

For me personally, this desire took on tangible form at the time of a trip I made to the Land of Israel at the earliest opportunity to visit – in the year 1945 – in order to receive from the handful of survivors from Volkovysk that had arrived in the Holy Land, authentic information and details concerning the fate of the Jewish population of Volkovysk in general, and about my family in particular. The news that I received [at that time] gave me my first overview of the course of those tragic events in Volkovysk – and shook me to the depths of my heart.

After returning to New York, I decided to memorialize what had been destroyed and of which there remained no trace, in the form of an appropriate book, [to be called] *The Community of Volkovysk.* But apart from the little bit of information that I had gotten on my trip to Israel, I had no material – no literary or historical background, and no pictures – which would be necessary to construct a living portrait of the old home city. I therefore got in touch with Volkovysker organizations and specific individuals around the world – Argentina, Canada, South Africa, Australia, Israel, Mexico, England, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Poland, etc. – who at my request, supplied me with authentic materials: recollections, historical writings, portraits, diaries, pictures, editions of the periodical "*Volkovysker Leben*," etc.

I was greatly inspired by the *heartfelt response* that I received from our *landsleit* in all corners of the world. *Every Volkovysker* exerted himself to assist me in the attaining the important goal that I had set out for myself: whether it was those who sent in material, or those who provided new addresses of Volkovysker *landsleit* who might have been in possession of [additional] important material.

Apart from this I personally arranged, in New York and other American cities, meetings and interviews with many Volkovysker *landsleit,* and recorded a variety of episodes, facts, and the names of personalities and the active people in Volkovysk, lists of public servants, and the various political, community, cultural and social organizations, and the clubs in our beloved home town. A separate difficult task was to identify the names of the people in the group photographs that were sent to me. It was also necessary to review, organize and edit all the materials that were gathered. However, in general, the "Volkovysk Yizkor-Book" *is a collective creation of our Volkovysk landsleit the world over.*

Since Volkovysk [also] served as a cultural, economic, and community center for many small *shtetlach* in its vicinity, who also shared in its tragic and bitter fate, I found it necessary to create a *special section* in the book dedicated to several of these little towns, for whom it happened that I received authentic information about their way of life and tragic end. We know that, not only those *landsleit* from these towns, but also our Volkovysker

landsleit – who had strong ties to these surrounding towns, and had many relatives, friends and acquaintances there – are also deeply interested in knowing the details of the fate of these neighboring towns.

The portrait of the sorrowful events in Volkovysk takes up over four hundred fifty pages of the book, and gives an authentic overview of everything that happened in Volkovysk, beginning in the summer of 1939 until the frightening end.

Of separate greater meaning is the authentic account, which is presented in the book, regarding the fate of all the Jews of Volkovysk, families and individuals – organized by the street on which they lived. This account gives every Jew from Volkovysk the opportunity to precisely know not only the fate of his own family members, but of practically all the Jews of Volkovysk. Such an accounting is a rarity in the Holocaust literature of recent years. This accounting was put together by our dear and dedicated *landsman, Yitzhak Tchopper*, who was born in Volkovysk, and who lived there his entire life. He went through all of the suffering of our home town, and is one of the [very] few natives of Volkovysk to have survived the calamitous destruction.

The book also has an *English Section* in which a summarized overview of Volkovysk is given, its way of life, with a candid exposition of the tragic events in Volkovysk until it went under. This is done in order that those young, who are descended from Volkovysker antecedents, but lack a command of Yiddish, [also] have the possibility to acquaint themselves with the home town of their forbears.

The book contains nearly *three hundred pictures,* in which life all over the city [is portrayed] – almost all of the streets of Volkovysk, buildings of Volkovysk, organizations and institutions, [political] parties and schools – so much so, that anyone from Volkovysk will be able to find the house in which he was born, and many faces of those people nearest and dearest to him.

I cannot here set down *the names of all those* who helped me in putting this book together, because it would take up too much room. The number of such people is very large. *Hundreds of Volkovysker landsleit from all parts of the world, did their share of this labor. Here, I send all of them my most sincere thanks for their cooperation and assistance in the creation of this "Yizkor-Book."*

Despite the fact that the Volkovysk Yizkor-Book is local in character, it nevertheless also reflects, in great measure, the life and times of hundreds of Eastern European cities and towns of the last two generations. In almost every Jewish community in Eastern Europe, there existed, or arose similar organizations, institutions and schools, to those that were found in Volkovysk. Therefore, the "Volkovysk Yizkor-Book" is of *great interest* to the general Jewish reading public, and for every Jew seeking to obtain an increased familiarity with the genuine Jewish way of life [in that area]. Also, the concerned *Jewish Historian* will be able to draw important material for his/her research concerning Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

I wish here especially to express my heartfelt thanks and recognition to the following people who were faithful to me in the preparation, review, assembly and editing of the "Volkovysker Yizkor Book." *Chaim Weiner* – Well-known Hebrew-Yiddish writer, and *Charles H. Cohen* – Well-known English-Yiddish publicist. I also wish here to extend my congratulations to the talented artist, *Nota Kozlowski* for his fine illustrations throughout the book.

Dr. Moses Einhorn

Plan of the City of Volkovysk in 1887

Plan Legend

My Family

By Dr. Moses Einhorn

The Einhorn Family

Before I begin to describe my hometown which was destroyed, Volkovysk – its history and development, its dreams and those who built it, its characters and personalities – I am allowing myself to provide a short portrait of my own family, the *Einhorn Family*. I am certain that my Volkovysk *landsleit*, who knew my family well, will understand the underlying impulse that drives me to do so.

The Einhorn family is venerable, large, and has many branches. The Einhorns are spread out in a variety of countries, and were I to attempt to bring the life story and characteristics of all of them here, it would take up a great deal of room. I will therefore satisfy myself with recording what I will bring to mind of the more well-know of the Einhorns, and those with whom I am best acquainted and near to. I will begin my portrait with a short overview of my family tree (thanks to the information provided to me by Dr. Shimon Einhorn of Tel Aviv) – beginning with Reb Ozer[1], the sixth generation before me.

Reb Ozer, who lived in the vicinity of Grodno, was the son-in-law of *Rabbi Zvi-Hirsch Hanover*, and the father-in-law of *Rabbi Yehoshua Zeitlin* and *Rabbi Aharon Brody*. Reb Ozer's son was Reb Isser.

Reb Isser had three sons: *Zvi Hirsch* (the eldest), who was my great-grandfather, *Ze'ev Volf* (who put together a fine commentary on *Medrash Rabbah*), and *Ozer, "Der Moskver*[2]*."*

Ozer "Der Moskver" had several daughters and four sons: *Isser "Der Groiser"* (named this way because he was tall), who lived in Grodno, *Shmuel-Leib* (who went away on an exploratory expedition to North Africa, and vanished there), *Yitzhak and Eliyahu.*

Isser "Der Groiser" had three sons: *Abraham* (Rabbi of Sokhovolya), *Mendel and Moshe* (who lived in Bialystok).

Abraham (the Rabbi of Sokhovolya), had three daughters and three sons, from whom we especially know Professor Max Einhorn, (a renown gastroenterologist in New York).

Mendel's grandson is *Dr. Shimon Einhorn* (a well-known Hebraist and scholar), who lived in Minsk and was a military physician during the First World War; he later settled in Tel Aviv, where he lives to this day, where he practices as a specialist in nervous disorders.

Moshe had three daughters and three sons, among which were specially recognized: *Aharon Einhorn* (a well-known author and associate of the Warsaw periodical, *"Heint"*), who was killed by the Nazis, and *Joseph Isser* – an agronomist, and one of the first teachers at *"Mikveh Yisrael"* and a professor of Hebrew works on the subjects of Anatomy and Agronomy. He is also recognized as the classic translator of the works of Carlyle and Hippolytus into Hebrew. *Eliyahu's* children: *Chaim Moshe, Isser, Leah and Chas'sheh* – emigrated to America. Their children – well-known merchants, industrialists and professionals – all live in the United States.

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1 *Ozer* is from the Hebrew word for 'help.' Related to the name *Ezra.*

2 Indicating, perhaps, a connection with Moscow

Zvi Hirsch, my great-grandfather, dealt in turpentine, and lived in Slonim which is also where he passed away.
Chaim Ozer (my grandfather), was the oldest son of Zvi Hirsch. Chaim Ozer was the first of the Einhorns to settle in Volkovysk, where he too dealt in turpentine. My grandfather Chaim Ozer died as a young man, and after he passed away, *Dvora* (my grandmother) continued the business of dealing in turpentine, and later on opened a pharmacy. My grandfather Chaim Ozer had six sons and three daughters: *Rivka-Elkeh, Joseph-Isser* (military physician in Moscow), *Shmuel, Shaul-Zalman, Bluma, Kadish-Benjamin, Yitzhak-Zelig* (was an engineer in St. Petersburg where he participated in a variety of projects), *Tzivia, and Zvi-Hirsch* (my father).

Rivka-Elkeh married *Rabbi David Shlomo Grodzhensky* (Rabbi of Ivie) – and their son was the famous scholar, *Rav HaGaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky*[3] (from Vilna), who died at the onset of the Second World War. A daughter of Rivka-Elkeh's, (a sister of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky)[4] was married to *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* (who was the Rabbi of Volkovysk).

Shmuel's sons were: *Chaim Ozer* (a lawyer in Volkovysk), and *Yankel* (had a general store in Volkovysk), whose son *Mulka* (Shmuel Einhorn) lives today in Tel Aviv, and is well-known there as a merchant and importer.

Kadish-Benjamin was a medical doctor, and also – for a period of time – *Kozioner Rabbiner*[5] in Volkovysk; His son is the well-known Yiddish writer, *David Einhorn*.

My father *Zvi-Hirsch* was the youngest son of my grandfather, Reb Chaim Ozer, and after the death of his mother, Dvora, took over the pharmacy in Volkovysk. He was therefore known throughout Volkovysk as *"Herschel Der Apteyker."*

**
*

Fate decreed that while I was still young, I would be torn from the bosom of my home. While still a young man, I went away to the Land of Israel to study in the Hebrew "*Hertzeliya*" Gymnasium, and later I studied medicine in America. However, I always remained closely tied to my loving family and home city. The warm and full-hearted atmosphere of my home remained in my memory from my earliest childhood – and I always made an effort in order to maintain ties with my nearest and dearest. As a student of the "*Hertzeliya*"

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[3] See *There Once Was A World* by Yaffa Eliach, Little Brown (1997) pp. 190-1. Eliach uses the spelling *Grodzinski.*

[4] From both the 1965 and 1967-1968 *South Africa Jewish Year Book*, and Neil Rosenstein's Book, *The Unbroken Chain*, we learn the following: He married:

1. *Feyge Leah* (died in 1907), daughter of *Rabbi David Solomon Grodzhensky* (and sister of renowned *Rabbi Chaim Ozer*).

Children were: *Deborah, Chava, David Solomon Kossowsky*

2. *Feyge* (died Tel Aviv in 1976), daughter of Meir Goskind and the niece of his first wife.

Children were: *Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky, Chaim Kossowsky*

[5] Apparently a title used to designate a senior, or chief physician.

Gymnasium, I would always travel home during the summer on vacation, and also later, as a doctor in America, I would from time-to-time visit my family in Volkovysk. You will understand that I kept up an intensive contact through correspondence with my family, who were deeply baked into my heart.

My Father

Photo: Page 13: Zwi Hirsch Einhorn

My father stands before me, as if he were alive, with his sympathetic demeanor. He was of medium build, had fine features and had a full head of hair. He was good and gentle, and all Volkovysk residents, whether Jewish or Christian, respected him and were drawn to him with [a] great [sense of] loyalty. People would come to seek his counsel regarding their various maladies and other matters. And he never grew tired of demonstrating his goodness and patience, and receiving everyone with a hearty smile. He would address hundreds of letters on behalf of the residents to their relatives and friends in America. He had a deep knowledge of the science of pharmacy and in therapy. When I was already a physician, and used to travel back to Volkovysk to visit, I would look through the formulations he had left behind, and literally was awestruck by his extensive knowledge of pharmacy. I myself, in my own practice, did not stint in using many of his formulations which had proven to be very effective.

He was drawn with great love to his children, and gave them all a good upbringing. He was an observant Jew – he would pray every morning – but he was no fanatic. He also exhibited tolerance to all people. On the eve of Passover, he would prepare *haroseth*, and many residents of Volkovysk would come to partake in this *haroseth* for their own Passover *Seders*. In his goodness and gentleness, he served as a shining role model to his children, and after his passing on 6 Tevet 5679 (1918), my sisters *Pes'shka and Rosa* took over the good deed of writing addresses on behalf of Volkovysk residents writing to their relatives and friends.

My Mother

Photo: Page 15: Mikhlah Kagan Einhorn

My mother Mikhlah came from Lida and was a daughter of *Reb Chaim Leib Kagan*, a prominent merchant of Lida, and businessman. The Jews of Lida would lodge funds for orphans and indigent brides, etc., with him for safekeeping. To this day, Lida *landsleit* in America recall the name of Reb Chaim Leib Kagan with reverence and respect.

My mother had an aristocratic bearing. She was tall, thin and pretty. She was both good and gentle, and loved to dress elegantly. She also was possessed of a high order of intelligence and deep understanding. She was strongly dedicated to her children, and together with my father, created the warm atmosphere in our home that bound each of us children to one another with the greatest ties of love and commitment.

When my mother became seriously ill in 1926, I closed up my office in New York and traveled to Volkovysk. All the children were gathered at home. My sisters, Lisa, Rosa and Pes'shka were with her during the entire length of her illness and her decease. She passed away on the first day of *Shavuot* 5686 (1926).

My parents had seven children: *Shmuel, Lisa, Ozer (Oscar), Rosa, Dora, Myself, and Paula (Pes'shka).*

Shmuel died while still a child – not more than five years of age.

My Sister Lisa

Photo: Page 17 Lisa Einhorn Kharakh

My oldest sister, *Lisa* married Shimshon Kharakh and lived in Warsaw and Lodz, until she and her husband made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel at the beginning of the 1930's, and settled in Tel-Aviv.
In her youth, Lisa was considered one of the most beautiful and intelligent young ladies in Volkovysk. She stood out as someone with a good heart, and was very committed to her home city and its charitable institutions. We, the younger children, would always look up to our older sister Lisa with great respect and love.

After the last World War, in July 1945, as soon as the first possibility arose, I flew from New York to Israel to visit my sister Lisa. The war in Europe had just ended, and I might possibly have been the very first civilian to come to Israel after the war. The exceptional joy with which my sister received me could not lighten the terrible anxiety that she felt. Her love for her family was always deep, and as she herself never had children, Rosa and Pes'shka's children were baked into her heart as if they were her very own.

While in Israel, I learned from Kotliarsky, Roitman and Shayn'eh Lifschitz – the surviving witnesses of the tragic occurrences in Volkovysk – of the bitter fate of my family, who shared in the destiny of all the Volkovysk Jews. However, I lacked the strength and energy to convey the terrifying news to my sister Lisa, whom I always took into my confidence during my stay in Israel. Daily, she would ask me if I had found out anything new about Volkovysk, and carried herself with the hope that perhaps some member of our family remained alive. "If Rosa and Pes'shka were still alive – she would simultaneously argue – they most certainly would have found some way to get in touch with us, and if truly they are all gone, I cannot make any sense out of continuing to live."

On my return to America, I regularly wrote extensive letters to her and attempted to comfort her. I send her many gifts, so she would know that she was permanently imbedded in my heart. But, on her part, she seldom wrote, and I often had to wait for an extended period before receiving a letter from her, which [never failed] to be redolent with love and dedication.

Like a thunderclap on a clear day, the terrible news reached me that my sister Lisa had suddenly taken ill and passed away – 15 Sivan 5706 (1946).

My Brother Oscar

Photo: Page 19: Oscar Einhorn

My brother Oscar left home at an early age and went to Tashkent, and later settled in Sosnowiec where he married, and opened an business that sold optical and photographic equipment. Things went well for him, and from time to time, he would travel to Volkovysk to visit the family. He had three children. At the time that the Nazis occupied Sosnowiec and installed a ghetto there, he was able to obtain an Aryan passport and conceal his identity, passing as an Aryan in Czenstochova.[6] In 1944, the Nazis discovered his true identity and shot him. One of his daughters, *Terenya* who was married and lived in Ostrin, was killed together with her two small children. The second daughter, *Halina*, was deported to Theresienstadt where she spent two

[6] This likely is the city of Czestochowa, which is not far from Sosnowiec.

and a half years in that concentration camp, and miraculously survived. Her two children also survived. Oscar's *wife* and his son, *Jerzy* lived in Warsaw, where they lived as Aryans for the entire duration of the war and also were saved from death.

My Sister Rosa

Photo: Page 21: Rosa Einhorn Pshenitsky

My sister Rosa was much beloved in Volkovysk. She had very good looks and much intelligence. She was very gentle and good-hearted. She also – just like my mother – was tall, thin and graceful. She had thick black hair, big black eyes, finely chiseled features, and a smile that expressed great goodness and sympathy for her fellow man. She was totally dedicated to helping the poor and downtrodden with her whole heart, and in her final years became interested in the Land of Israel.

Rosa completed the course of study at the Government Gymnasium in Grodno, and afterwards studied in Warsaw, where she graduated as a dentist even prior to the First World War, and opened a clinic in Volkovysk. I can still remember the joy we all felt in our house, at the time we went to get Rosa at the railroad station, when as a Gymnasium student, she would return home from Grodno for Passover.

During the period of the First World War, all of my sisters (except Pes'shka) went to Russia – and Rosa was subsequently installed as a dentist in the Minsk district. When my father fell ill in 1918, Rosa returned to Volkovysk and looked after him until he passed away. She again opened her clinic in Volkovysk and developed a large practice. She was one of the most popular dentists in the entire region. She later married an engineer, Mulya Pshenitsky, who ran a large electric generating plant and a glassworks. Nevertheless, she continued with her profession. When her first child was born, a girl, she named her Dora – after her beloved young sister who had died.

Rosa treated her patients – whether Jewish or Christian, rich or poor – in the same manner, giving no heed to whether they had the means to pay or not. She was always prepared to help the indigent, and she was broadly generous in supporting worthy causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. The Volkovysk Jews counted her as their first citizen. In the time of the Nazi regime, when the murderers concentrated all the Volkovysk Jews into the bunkers, and Rosa received a special permit to remain in the city and continue her practice as a dentist – Rosa would provide to Dr. Marek Kaplan and Dr. Yitzhak Resnick (who at that time found themselves in the Volkovysk bunkers) food packages, that Christians in their villages sent for them.

Rosa was equally protected by the Christian Volkovysk populace, and it is noteworthy: even the troops of the murderous Gestapo showed respect for her charismatic personality, and they were prepared to let her stay behind alone at the time that they were sending off the last of the Volkovysk Jews to Auschwitz, but without her daughter Dora, she had decided to share the fate of all Volkovysk Jews, and was killed at Auschwitz.

Rosa's daughter *Dora* inherited much of her mother's beauty and intelligence – and she also stood out with her skills in gymnastics. She was very attached to her mother. When the Nazis burst into Volkovysk, Dora had a chance to save herself. Stevka, the Christian [sic: housemaid] who raised her, and took care of her from childhood on, wanted to take her to her village. But Dora did not want to be separated from her mother and remained in Volkovysk. She later was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

My Sister Dora

Photo: Page 22 Dora Einhorn

My sister Dora was also a pretty and good person, and was loved by all who knew her. She graduated from the Volkovysk Women's Gymnasium with distinction, and entered the university in Warsaw. However, when

the First World War broke out, and the German occupation began, Dora fled to Odessa, where she completed the course of study in dentistry. She was later appointed as a dentist in the Minsk district, where she worked alongside her sister Rosa. Approximately nine months after my father's death, Dora came home for Rosh Hashana. She caught typhus while riding the train, and arrived in Volkovysk gravely ill. Despite the fact that she received the best medicine and care, she nevertheless died two weeks later – at the budding age of 24 years – 5 Tishri 5680 (1919).
I visited Volkovysk in 1921. At that time, nearly two years had passed since Dora died, but despite this, my mother and sisters continued to mourn for her, and Rosa would visit her grave site every day.

My Sister Paula (Pes'shka)

Photo: Page 23: *Paula Einhorn Yanovsky*

Page 25: *Top* *Terenya Einhorn Greenkraut, my brother's daughter. Slain by the Nazis with her two children*

Bottom Right *Millie & Herschel, my sister Pes'shka's children killed in Treblinka in December 1942.*

Left *Yulik & Chan'keh, my brother's grandchildren, killed by the Nazis along with their mother, Terenya.*

Page 27: *Top:* *My family in the year 1910. RtoL: My sisters – Rosa, Dora, Lisa and her husband, Shimshon.*

Bottom Right *My sister Lisa on a visit to Volkovysk in 1938. On her right, Pes'shka's children, on the left, Dora (Rosa's daughter).*

Left *My sister Rosa as a Gymnasium student*

Page 29: *Top* *The sole survivors of my entire family, Halina & Jerzy Einhorn, my brother's children.*

Bottom Right *Dora (Rosa's daughter) & Millie (Pes'shka's daughter)*

Left *Dora, killed at the age of 18 in the Auschwitz camp.*

Page 30: *Dr. Moses Einhorn*

My sister Paula (Pes'shka) even as a young person, took over the affairs of my father's pharmacy at the time that he fell ill, and she managed the pharmacy even after his death. We all respected her sensibility and sense of responsibility. She was strongly attached to and loyal to the family. She studied at the Volkovysk Gymnasium and spent nearly her entire life in Volkovysk. She married Joseph Yanovsky, a merchant, and had three children: a son whom she named after my father, and a daughter whom she named after my mother. She was murdered, along with her husband and two children, in the gas chambers of Treblinka.

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Apart from my brother's son and daughter, I now remain as the only one survivor from our large family. This is all that remains of my parents' children. I do not understand nor apprehend the ways of God.

Volkovysk, My Home City

by Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York
Moshe'keh – Herschel the Pharmacist's son, Rosa the Dentist's brother

The History of Volkovysk

A Little History, Data and Statistics

Volkovysk has a rich historical past, which occupies an important place in the history of Poland, Russia and Lithuania, not to mention the important historical significance that Volkovysk had as a large Jewish community, a city an a Mother in Israel. As I think about the glorious past and the tragic end to Volkovysk – a sea of memories and sad recollections swims through my mind, and it is nigh impossible for me to concentrate on setting down the record of "what used to be" in writing, about Volkovysk . However, I cannot help myself. I think that in the *Volkovysk Yizkor Book*, there must be a short, concise description of the history and topography of the city. I will therefore attempt here, attempt to convey a short topographical exposition in general terms about Volkovysk.

The Geographic and Topographical Situation

Photos: Page 32 *A Panoramic View of Volkovysk (Photographed from the Rosher Barg; The Schlossbarg is visible in the distance)*

Page 33 *A Pre-WW I Russian Map of the Grodno Guberniya*

Volkovysk, an outlying city in the Grodno *Guberniya,*[7] is on the Volkova River, on the Bialystok-Baranovich[8] railroad line. The city lies in a valley, surrounded on three sides by mountains. The old Volkovysk railroad station stands between Berestovitz and Zelva. The city of Volkovysk itself is 90km from Bialystok and 112km from Baranovich. The soil around Volkovysk is sandy and mountainous. The hills, which are found to the south of the city, are called "Die Schwedische Berg[9]" and have the appearance of entrenchments. From the many pieces of munitions found there, it would appear that these hills served as fortifications in the time of the Polish-Swedish war.

The swamps that are found in the Volkovysk area are principally in the south and southeast. The biggest swamps are found around Novy-Dvor. About a quarter of the area consists of forests. The forests consist primarily of fir trees. The Bialystok-Baranovich rail line runs from west to east.

In the Volkovysk ambit, twelve smaller towns are found that had Jewish residents: *1) Izavelin*[10]*, 2) Yalovka,*

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7 Province, in Russian

8 Also Baranovichi

9 Seemingly, the Swedish Mountains

10 Also *Izabelin*

3) Lopenitsa, 4) Lisokovo, 5) Amstibova[11]*, 6) Novy-Dvor, 7) Piesk, 8) Rosh, 9) Svislucz, 10) Zelva, 11) Volp, 12) Porozovo.*

The first settlers in the Volkovysk area were the *Zaviekovshchizna* in the Zamkov Forest, several kilometers from Volkovysk. There are still traces there of stone foundations.

The Origin of the Name, "Volkovysk"

Photos: Page 35	*(Top)*	*The Schloss Barg*
	(Bottom)	*The Street in Front of the Stores in the Town Square*
Page 37	*(Top)*	*Boulevarna Gasse (Right: Houses of Manya Galai, Kobrinsky, Marantz, Poliachek. Left: The Orthodox Church)*
	(Bottom)	*The Wide Street*
Page 38		*The Boulevarna (Kosciuszko) Gasse (Right: Houses of: Khantov, Galiatsky (the Barber), Left: Avromsky Galai (the Butcher), and Efrat.,*
Page 39		*The Bus Station on the Wide Boulevard (Left to Right, the houses of: Mordetsky, Lytus, Lapin, Einhorn (white arrow), Shiff, Slutsky; On the other side one can see Zhemenshky's houses).*

According to the writings of Bulakovsky – from the end of the 17th century (the writings were in the library of the Sapieha[12] Grafs[13] in Ruzhany, translated into Russian and published in the Vilna newspaper *Vilny Vestnyk* in 1881) – there was a very thick forest in the place where Volkovysk is now located, where two gangs of bandits had their hideouts. The leader of one gang was named *Volko*, the leader of the second gang was called – *Visek*. These gangs used to attack and rob riders [going through the area]. A man named *Zavieka* apprehended these bandits, hung them, and ordered that their hideouts where they concealed themselves in houses be built over. He named this new settlement *Volkovisek*, after the two robber chieftains, *Volko and Visek.* On the spot where the bandits lived, a large memorial was erected. Later, the memorial was cut up and used as a foundation for a church.

Incidents & Facts in Chronological Order

In the year 1000 A.D. Max Pusto dug a lake next to which he built a "Svientina" (a holy building) named *Niyai.* Traces of this lake can be found in the Zamkover Forest that are called the "Maxokovi Lug."[14] On the south side of this settlement was the "Svientina Smiguza," on the spot where today the Pohiblover Swamps are located. There, *Vighaytis Al. Vihayis* built himself a great palace (remnants still can be found around the Schwedische Barg). This settlement grew substantially by the 11th century. According to Bulakovsky's writings, the Jadzvings, on the nights of the 15th and 16th of February 1038 fell upon Volkovysk, murdered its inhabitants, stole all their possessions, and burned the city. It is further told that in the years between

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11 Called *Mstibov* or *Mstibovo* or *Mscibava*

12 The Sapiehas were the developers of Dereczin. See *The Dereczin Memorial Book.*

13 A *Graf* is a nobleman, comparable to a Duke or Earl in western nomenclature.

14 Perhaps 'The meadow of Max [Pusto]'

1124-1130 a great flood occurred from the river Nietufy that annihilated the town. In the year 1224, the Tatars destroyed a greater part of the town, which at that time belonged to a Russian noble. After the death of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Dingold, the Mongols attacked Russia, and destroyed Volkovysk along with other cities. Later it was rebuilt by Mendug[15]. In 1252, the city was taken by the Volhynian Duke Wasil. In this fashion Volkovysk was sometimes in the possession of the Russians and sometimes the Lithuanians. In 1258 a treaty was agreed to, in which Volkovysk was given to Mendug (a Lithuanian) who built a beautiful palace there (part of the stonework of the palace were subsequently used as gravestones).

After Vielon murdered Gedymin, Volkovysk and Novogrudok were taken over by his youngest son, Koriat[16], whose mother was the Russian noblewoman, Jewna[17]. He beautified and built up the city to a great extent. His son Alexander, together with Olger[18] launched an invasion in 1365 against the Teutonic Knights and brought a great amount of booty and many prisoners to Volkovysk. He improved the city even further.

Twenty years later, [Wladyslaw] Jagiello ceded Volkovysk to Witold[19] in return for the Troki region.

At that time, Volkovysk acquired historical significance, because in the year 1385 the king, Jagiello sent emissaries from Volkovysk to Cracow to advise, that, along with the entire Lithuanian nation, he would adopt the [Roman] Catholic faith, if [the Polish princess] Jadwiga would become his wife, and the Poles would accept him as their king. Negotiations dragged on for a long time, and Jagiello waited for an answer, living in a palace in Volkovysk, which is where he later received the Polish emissaries – Wlogan from Lublin[20], Pyotr Szafraniec (pronounced: Shafranyetz)[21] from Cracow, Mikolaj from Zawichost [22], and Kristin from Ostrov. It was agreed there between the two sides (in 1386) that the entire Lithuanian nation would adopt the Catholic religion. From that time on, Jagiello referred to himself as "King of Poland, the First Duke of Lithuania and Ruler of the Rus." A plan was also agreed to whereby Jagiello would undertake the obligation to travel to Lublin on the 2nd of February for a general conclave. From that time onward, Volkovysk prospered. Special churchmen were brought there to instruct the populace in the elements of the Catholic faith, and pagans were pursued and driven out.

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15 Also rendered as *Mindaugas*

16 *Koriat Mikhal* was born in 1306 and died in 1360. He was the Prince of Novgorod, father of the line of the Princes of Podoloa. He died in 1360

17 *Jewna Iwana Wszwolodowicza*, daughter of Prince Smolensk.

18 Also called *Olgierd* or *Algirdas*

19 Also called *Vytautas*

20 The first emissary, "*Wlogan* from Lublin," was likely *Wlodko* (Wlogan) from *Ogrodzieniec*, which is located close to Czestochowa.

21 *Szafran* means 'Saffron' in Polish.

22 In Polish history texts, *Mikolaj* from *Zawichost* is called *Mikolaj* from *Ossolin*. It is 30 miles from *Ossolin* to *Zawichost*. *Ossolin* is a small town, where the palace was located, but *Zawichost* is much bigger, and located at the bank of Vistula (Wisla) River. This is likely why the bigger town is mentioned in Dr. Einhorn's book.

With the help of the residents of Rosh (near Volkovysk), a triumphal arch was erected, through which Jagiello marched along with selected Polish supporters. Jagiello, who was pleased with the quality of how he was received, ordered a cathedral to be built. This promise made a deep impression on the Duke Witold, who erected the Cathedral to St. Mikolai. In the year 1409, suddenly on a Sunday March 16, the Grand Master *Ulrich von Jungingen* (Germany)[23] fell upon the city of Volkovysk, murdered many people, burned the city and took many prisoners. Later, thanks to the fact that the city was located between great forests, it was once again re-built.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Lithuanian Grand Duke Alexander accorded the city may rights and privileges – and this was formalized in 1507 during the reign of Sigmund II. During the 16th century, Volkovysk already was counted among the first class cities in Lithuania, and an important area city in the Novogrudok *Guberniya*. The Sejm (Legislature) met often in Volkovysk.

At that time there were nine thoroughfares in Volkovysk: *Slonimer, Jasikover, Biskupier, Jesuitzka , Vilner, Piekarski, Piesker, Zamkova, and Petroshovsker.* To this day, traces of these streets remain near the Rosh River. There were smithies on the *Slonimer Gasse*, and a Jesuit institution, which was built over in 1598 by Oskierka.

Volkovysk was destroyed during the time of the Swedish-Polish war, when Jan Kazimierz reigned. In 1656 the city was surrounded on three sides: from the south – the Swedes, from the northeast – Polish and Lithuanian military forces, from the northwest – the Tatars. A heavy battle ensued for three days, and finally the Swedes were vanquished. As a memorial to that time, the treaty hill (Schwedische Barg) remains to this day. The hill was 50 meters high. It had been even higher than that.

A hundred years later, in 1762, Volkovysk had only 112 houses, and in the year 1792, there were already more than 1000 houses, a Catholic Cathedral and an Orthodox Church. In 1794, Volkovysk became a regional city of the Slonim *Guberniya*. Later, it was transferred to the Lithuanian *Guberniya,* and in 1802 – to the Grodno *Guberniya.*

In 1812, Volkovysk was the principal headquarters of the Second Russian Army. During Napoleon's invasion, from the 15th to the 16th of November, a very intense battle took place there between Sacken's Russian Corps (consisting of 28,000 soldiers) and Reiner's French division. The French were put at risk of encirclement and were forced to withdraw, and because of this, the city was so frightfully devastated that only a small number of houses were left standing. The municipal apparatus of the city had to be transferred to the neighboring town of Izavelin.
By 1817 there were once again 156 houses in Volkovysk, and in 1860 – 492 houses, and in 1891 the city already had 910 houses, five warehouses for a variety of merchandise, and 334 stores. A few years before the outbreak of the First World War, in 1910, Volkovysk was already a large city, with a population of 14, 593 people.
In *"Volkovysker Leben"* from January 15, 1932, the results of a population census were printed that had then been taken. According to that calculation, Volkovysk had at that time a general population of 15,147 souls and 2006 residential dwellings.

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[23] On July 15, 1410, a decisive battle, one of the biggest in the Middle Ages, took place near the village of *Grunwald* (also known as *Tannenberg*). On one side were the Teutonic Knights with West European mercenaries, about 27,000 soldiers commanded by Grand Master *Ulrich von Jungingen*. On the other was a larger army of Jagiello and Vytautas, supported by Czech and vassal Tartar contingents, of about 39,000 men. The allied forces included a unit from *Bierascie*. By the end of the day, the Teutonic Knights were defeated. Some 8,000 of them were slain, including the Grand Master of the Order.

The History of the Jews In Volkovysk and The Towns

Photo: *Page 42* *Napoleon's House on The Poritzisher Gasse (Napoleon headquartered in this house during his march on Moscow in 1812)*

Page 44 *The Entrance to the Old Railroad Station*

Page 45 *The Principal (Central) Railroad Station*

Page 46 *The Brick Factory of Minch, near the Schloss Barg*

There is an historical source ("Regesta y Zapiski"), where a record exists of Jews living in the Volkovysk area in 1577. It is brought out there, that because of the risk of war, it was decided to levy a head tax of 12 groschen on everyone – including the Jews.

In the folio of the *Vaad Arba Aratzot* [24] details are recorded of the taxes that the Volkovysk Jews paid at the demand of the Lithuanian Duke in the years 1680 and 1693.

In Volkovysk, and its nearby surroundings, there were 1,282 Jews living in 1766, and 4,881 Jews in the entire district.

In 1797 there were 1,829 Christians in Volkovysk and 1,477 Jews and Karaites.[25]

In 1847 there were 5,946 Jews in the entire Volkovysk district. They were found in the following settlements:

City/Town	Jewish Population
Volkovysk	1,429
Zelivian[26]	856
Izavelin	297
Lopenitsa	88
Lisokovo	232
Amstibova	304
Novy-Dvor	53
Porozovo	397

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[24] The Committee of the Four Lands. A Jewish governing body of this area of the Pale of Settlement.

[25] A niche sect of Jewish people who adhered only to Mosaic Law (the Torah), but not Talmudic and rabbinical teachings.

[26] Possibly *Zeljanevicy*

Piesk 662

Rosh 287

Svislucz 997

Yalovka 372

In 1860 – out of a general population of 3,472 residents – there were 1,518 Jews.

In, 1891 there were 8,057 residents in Volkovysk, of which 1,934 were Eastern Orthodox, 2,752 [Roman] Catholics, 16 Protestants, 23 Muslims, and 3,232 Jews. In that year there were 19 factories in Volkovysk (tobacco, candles, bricks, etc.) And there was also (from earlier times) the known fabric factory of Pines and Zabludowsky, whose annual revenue was fifty thousand rubles.

In that year (1891) there were two Eastern Orthodox churches in Volkovysk and a Catholic cathedral, a Jewish synagogue, six Jewish houses of study (*Bet HaMedrash*), one pharmacy, three civilian hospitals, four military hospitals, and one post office. The Catholic cathedral was constructed by Jan Lentovsky in the years 1841-48.

In the vicinity (apart from the city) in that year (1891) there were 121,102 residents – 11,571 Jews. There were 220 work establishments (mills, tanneries, etc.). In that year, 588 patents were issued. There were 36 "second category" merchants, and 325 small businessmen. Commerce was transacted mostly in the markets and market fair days. Most of the merchants were Jews, because there were not permitted to engage in other occupations. Jews were forbidden to own land, and they were excluded from holding government positions.

In 1897, there were 12,942 Jews in the entire district (excluding Volkovysk), who comprised 9% of the population. In *Volkovysk* proper, there were 5,528 Jews who made up 53% of the general population. Also, for a majority of the towns in the Volkovysk area, the Jews made up more than 50% of the population.

In that year (1897) the following was the count of the general population and the Jewish population in the towns mentioned previously:

City	General Population	Jewish Population
Zelva	2,803	1,844
Zelivian	600	81
Izavelin	963	454
Lisokovo	876	658
Amstibova	1,228	389
Novy-Dvor	1,481	183
Piesk	2,396	1,615
Porozovo	2,028	931
Svislucz	3,099	2,086
Yalovka	1,311	743

In 1910, there were 14,593 residents in Volkovysk, of which 55% were Jewish. There were two Orthodox Churches in the city, one Catholic cathedral, and one synagogue.

In that year (1910) there were 187,200 residents in the entire Volkovysk district, of which 82% were White Russian, and 12% Jews. There were 14 towns in the entire district, and 1,031 villages and inhabited byways.

Volkovysk survived two large fires. The *first fire* took place in 1886. At that time, nearly all of the houses (that were then constructed from wood) burned down. Afterwards, a greater part of the city was rebuilt using brick. In the *second fire*, which took place in 1908, part of the center of the city was consumed, the entire Wide Boulevard (*die Brayteh Gasse*)[27], the *Mitzrayim Gasse*, and the *Schulhof* with the old historic synagogue, and the houses of study. But Volkovysk was quickly rebuilt. Also, at the time of the First World War, during the German occupation, a fire took place in which a large part of the *Kholodoisker Gasse* was consumed.

During the time of the First World War, in the year 1915, Volkovysk was taken by the Germans. At that time, a portion of the populace fled deep into the Russian heartland, but the larger portion of these returned after the War.

In that war, the old railroad station was destroyed, and the barracks of the 16th Brigade. *After the War* Volkovysk passed under *Polish hegemony*. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Volkovysk was significantly renovated and built up. The entire Karczyzna neighborhood was rebuilt and occupied by Jews. Old, small shacks were built over, and developed into large structures. Volkovysk became one of the most important railheads. There were two attractive railroad stations – old and new Volkovysk. The Volkovysk abattoir was famous throughout Poland and was noted for the latest technology. The cement factory in Rosh was also well-known. Apart from the various clinics, Volkovysk had two hospitals, one Jewish and the second Polish.

During *the Second World War,* at the time of the German invasion of Russia, ninety percent of the city was destroyed. From June 22-29, 1941, the city underwent a terrifying bombardment by the Germans. During the period of Nazi control, on *November 2, 1942,* the Jews of Volkovysk and vicinity were rounded up and concentrated in bunkers near the barracks. Many transports, filled with Jews, were sent to the extermination camp at Treblinka. The last transport left Volkovysk on *January 26, 1943* to Auschwitz. At that point Volkovysk became *Judenrein.* At the time of the retreat of the Nazis in 1944, the small part of the city that had remained intact, was also destroyed. At this time there are approximately *18 Jews* in Volkovysk – a few had returned from inside Russia, and a few from Volkovysk, who had become partisans in the forests, saved themselves.

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[27] Later on, in a picture, this main thoroughfare is also identified as having had the Polish name, *Ulica Szeroka*. In the third part of the Trilogy, *Volkovysk*, edited by Katriel Lashowitz, the street is also called the *Sheroka Gasse* by some of the contributors to that volume.

The "Symphony" of *Erev Shabbat*

Page 48: *The Market Opposite the Stores*
In the distance, one can see the houses of: Karshel the Grain Handler (Rothford), Malsky, Boyarsky, Feinstein and Bliakher.

Page 49: *The Row Stores (Rad Krommen) and Stands Across from the Einhorn and Shiff Homes.*

Page 50: *A Corner of the Fruit and Vegetable Market*

Page 51: *A Picture of the Wide Boulevard in 1910*[28]

Page 52: *The Wide Boulevard*[29]

Page 55: *The Dog Catcher, as painted by Shmuel Rothbart*

Page 56: *The Heder, as painted by Shmuel Rothbart*

Page 58: *A Wedding Canopy in Volkovysk*
In the center of the picture, one can see Aaron Lifschitz and Ahareh the Shammes

Page 59: *The Millner Gasse near the Polish Catholic Church (called Ulica Kosciolna in Polish)*

Page 61: *The Great Synagogue of Volkovysk*

Page 63: *A Group of Friends with Moshe Einhorn During His Visit to Volkovysk in 1921.*

(RtoL, First Row, Seated): Tevel Smazanovich[30]*, Moshe'keh Einhorn, Pearl Hubar (Second Row): Dworetsky, Yud'l Khvalovsky, Abraham Kalman Lev, Milia Kaplan, Sioma Gallin, Liotsha Glembotsky, Misha Gallin, Israel Hubar*

Page 64: *The Poritzisher Gasse*

Page 65: *A Group of Girl Gymnasium Students from Volkovysk*

(RtoL, First Row, Seated): Millie Kaplan, Zhenya Frankel (Second Row):

Dora Einhorn, Frieda Halpern, Liotsha Glembotsky, Sonia Klebansky

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28 The Russian and Polish Titles suggest this was known as a 'Commercial' Street.

29 Showing the street by its Polish name, *Ulica Szeroka.*

30 Members of this family, who emigrated to the U.S. rendered this name in many ways, of which the most common form was *Smazanowitz*. A part of the family, which resided in Connecticut, changed their name to *Smith.*

Page 66: *A 'Cruise' on the River with the Canoe*
The Picture Captures: Yankel Zuckerman, Miss Rabinovich, (the daughter of the garment seamer), and Itzel Tchopper.

As soon as I close my eyes, and focus my thoughts and memories on my youth, the strains of a long-dead, great symphony begin to echo in my ears – **The Symphony of the Eve of the Sabbath in Volkovysk.** This was a symphony in which many instruments and players participated, with their different but unique tones and sounds pervading all of Volkovysk, and giving rise to the very special atmosphere that characterized Volkovysk on Thursday-to-Friday, comprised of so much harmony and beauty, etching itself into the memory and soul of each and every Jew from Volkovysk forever.

The symphony of *Erev Shabbat* began as early as Thursday morning, when Jewish homemakers and housemaids would converge to begin buying provisions for *Shabbos.* Already before dawn, meat and cuts were brought from the slaughterhouse and the butchers. Our house was directly opposite the stores, and from the stores, benches and tables laden with merchandise, there arose a ceaseless din from the Sabbath trade – from the *Erev Shabbat* symphony – awakening me from my sweet youthful sleep. But immediately on arising, I was possessed by a deep feeling of joy: today is Thursday, and tomorrow is Friday – *Erev Shabbat!* The tumult in the street is the tumult of *Erev Shabbat*, the noises are those of *Erev Shabbat*, the entire racket is rooted in the preparations for the Sabbath. Everything is part of the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Food Center

Opposite our home was the Food Center of the city. Most of the selling points were concentrated in a row of stores opposite us. There were found the tables piled with fruit, and the stands with bread, and *challah*, bagels, candies, cheese, butter, etc. The [entire] city came there to make its Sabbath purchases. And the entire area was black with people and seethed with commerce, with buyers and sellers, with bargaining, complaining and replies. The womenfolk would arrange to be there quite early – no small thing – [shopping] on *Erev Shabbat!* One has to produce baked goods, cook, grind, fry, braid the children's hair, and get everything ready that is needed for the Sabbath. Indeed, when *Erev Shabbat* comes, everybody starts early. Everyone wants to be among the first of the buyers, in order to get the very best portions, the best cuts of meat, the tastiest portion of liver, the most delicious *challah*, and for this reason, the crowding is great at the butcher stalls, and the final sale, without evil intent, is so satisfying. And the complaints from the womenfolk and the replies of the butchers become interwoven into the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Butchers

Here they are, standing before my very eyes, the butchers of Volkovysk – hearty and reliable Jews, whose entire families participated in this enterprise to make a living, for example, [the case of] *Yehuda Hirsch*, the butcher, with his brother and sister. Often the business franchise was handed down by inheritance – from father to son – and when Thursday would arrive, the day of the big sales, when even the most indigent among the Jews made an effort to buy a little bit of meat for the Sabbath, all members of [the butcher's] household, the husband along with his wife and children, were totally occupied with work. Indeed, they stand before me even now, those ardent Jews, like bulwarks: *Yehuda Hirsch the butcher* who was the meat provisioner for the 16th Brigade, which was billeted in the city; His brother, *Aizik the butcher*, and his sister, *Mirkeh the butcher; Herschel Ada's;* The two brothers, *Joel & Zalman; Itchkeh Sinaikeh's, Avromi'keh Sinaikeh's* and his wife, *Chaya; Chaim & Chana'leh Sukenik* (she was also known as *Chana'leh the butcher*); *Nakhum the*

butcher; Moshe'keh Yehuda Leib; David the butcher; Reyn'ehleh the butcher; Shepsel the butcher; Alter & Sarah Suwalski – who were located a bit to the side of the center. These were Jews who were all deeply rooted Volkovysk residents whose families had lived there for many, many generations, people strong in body, and with hearts full of warm Jewish feeling.

The Fish Market

And by the restaurant opposite the center where the stores were, stands the fish market. Buyers are drawn there to negotiate the purchase of fresh fish in honor of the Sabbath. Can one really have the traditional Sabbath feast without a good, savory piece of gefilte fish? And the fish trade was something of a monopoly in Volkovysk. It was concentrated in the hands of specific families: but the fish merchants did not take advantage of their privileged position, and neither overcharged their customers nor deceived them. They always had available the fat, heavy carp for their Jewish clientele. *Sarah the Fishmonger (Tzal'yeh's [31] wife), Esther the Broker, and Shayna Leah (David Shlomo's wife),* understood their obligation to the Volkovysk families: in the worst weather, they would come with their wagons loaded with live fish. The quiet sound of the writhing live fish, the splashing of the water from the containers in which they found themselves, and the muffled thrashing of the fish from the bundles of the womenfolk, all these wove themselves into *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Fruit Peddlers

And to the right, on a mound, are the Fruit Peddlers – and the buyers for the Sabbath wend their way from the fish market to buy vegetables and fruits for the Sabbath, fruits for a compote. Every fruit peddler has a franchise for his place of business, handed down from parents to children. One hears noise and shouting from the fruit market – the fruit peddler *Esther Mochkes* is arguing with her colleagues, the three partners: *Leah Vigderchikheh,* whose husband was an soldier impressed into the Russian Army under the ukase of Czar Nicholas I, *Feyge Rokheh Shalakhmones, [32] and Mendel Maggid-Kordovri.* It was not easy for poor *Esther Mochkes* to carry on a "battle" with three other women, simultaneously, and most difficult of all to confront *Leah Vigderchikheh*, who was a feisty, aggressive Jewish lady with a sharp tongue, and would often not only confront *Esther Mochkes*, but also the fruit peddler, *Shayn'eh Rod'sheh's*, and her daughter *Sarah Elkeh.* But what does one *not* do for the sake of the bitterly pitiful living to be earned? Quite often, bolts of lightning would fly from one fruit peddler to another, when they would haggle over a particularly attractive sale prospect, but fear not! *Jewish robbers!* [they would yell at each other]. Yet, an hour later after work, they would make up and together would go home, carrying on a conversation about decorum in the conduct of business, as if nothing had transpired. *Erev Shabbat* sales provided many a fruit peddler's family with an income, such as the *Kvachuks*, whose fruit business was to be found in the cellar of Epstein's house. David Herschel was a tall Jew, friendly, and whose cellar store was constantly full of buyers, because of the good produce he carried, and his friendly smile, with which he always greeted his customers. A warm engaging atmosphere pervaded the otherwise cold cellar store, which attracted the public. And the noise of the co-located fruit peddlers, and the straight talk of David Herschel were part of the harmoniously rich *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Grinder

But now we hear entirely different kinds of sounds. The ear detects a sort of humming and scraping noise,

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[31] Diminutive of the Hebrew name, *Bezalel*

[32] From the Hebrew phrase for gift giving on Purim. Possibly a reference to this person as a source of such gifts in the form of fruit.

and the eye sees sparks of fire flying in the air – it is *the grinder* doing his usual task, sharpening the knives of the Volkovysk housewives. He carries his entire apparatus on his scrawny shoulders – his grinding wheel – and he sets it down in its usual place, between Zalman-Leib's house and Meir Shiff's house, immediately attracting his usual customers. Primarily, he has a large demand on Thursday and Friday: one housewife is having a bread knife sharpened, a second – a meat knife. And to the side, stands a young lad, sharpening his pocket knife, with which he carves all manner of trinkets, in *Heder*, under the table. The clangor of the knives and the humming of the grindstone rise up into the air, accompanied by a shower of sparks, and are amalgamated into the larger *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Bakers

The grinder is sharpening the bread knives, and the housewives are reminded that the *central ingredient* for the Sabbath is still missing – *challah and bread.* And all the women move off to buy bread for *Shabbos*. One can tell a person's social standing by the type of bread they purchase for the Sabbath: a person who buys a simple, black bread to eat with salted herring, and the person who buys the white, soft, better quality *challah*; the person who buys the finer rolls, and the person who only allows themselves a bagel. But all need to acquire the principal form of nourishment – bread, and this provides an income to the bakers and bread merchants of the city; *Katriel the Baker* (in Slutsky's street) and *Herschel Yosh'keh's* – who sell bread to the peasants; *Mindl (wife of Hona the Melamed)*, who sells bread and rolls; the bakers of the food stands – *Tzirel, Mordechai Chaim's* and afterwards *Mani* (in the first stand), *Sender Solomon* (in the second stand) and *Eli Chaim and his wife, Yehudis* (in the third stand). Activity was heavy, and the overflow spilled over to the bakers on the *Tzerkveh Gessel*[33] and other streets, not far from the marketplace: *Moshe the Baker; Khatzkel the Baker* – in the *Ostroger Gasse*[34]; *Ronya the Baker* – in Slutsky's cellar; *Meir Shosh'eh's* – in the Hassid Street; *Shlomo the Baker* – in Yoss'l Shustak's building; *Zlateh the Baker* – from Zamoscheh (who had a stand in the marketplace); *Feivel the Baker* – near Benush's carpentry store; *Aizik the Baker* – near Galiatsky the shoemaker's house. But the majority of the *young* buyers, young people and young men, would be drawn to the *Bialystoker Bakery,* where three pretty daughters helped out the proprietor with the business – *Slova, Ethel and Pearl,* and the young folk were inclined to go shop there in order to catch a glimpse of these three good looking young women. But there were plenty of customers left over for the other bakers as well; *Mot'cheh*, who sold rolls; *Shifra Aizik's the baker; Zaydkeh Yosh'keh's (Lazarovsky)* – on the *Grodno Gasse*, and *Yankel-Berel the Bagel-Baker.* The *challahs*, rolls, breads, and bagels, would drop with a quiet whoosh into the shopping baskets of the buyers, and contribute their quiet, pleasant tones to the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Dog-Catcher

And amid all these sounds, one hears the deafening bark of dogs. All the dogs of the city have gathered – as was their custom on Thursdays and Fridays – at the butcher shops, because they have smelled, that on the eve of the Sabbath, with such plenty, they will likely be tossed a bone, and possibly – in their canine hearts, they hoped – maybe the butcher himself will be in a good mood, because of the large amount of business, and throw them a particularly fat bone or a *trayf* piece of meat. But the canine Angel of Death, *the Dog-*

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[33] The street of the *Tzerkveh*, or Russian Orthodox Church.

[34] From the Russian word, '*Ostrog*' meaning 'fortress.' It refers to two jail houses located on that street. See later, the memoir of Rabbi Jacob Zakheim.

Catcher, has also looked forward to the Sabbath eve. He knew that on Thursday and Friday, all the dogs would be gathered in one place, and he anticipated them by getting to his appointed place very early, between the houses of *Joshua the Hassid and Leizer-Chaim the Tinsmith*. And so he stands – tall and florid – and he looks about him, until he snares a poor dog in the coil of his noose, who tries to tear himself loose amid violent thrashing, and all the other dogs run after them barking at the top of their lungs, howling in a whining fashion, until the dog-catcher disappears with his hapless prey in the direction of Grodno Gasse, and the dogs gradually disperse – sadder and a bit more subdued than before, lost in their own thoughts, seemingly thinking that a dog's life isn't worth a pinch of snuff – first one is alive, being occupied with a nice fat bone, and suddenly one finds oneself in the dog-catcher's noose, and everything is over. The racket from the dogs and the yelping from the dog caught by the dog-catcher blend into the *Erev Shabbat* symphony and give it a unique character.

Sweets and Dairy Products

Sweets for the Sabbath were obtained from *Drayzl Alteh's* (who inherited her table from her mother, Alteh), and from *Fraydeh Chaya Lytus* (who had a store near our house).There were also women who bought cheese and butter from *Nekha Ada's and his wife Chas'sheh* (who had a store), from *Jekuthiel the Dairyman and his wife Basheh* (who occupied a stand), and at *Yoshpeh-Chaim Nakhum Aharon's* (also at a stand).

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With this, the shopping for the Sabbath ended, and one returned home satisfied: thank God, everything had been made ready for the Sabbath, as it is customary among Jews. And the tread of the returning housewives sounded both tired and sprightly on the streets of Volkovysk and blended into the larger *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Weekly Torah Portion is Reviewed in the *Heders*

And from where, suddenly, does one hear so many sweet voices of young children? Aha! It is, after all Friday, and it is eleven o'clock in the morning, and in the entire city, in all the *Heders* and in the Talmud Torah, the Torah portion of the week is being reviewed. And the ancient strains of the Torah *trop*[35] spreads all over and fills the entire air with *Yiddishkeit* and Torah. From all over, from every street, the traditional notes rise up and echoes crisply and clear. Young Jewish children are reviewing the Torah portion, and the hearts of the adults grow warm, and melt from overwhelming sweetness. The ears catch the familiar strains as they emanate from the full *Heder* classrooms, where the instructors are teaching their students, rehearsing with them the *pazair* and the *shalshelet* [36]. For the instructors, this is the "music hour," and each one does his duty faithfully and with concentration. Lo, it is as if they are all standing right before mine eyes: *Shimon Ada's the Melamed* with a blond beard (who lived on Shifra's street, at the home of Nekha the Dairyman) – a Jew who would by incantation nullify a evil-eye with a bone; *Naphtali der Melamed* (who lived on the Wide Boulevard) – a man who had beautiful daughters and was renown for his sense of humor; *Moshe-Ber Lipa's* – an exacting man who enforced an iron discipline in his classroom; *Zalman Arreshtant* – of whom it was said that he could make civilized people out of wild men; *Nachman der Melamed* (who lived in

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[35] Hebrew/Yiddish for the unique musical notes used to read the Torah

[36] The Hebrew names of two of the *trop* notes.

Lapin's house); *Leib-Oreh der Melamed* – an observant Jew, with a black beard and a very charitable individual (lived on the *Mitzrayim Gessel*, near the Wide Boulevard); *Aizik Lulav* (lived on the *Grodno Gasse*); *Moshe Herschel der Melamed.*

The young voices of the children rise higher and higher, the chorus of the children from all the *Heders* and the Talmud Torah mix with one another, and create one of the most beautiful parts of the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

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The Friday midday hours pass along, and the Jewish housewives become very busy: cooking, baking, cleaning the house, and braiding the children's hair – all in honor of the Sabbath. The air of the city becomes redolent with the sweet odors of Sabbath delicacies – the gefilte fish, the tasty *cholent*, and the delicious soup. And the smell of these delicacies, along with the humming from the bubbling pots tease the nostrils and tempt the ears – and are blended into the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Musicians Escort the Bride and Groom

And suddenly, in the distance, the sound of a fiddle is heard playing a tune that awakens and calls, demands and complains, and yet ends with happiness and confidence. A wedding canopy is being erected in Volkovysk – this was the custom, that most wedding ceremonies took place Friday afternoon[37] – and the bride and groom are escorted into the synagogue, escorted and accompanied by the Jewish musicians, and the merrymakers recite their verses, making the onlookers alternately cry and then laugh. Here they are, all in order: *Moshe Aizik der Fiddler* – he is out front, first, he is the leader of the ensemble; *Yisrael,* his brother – the second fiddler; *Berel-Leib der Fiddler* – also a brother to Moshe-Aizik; *Itcheleh der Fiddler* – the father of the three brothers; *Mordechai* with the clarinet; *Leizh'keh Bandureh*[38] – tall, blond, with blue eyes – the romantic actor; *Moshe der Trubashch*[39]*, Pesach Levkov* on the flute (the fife player), with black hair and black eyes; *Yisrael – Moshe Aizik's son* who played the cornet. The wedding procession stretches from the *Millner Gasse* over the length of the wide boulevard to the *Schulhof*. The little children, for whom every wedding is a holiday, run ahead first. The parents of the couple then come with lit candles in their hands, and the ensemble plays a *freilach,* which together with the noise of the dancing parents, weaves itself quite naturally into the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

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37 On re-reading this once the translation was complete, one cannot help feel that this 'custom' was driven by economic circumstances only. When one assesses the commitment of energy and financial resources to the preparation of the Sabbath, it is no small wonder that people of modest means would seek to gain leverage from such an expenditure if a wedding was in the making. It certainly is a far cry from late 20th and early 21st century experience in more affluent countries, where scheduling a wedding for a Friday afternoon would likely be seen as a 'conflict' with the oncoming Sabbath, if not an outright inconvenience.

38 Some of these names are actually descriptors. In this case, they relate to musical instruments. A *bandura*, or bandore (Sp. bandurria) is a form of lute.

39 A trumpet-like horn

Herschel the Scribe and Chana-Chaya the Yoreshteh[40]

It looks like it is quite late in the afternoon, because here comes *Herschel the Scribe* from the *Kholodoisker Gasse*, who is passing about reminding all the Jews that the Holy Sabbath is about to commence. He would announce, this beloved Jew, in his characteristically Jewish dress – a long caftan with a *gartel,* [41] and his velvet hat – never growing tired: *"Jews! Shabbos! Shabbos! Jews!"* In this manner he would remind all the shopkeepers that it is time to close up their stores. And from the second side, from the wide boulevard, comes *Chana-Chaya die Yoreshteh* (wife of Khatzkel the Yoresh). Yesterday, on Thursday, she was very busy, because on Thursday she would gather from all over the city into her wide apron: bread, *challah*, candles – and distribute it on Friday among the needy. But now she has finished her work and has provisioned the poor with all that is required for the Sabbath, and she appears all decked out in her Sabbath finery, in a head covering with a fully colored Turkish kerchief. She seemingly dances along, and calls out: "Ladies, Shabbos! Ladies, Shabbos!" And the calls to the Sabbath by Herschel the Scribe and Chana-Chaya die Yoreshteh mix with the clicking sounds of locks that storekeepers are affixing to the doors of their establishments – and all of this is woven into the greater *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Promenade to the Synagogue

It is dusk. The Sabbath Queen has entered the city in full regalia. The weekday cacophony has vanished, businesses are padlocked, the marketplace has been cleaned off – and from all the streets a beautiful procession begins, as the populace is drawn to the synagogue for prayer. This is the procession of the Volkovysk *balebatim.* Their social standing can be ascertained from their headgear: the wealthy wear cylindrical top-hats on their heads: the middle class – merchants and *balebatim* – wear hard hats: the workers and small storekeepers – simple hats. The same holds for the women: wealthy women wear hats; the less well-to-do throw a simple kerchief over their heads; older more observant women wear wigs. All participate in the procession, they walk with their children and hold small prayer books in their hands.

And here comes the old Rabbi, *Reb Abba Yaakov Borukhov*, with his long beard and proud mein. On either side of him walk the *Shameses, Aharon & Jedediah.* And here comes a whole row of prominent *balebatim*, on their way to the Main Synagogue. It looks like today, the Cantor, *Koppel,* accompanied by his choir, will be leading services, because among those going to the Main Synagogue are many worshipers who normally attend other places of worship. With no evil-eye intended, it looks like a mass of humanity is on its way to the [Main] Synagogue – the "cream" of the city! And the people come streaming from all the streets: from the Millner Gasse – *Ephraim Zilberman, Shmuel Grodzhensky, Eli-Leib Rakhmilevich, Shaul Mintz, Aaron Lifschitz, Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky and Sholom Lev:* from the Wide Boulevard – *Abraham Epstein, Leib Heller (Weiss), Abraham Eli Markus, Asher Yudzhik, Abba Yud'eh Winetsky, Shmuel Chaim Bayl'keh's, Moshe Yaakov Finkelstein, Moshe Lapidus, Nissan Yanovsky, Zelig Bartnovsky, Zalman Leib Slutsky, Leizer Yudzhik, Nakhum Halpern, Nakhum Lytus, Akiva Yudzhik, Yaakov Weinstein, Zalman Isser Goldberg, Eliyahu Shaikevitzevich, Meir Shiff and Joshua Zuckerman;* from Shifra's Street – *Naphtali Hertz*

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40 The root Hebrew word, *Yoresh* has to do with inheritance. It is not clear what this lady, or her husband inherited.

41 A silken belt-like sash wound around the midriff, used to separate the 'higher' parts of the body from the 'lower' parts.

Nakhumovsky, Feivel the Shokhet[42] *, Katriel the Baker, Mani the Baker, Shimon Ada's and Berel Simcha's (Kushnir);* from the Ostroger Gasse – *Yaakov Berestovitsky (The Dayan), Aizik Neiman, Joel Amstibovsky, Hanokh Neiman, Berestovsky (from the post office), Jesierski (the lumber merchant), Weinstein the banker, David Hubar and Sholom Vinogradsky; from the Church street – Chaim Ozer Einhorn, Joseph Berestovitsky the Beer Brewer, Galiatsky the Shoemaker , Benush the Carpenter, and Gedaliah Pereshetsky;* from the Kholodoisker Gasse – *Yaakov Saletan;* from the Vilner Gasse – *Koppel Isser Volkovysky;* from the Grodno Gasse – *Joshua David Papa, Tuvia Fenster, Sholom Barash, Yud'l Bereshkovsky, Shmuel David Yunovich, Abraham Zalman Kurtz and Leizer Shaliota;* from the Tatarskeh Gesseleh – *Aaron Shifmanovich;* from the Neuer Gesseleh – *Zundel Kaplan, Shimon Zamoschansky*, *Katriel the Tailor, Ozer Kaplan, Yitzhak Pisetsky, Moshe Meir the Teacher and Jesierski the Teacher;* from across the way from the marketplace stores – *Itcheh Novogrudsky, Jekuthiel Bereshkovsky, Yankel Einhorn, Ze'ev Bliakher and Israel Gershon Zakheim;* from below the river – *Moshe Shapiro, Zalman Chafetz, Avigdor Bloch and Leib Pines.*

Most of them, as previously mentioned, are going to the *Main Synagogue* today, where *Koppel the Cantor* will be leading services with his choir (among whom the most significant were *Israel the Furniture Turner,* son of Jedediah the *Shammes* – he was the choirmaster); but many are on their way to pray at the other houses of worship on the *Schulhof*; *Der Hiltzener Bet HaMedrash*[43]*, "Der Mauer"*[44]*, Die Hayyatim-Schul*[45]*,* and the *Ein-Yaakov Schul*, and the remaining synagogues and houses of study in Volkovysk; *Kholodoisker Schul,* on the Kholodoisker Gasse, *Levi's Bet HaMedrash* – on the Millner Gasse, *Tiferet Bakhurim* – on the Neuer Gessel, *Zamoscher Bet HaMedrash* – on Zamoscheh, *Reb Meir'keh's Bet HaMedrash* – on the Ostroger Gasse, *Poliakov's Bet HaMedrash* – on the Grodno Gasse , *Karczyzner Bet HaMedrash* – on Karczyzna, *The Small Bet HaMedrash* -- behind Herschel Yankel's house, on the wide boulevard, and the -*Hassidic Shtibl* – near the river.

Light streams out into the city streets from all the houses of worship, lighting up the city, and the melody of Koppel the Cantor, along with his choir, together with the lusty and fervent voices of the congregation who sing *Lechu Neranenah,* and the other Sabbath prayers with such great conviction, fill the air with a loftiness and a spirituality, and transport the *Erev Shabbat* symphony into the sanctified Sabbath atmosphere.

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It is Friday Night. The collective congregation has returned home and recited the *Kiddush.* The Sabbath candles light up the finely cleaned table and shine out of the window into the street. The voices singing Sabbath hymns and reciting the blessing after the meal fill the entire street and create the introduction to the *Erev Shabbat* symphony.

The Youth Promenades and Sings

After the Sabbath Feast. A little at a time, the kerosene lamps in the houses begin to go out, and the candles burn down and go out. Only the pinpoint stars in the sky illuminate the darkened streets. The older folks go to bed after the sumptuous repast, but the young people flee into the streets. One is going for a walk. Party-

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42 A Ritual Slaughterer

43 The wooden House of Study.

44 The "Wall," referring to its sturdy (probably stone) construction.

45 The Tailor's Synagogue. Probably frequented by a variety of the smaller shopkeepers.

affiliated members – Zionists, Bundists – gather in their own milieu, in the homes of friends, to discuss a variety of issues, to hear news, and to keep company. Those who are unaffiliated, take a walk, just for the sake of it, along the streets and byways – the Poritzisher Gasse, Ostroger Gasse, and Millner Gasse – and flirt with one another. [Boys] meet with girls of their acquaintance, words are exchanged, invitations, and one slips away unnoticed to the smaller streets by the riverside.

Here appears the once young *David Einhorn*. He lived with his parents in Kulakowski's house at the end of the wide boulevard opposite the church. Einhorn is rushing to the house of his girlfriend, *Sonia Farber.* Sonia Farber was an interesting young lady, and her house was a gathering place for the revolutionary-minded young people. Einhorn runs as if besotted. His pockets are stuffed full of brochures and writings on paper that contain marked up thoughts and musings from the entire week [gone by]. All his acquaintances will be at Sonia's house, and with them, he will be able to discuss and obtain their opinion on his youthful songs. It is on Friday nights, at Sonia's house, that the talent of the future author of the "*Shtilleh Nigunim*[46]" becomes developed and ripens. The sounds of joyful Yiddish and Russian revolutionary songs pour out of Sonia's house into the streets.

In the house of *Baylah Rivka Kushnir* (daughter of *Berel Simcha*) – in Shifra's Gesseleh – the Bundists assemble – *Berel Karpovich, The Likovsky Brothers, Zaydl the Binder, Moshe'keh Zakroy, Yankel Levin, Chaim Nemzer, Rosa Einhorn, Moshe Katriel's* – and discuss their party affairs and sing "The Oath" and "The Salty Sea." In *David Hubar's* house the Zionists gather – *The Vinogradskys, Nakhum Halpern, The Novogrudskys* – and their singing of "HaTikva" and "There in the Place of the Cedars" is carried forcefully through the Volkovysk streets, and fills them full of hope, happiness and life. And at the home of *Liotsha Glembotsky* a rather different sort of group gathers. That Liotsha is an intelligent and remarkably pretty young lady. At her house, the so-called "golden youth" gathers – the gymnasium students, young students and other "intelligentsia" – and enjoy each other's company. Her house, on *Yanovsky's Gessel* seems to have been created just for this purpose. A beautiful house with a wide porch – by the riverside. Who *didn't* come to that place? Everyone came to visit this home that was so friendly to guests: *Israel Hubar, Yankel Neiman, Zhenya Frankel, Frieda Halpern, Pearl & Frieda Hubar, Dvora'leh Einhorn, Milia Kaplan, Moshe Benjamin Shalakhovich, Yud'l Khvalko, Tevel Smazanovich, The Gallins, The Dworetskys, The Khmelnitskys* – all of the so-called "Russian Intelligentsia." From there, one could hear the strains of "Ochi Tchornaya" and other romantic Russian ballads, that would mingle with the sounds of other Yiddish folk songs, sung by the romantically involved strolling couples on the Poritzisher Gasse and the darkened side streets. And as all these young voices, along with the revolutionary and nationalist hymns, blended together in one mighty chorus, forming the coda, and final climax of the great enchanting symphony.

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[46] *Soft Melodies*

The Volkovysk Rabbis & Dayans

The Volkovysk community occupied a place of honor among the most important communities in the Grodno vicinity. It appears that its *balebatim* were accomplished scholars and wise people. Also, the Rabbis of Volkovysk of the past 150 years, were counted among the most famous of the *Gaonim* among Jews, and they left their stamp on the city.

I have, however, not been able to elicit specific details and stories about all of the famous Volkovysker Rabbis. The little that has come my way, I set down here, as much as possible in chronological order.

The First Rabbis in Volkovysk

Page 68: Rabbi Shmuel ז"ל *(Rabbi Avigdor's son)*

At the time of the *Vilna Gaon,*[47] the Rabbi of Volkovysk was *Rabbi Avigdor,* ז"ל. His son, *Rabbi Shmuel* became the son-in-law of the Vilna magnate *Reb Yud'eh Yesod.* Rabbi Shmuel was later appointed as the Rabbi of Vilna, on the condition that he go away for a number of years to study for the rabbinate – as it would happen – with his father in Volkovysk.

After Rabbi Avigdor passed away, the Rabbinical seat in Volkovysk was occupied by *Rabbi Benjamin Diskin*, ז"ל, a son-in-law of a Volkovysk magnate. Rabbi Benjamin Diskin contributed greatly to the spiritual development of the city. His sons, *Rabbi Joshua Leib Diskin,* ז"ל, and *Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Diskin,* ז"ל were renown as Torah scholars. His first son, Rabbi Joshua Leib (born in 1818), was the Rabbi of Brisk and later the Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazic community of Jerusalem, and there he founded the famous "Diskin Orphanage," that bears his name to this day. At the time when Rabbi Benjamin Diskin was the Rabbi in Volkovysk, the colorful epoch of the world-renown *Gaon, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor*, ז"ל [of Kovno] was initiated – he being renown as the author of *Beer Yitzhak, Ein Yitzhak, Nakhal Yitzhak* , and other books – who in his time, was the central figure of the rabbinical world, both as an interpreter of the Law and as the leader of Russian Jewry. In New York, the renown Yeshiva of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan (of "Yeshiva College"),was established and named for him.[48] We will [therefore] spend a little extra time here on [the biography of] Rabbi Isaac Elchanan ז"ל, because Volkovysk played a prominent part in his life's story.

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan ז"ל, in Volkovysk

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan was born in the year 1817 (5577) in the *shtetl* of Rosh, not far from Volkovysk. His father, *Rabbi Isser*, was the Rabbi of that town. When Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan was not yet 12 years old, his mother died. His father , Rabbi Isser, decided that the most practical thing to do was to get him married, in order that he find himself in a warm domestic atmosphere. The young Isaac Elchanan was already showing signs of exceptional intellectual prowess, and he was offered the best of the possible marriage matches in the area.

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47 The personality which symbolized the supremacy of Torah learning within Lithuanian Jewry, and determined its character for several generations, was that of the *Gaon of Vilna, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman,* who lived during the second half of the 18th century.

48 Today the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) of Yeshiva University.

One of the matches being discussed for him, was with the daughter of a magnate from the nearby city of Volkovysk. Before sitting down to write the terms of the union, the prospective groom was invited to the home of the bride's parents for a Sabbath. The most prominent of the *balebatim* and scholars of the city came there to take their measure of the young prospective groom.

At a finely covered table, laden with the best of what a wealthy host could offer, the most important of the citizenry of Volkovysk were assembled, and the accomplished young scholar held forth with the best of what he knew. However, something then occurred that dismayed everyone. The young *Isaac Elchanan* pulled over the small dish with the rich, elaborate fruit preserves on it, being deeply engrossed in discourse, he forgot where he was, and began to eat [from the dish] with his hands. The host's face reddened with embarrassment. This comic occurrence also made a bad impression on the prospective bride, and she stubbornly argued that she didn't want as a groom, someone who ate fruit preserves with his hands. The proposed match was dropped. But the young woman remained a spinster for her entire life, and she never married.

When Rabbi Isaac Elchanan returned to Rosh, the entire town knew the story, which had been rapidly communicated. But his father, the Rabbi of Rosh, rationalized the event and argued that *a priori* the bride-elect was not suitable to be Isaac Elchanan's wife. And Isaac Elchanan returned to his studies.

A few months later, the Rabbi of Keidan traveled through Rosh, and as was his habit, dropped into the Rabbi's house and spent a while in discourse and learning. The Keidaner Rav was awestruck by the intellectual prowess of the young Isaac Elchanan and he proposed a match for him with a girl, also from Volkovysk, *Sarah Raizeh,* the daughter of the magnate *Reb Leizer Jesierski.* The match, with good fortune, was consummated. Rabbi Isaac Elchanan received a dowry of 300 rubles, and was supported for six years by his father-in-law, who at that time resided in the big house on the *Millner Gasse*, while he continued his studies, and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan sat and continued his learning with great concentration in the *Hiltzener Bet HaMedrash.*

Rabbi Benjamin Diskin, as previously mentioned, was at that time the Rabbi of Volkovysk. *Rabbi Isaac Elchanan* became his pupil, and studied in a group that consisted of the Rabbi's son, *Rabbi Joshua Diskin, Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz* (the son-in-law of [another] Volkovysk magnate), and *Chaim Zelig Slonimsky*, would become the famous editor of *Hatzefira.*[49] Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz would later become the Rabbi of Volkovysk, and founded the Volkovysker Yeshiva there. He is well-known throughout the Jewish world because of his book, *Brit Yaakov.* In the sixth year of his residence at the home of his father-in-law, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan took stock, and concluded that it was no plan to continue to rely on his father-in-law's sufferance, and decided he would become a Rabbi. He had received his ordination from Rabbi Benjamin Diskin, and at the age of twenty, became the Rabbi of the *shtetl* of Izavelin. And years later, this scion of Volkovysk training would become the Rabbi of Kovno. A tale is told, that once Rabbi Isaac Elchanan was making a trip to his home town of Rosh to pay respects at the graves of his parents. On his way, he passed through Volkovysk, where the entire city came out to pay their respects to him. Among the multitude was also the broken old woman – his would be bride of many years past, who had never married.

The Rabbis Rabbi Yitzhak Aizik Khaver ז"ל, & Rabbi Yekhiel Ben-Aharon Heller ז"ל

Following Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz, came the following two Rabbis: *Rabbi Yitzhak Aizik Khaver* and *Rabbi Yekhiel Ben-Aharon Heller*. Rabbi Khaver later became the Rabbi of Tyczyn and he is the author

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[49] One of the foremost Hebrew periodicals of the late 19th century.

of שאלות ותשובות בנין עולם Йж *A Guide to the Shas,*[51] and *Beit Yitzhak* which was printed in Siedliska, in the year 5595 (1835). *Rabbi Heller* was one of the well-known brother Rabbis of that era with the surname Heller, and traced their roots to the family of Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman Heller, called *"Baal Tosafot Yom-Tov."*[52] Rabbi Yekhiel Heller was born in Kadinov (Minsk *Guberniya*) in the year 1814 and died in Plungian (Kovno *Guberniya*) in 1861. During his life, he was Rabbi in Glusk (Minsker *Guberniya*), Volkovysk, Suwalk and Plungian. He authored a German overview of the "Eight Chapters" of the *Rambam*,[53] and is also the author of *Amuday Or.*[54]

Rabbi Abraham Shmuel [Diskin], ז"ל

After them, *Rabbi Abraham Shmuel* ז"ל, became Rabbi of Volkovysk, the son of Rabbi Benjamin Diskin. With Rabbi Abraham Shmuel, a new epoch began for scholarship in Volkovysk and the methods of its religious upbringing in general. The Volkovysker Yeshiva was significantly enlarged. Qualified young men from the surrounding towns in the area were drawn to Volkovysk, in order to be educated at the Yeshiva, which was under the supervision of the great *Gaon*, Rabbi Abraham Shmuel, the brother of Rabbi Joshua Diskin. Rabbi Abraham Shmuel was distinguished for his flawless reading of the Torah, and almost every *Shabbos*, the *balebatim* would come to hear his reading of the weekly portion in the *Alter Mauer Bet HaMedrash.*

Incidentally, *Mindl Tzirel*, a daughter of Rabbi Abraham Shmuel, became the wife of *Reb Itcheh Lev*, who owned a row of houses on the *Millner Gasse*.

Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, ז"ל

Page 72: *Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg,* ז"ל

After Rabbi Abraham Shmuel, the well-known *Gaon*, *Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg* ז"ל, became Rabbi of Volkovysk.

Rabbi Jonathan lived in the house of Chaim Warshawer (the Tailor), on *Millner Gasse*. He had three daughters: *Ethel, Rokh'cheh [sic: Rachel],and Ron'keh.*

As related by Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky, the former Rabbi of Volkovysk, today in Johannesburg, the Rabbinical seat in Volkovysk remained vacant for seven years after the passing of Rabbi Eliasberg's death (he died young), until Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov ז"ל came.

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50 Questions & Answers Relating to the Creation of the World.

51 *Shas* - is the Hebrew acronym for the Six major Orders of the Talmud

52 Indicating his mastery of the *Tosafot* commentary to the Talmud.

53 Acronym for the great medieval Jewish scholar/physician, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon.

54 Literally, Pillars of Light.

Rabbi Jonathan ז"ל, was a great Rabbi and was even acknowledged to be one of the leading exponents of Torah scholarship in that generation. He was a wise man, a scribe and an intellectual, and great thinkers would correspond with him and hold him in high regard. Among the books of Rabbi Jonathan, Rabbi Kossowsky found a letter, written by *Rashi Fin* ז"ל from Vilna, who was one of the most highly regarded intellectuals and scholars of that generation, and one of the *Hovevei Zion.*[55] In that letter, the question of an important meeting is addressed, that was called prior to the first Zionist Congress in Katowice about sixty years ago [sic: 1880's].

Rabbi Jonathan was the author of *Kesset Yehonatan* and *Sefer HaMidot.*[56] He had a great influence on the Jewish community of Volkovysk, and he was the one who introduced the concept of the Love of Zion (*Hibat Zion*) to the Volkovysk Jews. After him, his successor *Rabbi Borukhov* ז"ל, took his place, and thanks to both of these Rabbis, Volkovysk stood out among the remaining cities around it, in its commitment to this nationalistic ideal. The result of this was, that a significant number of the Jews of Volkovysk made *aliyah* to the Holy Land and settled there many years prior to the upheavals in Europe – and incidentally were thereby saved from almost certain death.

Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, ז"ל

Page 73: *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov* ז"ל

Page 77: *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov and the Elders of the City with the Volkovysk Relief Delegates from New York (After the First World War).*

From Right to Left, first row from the bottom: *Naphtali Hertz Nakhumovsky (Herschel the Teacher), Zalman Chafetz, Abraham Nissan Kronenberg, Berel Domovsky (Delegate), Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov (the Rabbi), Avigdor Perlmutter (Delegate), Yitzhak Novogrudsky (Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's), Manya Galai, Aizik Neiman, Hosea Nakdimon.*

Second Row: *Zundel Kaplan, Yaakov Berestovitsky (the Dayan), Aaron Solodovnik (Frayd'keh's), Joseph*

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55 The first *Hovevei Zion* ("Lovers of Zion") organizations had been established in 1881 –1882 with the aim of furthering Jewish settlement, particularly agricultural settlement in the Land of Israel. The groups varied not only in size but in their activity. Some were interested in philanthropic work while others were intent on *aliyah*. From its inception, the *Hovevei Zion* groups in Russia sought to erect a country –wide legally recognized framework. After arduous negotiations, in which the authorities demanded that the society be set up as a charitable body, its establishment was approved, early in 1890, as "The Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Eretz-Israel," which came to be known as "The Odessa Committee."

In 1892, the organization had approximately 14,000 sympathizers in Russia. Among its leaders were Rabbi Samuel Mohilever (1824 –1898), Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843 –1910) and Leon Pinsker (1821 –1891). Following the publication of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* in 1896 and the establishment of the *World Zionist Organization*, most of the branches of *Hovevei Zion* aligned themselves with the new movement.

56 Literally, Jonathan's Inkwell, and The Book of Measures

Shapiro (Vatashchiner[57]), Herschel the Scribe, Joseph Kolgavin, Zelig Bartnovsky, Gedaliah (from Haminich[58])[59] .

Third Row: Ahareh the Shammes, Yitzhak Nakhumovsky, Meir Shiff, Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Jekuthiel Bereshkovsky, Leib Tchopper (from Zamoscheh).

As previously mentioned, after Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, the *Gaon Rabbi Abba Yaakov ben Yekhiel Michael HaKohen Borukhov* became Rabbi. He received his ordination from Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor. Afterwards, [first] becoming the Rabbi of several communities – Maishigula, Kupishok[60], Vakshneh, and Polotsk – he was appointed Rabbi of Volkovysk in 1903 (5663). The Volkovysker Yeshiva, which had been founded in 1887 (5647) through the efforts of the *Gaon* Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz, was, thanks to Rabbi Borukhov's influence, enlarged both physically and in substance. The number of students grew to about three hundred, who were divided into five classes.

In the year 1923 (5684), Rabbi Borukhov – whose two sons, one a well-known Hebrew writer, and the other a prominent physician, a officer of the Hygiene Unit of "Hadassah"[Hospital] who both lived in Jerusalem – decided to emigrate to the Holy Land (Rabbi Borukhov's third son was the Rabbi in Malden, near Boston). The Volkovysk community honored its aged Rabbi with a beautiful gift and, with great respect, saw him on his way.

In 1928 (5688), when Rabbi Borukhov reached the age of eighty years, the well-known Hebrew author *Reb Benjamin* did a portrait of him in the Israeli journal, *HaHayd*, an interesting article, from which we provide some excerpts here:

> As you encounter this endearing persona on the Jerusalem streets, along where he modestly makes his way, not wanting to arouse any recognition, you get the impression of an outstanding Torah Scholar of days gone by, in which Torah and their way of life were totally interwoven. The writer of these lines had the pleasure of meeting him, when he traveled for several days together with *Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook*[61] ז"ל, through Jewish settlements and towns on Jewish owned property in the Holy Land. The entire trip consisted of Torah, the fear of God and love of the Land.
>
> Let us here, briefly summarize the story of his blessed life.
>
> He was born in the month of Tevet 5608 (1840), in the city of Darshunishok in the Kovno *Guberniya*. His father died while he was still young. He lived in the city of Vorna. His teachers

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57 Also rendered *Vatachiner.*

58 The aspirate 'H' at the beginning of this name is occasionally omitted, and it is rendered as *Aminich.*. The consensus opinion is that this is an elided form of the name, Krzemienica, which is one of the nearby towns. The elision may be derived from the alternate Yiddish name of the town, Kus***hemienits***a Kosciolna

59 This would appear to be *Gedaliah Salaman.*

60 Also *Kupiskis*, *Kupishki*

61 Then the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community in Palestine.

recognized his great intellectual skills, and said to him: "We cannot teach you any more, go to the *Bet HaMedrash* and teach yourself." In the *Bet HaMedrash*, were found the books of the Original Scholars, The *Rashba*, the *Ritva,* and others. The youth, who was not yet Bar Mitzvah, became accustomed to studying the *Gemara* together with these texts of the Original Scholars. These Original Scholars [sic: *Rishonim*] became for him his companions and teachers. This aspect of his learning became almost an alter-ego to his personality.

He arrives in Butrimantz and undertakes study in the *Bet HaMedrash*, where at the same time, the *Gaon* Meir Simcha of Dvinsk ז"ל studies there. The most significant experience came during the three years when he studied with the *Gaon* Rabbi Joshua Leib Diskin ז"ל, together with Rabbi Diskin's late son, the *Gaon* Rabbi Yerukham Diskin. In the year 5633 (1865) he studied for an additional half-year at the Bet HaMedrash of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan in Kovno and received his ordination from him.

He has been a Rabbi for about fifty years. His natural personableness and great Torah scholarship blend together to lighten his work and make him beloved by everyone. His natural tendency was to show his affection for people without regard for their station, with a simple, decent love.

He also involved himself in community affairs, that dealt with providing help for the sick and assistance to poor people. He earned a good reputation among Christians, and they would come to him to adjudicate disputes between them and Jews over money matters. Occasionally the government judiciary leader would pass him cases of particular complexity.

He was generally loved by all classes of the community. In one city, where he had been appointed as Rabbi, a terrible controversy developed between the *Mitnagdim* and the *Hassidim,* [62] which took on a very serious form. But thanks to his influence, it was dissipated with no harm, and both factions would come to him with love and friendship. A love for the Holy Land suffused his soul, and, as you can understand, he was one of the first of the volunteers for the Jewish *Yishuv* in the Holy Land, and for Zionist funds, and he would inspire enthusiasm in other people for this issue. Despite this, he was held in great affection by the Bundists, who would often come to hear his sermons, and when he made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, they too, sent him a letter of good wishes in Hebrew.

With all this, he never ceased his own studies. He published his book, *Questions & Answers The Halyard of Jacob* in two editions. In that very book, there is also an exchange of correspondence between him and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, ז"ל. As Rabbi Isaac Elchanan was already of advanced age, and "the labor of writing was undertaken only with great difficulty," and he couldn't organize his writing well, nevertheless, he could not resist the pleasure of "an excursion into his compelling words." Understand that this "excursion" was into new Torah insights.

When in 5683 (1915) it had been fifty years that Rabbi Borukhov had served as a Rabbi in the pulpit, he decided to retire from the Rabbinate and to make *aliyah* to Jerusalem, to the great sorrow of the entire Volkovysk community.

The idea of living in the Holy Land mad a very strong impression on him and filled his soul with happiness and joy. Also, in the Holy Land it was his hope to enlarge the scope of Torah study among Jews, and in this way to inject an element of peace and friendship among the

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62 Two different schools of thinking on the practice of Judaism who often came to loggerheads with one another, to the point of violence.

various factions of the community. It was in this spirit that he addressed an assemble of Rabbis from the entire country, which was held in Jerusalem, at the behest of the *Mishmeret Shabbat* organization. His words made a strong impression on all the listeners.

When Rabbi Borukhov died in 1936 in Jerusalem, his death elicited great sorrow in Volkovysk. In the May 8, 1936 edition of *Volkovysker Leben*, a long article appeared by Ch. G. Harkavy, which gave expression to the grief of the Jews of Volkovysk. We will introduce this article here (with specific abbreviations):

Like a severe blow on top of a wound, we received the news of the passing of the Gaon, Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, ז"ל.

It has been decreed that we must lose one of the finest and greatest spirits of our generation. One of the gentlest representatives of the essence of the true spirit of Israel. A mighty oak in Torah scholarship, a leading figure in the rabbinical world, a leader and truly great personage among Jewry.

This great loss to our entire people cannot, however, be compared to the loss felt by those who were privileged to know this great man of our generation personally, and to have enjoyed receiving from him the radiance of his bright spirit, emanating from his great friendship that emanated from his brilliance.

This was a leader with a warm fatherly attitude. Therefore, the pain of Jewish Volkovysk is understandably that much greater.

If one wanted to briefly characterize the personality of the *Gaon* Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov ז"ל, one would articulate it by saying that apart from being one of the greats in his generation, he was the regal embodiment of a paternal leader of a city and a nurturing maternal instinct within Israel.

The *Gaon* Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov ז"ל, or – as he was called after his great work – the *Hevel Yaakov*, articulated in that book a synthesis of two systems: the way of casuistry (sic: *pilpul*), and the so-called method of understanding (sic: *havanah*). The *Hevel Yaakov* – a meaningful exposition created fifty-five years ago! This can also be seen from the responses to the author that were printed – it generated a great response and a truly warm reaction in the world of Torah scholarship.

The [work], *Hevel Yaakov*, is in the category of the best of the works on *Halakha*, in which thoroughness, incisiveness, depth and casuistry all come together in a great, mighty and esthetic harmony.

And the same spirit of harmony that we find in such large measure in *Hevel Yaakov,* shone forth in a practical manner from his great wellspring.

This was a great spiritual aristocrat and master of the Torah, such as is rarely seen. And yet his great nobility absolutely did not prevent him from being able to extend warm and friendly relationships to everyone, anyone who had the opportunity to come in contact with him. His reception [of others] was so full of heart, that sitting at his table, any distance between him and his guest virtually disappeared. One felt in his presence like a child before his father. And it is necessary to add, that this attitude came across quite naturally, without a trace of artificiality, which would have come over as contrived and tasteless. Here one felt the purest simplicity of a great scholar, for who it was completely clear that the importance of a human being did not originate with intellect, but rather that every decent human being, without exception, has enough worth to be valued and loved.

He simply loved people. For everyone at all times he had a kind word, an anecdote, a word of comfort for a difficult situation, a part of his good, dear heart which beats on more.

This was his essence, his inner strength, which endeared him so much to his congregation, and far beyond the ambit of that congregation, which elicited so much awe of his capacity and respect for his persona.

His mastery of Torah and mastery of the Law, his spiritual richness, the skillfulness and weightiness of his artful sermonizing, and first above all, his fear of God which preceded even his wisdom, his lifelong interest in the development of the Land of Israel in the spirit of the Torah, and especially his own inner sense of direction, his resoluteness of hope at a time of despair, which never evidenced a visible capacity to break his strong and great spirit – all this embodied in one person, imagine before you a phenomenon of spiritual and moral richness, a master of the greatness capable by a human being, a glory and a praiseworthy member of the family of the Rabbinate, and for the entire world.

Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky

Page 80: *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky*

Page 81 (Top): *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky with the membership of "Tiferet Bakhurim"*
(Bottom): *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky with Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, greeting the Voievode*[63]

Immediately after Rabbi Borukhov ז"ל, left for Jerusalem, the pulpit in Volkovysk was given to *The Gaon, Rabbi Yitzhak ben Rabbi Saul Kossowsky*, who held the position of Rabbi in Volkovysk from the beginning of 1925 (5685) to the end of 1933 (5693), when he emigrated to Johannesburg (South Africa), to become the Chief Rabbi of the communities of Johannesburg and the Transvaal.

Rabbi Kossowsky was not only a Rabbi in Volkovysk, but also a leader of Orthodox Jewry, at all rabbinical conclaves, he played a prominent role as a theoretician, and a founder of Jewish Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky was born in Warsaw, 5Tishri 5633 (1873). He was the son of *Rabbi Saul Kossowsky* ז"ל, and a grandson of *Rabbi Chaim Leib Shakhor* from Mir, of the family of the renown *Gaon* Rabbi David Mirrer (The family name was changed from *Shakhor* to *Kossowsky* because of earlier decrees in Russia [64]). Rabbi Kossowsky's mother was *Tzirel Rudkin*, from the city of Byten, the daughter of the *Grand Rabbi, Ze'ev Rudkin,* ז"ל.

After his Bar-Mitzvah, Rabbi Kossowsky studied Torah with his brother-in-law, the *Gaon Rabbi Joseph David Rudkin,* the Rabbi of Antipolya, and later in Sejmiaticz Rabbi Kossowsky studied with him for six years, and in the year 5658 (1898) he departed to study at the famous Yeshiva at Telz. There he studied for

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63 An Eastern European government functionary.

64 Family name changes were often used to confound Russian census taking, in the days when the ukase of Czar Nicholas I was in force, mandating the forced conscription of every third Jewish son into the Russian Army for a term of 25 years.

two years with the renown *Gaon, The Gra*[65] *Gordon* ז"ל. In the year 5660 (1900) in Vilna, he married the daughter of the renown scholar, *HaGaon Rabbi David Shlomo Grodzhensky* of Ivie, father of the Great *Gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky* of Vilna. He remained in the home of his father-in-law, and after his father-in-law passed away in the year 5664 (1904), he succeeded him as Rabbi of Ivie. He remained there until the beginning of the year 5676 (1916) (at the onset of the First World War), when he was forced, for political reasons, to abandon his place, and went into Russia. There he was accepted as the Rabbi of the city of Mariupol (near the Sea of Azov), where he served as the Rabbi with great distinction for about six years, until the beginning of the year 5682 (1921), when he left Bolshevik Russia and returned to Warsaw. In the winter of 5683 (1922) he assumed the post of Rabbi of Yagustov, and remained there for two years. From there, he went to Volkovysk in the year 5685 (1925), where he assumed the post of Rabbi. He remained in Volkovysk until the year 5693 (1933), when after many invitations, he decided to accept the Rabbinical Seat in South Africa.

Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky received his ordination from the following distinguished Rabbinical teachers: The Gra Gordon, The Grash[66] Shkop (with whom he studied), The *Gaon* Rabbi David Friedman of Karlin, the *Gaon* Rabbi Raphael of Volozhin, and the *Gaon Chaim* of Brisk.[67]

In 1946, Rabbi Kossowsky brought out a book of sermons under the title, "*The Sabbath & Festivals*," which received highly acclaimed reviews, and sold very well in America.

Rabbi Kossowsky's two sons are in Israel. One of them is the lawyer, *David Shlomo Shakhor-Kossowsky*, who is also a great scholar. The third son, *Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky* had previously been the Rabbi of Zelva, and is today a Rabbi in South Africa.[68]

A son-in-law of Rabbi Kossowsky, *Rabbi Yehuda Leib HaKohen Kagan*, is today found in New York. Rabbi Kagan came to Volkovysk in 1929 as the son-in-law of Rabbi Kossowsky. For a set period of time, he helped administer the Rabbinate in Volkovysk. He was then taken in Antwerpen (Belgium) as the Head of their *Bet Din* and founder of their Yeshiva, *Shaaray Torah.* In the summer of 1940, he fled and settled in Lyons (France), where he assumed the leadership of the Lyons orthodox congregation, *Kehillath Jeshurun.* From there, it became possible for him later to come to America, and today, he is the Headmaster of the Yeshiva Rabbi Israel Salanter in New York.

It is suitable to mention in passing, that the *Gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky* ז"ל, the Vilna Rabbi who was renown in every corner of world Jewry – also has roots in Volkovysk, on his mother's side, who was a member of the Einhorn family. Rabbi Chaim Ozer is a brother-in-law to Rabbi Kossowsky, and the responses that were published in his well-known book, *Akhi-Ezer*, Rabbi Kossowsky is mentioned many

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65 Hebrew abbreviation for *HaGaon Rabbi Eliezer Gordon*, one of the prominent scholars of the Telzer Yeshiva at that time.

66 An abbreviation in Hebrew for The *Gaon Rabbi Shimon Shkop*, yet another of the leading teachers at the Telz Yeshiva where Rabbi Kossowsky studied.

67 This is, without a doubt, *Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (Brisker).*

68 In the *Zelva Memorial Book*, *Yitzhak Shalev* gives an account of how this Rabbi Kossowsky's life was saved during the early days of the Second World War (See ZMB p. 92).

times, his son, David Shlomo,(who is today a lawyer in Tel-Aviv), and his son-in-law, Rabbi Kagan.

Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich, ז"ל

Page 83: *Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich with the members of the congregational committee in the year 1937.*

Right to Left, First Row, Seated: *The ritual slaughterer, an unknown person, Anshel Bliakher, Ze'ev Glatzer, The congregational leader Zalistovsky, Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich (the Rabbi), Melekh Khantov, Hona Kavushatsky, Yochanan Galai (the Butcher).*

Second Row: *Avra'sheh Offenberg, Reuven Rutchik (Director), Wallach (the Shammes of the synagogue), an employee at the abattoir, the Cantor of the synagogue, Kaputchevsky (an employee of the synagogue), Malmed (the new Shokhet), the blond guy, Mordechai Leib Kaplan (Director).*

After Rabbi Kossowsky, *Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich* (from Moteleh[69] near Pinsk), was taken on as Rabbi – for a couple of years prior to the last [sic: Second] World War. Immediately after the Germans occupied Volkovysk, he went away with his family to his parents in Szczucin. There, he perished with the Szczucin Jewish community.[70]

The Volkovysk Dayans

Volkovysk also distinguished itself with its famous *Dayanim* (Jewish lawgivers and jurists).

The Dayan Rabbi Yaakov Abraham Stein, ז"ל

One of the most important *Dayanim* of olden times – going back to when Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz was the Rabbi of the city – was the *Gaon Rabbi Yaakov Abraham Stein.* In the book, *Ein Yaakov,* written by Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz, a responsa is presented – which the Rabbi had then provided in connection with ruling on a matter of Halakha – that this was with the advice and consent of Rabbi Yaakov Abraham Stein. He was also the Dayan and Justice later, in the time of Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, ז"ל. It was told in Volkovysk, that when the *Gaon* Rabbi Jonathan sat with the leading thinker of the times, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan ז"ל, to discuss details relating to his new post [as Rabbi], Rabbi Isaac Elchanan told him the following: be aware of whom you have at your disposal as a *Dayan* in this city – the *Gaon* Rabbi Yaakov Abraham!

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69 Called *Motal'* on maps of modern Belarus.

70 The Yizkor Book of *Szczucin* identified the Rabbi of that city as *Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhal Rabinowitz.* This may very well have been the father of *Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich* of Volkovysk. The Szczucin Yizkor Book indicates that *Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhal* was slain in the first wave of murders that the Germans perpetrated against the intelligentsia. The mystery here, is why the Volkovysk Rabbi would flee to the west – into the jaws of death – when the more obvious course of action would have been to flee eastward. It is possible that, under German control, he really had no choice.

In his younger years, Rabbi Yaakov Abraham did not want to take a pulpit position as a Rabbi, and therefore, he became a merchant, and for many years he operated the mill at Zelva.[71] Later, when he was compelled to assume the position of *Dayan* in Volkovysk, he was already famous throughout the area as an outstanding *Gaon.* Even gentiles would come to consult with him, and his word was treated by them as sacred.

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Among the known *Dayanim* of the last years were: *Rabbi Menachem Joseph ben Rabbi Azriel HaKohen Volk, Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky* and *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky.*

The Dayan, Rabbi Menachem Joseph Volp (Reb Mendele), ז"ל

Rabbi Menachem Joseph Volp was greatly beloved in the city, and everyone knew him by the name Reb Mendele. He was the author of *New Mitzvah* and *Shekel HaKodesh.* His book, *New Mitzvah* was published in 1907, and at the end of the book, there is a list of all the prominent citizens of Volkovysk, who contributed to getting the book published.

Reb Mendele, lived in Hinde-Baylah's building, on Shifra Slutsky's street, where Manya the Baker lived (later, Feivel the ritual slaughterer bought this building). Reb Mendele had three daughters: *Yehudit, Esther,* and *Tzivia.*

The Dayan, Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky (Reb Teveleh), ז"ל

Page 85: *The Dayan, Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky (Reb Teveleh)* ז"ל

Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky was known in the city as Reb Teveleh. His wife was one of the sisters of the Jesierski family, who were merchants of forest products.[72] She had a dry goods store among the market row stores. Before he became a *Dayan*, Reb Teveleh was the Head of the Yeshiva of Volkovysk. He lived on the *Schulhof*, opposite Naphtali the teacher. He had a son, Herschel, and several daughters.

The Dayan, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, ז"ל – The Last Dayan

Page 87: Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky ז"ל*, the Dayan*

Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky was born in Lisokovo in 1867, to poor parents. While still a child, his father passed away, and his mother sent him [away] to be educated. In the Yeshiva where he studied, he excelled brilliantly as an outstanding intellect, and obtained rabbinical ordination at a young age. After he married, he opened a dry goods store that was together with his dwelling. On the table, where cloth was measured out,

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71 The Zelva Memorial Book has no record of this. Perhaps, from a Zelva perspective, this ownership had no local significance. By the time ZMB authors write, they identify the Borodetzky and Sedletsky families of Zelva as the principal flour millers.

72 Very likely lumber, but also possibly turpentine, etc.

one could always see to the side copies of *Yoreh Deyah* and *Hoshen Mishpat,*[73] into which Rabbi Yaakov would always be peering.

Rabbi Yaakov was in the habit of traveling several times during the year to Warsaw, Lodz, and Bialystok to buy new cloth. He was recognized in the commercial world as a man with a good head on his shoulders, and as a great scholar, and he began being called upon to undertake complex adjudications. We will relate two of these here.

On a certain summer day, a carriage drawn by two horses tore into the tranquil and quiet town of Lisokovo, and pulled up in front of Rabbi Yaakov's house. Two Jews with long beards came into to see him, called the head of the household into a separate room, and informed him that in their town of Ruzhany, a short while ago, the wife of Mot'cheh Pines had passed away. The *Khevra-Kadisha* [74] had heart for the husband, the rich miser, Reb Mordechai Pines who was a well-known manufacturer in that city. So, the *Khevra-Kadisha* took advantage of the circumstances, and took funds amounting to four thousand rubles for the public community chest as a burial fee. After the *shiva* mourning period, Reb Mordechai Pines took stock of this, and decided that he would approach the town authorities, and lodge a complaint that he had been robbed, and that so large a sum as a burial fee had been forcefully extracted from him. The members of the *Khevra-Kadisha* were immediately arrested and a deathly blackness settled on the city. It was for this reason that these two Jews had come to Rabbi Yaakov, to implore him to exert himself, and immediately travel to Slonim, where a *Din-Torah*[75] was to take place before the Oshmianer[76] Rabbi between the members of the *Khevra-Kadisha* and Reb Mordechai Pines. It was only with the expenditure of a great deal of energy that Rabbi Yaakov was able to influence Reb Mordechai, to drop the charges.

A second story concerns the time Rabbi Yaakov suddenly received a telegram from a certain commissioner, Herr Neiman in Bialystok, to come there in connection with an important matter. At the train station, they informed him that it concerned a dispute that had broken out between horse traders in Grajewo (which since the time of the First World War, was adjacent to the German border), and that the Jews wanted him to come to the Grajever Rabbi's house for a mediation. The matter was a delicate one, since each side had threatened to go to the authorities and disclose the existence of smuggling of horses from Russia to Germany, an infraction that carried a long prison sentence. It fell to Rabbi Yaakov, thanks to his integrity, coolness and great wisdom, to influence both parties of horse dealers that they should make peace with one another.

In Lisokovo proper, one could often run into Rabbi Yaakov in that town's court, sitting to the side on a bench, and listening to the give and take of the cases, in which the famous Volkovysk lawyers, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* and *Israel Efrat* took part.

On Yom Kippur Eve, Rabbi Yaakov would visit the seriously ill, whom he would come to comfort, and to ease their hearts, [assuring them] that it was not necessary for them to observe all the rigors of the fast. On the High Holy Days, he would lead the services for either *Musaf* or *Ne'ilah* with great spiritual fervor and

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[73] The second and third volumes of the four major works of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, the *Rambam.*

[74] Jewish burial society.

[75] A judgement rendered according to Torah Law.

[76] Of the town of Oshmiany in Lithuania.

an outpouring of the soul. Rabbi Yaakov was beloved by the Jews of Lisokovo and the Christians of the surrounding area. Merchandise was bought from him with complete trust – that is, he would tell his customer what the merchandise cost him, and how much [profit] he wanted to make, and his word was considered to be sacred.

Very often Rabbi Yaakov would be invited by Rabbi Borukhov to join him in examining the Yeshiva students in Volkovysk. For a very long time, Rabbi Yaakov did not want to make Torah scholarship a means of livelihood, but after the First World War, he moved with his family to Volkovysk to assume the post of *Dayan* of the city. There, he worked in the greatest solidarity with the *Gaon* Rabbi Borukhov. After Rabbi Borukhov left for the Holy Land, Rabbi Yaakov remained for a while alone, until the time that the *Gaon* Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky was offered the post of Rabbi of the city, and also with him, he worked the entire time with a great sense of partnership.

Rabbi Yaakov received his ordination from many Rabbis, among which were also *Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik*, ז"ל the Rabbi of Brisk. He was in letter correspondence with many of the leading Torah scholars of his day, such as *Rabbi Yekhezkiel Lifschitz* of Kalish, author of the book, *HaMedrash VeHaMa'aseh*, *Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky* of Vilna, *Rabbi Joseph Rosen* (the illustrious scholar of Rogachov), *Rabbi Shimon Shkop* (Reb Shimon Briansker) and others. As a great lover of Rabbinic literature, he amassed a rich library, but which later was incinerated in the bombardment of Volkovysk by the Nazis.

Rabbi Yaakov fell ill a couple of years before the outbreak of the last [sic: Second] World War in 1939, and died literally days before the outbreak of Second World War. In his article about Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, that appeared in *Hurban Volkovysk* [77] published in Tel-Aviv, *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* said the following:

> "Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky the *Dayan* was a great Torah scholar, a man who spent all of his days in the study of the Torah with great focus, he was totally infused with Torah in regards to his daily way of living, and in addition to this, he had an unusually phenomenal memory. He was already recognized as an expert in jurisprudence even before the *Gaon* Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov appointed him as the *Dayan* of the city. After I was appointed Rabbi in Volkovysk, Rabbi Yaakov was my best and most loyal friend and he was my right hand during all the years I served as Rabbi in Volkovysk. When I left the city in the year 5693 (1933), he remained to deal with the details of city life until the time of his passing."

Concerning the *Dayan*, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, we received the following description from Mr. Yitzhak Bereshkovsky (from Tel-Aviv):

In the year 1920, two months before the Bolsheviks captured Volkovysk, two delegates arrived from America, Avigdor Perlmutter and Hona Nakhumovsky, who brought funds with them for relatives in Volkovysk and its vicinity, in the amount of eighty thousand dollars. In that time, the Bolsheviks got closer to the outskirts of the city. Nakhumovsky returned immediately to America, and Perlmutter remained behind with the money, being unable to properly divide the funds among those Jews whom he had met. The Rabbi then called a meeting, to which the *balebatim* came, as well as a large number of the leaders of various youth groups. Perlmutter, anxious to leave Volkovysk as quickly as possible, wanted to place the funds in trust with a number of the more important *balebatim.* Rabbi Yaakov opposed this, and argued in favor of giving the money to the Rabbi and kept under his responsibility. The Rabbi, however, did not agree to take the funds.

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[77] The second part of this Trilogy.

The matter was then brought to a vote. The majority favored placing the money in trust with selected *balebatim*. Shortly before the vote was to be taken, when Rabbi Yaakov saw that his position was going to be defeated, he made a motion for a ten minute recess. Certain of the *balebatim* were opposed to this, but the youth prevailed and the recess was declared. He then gathered the leadership of the youth groups together with the American delegate, Perlmutter, and laid out the situation, [namely] that the Russians will quickly capture the city and all the houses of each and every person will be searched, and the money and possessions of all the *balebatim* will be confiscated. However, if the funds are placed with the Rabbi, it is possible that the money might yet somehow be saved. The Rabbi then consented to take the money and hide it in his house.

In July 1920 Rabbi Yaakov's prediction came true. The Russians entered the city, sent the staff of the *Cheka*[78] through the houses, among which were found a number of Jews, to help facilitate their search process. The Volkovysk Jew, *Berel Dzhik,* happened to be among the *Cheka* personnel. Rabbi Yaakov summoned Berel to him and told him the story about the money, which was hidden in the Rabbi's house. In doing this, he stressed the importance of protecting these funds for the use of the Jewish community in Volkovysk, in order to have the means to buy off the enemy in times when it would become necessary to do so. He also reminded Berel about the significant assistance and support rendered by the city to his wife and his children, during the time that he was sent away by the Czarist regime. It was therefore incumbent upon him to help rescue the Jews in his own home city, when the danger of a certain pogrom loomed over their heads. In the end, Rabbi Yaakov won Berel over, and when the search was conducted at the Rabbi's house, Berel Dzhik stood on the very spot where the money had been hidden, and issued the commands to the soldiers, who were under orders to carry out a complete search of the premises, except for the spot on which he stood. When the search was over, he signed the necessary document, that nothing had been found at the Rabbi's dwelling, and the soldiers went away. It was in this manner that Rabbi Yaakov saved the money [from being confiscated].

And as he foresaw, in October 1920 the Polish Army re-took Volkovysk and its vicinity. In the battle for the city, a well-known Polish Army Captain was slain, and because of this, as soon as the Poles secured the city, they declared that as revenge, they planned to slaughter the entire Jewish population of the city.

The decree was literally shouted down, because with the help of the rescued monies from America, the Jews were able to buy off the high officials of the Polish Army. Special institutions were also established because of these funds, whose concern was distribution of foodstuffs among the more needy members of the community. A children's kitchen was opened, in which between 400 and 500 lunches were served daily, and many more support services were set up for the benefit of the Jewish populace. All of this was achieved thanks to the wisdom and energy of Rabbi Yaakov, who dedicated his life to the city – equally for specific individuals and for the general community.

Rabbi Yaakov's two sons reside in the Land of Israel today: *Azriel Broshi* and *Moshe Berestovitsky*.

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78 The first in a long series of secret police organizations under the communists.

A Jewish Education in Volkovysk

The Jewish education in Volkovysk at the dawn of the present [sic: twentieth] century was – as it was in the entire Jewish Pale of Settlement – primarily religious and traditional. Those who educated the younger generation then, were mostly the elementary teachers, the teachers of higher grades – for *Tanakh*[79] and *Gemara* – and the Talmud Torah and the Yeshiva. There were also a number of teachers – who would give lessons in Hebrew and general subjects – and a number of them ran private schools, in which studies were conducted in a more modern "current world" fashion. But by far, the majority of the educators were comprised of old-fashioned homey type *melamdim*, among whom could be found great scholars and interesting personalities.

The Elementary Teachers

Among the elementary teachers in Volkovysk, we knew: *Moshe Meir* (the elementary teacher of the rich children), who was much loved both by the children and their parents, and his *Heder* was between Shmuel Jonah's Street and the *Neuer Gasse*, not far from the houses of Katriel the Tailor, and Motya the tinsmith; *Jesierski; Hona* (whose *Heder* was on the *Schulhof* and his wife had a food store there), who was very active in the society for the care of the sick[80]; *Chaim*, whose *Heder* was on the side street that led from *Ostroger Gasse* to *Kholodoisker Gasse*; *Eli Bulvater*, whose *Heder* was on the street near Saul the Saloon Keeper.

As was well known, the elementary teachers had "school aides" who were needed to help out the teachers, keeping an eye on the little children, bringing them to class and then taking them home. On Shabbos and Festivals, all the aides of the elementary teachers would gather up the children from their homes, bring them to the *Heder* classrooms, and from there, along with the teachers, conduct them to the old *Hiltzener Schul* (before it burned down). There, the children would take seats in the gallery, and the aides and teachers would stand in the front and listen to the Cantor's recitation of the prayers, and would respond, together with the children, *"Boruch Hu Uvarukh Shemo"* and *"Amen"* [where appropriate], and recite the *Kedusha* prayer with them.

The Writers

There was a class of elementary teachers called 'writers.' The writers would spend either an hour or a half hour with each student personally. Their students consisted of little children, beginners, and consisted mostly of girls. Studies consisted primarily of "Hebrew" (learning to read and say prayers) and 'writing,' by which is meant, being able to write a letter in Yiddish and address an envelope in Russian. Among the writers we knew: *Ruveh'keh the Writer, Yaakov Leib* (the Postman)*, Velvel the Writer*, and *Alteh the Writer.*

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79 Hebrew acronym for the composite Holy Writ, consisting of the Torah, Prophets (Nevi'im) and Hagiographica (Ketubim).

80 Called *Linat Kholim* in Hebrew, after the duty of spending the night at the home of the sick, in order to render assistance and help ease the burden the affected family.

The Regular Teachers (Melamdim)

The seasonal break for teachers was "between the times" – *Khol HaMoed* Passover and *Khol HaMoed Sukkot*. At that time, teachers would exert themselves to enroll as many students as possible for the new "semester," and the *balebatim* would carry on negotiations with many teachers concerning their children and the amount of the tuition.

Under the tutelage of the elementary teacher, a child began with learning the alphabet, acquire the skill to say prayers and recite a variety of the blessings, and was then handed over to another teacher, where he studied the Pentateuch with *Rashi* commentaries, and after that, Prophets and the Hagiographica. Later, the child would transfer to a teacher of the *Gemara,* which was considered the highest level that could be achieved from a *Heder* education.

In the *Heder*, the teachers taught with a pointer in hand. Apart from the previously mentioned subjects, the students were also taught penmanship and calligraphy. On Fridays, the Torah portion of the week was reviewed out loud. In the winter, when the children were required to learn after nightfall, they would return home carrying lanterns.

Among the *melamdim,* we recognize the following:

Moshe Ber Lipa's, who lived on the Wide Boulevard and was known for his strictness – very much in the style of the old time *melamdim.*

Naphtali, who was born in Izavelin, a son of the teacher *Moshe Leib*, was well known for his great sense of humor, and lived on the Wide Boulevard near the Schulhof. His wife was the daughter of Chaim Simcha the ritual slaughterer. He had fifteen children.[81] His pretty daughters, who were very popular, loved to sing while their were working. Their singing often blended into the sing-song of their father's chanting of the *Gemara,* which he taught. Reb Naphtali passed away immediately after the First World War.

Alter Bernstein, the Amstibover – *Der Rebbeleh*

Reb Natan – a *Gemara* teacher. He was my teacher for a short span of time, and he lived in the house of Feivel the ritual slaughterer, on Slutsky's street. He was a man of the commandments, and very quiet.

Shimon Ada's (*"Shimon der Melamed"*) – "With the Bone." He was noted as an "expert" on nullifying the effects of the Evil Eye with a sort of bone that was in his possession. He was my teacher for a while.

Nosh'keh der Melamed

Naphtali Hertz Nakhumovsky – taught *Gemara*. He was a real scholar, and the children of the most important families in the city studied in his *Heder*.

Hona der Melamed – *Shammes* of the *Mauer Schul*. He was at one time an elementary teacher, and subsequently opened a *Heder* for higher grades.

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[81] No wonder he was known for his sense of humor...

Moshe Herschel Kaplan

Herschel Yankel

Zalman "Arreshtant" – he was known by this sobriquet because he was well-known as one who could transform wild kids, who were so bad that they were called *arreshtanten* (jail material), into fine people.

Nachman Berezovsky – He was my teacher, and his *Heder* was near the hospital. Later on, he had his class at Lapin's, on the rise near the river. After modern Hebrew schooling methods began to emerge, and fewer children were attending *Heders*, Reb Nachman gave up his Heder, and was hired as a teacher of Gemara at the Volkovysk Yeshiva. In the 1920's, he emigrated to America, where he directed Talmud studies at the Chicago College for Jewish Studies. Reb Nachman was very dedicated to his pupils, who loved him and respected him very much.

David Moster

Eli Lev (Eli Dinah's)

Moshe Velvel der Melamed

Pesach Gurevich, who lived on the Ostroger Gasse. He taught children introductory *Gemara*.

Itchkeh Botvinsky (from Karczyzna).

Mr. Harkavy, known as a decent and modest man. He passed away before the First World War, and his family left and went to America. His daughter, Chava Kaminetsky, along with her husband and two daughters, were murdered at Auschwitz.

Leib Bartnovsky (Leib Roneh's)

Zvi Yaakov Rutchik (Zvi Yaakov Feygl's)

Leib Oreh (Leib Aharon Friedenberg), who taught children Pentateuch, *Tanakh*, and introductory *Gemara*. Leib Oreh was my teacher, and he was known throughout the city as a righteous man and a man who greatly feared his God. He died in January 1934, and the city organized a very imposing funeral for him. After his death, the *Volkovysker Leben* (January 19, 1934 edition) wrote about him :

> "An exemplary God-fearing man – who pursued the study of Torah for his entire life, whether alone or with others, striving always to fulfil the commandment to "learn and to teach." Apart from his great righteousness, Reb Leib Oreh distinguished himself with is charitable giving and hospitality. Living alone in the poorest of circumstances, he would distribute his entire earnings as charity, and at every instance of a charitable initiative, his contribution was the first and the largest. Every guest knew that the door was always open to him at the home of Reb Leib Oreh. Instances are known where he would give away his own bed to a guest, and would quietly spend the night on the bare earth. And all this with the greatest grace and utmost stillness —
>
> It is therefore entirely understandable, that despite the fact that it was market day, Wednesday, his funeral attracted an enormous crowd, and along the entire route of the

funeral procession, the store keepers closed down their stores. —

The deceased was eulogized by Reb Yerakhmiel Daniel, Reb Abraham Shapiro, Reb Abraham Nakhum Prush, Reb Mordechai Moorstein, Reb Eliezer Shaliota."

Modern Heders

Volkovysk also had a number of Modern *Heders* (or "Private Schools"), run by a few Hebrew teachers, who mostly also gave private lessons, or урокй (Russian for 'lessons'), in the richer abodes. Among these teachers were:

Israel Meir Rubinstein – He was my teacher, and he ran a private school, located on Slutsky's street in Berel Simcha's (Kushnir) dwelling. He school was counted among the best of the modern schools in Volkovysk. He taught Tanakh, Grammar and inculcated a great deal of Hebrew poetry into the children who learned it by heart. The discipline in his school was very good. When he taught a chapter of the Tanakh, his pupils were entranced by his enthusiasm, and the residents on the street would often stand underneath the window and listen in. His students respected him greatly, and remained steadfastly loyal to him. They would come to visit him even years later, even after they were grown up and independent people. – Israel Meir Rubinstein was born in Piesk, near Volkovysk, and his father, Rabbi Yehuda gave him a traditional education. He studied in a number of Yeshivas, and with his own effort, acquired a general education. He especially excelled in his knowledge of the Hebrew language and his thorough knowledge of the Tanakh. In his later years, he directed important educational institutions in Bialystok – and all of his student recall his name with gratitude, because he endeared himself to his students not only through his knowledge, but also his good works. Although he was himself a religious person, he was a tolerant individual and circulated in different circles, and always found an appropriate form of discourse with everyone. In his later years in Bialystok, he was also very active on behalf of the public orphanage, and other institutions. – He would contribute to a variety of Hebrew periodicals, and in 1938 a collection of his articles and short stories was published in Bialystok, under the title, "Writings." His wife, from the Yunovich family (on the Grodno Gasse), who always supported her talented husband in all of his endeavors, passed away in Bialystok in 1940 at the time of the Russian occupation, and was honored with an imposing funeral comprised of many who mourned her.

Skop der Lehrer

Nakhum Halpern – He came from Piesk. He had a very patriarchal appearance, and was very much beloved by all. A great white beard adorned his round face, out of which shone the wise eyes of a scholar. Reb Nakhum was also a contributor to "*Hatzefira*" and the young 'lovers of the Hebrew language' would come to him to snatch a bit of a conversation in Hebrew. He was known as a Zionist, and was counted as an aristocratic teacher. Reb Nakhum's school was located on the Wide Boulevard, and he taught the finest children in the city. He was a specialist in Tanakh and Grammar. He spoke in a gentle manner, with the support of deep knowledge, and left a deep impression on everyone with who he came in contact.

Shlomo Sukenik – He was a son of Chana the Butcher, who lived near the brook on the way to the cemetery. A number of years before the First World War, the young Shlomo Sukenik returned to Volkovysk from Odessa, where he studied in the Yeshiva there. For a period of time, Sukenik was a private teacher (giving hourly lessons). He introduced the work, *Bikurim* by Pinchas Shifman, and he demanded of his students that they know by heart the poetry of Bialik and Tchernikhovsky. Later on, he opened a private school from which he disseminated Hebrew language and culture to the entire city.

Aizik Lulav – Lulav's school was located on the rise in the Grodno Gasse opposite Fenster's bank counter. Lectures in the school were conducted in Hebrew. Tanakh, Grammar, Jewish History, Arithmetic and other subjects were studied with great relish. The students spoke Hebrew with the teacher and with one another. Lulav, who was very dedicated to his profession, always dressed in fine clothes and his beard was well kempt. He was well-versed in Tanakh and Grammar. All this made a good impression on students and parents.

Herschel Linevsky (Pines' son-in-law) – Also had a private school.

A. Rabinovich (der Porzever[82]) – Was running his private school up to the last years before the Second World War.

In the modern schools where Hebrew was taught, there were school desks. Children were called up by ringing a bell. The children got vacation in the summertime.

It is appropriate to record here that in Volkovysk there was a *Heder Metukan*, directed by the teachers, *Boruch Zusmanovich* and *Israel Garbakher.*

The *Real Schul*

Page 98: *A Group of Students from the Fifth Grade of the Volkovysk Real-Schul in the Year 1908*

Left to Right, Bottom Row: *Noah Liuvich, Mulya Pshenitsky, Mendel Vinogradsky, Yitzhak Kaminer*
Second Row: *Israel Gubar[83], Ivan Makhvitz (a Christian), Zus'keh Berman, Eliyahu Golomb*

In Volkovysk, there was also a private, four class Russian *Real Schul*, that was founded by *David Hubar, Sholom Barash* and other *balebatim* of means. The school was found on the hill in Lazarov's building, which was re-built as a school building. Jewish and Christian children studied in the Real Schul, and the curriculum was the same as in the public school. I was a student at the *Real Schul* in the years 1908-1909. Among the students who studied there, were also: *Eliyahu Golomb, Zus'keh Berman, Noah Liuvich, the Dworetskys, the Gallins, Israel Hubar, Noah Kaplinsky, Kamianer,* and *the Solomons.* For a variety of reasons, the school almost immediately closed, and a Russian government Gymnasium for girls was opened there, which existed up until the time of the German occupation in the First World War.

Private Teachers

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82 Indicating his origin from the shtetl of Porozovo

83 In Russian, because there is no letter 'H,' the letter 'G' is used in its place. This then is the *Hubar* family that is well-documented later on. The anomalous spelling is retained where it appeared for integrity.

Page 99: *Children from the Talmud Torah in the Year 1923*

First Row, On the Right: *The Headmaster, Yerakhmiel Daniel*
On the Left: *Chana Novick, the Teacher*

In Volkovysk there were also private teachers – for secular and Hebrew studies – who gave lessons in the houses of their students. Among the teachers for secular studies were: *Weissenberg, Israel Merkin, Kobrinsky, Leizer Sokolsky, and Eliyahu Eliyovich.* Among the private Hebrew teachers were: *Herschel Linevsky* (who also had a private Hebrew school), *Farber, Shereshevsky* (from Ruzhany), *Kantzopolsky, and Jesierski* (from the *Neuer Gasse*).

The Talmud Torah and The Yeshiva

An especially important place among the Volkovysk educational institutions was occupied by the Talmud Torah and Yeshiva (the name of the combined two institutions at the end was: The *Takhkemoni* School – Talmud Torah and Yeshiva).

In the Yeshiva, located on the *Schulhof*, near the *Hiltzener Bet HaMedrash*, hundreds of young men studied in bygone days. The Head of the Yeshiva was *Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel* – a truly wise man, possessed of a keen mind, and a scholar. He would give a lesson to the students of his own class. However, by and large, he would let them learn by themselves, sitting nearby with a glass of hot tea, ever ready to assist them in the case of a difficult passage, if they required his assistance. He was very much loved in Volkovysk, and took a significant role in the community life of the city.

On the night of Thursday to Friday, many Yeshiva students would spend the night studying at the *Bet HaMedrash*. Others would study at *Lev's Bet HaMedrash*, in the *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash*, and at *Zamoscheh*. Additionally, study was conducted with great speed and concentration, and they would get ready to be examined by Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky (The *Dayan*), and others.

Quite a number of young men from the surrounding towns also studied at the Yeshiva. A number of them would take their daily meals with relatives and acquaintances, and those without relatives or friends in the city, were looked after by the general Jewish population of the city. The best of these "daily meals" was to be had with the butchers, who would give these pious young boys generous portions, and they considered it an honor and sacred duty [to do so]. There were also ordinary Jewish folk in the city, who would feed entire groups of Yeshiva students in this way. Among these Jewish people were: *Rabbi Joseph Berestovitsky (the Beer Brewer),* in whose house, every Wednesday, between 10-15 Yeshiva students received a meal. His wife, *Gittl Rash'eh,*
and her cousin *Chava*, and the servants in the house undertook this work with great fear of God, and great earnestness. When the boys would sit at the table and eat all the delicacies with appetite, and afterwards recite the *mezuman* blessing out loud – the members of the household would stand in a corner and their hearts would swell with satisfaction!

It was in this manner that the Volkovysk Jews supported the Yeshiva, sustained its students, and took pride in their religious cultural center.

After the great fire, when the Yeshiva was rebuilt anew, with the help of the Heller family and Reb Joseph Berestovitsky the Beer Brewer (*Yoss'l der Birrer*), a *Bet HaMedrash* was also added to the second floor. Once could find the distinguished members of the community there, saying their prayers with the students and the Head of the Yeshiva.

A *Gabbai* of the Yeshiva was *Reb Aaron Lifschitz*, the well-known manufacturer-merchant. He was a great thinker and a very intelligent Jew. He fought for the modernization of the Yeshiva, and supported Jewish culture and the Hebrew language with all his heart and soul.

Among the instructors and teachers in the Talmud Torah and the Yeshiva – at various times – were: *Svietsky; Aizik Lulav; Shereshevsky* (who directed *Tanakh* studies), and periodically wrote for [the periodical] *HaOlam*: *Sholom the Scribe* (son of Herschel the Scribe); *Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel*, who apart from his duties as Head of the Yeshiva was frequently occupied with Torah courts, because he was always selected to act in a juridical capacity; *Rabbi Natan* – A Gemara Teacher; *Abraham Pesach Niegal* (from Zamoscheh); *Eli Dinheim* (taught Gemara); *[Naphtali] Hertzl Nakhumovsky* (also taught Gemara); *Nachman Berezovsky* (taught Gemara as well as Tanakh with commentaries); *Israel Garbakher, Naphtali der Melamed; Chaim Nakhum Oreh's* (whose wife dealt with cheese).

Among those who served in the Talmud Torah and Yeshiva as teachers in the later years, were teachers who had previously run their own private schools, but because in later years, as the modern Hebrew teaching methods evolved in Volkovysk – with a variety of schools and Gymnasiums – and the enrollment in the *Heder* system began to decline, they took positions in the general educational institutions (Talmud Torah and Yeshiva), where the majority of the children of the city were being educated.

According to a "report" that was published in the January 1929 edition of *Volkovysker Leben* (distributed by the Volkovysk Center in New York), there were then approximately 250 students in the Talmud Torah, of which eighty percent were from poorer households and were pursuing studies free of charge without paying tuition. According to this same "report," there were at that time seven classes, in which the following was taught: Prayers, Pentateuch with *Rashi* commentaries, the *trop* melodies for proper chanting of the Torah portions out loud, *Tanakh*, *Gemara* with the *Tosafot* commentaries, Hebrew, Grammar, History, Geography, Natural sciences, Polish, Grammar and Arithmetic. The Talmud Torah had nine instructors, a Principal and a Director. The annual budget was thirty thousand zlotys. Expenses were partly covered by tuition (from the twenty percent of the students who could pay tuition) and support from Jews in Volkovysk – all this brought in twelve thousand zlotys; the remainder was covered through the American "*Ezrat Torah*," landsleit from Volkovysk and other sources.

On February 7, 1930, the leadership of the Talmud Torah published an open letter in the weekly paper, *Volkovysker Leben* (no. 148) – "An open letter to the Ladies Society of the Volkovysk organizations in New York and Chicago," in which it requested assistance from the organizations for the Volkovysk Talmud Torah. In the "open letter," the following appeared, among other things:

> "In the central Talmud Torah, about 160 children pursue studies, who are from the Jewish populace of towns surrounding our city. There are eight teachers who provide instruction in Jewish and general studies, and our expenses run in excess of two thousand zlotys a month. We have no sources of income, because the parents, who are among the poorest of the city, are not in a position to pay for the education of their children, and income is generally very small because of the straitened economic circumstances that prevail in the city, such that we owe the teachers [back pay] for a number of months, and if we will not receive significant

support from another source, we stand – God forbid – in front of a catastrophe, and the Talmud Torah, which is the one institution to provide poor Jewish children with a suitable Jewish and secular education, is in danger of being closed."

The "Open Letter" is signed by: *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* – the Rabbi of the city, *Yaakov Berestovitsky* – the Dayan, *Eliyahu Bykovsky* – the Treasurer of the Talmud Torah and Yeshiva, *David Yitzhak Pinkhosovsky, Aizik Neiman, Ze'ev Wolf Bliakher, Joseph Berestovitsky (*Beer Brewer*), Yaakov Matskevich, Dov ben Reb Yitzhak Poliachek, Yitzhak Novogrudsky, Joseph Gurevich, Mikhl Jesierski, Abraham Yitzhak Chopin, Nakhum Lades, Joseph Yunovich, Eliezer Shaliota, Jehoash Binkovich, Shmuel Sholom Weiner, Yekhezkiel Adin, Joshua Ginsberg, Abraham-Eli Markus, Shmuel Zapoliansky* (Shmuel Chaim Bayl'keh's), *Moshe Rutchik (*Zhelenevicher*), Mordechai Moorstein, Leib Aharon Friedenberg (*Leib Oreh*), Sholom Gordon (*Scribe*), Alter, ben Reb Shmuel Shalakhovich, Leib Ditkovsky, Ze'ev ben Reb Kalman Kaplan, Joseph-Leib Rabinovich.*

And despite this, not looking at the difficult financial situation of the Talmud Torah, the leadership presented its plan in an energetic fashion and exerted itself to implement many improvements in the operation of the Talmud Torah. As an example, we read the following notice in the October 13, 1930 edition of the *Volkovysker Leben* (No. 178) from *Takhkemoni*:

"The leadership of the central 'Takhkemoni' School (Talmud Torah), in striving to give the children , apart from a religious education, in the full sense of the word, also a worldly education in a broad measure, in order that they grow up to be observant Jews, cultured people, and of benefit to the community, has for the coming year arranged as Headmaster a very energetic individual [in the person of] Mr. Grossbart.

Apart from his excellent qualifications for his duties as a teacher of Polish and world affairs – he has, along with the entire body of teaching personnel, energetically applied himself to instill strong discipline among the children, and in general to make Takhkemoni a superior school.

The results that have already been achieved are noteworthy. The children have adopted a strong discipline, the appearance of the school has materially improved – both internally and externally. An attractive use of school hats has been introduced, which many of the students are already wearing –

A great deal of attention is paid to make sure that the children are always cleanly dressed and washed. The teachers control the cleanliness of the children on a daily basis. A recreation room has been created for the children, where they spend their recess time under the supervision of the teachers.

For the future, we project – the creation of a school library, as well as the purchase of certain physical goods deemed absolutely necessary – "

In 1937, there was an assembly of the city dignitaries, and it was decided to undertake an initiative to enlarge the enrollment of the Talmud Torah through financial support by sale of memberships, yahrzeits, candle-lighting, etc. The mission was delegated to a committee of 15 *balebatim* which was elected at that time. It was also decided by the committee to establish a 'Pedagogical Committee' whose purpose was to place the curriculum of the Talmud Torah on a central standard, following the directives of modern pedagogic theory.

At the time of the First World War, during the German occupation, in Volkovysk as in many of the other

cities of Poland, a movement started for a modern Jewish national school program in Hebrew – which in the course of time, brought about the founding of a whole array of various modern Hebrew *Volksschule* and middle schools in Volkovysk.

Volkovysk was known as a Zionist city, and the Zionists and Hebraists played a significant role in the community and cultural life of the Volkovysk Jewish community. Despite this, the Yiddishists and socialist organization in Volkovysk established their own Jewish *Volksschule* which belonged to the school network of the Central Yiddish School Organization of Poland, around which the so-called "cosmopolitan" and "progressive" elements of the Volkovysk Jewish community grouped themselves.

The Yiddish *Volksschule*

Page 104: *Teaching Personnel of the Volksschule in the Year 1917*
Right to Left, *Bottom Row: Finkelstein, unknown, Herschel Galiatsky*
Second Row: Miss Khananovich, Pearl Lev (The Bialystoker Baker's daughter)
Third Row: Eliyahu Khmelnitsky, Frank, Raphael Lemkin, Moshe Kaplinsky

Before the establishment of the school by the Central Yiddish School Organization, a Yiddish *Volksschule* already existed that had been opened in 1919. We will introduce here a chapter of memoirs sent to us by the renown pedagogue, *Shimon Krinsky* (who lives in America today, in Wilmington) in which can be found interesting anecdotes of that period:

"I will never forget that historic accomplishment. It was Purim of 1919. A group of teachers and culture activists from Yiddishist circles gathered to respectfully hear a "report" regarding child education in the large auditorium of the Bialystoker "Community Committee." After the presentation, *Dr. Israel Rubin*, Director of the Yiddish *Volksschule* and Secretary of the Culture League of the Bialystoker Circle called me into his office and said: 'Krinsky, we have obtained an important position: Volkovysk. A school awaits the right pedagogue and man of culture. A building, children [to teach], a committee and funding – everything is organized. We can't lose any time. The school must be opened immediately after Passover. You must travel immediately for a meeting with the committee.'

To tell the truth, I was a bit intimidated by Volkovysk. I knew the city well, from having attended the "kibbutz" of Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov. Volkovysk, along with its Hebraists and idealistic Zionists, had a reputation in Poland. I was fearful of such "zealots" as *Yud'l Novogrudsky, Moshe Rubinovich, Batinko, Yankel Neiman, Zvi Weinstein, Raphael Lemkin, Mordechai Leib Kaplan and Levin.* The Hebrew school had the reputation of being one of the best between Bialystok and Baranovich. It was only after I met with the committee, in Khmelnitsky's house, that I first apprehended Dr. Rubin's elation: we had [indeed] obtained an important position – Volkovysk. With people like *Khmelnitsky, Rosa Einhorn, Leizer Sokolsky, Yitzhak Merkin, Lantzevitzky,* and *Yelsky* a modern Yiddish *Volksschule* in Volkovysk will thrive.

With public fanfare amidst a festive air, right after Passover, the first *Volksschule* opened in the spacious house on the *Ostroger Gasse* with eight rooms. The teaching staff consisted of: *Kagan, Kantor, Schneider, Merkin, Landevitzky*[84], and *Krinsky.* I took over the Hebrew studies in all classes, and history for the upper classes. All sessions were taught in Yiddish. The *Volksschule* became the center for Yiddish culture and

[84] Possibly a mis-spelling of *Lantzevitzky*.

knowledge. Lectures and courses in Hebrew and Yiddish for adults were offered each evening. The progressive elements of the city organized themselves around the school. One hundred thirty children filled the eight airy classrooms of the school.

It was not only among *Poalei Tzion* and Yiddishist circles that this new and important institution was elevated, but the entire city, the Yiddish-minded community, and even the Zionists lent their support. The first concert given by the school, on the Saturday night of July 3, 1920 in Botvinsky's cinema theater, bore witness to the fact that the school would be around for a long time. *Lantzevitzky*, with his dedicated and committed effort and love for the school, contributed an enormous amount to the realization of the concert. The theater was festively decorated with an exhibition of the work of the children on may subjects. —

After the concert, we had a meeting at the school, where we broadened the scope of our activities in which we hoped to derive much *nachas* from our children, the up and coming builders of the great and productive settlement in Poland. However, this was not to be. Because of the Red advance (of the Bolsheviks) and later, the anti-Semitic incidents in the new "free" Poland, the atmosphere became stifling and dangerous to the progressive elements that had rallied within the ambit of the *Volksschule*, and the bright freshening chapter of the *Volksschule* in Volkovysk came to an end. —

Mr. Sh. Krinsky later left Poland – and today he is in America, where he occupies a prominent position as a well-known Hebrew educator and author of various works. But a Yiddish *Volksschule* was opened yet again in Volkovysk, and as already mentioned, carried on its work as the Volkovysk Branch of the Yiddish School Organization of Poland.

In the year 1929, evening adult courses were also introduced in Volkovysk by the Yiddish School Organization for the working public.

The Yiddish *Volksschule* would also carry out various special events on school holidays. Thus, for example, on the second day of *Shavuot* of the year 1929 the Yiddish Organization in Volkovysk arranged (according to the *Volkovysker Leben* No. 206) a grandiose holiday festival by the children for the children – put on by the children of the Yiddish *Volksschule*. In the program [were]: marches, singing, acting, dancing, speeches, etc.

In 1930, there were already four classes in the Volkovysk Yiddish *Volksschule*, and a kindergarten. Fifty percent of the children paid no tuition whatsoever, and the remainder only paid a small amount, which barely covered 25 percent of the budget, and it was only because of the tremendous commitment of the teachers, and those active on behalf of the school, that it was possible to sustain and develop the school.

In Volkovysk, a Yiddish Library also functioned, in which the best Yiddish and general literature could be found.

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As we have previously indicated, in Volkovysk the techniques of modern Hebrew pedagogy were widespread and deeply rooted. The movement to create a modern Hebrew school, which in Volkovysk began during the time of the German occupation, found its loyal supporters in the persons of *Yud'l Novogrudsky,* and *Moshe*

Rubinovich, who worked ceaselessly to secure Hebrew education for their home town. Thanks to their energy and effort, in Volkovysk were founded: first – A Hebrew Kindergarten (*Gan Yeladim*), later – A Hebrew *Volksschule* (*Bet Sefer Amami BeVolkovysk*), and finally, a Hebrew Gymnasium (*Hertzeliya*).

Our Volkovysk *landsleit* will doubtless find it interesting to read the description of *Mr. Yud'l Novogrudsky*, regarding the establishment of the Hebrew school system , and we therefore reproduce here, with pleasure, an article about the Hebrew school system, which Mr. Novogrudsky – who is today in Israel – sent to us from Tel-Aviv.

The Hebrew School System in Volkovysk

By Yud'l Novogrudsky
Tel-Aviv, ISRAEL

Page 109: Active Workers and Teachers of the Modern Hebrew School system in Volkovysk in the Year 1920

Right to Left
First Row, Bottom: Mordechai Leib Kaplan, unknown, Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), Shereshevsky
Second Row: Joseph Pines, Yaakov Milikovsky, Azriel Berestovitsky (Broshi), Moshe Rubinovich, Skop, Yaakov Gurevich, Batinko

Page 111: The First Years of the Hebrew Volksschule

Top: Students and Teachers
From Left to Right, standing, are the teachers: Paveh, Mordechai Leib Kaplan, Moshe Rubinovich, Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), Two unidentified teachers, and Batinko

Middle: Portrait of the Younger Classes of the Volksschule in the Year 1920

Among the Teachers (from Right to Left): Joseph Pines, Yaakov Milikovsky, Skop and Batinko

Bottom: Portrait of the Higher Class in 1919
Right to Left, the first row – the Teachers: Shereshevsky, Weinstein, Kaplan

The theme, with which I am coming to grips, takes me back to a bygone time which has been drowned in a sea of blood, that also swallowed up the life of my dear and unforgettable friend *Moshe Rubinovich*, the creator and builder of the Hebrew school system.

The echoes of bygone times swim up to the surface of my memory, when two inspired young men (Novogrudsky and Rubinovich – M.E.), still wet behind the ears, dreamt about the revival of the ancient, yet modern, Hebrew language.

In their conversations, the young men wove the plans for how they could attract the youth of Volkovysk to the Zionist renewal movement, how to lay the foundation for the education of the emerging generation in the spirit of the Jewish renaissance. Step by step they proceeded along the path that they held to be the only way of life for the Jewish people. With small, circumscribed steps, they laid the foundation for a Hebrew library,

which in time, developed into an important institution, which provided spiritual nourishment for the young people. A young circle of "Lovers of the Hebrew Language" grew up around the library, to which the Gymnasium student *Raphael Lemkin* belonged, today a well-known professor of international law in America. A couple of years later, they founded the first kindergarten in Volkovysk. I recall how, together with Moshe Rubinovich, we went to the homes of the parents, in order to persuade them to send their children to the kindergarten, which was viewed by them as some sort of a strange school, where the children are taught to play and dance. Our efforts were rewarded with consent. The kindergarten attracted the sympathies of the parents, who with considerable interest, sent their children to the first and only Prebel[85] School in Volkovysk. But the Prebel School was but a step in the creation of the *Hebrew Volksschule.* Then, 39 years ago, [establishment of] Hebrew schools, despite the existence of a *Volksschule* program, was a rare occurrence, and Moshe Rubinovich can rightfully claim to be called one of the original pioneers of Hebrew education in Poland in general.

"We must not be daunted by any manner of difficulties" – Moshe would argue with me. "The Hebrew *Volksschule* must be established, our older supporters, *Sholom Barash* and *David Hubar* have taken care of establishing a Russian Real-Schul on the *Lazaret Barg*. We must be concerned with providing for the new generation to be educated in the atmosphere of the spirit of Zionist renewal, so that from earliest childhood, it will be infused with the spirit of our Prophets and Hasmoneans, and that secular subject also be taught in Hebrew, – then a generation will grow up with a proud sense of Jewish identity, which will sunder its bonds with the diaspora existence, and break through to a new, free Jewish living experience."

It is to wonder, how two young men had the nerve to undertake the creation of such a learning institution, in which only large organizations can indulge themselves. But belief and inspiration can work wonders, and the Hebrew *Volksschule* in Volkovysk became a reality.

Hundreds of children were educated in the school. Poorer parents paid no tuition at all. Also, a larger part of parents who were in straitened circumstances, paid a minimal amount of money. It was arranged to retain teachers of the first rank in pedagogy, among them many with advanced education. Among the first teachers of the *Volksschule*, who contributed to the development of the school, we must recall the names of *Zvi Carmeli (*Weinstein*)*, who today is in America, and *Azriel Broshi (*Berestovitsky*)*, who is today a recognized figure in Israel.

Among the directors of the school, it is worth the especially mention: *A. Luvoshitsky* a famous Hebrew poet, and author of many pedagogic works; *Dr. Shafel,* the famous pedagogue and teacher of Judaic Studies, *Yitzhak Shkarlat*; and the very popular pedagogue *Gottesfeld*. These are all names that speak very much to the hearts of former students of the Volkovysk *Volksschule*, who today live in Israel, America and other lands. Moshe Rubinovich accomplished his purpose in life with the establishment of the *Volksschule.* He would leave his business affairs many times in order to attend, day and night, to the issues of the school. Images of those times live on in my memory, when we would receive each and every father of a prospective student with a fluttering heart, overflowing with happiness and good fortune. Shaking from the cold, we would sit in the poorly heated location of Papa's house on the *Grodno Gasse*, spending long winter nights in discussion with teaching personnel about the curriculum. Thanks to the supernatural effort that was invested in the development of the school, one way or another, the school made progress from year to year.

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[85] Based on the teachings of an educator, named Prebel. See the later anecdote regarding Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg on page 204.

The school served as a model for the surrounding towns where similar schools were opened. The school also helped to introduce the ideal of the Jewish way of life into the hearts of its students and their families. And it was in this fashion that the school became a Zionist factor in the first degree. Not only the youth of Volkovysk, but also the mature generation was swept along by the Zionist tide. It must be emphasized that Volkovysk became renown in the central office of the Zionist organization in Warsaw as a bastion of Zionism. Volkovysk stood out by virtue of the disproportionate sums of money it raised for the *Keren Kayemet* and *Keren HaYesod.*[86] A large pioneer movement of *halutzim* also developed among the young people, which also influenced the surrounding towns. And if today, we have a large Volkovysk *landsmanschaft* in Israel, we have to thank the indirect influence of the Volkovysk *Volksschule.*

The activists of the Hebrew *Volksschule* also dreamed of creating a *Hebrew Gymnasium,* where the graduates of the school will be able to continue their parochial and general education. "We must," – Moshe Rubinovich said to me – "Create a new type of Jewish intellectual, who will draw his spiritual sustenance from the treasures of Jewish culture, and be worthy of carrying out the great historic mission of our generation."

Moshe Rubinovich was not only one to have good ideas, but also capable of getting things done. For him, there were no difficulties that could restrain him. His will was strong, and his belief in the renaissance of the old-new Jewish culture was rock solid. An his will, in time, took on tangible form. We rented an appropriate premises in the former tobacco factory owned by Yanovsky on the Wide Boulevard, which was renovated to the specifications of a school, and qualified teaching personnel were retained. And on one fine morning, placards were pasted all over the city which informed the public about the birth of the new *Hebrew Gymnasium, "Hertzeliya."* The acceptance of the Gymnasium exceeded all expectations. The Gymnasium was one of 16 Gymnasiums in Poland.

Thanks to the Hebrew *Volksschule* and the Gymnasium, Volkovysk became a "spiritual center" for the surrounding province. Male and female students were attracted even from bigger cities, such as Slonim and Baranovich, to the Volkovysk Gymnasium. The influence of the Volkovysk educational institutions not only transcended the boundaries of the Volkovysk district, but also the boundaries of time in which they were active...

With great respect and gratitude, the pupils of the Volkovysk *Volksschule* and Gymnasium who live in Israel and other lands, must preserve the memory of *Moshe Rubinovich*, the creator and builder of the Hebrew school system in Volkovysk, which provided a purpose in life, and showed a way to live ... in respect to his sacred memory!

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Page 112: Children and Teachers of the Volksschule in the Year 1923

Among the teachers are found: Bella Alperin, Esther Wallach, Rosenfeld, Sarah Liss.
Among the children are found: Penina Levin, Yenta Patsovsky, Nechama Resnick, Bluma Stolovitsky, Moshe Wilk, Sonya Pisetsky, Nechama Shklavin, Rosa Berg, Rosa Vlosky, Chas'sheh Weinstein, Kravchik, Sonya Novogrudsky, Kalmanovich, Chaya Kaminetsky, Shuv.

Page 113: A Group of Teachers from the Tarbut Schul in the Year 1932

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[86] Precursors to the Jewish National Fund.

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Miss Zilberman, Fishl Weinstein, Miss [Batya] Landsberg
Second Row, Seated: Eliezer Kapelyushnik, Rothfeld, Luvoshitsky, Moshe Rubinovich (the Founder), Yud'l Novogrudsky (the Co-Founder), Miss Berliner[87]
Third Row, Standing: Zilber, Chana Turbovich, Y(itzhak) Itzkowitz, Hedva

Page 114: A Tarbut School Class from the Year 1923

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Assia Getzelevich, Winetsky (The handbag maker's daughter), Jonah Tronsky, Chasia Getzelevich
Second Row, The Teachers: Shoshana Levin, Miss Garbarsky, Shklavin, unknown, unknown
Third Row: Winetsky (The handbag maker's second daughter), Chopin (Yankel's daughter), Chaya Lazarovsky, A Teacher, Golda Gordon (The scribe's daughter), Malka Fuchsman (The Hassid's daughter), Rivka Tannenbaum (The ironmonger's daughter)

Page 115: Children of the Day School with their Teachers in the Year 1925

Right to Left, The Teachers: Chana Turbovich, Esther Wallach, Batya Landsberg,
Among the children are found: Miriam Levin, Taib'l Linevsky, Rachman, Shoshana Novogrudsky, Anya Peisik, Chaya Kaminetsky, Dora Kaplan, Sarah Galai, Ronya Kimmelman, Natan Levin, Isser Shkolnik, Mordechai Polonsky, Shoshana Goldberg, Chaim Weiner, Manya Einstein, Goldrei, Moshe Moorstein, Pearl Wilk, Dora Taran, Sarah Mushatsky, Lyuba Kavushatsky

Page 116: A Tarbut Class from the Year 1926

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Kreineh Levitt, Chaya Daniel, Zilpa Kaplan, Baylah Leivkovich, Zvi Werner
Second Row: Lunsky, unknown[88] *, Rothfeld, Aharon Luvoshitsky (The Director), unknown*[89]*, Zilber, Weinstein, Y[itzhak] Itzkowitz*
Third Row: Zipporah Movshovich, Chaya Vinnik, Zipporah Stolovitsky, Khien'keh[90] *Galansky, Dvora Lev, Esther Yudzhik, Baylah Lifschitz*
Fourth Row: Yitzhak Goldberg, Avigdor Kalir, Feivel Paveh, Hannan Azersky (Ozer)

Page 117: Students & Teachers of the Sixth Grade of Tarbut in the Year 1935

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Unknown, Masha, Tzil'eh[91] *Mazover, Lyuba, Jocheh [Jocheved] Linevsky, Nehemiah Bikuvitsky*

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87 Seemingly erroneous, since the picture shows a man sitting in this position.

88 Seemingly the same individual incorrectly identified as "Miss Berliner" in the photo on Page113

89 An oversight: clearly *Miss Batya Landsberg* (see prior pictures)

90 Along with *Khieneh*, a nickname for Hannah.

91 Along with Tzil'yeh and Tzil'ikeh, nicknames for the Hebrew name, Tzila, referring to a shady (i.e. restful place).

Second Row: Unknown, Y[itzhak] Itzkowitz, A Teacher, Schwartz (A Teacher), Rosenfeld (Principal), Pudels, [Chana] Nemlikh (A Teacher), Yuvel (A Teacher), Kaddel [Katriel?]
Third Row, Standing: Taiba Rotberg, Masha, Malka, Fanya, Shayn'dl, Yulin, Mikhlah, Rivka Horowitz, Genya[92] Berg

The dedicated work of *Yud'l Novogrudsky* and *Moshe Rubinovich* produced very good results, and the Hebrew school system put down very deep roots into the life of the Volkovysk Jewish community. The Hebrew *Volksschule* developed very well. In setting the level of tuition for those who attended in the *Volksschule*, the economic circumstances of each and every family was taken into account, and it was made possible to give every give their children a parochial Hebrew education without a single exception. Studies were on a higher level. Children who completed their course of study were accepted without having to take an entrance examination, at technical schools, teacher's seminaries and commercial schools. Among the prominent teachers at the Hebrew *Volksschule* was *Mr. Koppel Weinstein.*

The best Zionist and community resources of the Volkovysk Jewish community concentrated themselves within the Hebrew educational system, and there were occasions, from time to time, when friction and dispute arose between parents and the ranks of the teaching faculty, pertaining to differences of opinion over the curriculum and the direction of the school. It was in this fashion, for example, that a dispute arose in 1930, when the school administration dismissed the older teachers, and replaced them with new teachers. The children were on the side of the older teachers – and meetings were held in the city over this issue. The older teachers brought Mr. Moshe Gordon from Warsaw, the Vice President of the central committee of "*Tarbut*" in Warsaw, and Mr. A. Gelman, the Chairman of the Teachers Organization of Poland. A meeting was arranged in which a new leadership of twelve people was elected, with the engineer, *Ephraim Barash* as the head – which had to negotiate with the existing powers that the school [administration] be turned over to the newly elected [officials].

Ignoring however, such small instances of friction, the Hebrew school system progressed from year to year, and in time, the *Tarbut* school also provided courses to learn a trade.

The "*Kadima*" *Volksschule*

In 1931, a *Volksschule* called "*Kadima*" also opened. The language of instruction of "*Kadima*" was Polish. All studies were conducted in accordance with the curriculum of the Polish government schools. However, in a substantial measure, Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographica, Hebrew and Jewish History, were also taught. The Headmaster of the school was *Yaakov Neiman* (Hanokh Neiman's son), and one of the well-known teachers of "*Kadima*" was *A. Rabinovich*. The "*Kadima*" school, which had six grades, was located at No. 18 *Rynkowa [Gasse]*[93]. The children who completed the course of study at the school, were eligible to enter either the Hebrew Gymnasium or the Polish Gymnasium.

The "*Yavneh*" Hebrew School

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92 Because of the interchangeability of 'G' and 'H' in Russian, this name is equivalent to *Henya*. However, a review of the text does not reveal any inadvertent use of the two forms for the same person.

93 This is the Polish Name for the Wide Boulevard (*Die Brayteh Gasse*)

Page 119: *Sixth Grade Class of the Yavneh School in the Year 1935*
(Taken at the time of Tzipa Katzin's son's aliyah to the Land of Israel)

A "*Yavneh*" School also existed in Volkovysk. This school, which had seven grades, was located on the New Street. The director of the school was *H. Grossbart*.

The "*Yavneh*" school stood out because of its well-known teachers. For a certain period, the Acting Headmaster of the "*Yavneh*" school was *Rabbiner Dr. Scheib*, who also conducted the higher classes in Jewish studies – in place of *Prof. Zilberman,* who had occupied this position previously in the "*Yavneh*" school. *Dr. Scheib* had been recommended for this position in the "*Yavneh*" school – in which studies were conducted in a religious-national spirit – through the Chairman of the *Torah VaAvodah* Movement in Eastern Galicia.[94]

The "*Herzteliya*" Hebrew Gymnasium

Page 120: *Sixth Grade Class of the Volkovysk "Herzteliya" Gymnasium in the Year 1935*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Nakhum Lev, Moshe Kasovsky, Boyer (Educator), Chana Nemlikh (A Teacher), Fanya Mazover, a student from the province, Daniel Lemkin*

Second Row: Joseph Kaplan, A student from Svislucz, Epstein, Henya Moorstein, Yitzhak Shalkovich, Ulla Yaffa, Miriam Okulnitsky, Shipiatsky, Liova Meshengisser, Kaplan

Third Row: David Rossiansky, Misha Shkolnikovich, Noah Lidsky, Zvi Kavushatsky, Aharon Shaliota, Aharon Shereshevsky, A student from the province

Page 121: *A Group of Students from the Eighth Grade of the "Hertzeliya" Gymnasium in Volkovysk, in the Year 1937*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Ulla Yaffa, A student from the province, Fanya Mazover, Liova Meshengisser, Joseph Kaplan
Second Row: Nakhum Lev, Zvi Kavushatsky, Meir Marotchnik, Misha Shkolnikovich, Serlin
Third Row: Two students from the province

Page 122: *The Government Gymnasium on the Lazar Hill*

Right: – The path to the Lazar Street; Left: The Smithy

Page 123: *A Group of Gymnasium Students in the Year 1928*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Shimon Yudzhik, Rachel Khananovich, Zlatkeh Schein, Rachel Zayantz,

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[94] In '*Volkovysk,*' edited by Katriel Lashowitz, *Nechama Schein-Weissman* offers the following correction:
And it is worth correcting yet another inaccuracy regarding the work of Dr. Scheib. On page 118, it says that Dr. Scheib was the principal who was responsible for the *Yavneh* School, but the truth is that Dr. Scheib began his pedagogical career in Volkovysk in 1935 as a teacher at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium – in the same year that I began to work for that institution as a secretary.

Hirsch Vlosky
Second Row: Millie Kaplan, Tzil'eh Shaliota, Daniel Kaganovich, Chaya Khatzkelevich, Ethel Kushnir, Hinde Lytus
Third Row: San'eh Lifschitz, Leizer Bliakher, Yaakov Botvinsky, Beryl Rivatsky
Fourth Row: Abraham Turiansky, Regina Grodzhensky, Herschel Schein, Monya Movshovsky, Yaakov Makov

As already said, the educational activists were not satisfied with a kindergarten and with the Hebrew *Volksschule*, and they did not rest until they founded the "*Hertzeliya*" Hebrew Gymnasium. In an article, which appeared about the Hebrew Gymnasium "*Hertzeliya*" in the *Volkovysker Stimme* (published by the Volkovysk Center in New York) of January 1929, the following is told:

> "It is more than ten years that a Hebrew *Volksschule* exists among us, which has attracted popularity and great prestige among all classes of Jews in Volkovysk. Three years ago, the leaders of the school organized a Gymnasium in order to create the possibility for the students to receive a higher education. In the Gymnasium – apart from *Tanakh, Mishna*, Talmud, Literature and Jewish History – arithmetic, geography and all the other branches of general studies are taught, in Hebrew. The education develops a sense of national identity among the students, gives them a basic grasp of our literary treasures and gives them general knowledge as is provided in the higher government schools. – The income of the Gymnasium is rather small. Only twenty of the 85 students pay tuition, and the remainder are not always able to pay the full fee. The monthly outlay of the Gymnasium are on the order of 2,800 zlotys."

The children that completed the course of study at the Hebrew *Volksschule*, were able to enter immediately into the "*Hertzeliya*" Hebrew Gymnasium.

Initially, the Gymnasium did not have any external governance, but later – in the 1928-1929 school year – the Gymnasium passed under the aegis of "*Tarbut*." In this manner, it became integrated into the Hebrew school system network in Poland, which had a little at a time, acquired explicit authority.

Among the prominent teachers of the Hebrew Gymnasium were: *Mr. Wald,* teacher of general history, and *Yaakov Itzkowitz*.

A dispute erupted in 1937 among the leadership of the Gymnasium, about which it is written in *Volkovysker Leben* (No. 522) of September 19, 1937:

> "Friction arose in the Gymnasium from the fact that two members of the "*Hertzeliya*" Board, which supervised the Gymnasium, together with a number of teachers of the Gymnasium, had secretly, during the vacation period, decided to close the Hebrew Gymnasium and in its place, found a new gymnasium in which subjects would be taught in the Polish language. In this move, all the assets of the Hebrew Gymnasium would be transferred to the new Gymnasium, which would be run by a completely different Board. In connection with this, the initiators had already taken control of the operation both from the local administration and the Vilna district.
>
> However, the majority of the "*Hertzeliya*" Board together with the Director of the Gymnasium, Mr. *Mordechai Halevy Sakhar*, when they learned of the plan, they categorically opposed it,

and in that connection, there were incidents that arose that assumed a sharp form.

The conflict caused the intervention of the Chairman of the local authority, and also the Chairman of the Vilna district office, who had only recently visited the Gymnasium, and had confidently declared that the Gymnasium had all the attributed required to assure its survival and development.

Thanks to the visit of the Chairman of the District, who by the way, undertook to negotiate with both sides, the situation in the Gymnasium finally stabilized, and it is to hope that the normal course of study will not be disrupted."

As it appears from a variety of news bulletins and notices in *Volkovysker Leben* – and perhaps this was as a result of the controversy – the name of the Hebrew Gymnasium ("*Hertzeliya*") was changed to "The Hebrew Gymnasium Named for Ch. N. Bialik" The new name did not intimidate the opponents of the Gymnasium, who spread rumors (in the year 1937) that the Gymnasium was planning to shorten its Hebrew curriculum and introduce more Polish, but the Director, *Mordechai Halevy Sakhar* openly confronted and dispelled these rumors, and called on the Volkovysk Jewish community to support the school.

Private Trade Schools, The *Tarbut* Gymnasium, The T.K.A. Gymnasium and the "*Yavneh*" Trade School[95]

Page 124: *Graduates of the Government Gymnasium in the Year 1937*

Right to Left, First Row, Sitting: Herschel Davidovsky, Elijah Binkovich, Karpel Khananovich
Second Row, Standing: Chaim Kossowsky, Shepsel Epstein, Moshe'l Polonsky, Abraham Makov

Page 125: *The Gymnasium on the Lazar Hill*

In 1937, there also was a private four-year trade school in Volkovysk. It was a purpose-oriented school of the Gymnasium type, which also gave its students a full humanities course, and also a Judaic course along the lines of the Hebrew Middle Schools.

A short time before the outbreak of the Second World War, a Hebrew *Tarbut* school opened in Volkovysk. The Director of the *Tarbut* Gymnasium in 1939 was *Mr. Wolfstahl*, and the President of the *Tarbut* Branch in Volkovysk was *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg.*

Volkovysk, which was not a particularly large city, nevertheless had quite a number of different middle schools, which followed a wide variety of directions in providing Hebrew education. For example, in the last years shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, there was in Volkovysk a Gymnasium with the name, "Hebrew Gymnasium T.K.A. of Volkovysk." This school was part of the school network of Brody-type schools, and Jewish studies were conducted using the methods of the previously mentioned type of school There also was in Volkovysk a middle school called "Gymnasium *Koaduk*, for Commerce,

[95] Readers interested in historical accuracy regarding the evolution of the Volkovysk school system should also consult the memoir of *Nechama Schein-Weissman*, in '*Volkovysk*' edited by Katriel Lashowitz (the third part of this Trilogy) on p.64 of that book. As a participant in the events of the day, she identifies that a number of the facts presented here are somewhat inaccurate.

sponsored by the '*Yavneh*' Histadrut of Volkovysk." This Gymnasium enjoyed all of the rights of government schools. English was taught as a foreign language. For Judaic studies – taught according to the Brody school methods – eight hours were allocated weekly for each class.

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*

The proliferating Hebrew school system in Volkovysk enveloped the adult Jewish population of Volkovysk as well. Thus, for example, evening courses in Hebrew existed in Volkovysk (initiated by the *Tarbut* Organization). There was also a Hebrew library in Volkovysk – Under the leadership of *Yaakov Ein* – which in the year 1926 counted 1,700 books, and 160 readers. A Community Hall (*Volkshaus*) also functioned (on the Wide Boulevard), in which assemblies and lectures took place – on a variety of literary and community themes – which were put together based on local efforts, and also on specially invited guests, prominent Jewish writers and lecturers from Warsaw and other places.

Jewish cultural life in Volkovysk was rich and multi-colored. True, as you will understand, there were also Polish schools in Volkovysk, and even a Polish government Gymnasium in which a small number of Jewish students went to school. But in general, the Jewish community concentrated itself around the modern national Yiddish-Hebrew educational system, and all groups and persuasions in the Volkovysk Jewish population had their own cultural and educational institutions, around which they developed a tremendous activity based on Jewish spirit, based on the political and party foundations that they chose to follow.

A vibrant and healthy Jewish cultural life pulsed in Volkovysk, literally up to the outbreak of the last {sic: Second] World War – a life that in its very prime, was cut off together with the entire Jewish population through the cruel hands of the murderous Nazis.

Zionist Movements in Volkovysk

Page 129: Celebrating the Balfour Declaration in the Year 1919

Among the participants are: Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), Anshel Bliakher, Azriel Berestovitsky (Broshi), Shprinza Bialsky, Eliyahu Mot'cheh Ginsberg, Press, Sarah & Zvi Ditkovsky, Aizik Kantzopolsky, Joseph Pines, Archik Markus, Salutsky (the Pharmacist), Yaakov Milikovsky, Gurevich, Masha Dombrovsky, Yaakov Paveh, Amstibovsky, Sarah Khvalovsky, Chana Shipiatsky, Bobeh'leh[96] Marotchnik, The two Misses Fanar, Leibl Kaplan, Daughter of the Rabbi of Piesk

Page 130: A Group of Members of HeHalutz in the Year 1920

Right to Left, First Row, from the Bottom: Y. Khomsky, Shlomo'keh Markus, Shlomo'keh Bereshkovsky, Nakhimson[97], Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Amstibovsky, Moshe Saroka
Second Row, seated center: Y. Goshchinsky, Yankel Zuckerman
Third Row, seated: Joseph Mostkov, Chaim Burstein, Ethel Lifschitz, Herschel Dworetsky, Azriel Berestovitsky (Broshi), A student (founder of the Volkovysk HeHalutz), Shprinza Bialsky, Moshe Zelitsky, Yankel Ditkovsky, Moshe Lifschitz, unknown, Eliyahu Mot'cheh Ginsberg, Nionia[98] Khvalovsky
Fourth Row, standing: A soldier (unknown), Miss Goldberg, unknown, unknown, Kayla Schein, Munya Schwartz, Rachel Gotthielf, Feivel Dombrovsky, unknown, Moorstein, Kaplan, unknown, Hanokh Saroka, Elyeh Znaidin, Davidovsky
Fifth Row: Shmuel Einhorn, Yankel Shapiro, Ditkovsky, Herschel Podolinsky, Chana Lapin, Chan'tsheh Katzin's cousin, unknown, Lana Weinstein, Fira[99] Grodzhensky, Manya Movshovsky, Taran, Miss Galiatsky, Baylah Galiatsky, Feygl Yunovich, Rachel Rip

Page 132: Section Aleph of HaShomer HaTza'ir in the Year 1922

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: Chaim Khvonyik, Shai'keh Werner, Mazya, Moshe Mandelbaum, 4 unknown people, Saul Markus, Liova Glickfeld, Boruch Beckenstein
Second Row, seated: Unknown, Mottel Ein, Moshe Alpert, Unknown, Sholom Hubar, Goldberg, Two unknown people, Joseph Beckenstein, Moshe Langbord
Third Row, standing: Abraham Anush, Herschel Wolsky, Yaakov Gershuni, Unknown, Moshe Savuolsky, Unknown, Berel Davidovsky

Page 133: Section Bet of HaShomer HaTza'ir in the Year 1922

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: Kaplan, Mazya, Gass, Winetsky
Second Row, seated: Unknown, Shkolnick, Beckenstein, Ein, Leibl Kaplan, Kaufman, Mopsik, Zalman Goldberg, Nakh'keh Schein, David Markus

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96 Diminutive for Bobeh from the Czech-Christian, *Baba.*

97 It is not possible to tell if this name should be *Nakhinson*, or is truly distinct.

98 *Niona* is one of the Yiddish diminutives for *Binyomin* (Benjamin). Also see *'Nioma.*

99 Either from *Piryah* (fruit), or *Tzippora*

Third Row, standing: Kaminer, Unknown, Unknown, Gandz, Moshe Langbord (Graf), Liev, Davidovsky, Shammai Wilk, Joseph Galiatsky, Mostkov

Even many years before political Zionism appeared in the Jewish streets of Volkovysk, there was a strong sentiment for the Land of Israel and its institutions, and the Volkovysk Jewish populace supported the Yeshivas and *Kollel* study houses with a generous hand.

Later, when *Hovevei Zion* began its activities , the *Hibat Zion* movement found many enthusiastic adherents and supporters in Volkovysk. Also, the distinguished Rabbis who occupied the seat of authority in that epoch in Volkovysk, were all ardent lovers of Zion, and they, as you can understand, strongly supported the dissemination of the idea of *Hibat Zion* among the Volkovysk Jews.

One of the greatest and best known of the Volkovysk Rabbis was the *Gaon, Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg*, who occupied the Rabbinical Seat prior to Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov. The *Gaon,* Rabbi Jonathan, who died at a very young age, was known not only as one of the great Torah scholars of that generation, but also as a wise man, a writer and a thinker, and all of the wise men of his generation would correspond with him, and value his opinions. In this manner, Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky tells – in his article, which he wrote in *Hurban Volkovysk* – that he found a letter written from *Rabbi Sh. Y. Fein* of Vilna[100], the well-known Hebrew writer for *Hovevei Zion*, among the books of Rabbi Eliasberg. The letter dealt with the question of an important meeting, which was called before the first Zionist Congress in Katowice, about sixty years ago.[101]

When political Zionism appeared, it found great resonance in Volkovysk, and drew to it entire cohorts of important Volkovysk *balebatim*, who organized themselves into a Union that took the name, *B'nai Zion*. In 1902, members of this organization included: *Aaron Shifmanovich, Jekuthiel Roiman, Jekuthiel Novick, Aryeh Leib Markus, Moshe Mordechai Zelitsky, Shmuel Jonah Novogrudsky* and *Aaron Lifschitz*. The Steering Committee of the Union consisted of the following people: *Koppel Isser Volkovysky* -- Chairman of the Committee; *Shmuel Shapiro* – Treasurer; *Nakhum Halpern* (The Teacher) – Secretary; *Israel Efrat, Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky, Moshe Galai, Eliezer Yudzhik, & Shmuel David Yunovich* – Members of the Committee.

At a meeting of the Union that was held in the summer of 1902, The Volkovysk *B'nai Zion* elected *Aharon Lifschitz* as their representative to the Zionist Conference, that was at that time called for Minsk.

The Zionist sentiment in Volkovysk began to assume concrete form, and in the first years of the current [sic: 20th] century, before the outbreak of the First World War, individual Volkovysk Jews emigrated to the Holy Land and settled there. Others bought parcels in the Holy Land – in the hope that they would settle there as an ultimate objective. Many Volkovysker Zionists sent their children to study at the *Hertzeliya* – the first Hebrew Gymnasium that was founded in the Land of Israel.

Together with the opening up of the old-world Zionist movement with all its factions and parties, many Zionist groups and circles appeared in Volkovysk, of which a few first took on a concrete organizational form only during the last years of the First World War and the announcement of the Balfour Declaration.

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100 Referred to previously, and elsewhere, by the acronym of his name, the *Rashi* of Vilna.

101 Given that the Einhorn book was published in 1948, the reference is to the late 1880's

But the general Zionists remained as the backbone of the entire Zionist movement in Volkovysk, who were the majority and accounted for most of the builders of the nationalist elements of the Volkovysk Jewish populace. The general Zionists attracted its followers in Volkovysk from among the ranks of the merchants and professional intelligentsia. The general Zionists mostly carried the burden of financing all of the important Zionist funds , such as *Keren HaYesod, Keren Kayemet, HeHalutz*, etc. From the ranks of the general Zionists came most of the important activists for all Zionist and national-cultural activities. A portion of the general Zionists, in their formative years, belonged to other Zionist groups – *Tze'irei Zion, Kadima, Herut U'Tekhiya*, etc. – but later on they confined themselves to the general Zionist movement, and worked for the dissemination of the Zionist ideal.

Among the principal activists of the Volkovysk general Zionists at various times, were: *Sholom Barash, Engineer Ephraim Barash, Israel Efrat, Moshe Shapiro, Zvi Inker, Moshe Rubinovich, Yud'l Novogrudsky, Anshel Bliakher, Yoss'l Vinogradsky, Schwartz, Moshe Zvi Margalit, Ben-Zion Lifschitz, Eliyahu Shaikevitz, Asher Yudzhik, Akiva Yudzhik* (brother of Asher Yudzhik), *Hona Kavushatsky, Sh. Ch. Kaputchevsky, Ozer Kaplan, Leib Heller, David Hubar, Leizer Shaliota, Mordechai Tarma, Yankel Gurevich, Hanokh Neiman, Naphtali Golomb,*(father of Eliyahu Golomb), *Zalman Chafetz, Abraham Eli Markus, Dr. Shlomo Mandelbaum, Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg, Azhernitsky, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, & L. Kapelyushnik.*

The *Tze'irei Zion* party – which was active in Volkovysk after the First World War – attracted a large proportion of the Volkovysk labor intelligentsia, and among its active membership were: *Motteh-Leib Kaplan (*later to become the editor of the *Volkovysker Leben), Moshe Rubinovich, Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), Yud'l Novogrudsky, and Chana Novick.* The Volkovysk *Tze'irei Zion* carried out a variety of activities on behalf of the Hebrew school system in Volkovysk, for the national funds, and for the Zionist-Socialist movement.

It is appropriate to also record: the Zionist-Socialist Labor Party, *Poalei Zion – Tz.S.*, and its dedicated members, such as the lawyer, *Leizer Bliakher, M.A. Kushnirovsky, Eisenstein,* and others; the Zionist Labor Party, *Hitakhdut*, with its loyal members who later, after – immediately after the *HaPoel HaTza'ir* and *Akhdut HaAvodah* merged in Israel to form *Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael* (MAPAI) – merged with the *Poalei Tzion – Tz.S.*; The Zionist-Socialist youth organization, *Gordonia* (named for [the author,] A.D. Gordon), which had around 150 members, mostly young people of school age – with its magnificent Zionist, pioneering and cultural activities, with its choir, with its summer colonies and its facilitation of the *Halutz* movement; The youth organization, *Freiheit (*In *Poalei Zion Tz.S. – Hitakhdut*); The *HeHalutz HaTza'ir* organization, which prepared young people of the age 18-19 for membership in the general *HeHalutz* organization, where they later went through formal preparation and broadening, to prepare for their anticipated lives as residents in the Holy Land.

In Volkovysk (during the twenties), there also existed a Zionist-cultural youth organization called *Kadima,* which set as its objective the development of a pure national-Jewish spirit among the Jewish youth of Volkovysk.

The leadership of *Kadima* was: *Yaakov Shipiatsky, Mordechai Lev, Pinchas Steinwax, Eliezer Bliakher, & Shlomo Shipiatsky.* In the organization, sections were formed for Jewish and general history, for Hebrew and Yiddish literature, *Tanakh*, Zionist history, etc.

Kadima sponsored many assemblies and presentations, which were always attended by a significant number of Volkovysk youth. A large interest was elicited by the literary debate over Tchernikhovsky's poem *Boruch*

MiMagentza,[102] which *Kadima* had arranged.

The organization *Herut VeTikva* also occupies a set place in the history of the Zionist movement in Volkovysk. Among its active members were: *Joseph Galai, Chaim Khmelnitsky, Yitzhak Yudzhik, Raphael Ditkovsky, Raphael Klatshkin* (today a well known actor, and member of the *HaBima* theater group in Israel). This organization had a drama studio, which was very active on behalf of the Zionist national funds, and general Zionist cultural affairs. A large number of the members of *Herut VeTikva* survived, because they emigrated to Israel and other countries early on.

The religious direction of the old-world Zionist movement was also found in Volkovysk. There was a *Mizrachi* organization in Volkovysk, who counted among its primary doers: *Mr. Zvi Inker, Mr. Joseph Yervolimsky* (the *Shokhet*), and *Hona Kavushatsky HaShomer HaDati* also functioned in Volkovysk – an organization of religious Zionist youth. This organization was established in Volkovysk only a few years before the outbreak of the last [sic: Second] world war, and worked under the leadership of *Zelig Kagan* (the *Shokhet's* son). During its existence, the organization did a great deal for the *Keren Kayemet.* At a meeting of *HaShomer HaDati* that took place on July 5, 1935, a leadership was elected that consisted of the following comrades: *Z. Kagan* – Head of the Unit; *Ch. Kaplan* – Secretary; *M. Galai* – Treasurer; *Z. Minkovich* – Funds and Development; *Sh. Lazarovsky* – Press [sic: Communications/Public Relations].

The *HaShomer HaTza'ir* organization occupied a visible place in the Zionist movement, which had about 150 members – mostly young people of school age. The Volkovysk [chapter] of *HaShomer HaTza'ir* was a vibrant organization, which arranges many presentations and spirited celebrations. Principally, the *Lag B'Omer* celebrations originated from them. The membership of *HaShomer HaTza'ir* would engage in a set course of preparation by working at the tobacco plantation, and in the factory (where wood was cut, i.e. the lumber mill), in order to prepare themselves physically for *aliyah* to the Holy Land. The Volkovysk *HaShomer HaTza'ir* had its own orchestra and a choir, and also sections for drama and Gymnasium courses.

In Volkovysk, as in all other significant Jewish communities in Poland, there existed a League for Labor in Israel, which raised money for the institutions of the *Histadrut* and helped to disseminate the ideals of Labor Zionism. In the League, could be found the organizations and parties with direct ties to Labor in the Holy Land; *Poalei Zion, Hitakhdut, HeHalutz, Freiheit, HaShomer HaTza'ir* and *Gordonia*. Among the principal activists of the League were: *Yaakov Itzkowitz, Leizer Bliakher, Shishatsky,* Director, *Mordechai Sakhar, & Yitzhak Shkarlat.* Other active members of the League were: *L. Ziskind, R. Nishvitsky, M.A. Kushnirovsky, Pearl Sokolsky, Y. Bashitsky, A. Novick, K. Bialostotsky, & M. Tkach.*

The *HeHalutz* organization was very active in Volkovysk. Immediately after the First World War, *HeHalutz* was founded in Volkovysk, and the young men of Volkovysk began making preparations for *aliyah* to the Holy Land. They worked at agriculture and expended effort to accustom themselves to a bucolic existence.

An interesting description of the *aliyah* of the first group of *Halutzim* from Volkovysk, in the time of the so-called 'third *aliyah*' and their experiences in the Land of Israel – was sent to us by a member of that group, *Azriel Carmeli* (Berestovitsky), who is now found in Tel-Aviv:

> "On a clear summer day in 1920, a group of ten-odd young men from Volkovysk and

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102 *Boruch of Mainz*, an epic poem by *Saul Tchernikhovsky*, describing the great pogrom in Mainz in medieval times.

Lisokovo left their home towns, took their leave with the blessings of their relatives and friends, and set off on the way to the Land of Israel. We gathered on the Brisk and Zamoscheh Streets, and we traveled by wagon to Bialystok, where we were happily taken in to the local community house. When we arrived in Warsaw, we joined together with other groups, and together made our way to the Austrian border. With our departure, the so-called 'third *aliyah*' was initiated.

Our living arrangements in the Holy Land at first were not of the best kind. Immediately after we arrived in the Land, we were sent away to help build the road from Jeddah to Haifa. We were all united in one group, which had the name of our leader, *Metchik.* In The Land of Israel we were joined by *Sonya Bialsky,* who had already been there for a short while. We did no escape without casualties. One of our comrades, *Ditkovsky*, got sunstroke from the hot tropical sun to which he was unaccustomed, from which he became paralyzed. He was cared for in Haifa, and later in Italy, where eventually he died. Many of our comrades fell victim to malaria, and almost everyone suffered from dysentery due to the bad water, spoilage of fresh foodstuffs, and bad sanitary conditions that prevailed at that time throughout the land. Despite all of these difficult circumstances, the spirit of the group did not fall. We were of one mind, energized and full of a lust for work. During the day we would do the hardest of physical labor, and then spend the nights singing and dancing.

We were out of touch with our home city of Volkovysk for a longer period of time, because the Russian occupation interrupted the operation of the mails overseas. But our morale did not suffer. During our first year in the Land of Israel, we worked as one group on a variety of projects in different parts of the country – *Beit Shean*, Sarafand, Jeddah, and in the Haifa area. Our work consisted of building roads, taking out boulders with dynamite in *the Beit Shean* area, from which the rubble was taken by train to Afula, where it was used to put down roadbeds and railroad beds. We had our own kitchen, where we carried on with quite a bit of refinement. We slept in tents on the open fields.

When unrest suddenly broke out in 1921 at Passover time, a number of us were in Tel-Aviv where they were spending the holidays. They immediately joined the ranks of the security forces. The rest of the group, who were at their work site in Sarafand, barricaded themselves along with other comrades who were in the camp, in order to defend the place against the attack of the surrounding Arab villages.

Our group had to live together for another year. Most of the comrades spread throughout the Land – both in villages and cities. On of our dear friends, *Yaakov Shapiro,* a strapping young man, became a member of kibbutz *Merkhavya,* but he later developed a heart ailment and went back to his parents in Volkovysk, where he died at a young age. The majority of our comrades from the 'third *aliyah*' never gave up the work ethic. Ninety-nine percent of the first group of Volkovysk comrades, and also those who came after them, make a living from work of all kinds."

Page 134: The "Bet-Alpha" Group of HaShomer HaTza'ir in the Year 1928

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: Moshe'l Shereshevsky, Shepsel Poloyka, Aharon Ogulnick (Sitting first in front), Avreml Kilikovsky, Mendel Davidovsky, Head of the Unit, Yaakov Einstein (sitting center)
Second Row: Nakdimon, Miriam Hazan, Moshe Paveh

Page 135: An Executive Committee Meeting of HaShomer HaTza'ir in the Year 1928

Right to Left: *Shlomo Leibovich, Mirsky (standing), Yankel Ditkovsky, Hanokh Saroka, Leah Trunsky, Simcha Goldberg*

Page 136: *A Group of Halutzim in the Year 1925*

Right to Left. First Row, bottom: *Reuben Silverblatt, Simcha Goldberg*
Second Row: *Hanokh Saroka, Yankel Ditkovsky*
Third Row: *Mendel Green, Shlomo Leibovich, Ze'ev Mostkov, Moshe Langbord*

Page 137: *The Orchestra of HaShomer HaTza'ir with its Founder and Director Yitzhak Alpert in the Year 1927*

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: Baylah Lvovich, Henya Lidsky, Slapak, the baker's son, Tanya Pilatovsky
Second Row: *Moses Mandelbaum, Yitzhak Alpert (Director), Yaakov Einstein, Bunya Levin*
Third Row: *Munya Silverman, Baylah Rosenbloom, Shepsel Slapak, Rosa Panter, Basha Moorstein, Kasovsky*

Page 138: *The Gordonia Youth Group in the Year 1928*

Right to Left: *Mendelson, Rachel Kagan, Sonya Smazanovich, Sonya Ravitzky, Alia Avramitsky, Herschel Lev*

Page 139: *Members of the HeHalutz Central Committee (In the Year 1928)*

Right to Left, First Row, seated: *Velvel Novick, Yitzhak Paveh, Ephraim Barash, Yud'l Novogrudsky, Moshe'l Shakhnovich*
Second Row, standing: *Y. Taran, Rash'eh Siegel, Joseph Gandz and Chaim Mordetsky*

The Volkovysk branch of *HeHalutz* served as a regional committee. Hundreds of members of the Zionist youth organizations in Volkovysk and its vicinity got their preparation and orientation for *aliyah* through the *HeHalutz* organization.

By the year 1920-1921,the *HeHalutz* organization was already involved with tobacco farming on larger tracts of land – not far from the Jewish hospital. *Bet HeHalutz* was created in Volkovysk in the year 1925-1926, on the *Neuer Gasse* in Rachel Ein's house, where the members carried on a collective life together, and participated in a variety of physical work in the city, such as chopping wood, construction, etc. Shortly thereafter, two kibbutzim were established in Volkovysk, whose members were at that time employed in the Volkovysk factories, mills or other lines of work. The male and female *halutzim* obtained their training and orientation there for the Land of Israel. The *HeHalutz* organization founded several agricultural work centers in the vicinity for training purposes, on Christian property, as well as the familiar training point in Mikholovka on the property of Leizer Mikholovker (Leizer Getzelevich). The Volkovysk *halutzim* also participated in the kibbutzim, which were located in the village of Khoroshevich, in Podoroisk, and in Josef-Paulia.

Characteristic of the relationship of the Volkovysk Jewish populace to the *halutzim*, is a song of *Hanokh Winetsky's* , called "To the *Halutz*" (as a farewell to his friend David Farber on *aliyah* to the Land of Israel) and which was published in *Volkovysker Leben* (December 20, 1929 edition):

"You are traveling – to build a new world,

To elevate our lives,
To rejuvenate us, liberate us,
With your great and profound faith.

With a mighty, forceful will,
To transform our lives,
Ready for sacrifice, committed
To the land and national liberation.

You are traveling – to engage the land,
And to be forever united,
Tracts of land [that] long for you,
Like a child longing for its mother.

You do not fear hard work,
You do not fear sweat on your brow,
Where you [will] stand – begins the blooming
Of a desert into a Garden of Eden.

You will make – seedlings of grass to sprout in sand
And flowers to bloom in boulders,
And one hears, carried on the air:
– The resolution is at hand!"

Page 143: *A Group from Betar in the Year 1938*

Right to Left, from the Leadership in the center row: Unknown, Eliezer Sukenik, Rivka Markus, Berel Velvelsky (Commander) David Linevsky, Herschel Daniel

Among the others are: Mendel Steinman, Lidsky, Khatzkelevich, Tannenbaum, Mulya Jaffa, Epstein (from Soda-water), Moshe Moorstein, Joshua Patsovsky, Shereshevsky, Scharf, Pitotsky, Yitzhak Tzemakh, Rachel Pilatovsky, Tzil'yeh Mazover (from the Wurst), Tcherneh Rossiansky, Golda Werner, Zhameh[103] Marantz, Chas'sheh Boyarsky, Golda Markus, Chaya Galai, Ida and Fanya Mazover (from the Paper business), Chaya Sukenik, Tzirulnitsky, Shalkovich, Esther Beckenstein, Rosa Sukenik, Rivka Rothford, Slutsky, Rachel Markus, Dorochinsky

Page 145: *Flower Day for Keren Kayemet*

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: *Rosa Kaplan, Archik Shapiro, Miss Friedman (der Mostorkeh's[104] daughter)*

Second Row: *Yitzhak Paveh, Chana Dombrovsky, Fishl Mirsky, Yakheh[105] Zapoliansky, Rachel Rip, Miss Gurevich*

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103 Nickname for *Shimon.*

104 Seemingly a pattern-maker for dresses.

105 Variant of Yokheh, from Yocheved.

Third Row: *A. Novick, Yitzhak Alpert, Shlomo Shipiatsky, Zelig Kagan (the ritual slaughterer's)*

Page 147: *Members of the Keren Kayemet Committee in the Year 1924*

Right to Left: Shmuel Markus, Elchanan Yoshpeh, Moshe Lifschitz, Shlomo Shipiatsky

Among the first of the active members of the Volkovysk *HeHalutz* were: *Moshe Shapiro's son* and *Zelitsky's son*. Among the principal active workers of *HeHalutz*, from various periods were: *Avreml Novick, the Saroka Brothers, Moshe'l Shakhnovich, Ditkovsky, Leizer Zamoschansky, Taran, The Paveh Brothers, Mendel Solomiansky, The Pick Brothers, Yerusalimsky* (the *Shokhet's* son), *Rash'eh Segal* and *Yitzhak Shkarlat.*

There also existed in Volkovysk a *Halutz* organization called *HeHalutz HaMercazi*, supported by the right wing of Zionism. The Honorary President of *HeHalutz HaMercazi* was Engineer *Ephraim Barash*, and President – *Velvel Novick*. Among the noted members of the organization were: *Joseph Gandz* and *Izzy Mintz.* The central authority of *HeHalutz HaMercazi* built training and preparation points in the Volkovysk vicinity for the *HeHalutz HaMercazi* membership from the entire area of pre-War Poland.

In the last years before the outbreak of the Second World War, in many countries, but primarily in Poland, a new pioneering organization was created named *HaOved*. This immediately elicited a reaction in Volkovysk, and a chapter was established there. Working people and their families, in the age group 30-45 immediately joined this organization. [There were] people who had been associated with the Zionist movement since their youth, and wanted to prepare themselves for life in the Holy Land. After a period of tenure – members of *HaOved* could receive certificates from their organization to make the trip to the Land of Israel. As it happened, their lives were forfeit before they were able to put their plans into action.

The Zionist Revisionists were also represented in Volkovysk. The leading activist in Volkovysk on behalf of the Zionist Revisionists was Engineer *Yaakov Shipiatsky*. Under the Zionist Revisionists there also existed: the youth organization *Betar,* consisting mostly of young people from the Gymnasium (The Chapter Head – *Sh. Zohn-Mazya*); *Masada*, *Brit HaKhayal* – in which the previously mentioned Engineer *Shipiatsky* and *Appl[icant]*[106]. *Mezheritzky* were very active. The Revisionists and their sympathizers devoted a great deal of their energy and time to the Revisionist fund, *Keren Tel-Chai.*

To see how much Volkovysk was a center for Revisionist Zionism until the very last years prior to the Second World War, can be seen from the following notice – about a *Tzahar* conference and a *Betar* conclave in Volkovysk – which was published in the *Volkovysker Leben* of May 14, 1937:

> "On Sunday, the 23rd of this month, a conference of *Tzahar* and a *Betar* conclave will take place in Volkovysk, with the participation of the General Secretary of the Revisionist party in the Polish district, Y. Klarman. The agenda contains a list of real issues, and as a result we anticipate the attendance of many delegates and guests from the province."

The Zionist Ladies Organization, *WIZO* (founded in 1934) played an especially important part in the Zionist movement in Volkovysk, which encompassed a broad set of cultural and community activities. The leading activists in *WIZO* were: *Dr. Jocheved Barash*, wife of Ephraim Barash – President of *WIZO, Chaya Sarah Yudzhik*, wife of Nakhum Kroll the Pharmacist, *Feygl* (Galiatsky's daughter) and Mrs. *Mostkov.*

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106 An *Applikant* in Polish, is someone who is preparing themselves as a specialist. This term seems to be equally applied to physicians and lawyers, but may be used for anyone who is an apprentice.

WIZO often arranged bazaars for the benefit of *Keren Kayemet*. The *WIZO* ladies would assemble merchandise from the Volkovysk storekeepers and also from businesses in other towns – who were suppliers to the Volkovysk storekeepers.

WIZO also created courses in Zionism and also arranged a variety of lectures at the community house. During Purim and Hanukkah, *WIZO* also would organize a variety of events and balls – in the firehouse. The *WIZO* balls were especially popular during which a "Jewish Miss Volkovysk" was elected. During one such ball, *Baylah Galiatsky* was elected Beauty Queen of Volkovysk.

Apart from arranging various events for *Keren Kayemet*, children's holiday activities and leisure activities, *WIZO* also, according to an item in the Volkovysker Leben (from the year 1935) – arranged a children's retreat for the summer months. The newspaper writes:

> "Nearly a hundred children from very young to school age, spend four to five hours each and every day in the fresh air in song and play, under the supervision of two teachers in training, who immediately after the end of the semester of the Hebrew teachers seminary, applied their energies and education in the vacation months for this purpose (incidentally, former students of the advanced Hebrew educational institutions , who brought the product of their labors to the children)."

It is understood, that in Volkovysk – where there existed such a strong and vibrant Zionist movement – that much money was gathered on behalf of the national funds. Even in the year 1929, the sum of 9,545.63 zlotys were donated in Volkovysk to the *Keren HaYesod* – almost double what was given in the prior year (in which 5,463.20 zlotys were given).

According to an announcement from the year 1932, the Chairman of the *Keren HaYesod* was Engineer *Ephraim Barash*, and the Vice-Chairman – *Zvi Inker.*

Because of the significant role that Volkovysk played in the Zionist life of Polish Jewry, Volkovysk was often visited by the most important leaders of the Polish Zionist movement and its central institutions. It was thus, for example, that in the year 1932, in the interest of *Keren HaYesod*, Volkovysk was visited by the Chairman of the *Keren HaYesod* directorate of Poland, Mr. Asher Kolodny, and also the renown Jewish historian Dr. M. Shipper, who gave a lecture.

As late as June 1939 – shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, which sealed the fate of the Jewish community of Volkovysk with certainty – the Chairman of the directorate of the *Keren HaYesod* in Poland, Yaakov Bialopolsky – came to Volkovysk representing the interests of *Keren HaYesod*. The Chairman of the Volkovysk [branch of] *Keren HaYesod* at that time was *Zvi Inker*. Bialopolsky spoke on the theme: "Our Response to the White Book." Among those gathered for the *Keren HaYesod* initiative of that year, the following stood out: *Zvi Inker, Moshe Rubinovich* (Community Head), *Anshel Bliakher, Dr. Shlomo Mandelbaum, David Salistovsky, Joseph Vinogradsky, Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg, Mr. Wolfstahl* (Director of the *Tarbut* Gymnasium), and *Mr. Walkin*.

Those active in the Volkovysk Zionist movement also worked loyally and with commitment for *Keren Kayemet.* By 1925, the sum of 8,700 zlotys had already been raised in Volkovysk on behalf of *Keren Kayemet,* and in the year 1930 – 9,231 zlotys.

Among the activists on behalf of *Keren Kayemet* at various times were: *M. Lev, Y. Shipiatsky, A. Shaliota, Yud'l Novogrudsky, D. Kaplan, V. Novick, Y. Gandz, L. Trinsky, Yitzhak Yudzhik, H. Kovensky, K. Gagarin,*

Moshe Shapiro (who for a while was the Treasurer of the Volkovysk *Keren Kayemet*), *Aaron Lifschitz, Miss Mostkov, Wald, Yitzhak Shkarlat, B. Beckenstein, Y. Goldrei, and Mordechai Tarma.*

Entire generations were raised in Volkovysk with the ideals of the *Keren Kayemet* – from the fund which acquires parcels of land held by foreigners and transfers them to the aegis of the entire Jewish nation. It is in this way, that we find among the names of the Volkovysk activists during various times the names of *Sholom Barash* and his son, the Engineer, *Ephraim Barash.*

Regional conferences of the *Keren Kayemet* would take place in Volkovysk, in which the leaders of the *Keren Kayemet* throughout Poland would participate.

As we have already noted, the Volkovysk Zionist activists would arrange very substantial celebrations during the Jewish holidays, which served as a highly influential means of disseminating the Zionist ideal, and also as an important fund raising mechanism for the national funds. Separately arranged was the traditional *Lag B'Omer Celebration,* which culminated in a very large demonstration put on by the Zionist youth, leaving a very strong impression on the entire Jewish populace. Thus, for example, we read in the *Volkovysker Leben* (No. 112) about the "Grandiose Lag B'Omer Celebration" which took place in 1929:

> "The celebration commenced on Monday evening, the night before Lag B'Omer, with a parade by *HaShomer HaTza'ir* with the firefighters' orchestra at its head, through the streets of the city.
>
> On the morning of Lag B'Omer, a festive meeting took place in the Great Synagogue, which commenced with a prayer offered by the *Shokhet* and Meat Inspector Rabbi Israel Reuben Kagan. Mr. Shkarlat held forth with an emotional and glistening speech in Hebrew on matters of the day, and the choir, accompanied by the orchestra, sang nationalist songs.
>
> Afterward, a line formed from the entire body of the school-age children together with the Zionist youth organizations, *HaShomer HaTza'ir, HeHalutz*, and *Gordonia*, with their banners and standards, which then marched through the streets with the orchestra at its head to the outskirts of the town.
>
> Arriving in the fields, the young people spend the day productively in song and dance and towards evening, marched back to the city.
>
> After a final ceremony at the *Schulhof*, the entourage dispersed.
>
> The management of the celebration was primarily due to the energetic work of the *Keren Kayemet* commission under the leadership of Mr. *Zelig Kagan,* at its head, and the special events committee for the Lag B'Omer celebration."

From an earlier edition (No. 111) of the *Volkovysker Leben*, we learn that on that Lag B'Omer, a special fund raiser was conducted in the city, and also a "one-day fund raising activity among the working intelligentsia for the benefit of *Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael*. "
All the *Shomrim* of Volkovysk came to the Lag B'Omer celebrations.

We find an interesting description of a Lag B'Omer celebration of another year, in the *Volkovysker Leben:*

> "This year's celebration, in honor of Lag B'Omer, organized by the local *Keren Kayemet* Committee, was exceptionally imposing and masterfully run, so much so, that it elicited great wonder among the attending public, both Jews and Christians [alike]."

It was an authentic national youth holiday in the fullest sense of the word.

The celebration began on Monday evening with a march through the streets by *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, led by a brass orchestra.

Early on Tuesday morning, *HaShomer* with its standard, as also *Gordonia* and its membership, the Jewish student body from the "*Hertzeliya*" Gymnasium, the Hebrew School, Talmud Torah, The Orphanage, Private *Heders*, and the Kindergarten, along with its teachers, all gathered at the Schulhof, fell in by groups into rows with Jewish and Polish flags, and from there in an orderly, diverse and long row, marched through the streets under the music of the orchestra in the direction of the *Burkehs*[107].

The managed order, the controlled pace of the march, the beautiful, enchanting uniforms of the *HaShomer* youth, and most of all, the light, yet disciplined and proud stride of the *Shomrim* made a colossal impression on the surrounding spectators, who derived enormous *nachas* from just watching.

In the woods, the marching column bivouacked for the entire day, and spent the day in song and other diversions.

At six in the evening, the entire holiday crowd of marching young people came back from the woods, and after a closing ceremony at the Schulhof, the grand column dispersed, leaving an impression and unceasing joy and inspiration with the participants."

The Jewish populace of Volkovysk, steeped in nationalist ideals, literally lived and breathed with the Jewish settlement in the Holy Land. Every important event in the Land of Israel immediately elicited a reaction in Volkovysk, and strongly influenced Volkovysk Jewish life. We find an interesting description of the reaction of the Jewish populace in Volkovysk to the anti-Semitic unrest in the Holy Land in 1929 in the *Volkovysker Leben* (September 6, 1929 edition). We will reproduce this description here – entitled "Volkovysk Under the Pressure of the Bloody Events in the Holy Land" – with minor omissions:

"Into the stricken atmosphere which enveloped the entire Jewish population because of the bad news, which arrived from the Land of Israel, there came some comfort at the end of the last week, brought by news carried in the Warsaw press.

But by Saturday, the atmosphere deteriorated yet again, because of radio broadcasts about the frightful bloodbath that wild Arabs perpetrated in *Tzfat*[108].

Under the still-fresh impression of this new atrocity, a gathering did come together of a majority of the local *balebatim,* which was called for on Saturday night in the location of the orphanage, through the initiative of the Zionist organizations, community and Rabbinate, with the purpose of establishing an Aid Committee for the benefit of the victims.

---- On the spot, a sum of three hundred dollars was allocated and a committee of 30 people was put in place. Immediately following this gathering, the committee had its first constructive

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107 An area on the outskirts of the city, in the local woods, used for recreation.

108 Rendered *Safed* in English

meeting. *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* was elected Chairman; Vice-Chairmen – *A. Schlossberg, Eliezer Shaliota,* and *Ozer Kaplan*; Treasurer – *Engineer E[phraim] Barash.*

---- During the week, members of the committee visited Jewish homes and raised eight hundred dollars. ---- the local Jewish population, without regard for their [political] position or orientation, understood its need to fulfil its responsibility to the victims in the Holy Land, and demonstrated a true fraternal feeling to the fund-raisers with larger or smaller contributions ---- each according to his means.

A huge protest meeting took place on Monday in the Great Synagogue about the bloody events that took place in the Holy Land. For this reason, stores and places of business were closed from 4PM on throughout the entire city.

After the Cantor Mr. Stashevsky from Baranovich recited a series of appropriate chapters from the Psalms, the Rabbi eulogized the fallen martyrs in our Holy Land. The eulogy, which lasted over two hours, was a true masterpiece, and elicited a bitter lamentation from the audience of three thousand people.

The audience broke out into an especially pitiful wailing at the time that Cantor Stashevsky sang a memorial for the martyrs. Many fainted, mostly the women in the women's gallery.

After the memorial service, the Rabbi spoke once again, and demanded that everyone make a greater effort on behalf of the Holy Land, which will be – he said – our best response to the feral onslaught of the Arabs.

Mr. *Yehuda Novogrudsky*, and the pioneer *Moshe Weinman* also spoke to the audience in Shushchik's yard, near Volkovysk, and many protest resolutions were approved."

The meeting adjourned with the singing of *HaTikva*.

Also, at the time of the British Mandate (in the year 1939), when the "White Paper" was issued with its decrees against the *Yishuv,* Volkovysk stormed with upset and protest.

In this fashion, a variegated Zionist activism prospered in Volkovysk. There was not a branch of the Zionist world movement that didn't have at least a small branch in Volkovysk, and the Volkovysk population was rich in. creative and productive elements on the matter of cultural and Zionist activity.

It is appropriate to recall here the building which in the years after the First World War served as the focal point for the widely branched pioneering, cultural and Zionist organizational activities for Volkovysk – The *Beth Lehem* on the *Schulhof.* This building had been first constructed by the well-known Volkovysk philanthropist, *Nakhum Heller.* During the time of the First World War, and immediately thereafter, the building served as a subsidized kitchen for the poorer Jewish population in Volkovysk, especially for poor children. The kitchen at that time was supported by the "Joint" and by private Jewish contributions. This very building was initially under the supervision of Leib Heller (brother of Nakhum Heller) and afterwards under Aaron Lifschitz (Nakhum Heller's brother-in-law). The entire premises was later turned over to the Zionist movement. In it were found the offices of: *Keren Kayemet, Keren HaYesod, The General Halutz Organization, The Zionist Youth Organization, Gordonia, The HaShomer HaTza'ir Organization, The Volkovysk branch of the Israeli office in Poland, the Free Public Hebrew Tarbut Library*, and many other Zionist institutions and organizations. The place always pulsed with a full-blooded Zionist life.

Volkovysk was often visited by the highest Zionist leadership from the Land of Israel and other countries,

who would come to give speeches there on behalf of the national funds and Zionist ideals, and they always attracted a large enthusiastic audience. In the great calamity that befell Polish Jewry the vibrant Zionist life in Volkovysk was also eradicated from the face of God's earth.

Page 148: Members of the Zionist-Socialist Youth Organization "Gordonia"

Right to Left – First Row, bottom: Hanokh Pick, Gottleib, Rosenbloom, David Aaronson
Second Row, seated: Minia Greengass, Chana Friedlander, Chaya Rakhkin, Abraham Novick (Leader and Chairman), Taib'l Mopsik, Pessia Mordetsky, Yehuda Galai
Third Row, standing: Riva Rock, Esther Galai, Minia Yellin, Feygl Rotberg, Esther Goshchinsky, Ethel Lichtin, Chasia Weinstein, Aharon Sukenik
Last Row: Gideon Pick, Batya Steinman, Gedalyahu Kaplan, Dvora Rosenbloom, Rossiansky, Fruma Shabrinsky, Leibovich, Eliezer Minkovich

Page 149: Membership of the Religious Zionist Organization "HaShomer HaDati" in the Year 1935

Right to Left – First Row, bottom:	*Boruch-Mordechai (last name unknown), unknown, Epstein, Chaim Ozer Einhorn, Yehuda Rossiansky, Boruch Orlansky*
Second Row:	*Gurevich, Bayer, Winetsky, Winetsky (a sister), Kapelyushnik*
Third Row, seated:	*Mordechai Kapchevsky, Michael Galai, Zelig Kagan (the Shokhet's), Gedalyahu Levin, Sender Kaplan, Menachem Binkovich, Joshua Linevsky, Hanokh Rappaport*
Fourth Row, standing:	*Galai, Pisetsky, Markus, Epstein, Malka Levin, Cantor, unknown, Schwartz, Yunovich, Winetsky, Winetsky (Abba Yehuda's daughters)*
Last Row, standing:	*First – Moshe Kossowsky, Last – Chaim Kaplan (from the Wide Boulevard) the rest of this row is not identifiable.*

Page 150: Members of the HeHalutz Committee Together With A Group of Halutzim from Lodz

Among the Volkovysk members found in this picture, are the following:

Right to Left, Center Row, seated:	*Two people from Lodz, Velvel Taran, Yitzhak Paveh, Velvel Novick (Chairman of HeHalutz in Volkovysk)*
Back Row, standing:	*Four halutzim from Lodz, Izzy Mintz, Rash'keh [sic; Rash elsewhere] Siegel, A young lady from Lodz, Joseph Gandz, Chaim Mordetsky*

Page 151: A Parade of HaShomer HaTza'ir on the Wide Boulevard (Three panels, untitled)

The Volkovysk *Bund*

Based on the information I received from *Baylah Rivka Kushnir-Cahn* (Berel Simcha's daughter) *Hyman Shalkes* (Cahn), *Moshe'keh Katriel's* (Zayak) and *Shmuel Rothbart (Khudozhnik)*

The *Bund* played a visible role in the Jewish community life of Volkovysk. In the year 1939, shortly before the last [sic: second] world war, the *Bund* attracted *three thousand votes* in the elections for the Volkovysk

city government, and three *Bund* councilmen were elected at that time: *Sh. Ravitzky*, *Yitzhak Merkin* (the Teacher), and *L. Schlossberg* (from the brick factory). The leaders of the *Bund* in the community were: Sh. Lev, the butcher *Shevakhovich*, and *Lifschitz*. The *Bund* had its own local in Volkovysk and carried on a feverish level of community activity – organizing meetings, lectures, evenings, debates, tours, etc.

In the years immediately prior to the Second World War, the Volkovysk Bund also had [a chapter of] the Bundist youth organization called *Zukunft,* the Bundist children's organization, *Skiff*, and the Bundist sports organization *Morgenstern*. All these Bundist organizations were very active on the cultural and community fronts.

The History of the Volkovysk *Bund*

Page 157: *A Group of Bund Activists from the Year 1905*

Right to Left, First Row, sitting: *Herschel Zuckerman, Zaydl the Bookbinder, Joseph Captain (Likovsky), Moshe Yoss'l the Hatmaker, Michael Zohn-Mazya*

Second Row, standing: *Moshe Katriel's (Zayak), Berel Karpovich, Chaim Shalkeh (Cohen), Moshe'keh the Bone-Turner*[109]*, Israel the Locksmith (from the Neuer Gasse)*

The history of the *Bund* in Volkovysk is analogous to the history of the *Bund* in hundreds of cities and towns throughout Poland and Lithuania. Starting at the beginning of the twentieth century as a small "circle," it later grew into a powerful organization with a multi-branched party apparatus, which affixed its stamp on a significant portion of the Volkovysk Jewish population. Therefore, it is our assessment that it is proper here, to give a short overview of the founding and development of the Volkovysk *Bund*.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Volkovysk had a couple of hundred Jewish workers: part of them worked in Yanovsky's tobacco factory, in the beer breweries, in Bloch's tannery, and a portion were apprenticed by the community [as] – learning the trade of shoemakers, tailors and other workers. The condition of the workers and the apprentices was pathetic. True, the apprentices were at least certain of their meager next meal, which they obtained from their employer, but the trouble was that their employers thought of them, especially in the first years, as simple menials. They were compelled to clean house, help the woman of the house with her housework, run errands, and do all manner of heavy work before the worker would begin to instruct them in the skills of his trade. In addition to this, the apprentices were compelled to work on Saturday nights. Immediately following the *Havdalah* service, when the *Maariv* prayers were completed in the houses of worship, the apprentices would have to return, like the wicked condemned to Hell, to their darkened workplaces. The fate of the worker was not much better. He too, would have to slave away for long hours every single day for a mere pittance.

The Struggle of the Apprentices with the Tradesmen

After the establishment of the *Bund* – In Vilna in 1897 – the Jewish worker in Volkovysk begins to awaken.

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[109] An artisan, who turned bone material on a lathe to create decorative objects.

He receives notices of worker strikes in the large cities. During the summer months, students from Vilna and other cities come to Volkovysk, teachers and plain intellectuals, who were mixed up in revolutionary activities, and they begin the work of clarification among the oppressed workers, and incite them to agitate for better working conditions and higher wages, and awaken in them their class identity.

The first strike in Volkovysk broke out under the slogan: "Abolish [work on] Saturday Night!" The tradesmen, however, did not want to give in and they attacked the perpetrators of the strike. Several of the "strong arm" types of young men aided the tradespeople, and beat up on the "*Bundovchikehs*." An altercation of this type once broke out in front of the Synagogue at the time of the recitation of *U'Nesaneh Tokef*. [110] But the young workers had prepared themselves, and had recruited support from the surrounding towns, and prevailed against the tradespeople and their "*shtarkers*."[111] Part of the young toughs regretted their position, and took sides with the *Bundovchikehs.* In the end, the apprentices won their battle, and Saturday night work was abandoned [as a routine practice.]

This victory energized the Jewish workers in Volkovysk, and they began to organize themselves for a mass demonstration. It happened, because of a student from Vilna by the name of *Chaim Nemzer*, who because of the Czarist decrees, lost his opportunity to continue with university studies there. He became a teacher of Russian in Volkovysk. He put his heart and soul into the organization of the Jewish workers, and he became the leader of the Volkovysk "Cell."

The Volkovysk Cell (Кружок)

Page 159: *A Group of Girl Friends from the Bund in the Year 1917*

Right to Left, First Row, bottom: *Myteh*[112] *Pikarsky, Ronya Fanar, Gittl Bayer, Kham'keh Lev, Leah'keh Ravitz*

Standing: *Pes'sha Kaplan (David Hirsch'l's), Itkeh from Porozovo, Rosa Levitt*

The "Cell" set itself the goal of organizing the workers – whether they worked for the various tradespeople, or whether they worked in the few factories which were in the city at that time – and to attract all sympathetic people to fight for decent working conditions for themselves and for a better lot for all of mankind.

The founders of the Cell strived not only to improve the material well-being of the workers, but also to raise the workers to a higher spiritual plane and to spread education and reasoning among them. To this end, they founded a library, in which were found various forms of publication, and also popular science books and political books and brochures – legal and illegal. In that era, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the library served as a good means to attract candidates for the labor movement. The directors of the library would first give the new readers books of general interest – novels, and the stories of Jule Verne, Tannenbaum, and others – and later after they had gradually become acquainted with the character and emotional outlook of the reader, they would start giving them more serious books of a socialist and revolutionary character, and also illegal brochures that the *Bund* published. Later, when it was decided that the individual was a sympathetic and trustworthy person, he was brought into the Cell and invited him to

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110 Obviously, the sanctity of the High Holy Days did not mitigate against this behavior.

111 Yiddish for 'a strong guy,' implying a young 'tough.'

112 Judeo-German diminutive from the common noun, meaning 'maiden.'

secret evening [meetings], [regular] meetings, May First gatherings, which the Cell would organize – during the summer in the woods, and during the winter in designated houses. At these meetings, they ;would join hands and sing "*Die Shvuah*"[113] and various revolutionary and folk songs and the popular songs of that day: *Doreen in Vinyl in Nasser Keller*, and *Der Gezaltzener Yam fun Menshlikhen Trerren*.[114]

The Activists of the Cell

Page 161: *Committee of the Youth-Bund 'Zukunft' in the Year 1927*

Right to Left, seated: *The (I)zaveliner, Rosa Vlosky, Yud'l Stolovitsky, Yankel Rubinstein (the Locksmith's), Reizl, Chana Irmess, Shimon Lev (Son of Yehuda Hirsch the Butcher)*

Standing: *Hona Falkovich (the Tailor), Shmuel Pashinker*

Page 162: *The Mikhalevich Cell of the Youth Bund 'Zukunft'*

Left to Right, sitting: *Yankel Lev, Yankel Pereminsky, Miss Pereminsky, Yankel Rubinstein (the Locksmith), Yankel Pashinker, Miss Rubinstein, Yud'l Zlotnitsky, Mrs. Pashinker, Bayer*

Page 163: *The Sakifist Youth Organization of the Bund*
The picture shows Yankel Rubinstein, the Leader of the Bund

The Steering Committee of the Volkovysk Cell consisted of from seven to eleven people, and each one had ten members of the Cell under his oversight whom he would have to indoctrinate and educate them politically and in a community sense.

The first founders of the *Bund* Cell were: *Yud'l Likovsky* and his brother *Joseph* (Captain), *Moshe'keh Zakroy* (Feivel the *Shokhet's* son), *Baylah Rivka* (daughter of Berel Simcha's), *Berel Karpovich, Yankel Levin*, (son of Tzipa the Sweet One[115]) and *Rosa Einhorn*.
At the very beginning, the leadership consisted of eight people and the membership numbered thirty. Later, the Cell grew, numbering 70-80 people. Among its active adherents were: *Chaim Nemzer, Moshe Katriel's* (Zayak), *Chaim Sholkess* (Hyman Cohen), *Moshe the [furniture] finisher, Yisroel'ikeh the Locksmith, Herschel Zuckerman, Zaydl the Bookbinder, Moshe Yoss'l the Hatmaker, Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Mottel Chana Shosh'eh's, Yoss'l* (Popiloy's son), *Velvel the Baker, Jedediah the Baker, Yankel the Carpenter, Sima Chay'keleh's, Moshe Nakheh's* (Son of Lapin the expediter), *David Bogomilsky* (Katriel the Baker's son), *Shmuel Khudozhnik, Bodaneh*[116] (The Tinsmith's daughter), *Chay'keh the Grinder's daughter, Dvo'shkeh,*

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113 "The Oath" in Yiddish

114 'There in the Corner in the Damp Cellar', and 'The Salty Sea of Human Tears'

115 More likely to be a sobriquet connected with a trade, such as selling sweets, rather than a personality trait.

116 From a Slavic composite, meaning '*given by God*.'

Bobeh'leh Adef (Leizer Chaim's daughter), *Pearl Lev* (The Bialystoker Baker's[117] daughter), *Avreml Adef* (Leizer Chaim's son), *Son of Sholom Barash, Hirscheleh* (Bontsheh the Shoemaker's son), *Litman* (Mendel the Baker's son), *Herschel Rokhkin, the younger L. Schlossberg* (from the brick factory), *Yankel the Dark One*[118], *Hona Gluck, Mendel Nissan* (the *Shokhet's* son), *David Einhorn, Zaydl Feinzilber, Golda Papess, Kayla (*David Herschel's daughter), *Chasia Salman, Bayl'keh the Hassid's, Jedediah Margolis, Moshe Tchopper, Berel Dzhik, Itcheh Niezhnik, Yankel Lifschitz*, and others.

These very members would meet periodically in various houses in order to conduct their meetings. Among the gathering places, we must record here the houses of the following: the Likovskys (Chana Frieda's son, who lived on the Wide Boulevard), Baylah Rivka (Berel Simcha's daughter), the teacher, Berel Karpovich (who lived in the rented room, at Berel Kushnir's on Slutsky's street), and periodically in the *Tiferet Bakhurim* Synagogue. These secret meetings were known as "the meetings" (сходкй).

During the summer, the secret meetings would be held in the Zamkover Forest, and once on the "Mayak." These meetings were guarded by a special group of the members, who were thoroughly familiar with all the paths and byways of the vicinity, in order to interdict the intrusion of unfamiliar people, and one was always ready in case of a betrayal, to elude the grasp of the police. These meetings were mostly held in the afternoons of the Sabbath or on Holidays. In the forest on the grass, one could often listen to fiery oratory, which had the character of indoctrination, and informed the members about strikes, self-defense, and in general about the activities of the *Bund.*

At these secret meetings, plans were worked out for attacking government convoys and whiskey monopolies, and expropriating money in order to have resources to carry out revolutionary work. An attack of this sort was once carried out in Izavelin. The telephone wires were cut, and the expropriation was carried out.

Berel Dzhik was once arrested for political activity. So, on a dark night, the members of the Cell sawed through the iron bars of the jail, took Berel out, and hid him in Baylah Rivka's house. The authorities conducted searches in many of the local houses, Kareyev, the well-known police officer, accompanied by gendarmes, made a "sortie" against Baylah Rivka's house to look for the prisoner. But Berel, disguised as an elderly Jewish woman, managed to sneak out of another door and vanished.

It would happen that the group would attack convoys that were taking in revolutionary prisoners, throw tobacco into their faces, and in the ensuing confusion, free the prisoners.

In October 1905 – when all of Russia seethed with revolutionary activity, on October 18, the Volkovysk Bundists prepared themselves on that day to mount a big demonstration. It so happens, that *Yoss'l Kishke,* a member of the Cell, died that day. The Cell decided to transform the funeral procession for their comrade into a grandiose demonstration. Baylah Rivka (Berel Kushnir's daughter) specially sewed up two flags – a black one and a red one. *Yud'l Likovsky* gave the eulogy and held forth with a fiery, flaming speech. The stores were all closed, and masses of people participated in the big funeral procession – which lingered in the memory of the Volkovysk residents for a long time.

A strong push to the development of the Volkovysk Bund was provided by the visit of the leader of the

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117 It is not possible to easily tell whether the baker was from Bialystok, or if he was from Volkovysk, and specialized in baking the famous Bialystoker *kuchen.*

118 Difficult to know if this was because of a swarthy complexion or because of dark hair.

central committee of the *Bund* – Wladek – "The Young LaSalle," whose presentation in Poliakov-Lev's Bet HaMedrash made a strong impression.

The *Bund* Prior to the Second World War

Page 164: *A May 1st Demonstration with Bund Participation*

Page 165: *The Wide Boulevard (Near the Church)*

Years went by. A slaughterhouse and meat-processing factory were built in Volkovysk. Then came houses, buildings, mills, brick factories, businesses, sawmills, and the number of Jewish workers and laborers grew, and the *Bund* grew with them.

Among the leaders and activists of the Bund, prior to the Second World War, were: *Yankel Rubinstein* (Son of Yud'l the Locksmith), *Shmuel Pashinker, Abraham Markus, M. Zeleviansky, Berel Falkovich, Shimshon Lev* (Son of Yehuda the Butcher), *Yankel Lev, Yitzhak Merkin, L. Schlossberg, Sh. Ravitzky, Hona Falkovich, The man from (I)zavelin, Rosa Vlosky, Yud'l Stolovitsky, Chana Irmess, Abba Shtumer*, and *Yankel Pereminsky.*

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As previously stated, the Volkovysk *Bund* was very active in the years between the two World Wars, and often brought in speakers from Vilna and Warsaw, celebrated worker holidays in a nice manner, as well as the *Bund* "Jubilees." From time to time, regional conferences of the *Bund* were held in Volkovysk. The Volkovysk *Bund* bubbled with life and activity, and would often arrange concerts, presentations, evenings and undertakings – until it went under, along with the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk.

The Social-Medical Institutions in Volkovysk

Khevra Lina[119]

Page 169: *Leadership of Linat Kholim after the First World War*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Shlomo'keh Frei the Tailor, Fuchsman, Abraham Kaganovich, Sioma Gallin, Ozer Kaplan, 'Nioma Solkovich*

Second Row: *Archik Markus, Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Shakhna Dworetsky, Abraham Shalakhovich (the Tailor)*

Page 170: *First anniversary of Linat Kholim in the Year 1920*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Bogomilsky, Noah Gordon (son of the Scribe), Sarah Khvalovsky, Chaim Weinstein.*

Second Row: *Zhameh Schein, Manya Gandz, Mytchik Yelsky, Unknown, Archik Markus*

Third Row: *Kaplan, Chaya Klatshkin, Bobel Marotchnik, Lina Berg (daughter of the Podriachik), Sioma Gallin, Shevakhovich (Pelteh the Butcher's daughter), Unknown*

Last Row: *Unknown, Aizik Werner, Shakhna Dworetsky, Manya Savuolsky, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, Feygl Galiatsky, Chana Bialsky, Ronya Fanar (?), Cohen, Miss Gurevich, Chana Shipiatsky*

Khevra Lina was one of the oldest institutions, which had already existed in Volkovysk since the beginning of this [sic: 20th] century. The organization would send, as its name indicates, people to spend the night at the homes of the sick. Sometimes, they would send two people to spend the night – two men, if the sick person was a man, and two women if the sick person was a woman – in order to service and also relieve the sick, and to provide an opportunity for the other household members to get some rest and catch a little sleep.

One of the foremost activities of the *Khevra Lina* was to create an ice cellar (лёдовна in Russian), that is, a place where ice could be stored year-round (also in the hot summer months), and to allocate that ice among those sick who had a need for it. At the beginning, a location for such an ice cellar was rented from the lawyer, Mr. Israel Efrat, and later, a proprietary ice cellar was constructed on the *Mitzrayim Gessel,* not far from the Wide Boulevard. The Khevra Lina also had a few items it lent to the sick: an ice bag, thermometers, enemas, *bonkes*[120] and bottles for holding hot water. As Rabbi Zalman Kurtz related, this equipment was kept by *Hona the Melamed*, who was the assistant *Shammes* of the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash*. He lived on the Schulhof, and he was a very good man, literally 'having no bile in him.' Hona has a list of the members of the *Khevra Lina*, and Hona would inform everyone whose turn it was to go spend a night with a sick person. If there was a circumstance where someone for some reason could not or did not want to spend a night, Hona himself would hasten to fill their place, and sit with the sick, to the extent, that occasionally, weeks would

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119 From the Hebrew, literally, 'the Organization that Spends the Night.' Sometimes called *Linat Kholim*, or Spending the Night with the Sick.

120 Glass cups, affixed to the body by igniting some rub alcohol inside to create a vacuum. Thought to have healing properties by 'drawing out evil humors' from the body.

go by in which Hona would not spend so much as a single night in his own home, but rather would be with the sick. There were a number of *balebatim* who were dedicated to this institution, but Hona was the leading active member. *Nakhum Halpern the Teacher* was also very active in the group.

The equipment was given out and security was taken – a silver spoon, a cup, or money – and Hona would record it all.

Zvi Leibowitz (today resides in Rishon LeZion in Israel), who was active in the Volkovysk Khevra Lina, and for a time was the secretary of the group, sent us interesting memories about the personality of *Benjamin Tal-U'Mottor*[121] and his dedication to the *Khevra Lina*:

> *'Nioma the Agent* (Benjamin Tal-U'Mottor) was active in the *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash*, and he also, just like Hona the Shammes, donated his free time to the *Khevra Lina*. He would schedule the people (usually two at a time) to spend the night with someone who was ill. At about 11-12 at night, he would come to see if the people were at their appointed locations. If one of them didn't show up, he would go to wake him up in the middle of the night, and if that individual either could not, or would not go, he would have to pay for the night, in order to hire another person to take his place. If it happened that he could obtain the services of another person without charge, he would use the monies received to procure additional equipment for the sick. He would fill up an entire cellar with ice for the summer – for the benefit of the sick. But the need for the ice increased, and the large cellar where he would store the ice proved to be inadequate to hold the amount of ice really needed, so he accumulated the money, and bought a place on the *Mitzrayim-Gessel* (near the Wide Boulevard). He then went out into the city streets with a wagon, and gathered up stones from wherever he found them, and [used them] to build a large, and deep cellar in that place, which he filled up with over five hundred wagon loads of ice.
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> The winter after the outbreak of the First World War, when the Germans occupied Volkovysk, was a very mild one. The river did not freeze, the weather was very nice, the trees literally bloomed, and people worked in the fields. *'Nioma Tal-U'MOTTOR* was greatly concerned at that time about procuring ice for the coming summer. He practically expired from worry. He was thinking about buying an ice machine, but he did not have the financial resources for this purpose. Suddenly several cold days ensued, in which the standing water in the forests froze over, and he energetically threw himself into his work. He rode around in a wagon, and in a short time, he filled the cellar with ice for use by the sick during the summer.
>
> During the time when 'Nioma was active in the *Khevra Lina*, he elevated that institution to high level. Apart from the fact that the sick would receive their medicaments free of charge, they would also receive at cost, necessary products such as milk, butter, sugar, etc.
>
> He did this prodigious work purely for the *mitzvah* of doing a good deed, and never took any remuneration for it. In old age, he went to the Land of Israel, where he took up residence in Jerusalem. There as well, he occupied himself with charitable work, looking after the indigent sick with the greatest needs. He is today ninety years old, and continues to work for the benefit of the community with all his might.

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121 A Hebrew Name formed from the words for Dew and Rain.

Linat Kholim

With the outbreak of the First World War, the *Khevra Lina* was disbanded along with all the other institutions in Volkovysk. If it was possible to get along for a time – temporarily, it is understood – without the other necessary institutions, it was the lack of medical services that was felt most keenly, because of the many epidemics and diseases which reigned throughout the area without surcease, as a result of the persistent fear of death, impoverishment, and deterioration in standard of living.

The activists, *Rabbi Zalman Kurtz, Joseph Rudy & Shepsel Gordon,* decided to revive the *Khevra Lina.* Other young sympathizers rallied to them: *Aaron Markus, Sioma Gallin, Shakhna Dworetsky, Mytchik Zuckerman, Jedediah Margalit, Berel Zilberman, Lifschitz* (the brother of Ben-Zion Lifschitz), *Shimshon Lev* (Yehuda Hirsch the Butcher's son) – and in the year 1918, the group began once again to function as an organization, with the name *Linat Kholim.*

The new committee, which attracted a large number of young people, instituted a policy that the sick would be visited by the membership in pairs – a young man and a young woman. Many of the *balebatim* were disconcerted by this policy at first, but as time went by, and it became evident that these services brought great benefit to the sick, they made their peace with the new arrangement.

The activities of the group expanded, and first of all they created a dispensary, where patients without financial means could obtain medical advice from local physicians at a nominal cost. Shortly thereafter, a pharmacy was established adjacent to the dispensary, where the needy sick could obtain a required prescription for a nominal cost, or entirely free of charge. The allocation of assistance along with the appearance of the previously mentioned services immediately attracted mass patronage.

Thanks to the "Joint" and other charities from America, the *Linat Kholim* membership was able to procure the necessary resources to expand its activities in a meaningful way. One division was created after another, and the organization rapidly grew to become multi-branched.

The dispensary was open every day from 10AM to 1PM. The maximum charge to a patient was 1 zloty, as opposed to 5 zlotys for a visit to a private doctor, and many of the sick were treated entirely free of charge. In the year 1927, the dispensary handled 6,441 patients.

The pharmacy was open for eight hours a day, and conducted an intense level of activity through a manager and one assistant. In the course of that same year, the pharmacy filled 24,183 prescriptions.

Visitation – Apart from the great support activity in the dispensary, visits to the indigent sick, who were unable to leave their beds, was also specially provided. Doctors, nurses and *Feldscher*[122] were sent to their homes. For those, who because of doctor's orders, found it necessary to travel to a larger city to be cured, one-time subsidies were dispensed for travel and food.

Dentist Office – The dispensary was open for three hours a day under the direction of a well-experienced tooth specialist. Much assistance was rendered in this area to those sufferers who had no means [to pay].

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122 Paramedical personnel; analogous to a medic in the military.

The *Laboratory* was open for four to five hours daily, and serviced the hospital and also the entire city population without exception, thereby saving much time and cost tied up in making an analysis, because in those days, it was [otherwise] necessary to send the sample to Bialystok or Warsaw. The laboratory carried out all manner of medical analyses.

Distribution of Instruments and Ice – This division was very popular with the entire population for its prompt service, where everyone without exception received the necessary instruments or equipment, as well as ice for the sick. This division was always on duty without a break, whether day or night, and also on the Sabbath and Holidays.

Child Consultation & "Drops for Milk" – The area of child care received special, and considerable attention. A child's health was looked after from birth until the attainment of school age. To this end, a child consultation service was established, where a newborn child was under the oversight of a consulting physician and practical nurse. The need was great in the case of children, for "*Drops for Milk*," where various supplements to be mixed with milk were distributed to be used with bottle feeding, because of the weakened state of the feeding mother. Among these many cases, there were often children who became ill with dyspepsia, and it was only through this "*Drops for Milk* Supplement" that they were rescued from a certain death.

School Medical Care – Medical care for school age children was provided for separately. To this end, a special school medicine office was set up, and all the schools and *Heders* found themselves under the direction of a school physician, who looked after the sanitary condition of the school premises, and for the health of the students. Children who had a need for fresher air and better nutrition were sent to special children's colonies during the summer months in *Otvotsk*, *Chekhotchinek*[123] and *Druzgenik*.

The *Linat Kholim* demonstrated special vigor during the outbreak of the measles epidemic. The needed medical help was dispensed with a full and generous hand, and the stricken were carefully monitored for signs of complications known to accompany this disease. Necessary precautions were also taken against scarlet fever, which had begun to spread throughout the city. To this end, timely vaccinations were given to the children to immunized them against scarlet fever – partly for free, and partly at reduced charges – and this contributed to a rapid isolation of the disease, thereby preventing it from taking on the character of an epidemic.

Dr. M. Weiner (who also was the Kozioner Rabbiner) came to the dispensary daily. The pharmacist of *Linat Kholim* , who sold medicines at low prices, was the son-in-law of Sholom Lev. The dentist of the "Dental Division" was *Miss Rosa Feinzilber*. Later *Mrs. Sarah Novogrudsky-Peisik* worked there as well.

Linat Kholim was one of the most important institutions in Volkovysk, and was very popular because of its wide ambit and grandiose work of assistance – not only in Volkovysk, but in the larger Jewish centers in Poland.

Linat Kholim served the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk without exception: young and old, rich and poor [alike]. There was practically no person in Volkovysk that had not received some help from this institution at one time or another.

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[123] Taken from the Russian word for Tuberculosis, implying a fresh air sanatorium for that disease.

The Jewish Hospital in Volkovysk

Page 173: *The Jewish Hospital in the Year 1925*

Page 175: *The Leadership of the Jewish Hospital in the Year 1924*

Right to Left, First Row from Bottom: Shlomo'keh Frei (the Tailor), Fuchsman, Abraham Kaganovich, Dr. P. Bebchuk, Sioma Gallin, Dr. M. Weiner, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Ozer Kaplan, Sholom Lev's son-in-law (the Pharmacist).

Second Row: Unknown lady, Yud'l Goshchinsky, Reuven Lifschitz, Archik Markus, Shakhna Dworetsky, Sarah Novogrudsky, Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Miss Schwartz, Mrs. Press, 'Nioma Solkovich, Abraham Shalakhovich, a Grandson of the Pot maker.

Page 177: *The Personnel of the Jewish Hospital in the Year 1929*

Right to Left: Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Unknown, Mrs. Sedletsky, Milia Khirurg, Sioma Gallin, Unknown, Unknown, Gruna Halpern (the Midwife).

Page 179: *A Children's Playground Organized by TOZ and WIZO in the Year 1928*

Right to Left, the members of the leadership sitting: Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Rachel Zayantz,
Standing in the last row: Unknown, Mrs. Zohn-Mazya, Miss Mostkov, Sioma Gallin, Zlateh Schein, Mrs. Kovensky-Bliakher.

Page 181: *A Group of Doctors and Nurses in the Jewish Hospital in the Year 1934*

Right Photo:
Right to Left: Dr. Yitzhak Resnick, Khien'keh Galansky, Dr. Joseph Ravitz, Manya Lev, Nechama Lipiak

Left Photo:
Right to Left: Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg, Khien'keh Galansky, Dr. Moshe Niemchik, Dr. Yitzhak Resnick, Nechama Lipiak, Dr. David Kaufman.

Until the last years of the nineteenth century, there was no Jewish hospital in Volkovysk. There was only a military hospital (e.g. *lazaret*). If a Jew became ill, *Dr. Mintz* (who was very popular in Volkovysk) would be called for him, and nobody went to the hospital.

Towards the end of the 19th century, in the year 1898, the renown Volkovysk donor, *Nachman* (Nakheh) *Heller* who was a great merchant and also a great philanthropist (his life story is recounted in the chapter, "Dreamers & Builders"), allocated a large sum of money – 20 to 25 thousand rubles – and erected the *Volkovysk Jewish Hospital* with all required equipment, and also helped out the hospital with annual substantial donations. Also, his *mekhutan*[124], the renown Moscow tea-merchant and philanthropist, *Mr. Gatz*

[124] Curiously, no good English equivalent for a simple relationship: the father-in-law of one's married child.

supported the hospital and would send it supplies of tea and sugar.

Oversight of the hospital was given to Reb Nachman's brothers, *Schraga Feivel & Leib Heller*, his son-in-law *Reb Shmuel Shapiro*, and *Shmuel David Yunovich*. *Shmuel Feinzilber* (Shmuel Glassner) – the sole Jewish deputy in the municipal government – and *Israel Efrat* the well known lawyer, were appointed as curators.

The women of Volkovysk then decided to participate in the good work of helping sick people and they founded the *Bikur Kholim.* Their work consisted of offering assistance to the indigent poor, helping the sick person to get to the hospital, visiting him there, and providing him with good things, which they brought to his sick bed. *Mrs. Chana Khmelnitsky, Fradl Novogrudsky, Mikhlah Einhorn and Chana Heller* were engaged in this work. Also, Mrs. *Chaya Sarah Yudzhik* assisted with the important work of the *Bikur Kholim* organization.

The work was divided among the ladies in the following way: During the course of the week, one part of the ladies would gather up all the good stuffs in the city – wine, chocolate, baked goods, pears, apples, oranges, etc. *Tzip'keh die Ziss'eh* and *Esther die Podriachikheh* (Weinstein)[125] stood at the head of the collection committee. Both would gather a variety of goods for the sick in the hospital, which the sick would receive on the Sabbath. It is interesting to relate an incident that occurred once in connection with the previously mentioned two [women] collectors, at the time when Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg was the Rabbi of the city. A complaint was registered with him that the two lady collectors were taking all the better items they collected for their own use, before giving the rest to the sick. The Rabbi immediately ordered his sexton to bring the two women collectors to him. He didn't spend so much as an hour with them – *Tzip'keh die Zisseh* and *Esther die Podriachikheh* – presented themselves before the Rabbi, trembling with fear. The Rabbi asked them in a stern voice, if [it is true that] they go through all the collected goods for themselves prior to distributing the remainder to the sick. The women answered: "Rabbi,.dear, what are you talking about? May our mouths be forever silenced if we so much as go near the better gathered items. This is for the afflicted, indigent sick, who cannot indulge themselves to even take a taste of good wine, oranges, etc." The Rabbi then stood up and announced: "I decree upon you that from this day forth, you shall indeed take a taste of each of the good stuffs you gather on behalf of the sick, and if there be found [other] women whom this does not please, let them go themselves and gather good stuffs and also distribute them among the indigent sick. This is a great *mitzvah*, and you shall conduct yourselves as I have prescribed."

The second group in the ladies organization consisted of those women, who would take the collected goods, every Friday night after the Sabbath prayers, not giving heed to the weather, rain or snow, and go to the hospital and by themselves, distribute the good stuffs among the indigent sick. This last group consisted of: *Fradl Itcheh Shmuel-Jonah's, Einhorn* the [lady] pharmacist, *Aydeleh Yud'l* the Ironmonger's, *Sarah'keh Yudzhik, Esther Yudzhik*, and others. Each time, they would gather at the house of one or the other of the ladies. In really bad weather, the women were accompanied by the menfolk.

At that time, the *hospital* served only the Jewish poor. No part of the *balebatim* made use of the hospital. Up to the First World War, *balebatim* would be treated in their homes – and the hospital was solely for the use of the indigent.

As the only hospital in the Volkovysk area, it served not only the sick of Volkovysk, but also those of the

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125 These appellations were probably related to the way they made a living. *Tzipkeh die Zisseh* (Sweet) may have been engaged in the sale of sugar and/or confectioneries. *Esther die Podriachikheh* in undergarments.

surrounding towns, who came for therapy to the center-city, where they could always count on receiving the needed help.

With the outbreak of the First World War, the hospital, along with the city, began to undergo requisitioning, going from hand-to-hand with the changes in sovereignty, and was taken over by a variety of civilian and military organs, who made use of it, as usual, only during times of battle. But there was no one to provide maintenance, as is required periodically for a building of this kind. The Jewish populace looked on bitterly, seeing how their community institution was being ruined, and could do nothing about it. The worst of this was when city residents as well as those who came from the surrounding towns, were compelled to be shuttled between cramped private dwellings, often consisting of no more than one room, in which there were often found six or more souls. It is easy to imagine the sanitary conditions of such a domicile, and what kind of circumstances existed in which it was necessary to heal the sick.

The *Linat Kholim* organization, feeling the disruption visited on the Jewish population most strongly, resulting from the confiscation of this important health institution, applied every conceivable measure and pressure in order to re-take control of the hospital. However this was no easy matter. It actually came to carrying out a campaign one year, until finally, in the year 1924 the hospital was released.

But it is not easy to portray the condition in which the hospital was found at that time, after it had passed through so many different hands, who thought of the hospital as an alien institution, and didn't maintain it, even though the structure was destroyed once, along with its inventory during the various battles. The foundation of the building needed to be re-built anew, and a new inventory provided. A colossal amount of money was needed for this. Thanks to the substantial help of Volkovysk *landsleit* in America and contributions collected locally, the hospital was re-built and equipped again, with sections for internal medical and surgical conditions, and a Maternity Division, with all the necessary equipment. It is necessary here to recall *Gruna Halpern*, whose ardor for the Maternity Division was unusually great.

The management process of the hospital, that is to say, the means by which the large annual deficits were covered, was accomplished by a regular monthly membership fee from the local Jewish population, subsidies provided by local community organizations (magistrate and representatives to the Polish *Sejm*), and from Volkovysk *landsleit* in America, who assumed the burden of supporting beds in the hospital in their own names, or in the names of their relatives.

On the basis of the support from the revenue sources previously noted, the hospital began its multi-branched activities in July 1925 for the benefit of the Jewish populace of Volkovysk and its surroundings. Hundreds of sick people were cured thanks to the hospital. A large number of poor expectant mothers had the opportunity to go through their childbirth under the most stringent hygienic conditions, getting medical attention, under good conditions and with attentive care, until they were restored physically after their confinement. These services were rendered to the poor expectant mothers either at a very low cost, or entirely for free. Thanks to this, the hospital attracted both the popularity and sympathy from the entire Jewish population. The expenses of the hospital in 1927 reached 45,000 zlotys.

It its fitting once again to underscore the important role played in the development of the hospital by the two unforgettable dedicated public servants, *Sioma Gallin* and *Archik Markus*. These two individuals literally gave away their entire time and energy for the sake of the health and well-being of the Jewish populace of Volkovysk. These two incomparable public servants used every conceivable opportunity to advance the development of the hospital. The fact that Avigdor Perlmutter brought a substantial sum of money from America in 1922, and promised further assistance from America, served to galvanize these previously mentioned activists, and they literally did not rest, raising funds in good times and bad, until – from the

wreckage – a more beautiful hospital was erected, which by that time served not only the less affluent patients, but also the ranks of the *balebatim* as well. The public was already better informed, and began to understand that one could not receive the same care at home that was available in a modern, well-equipped hospital, and those patients with means were anxious to use the hospital – understandably – for a set fee.

When *Archik (Aharon Markus)* made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, *Sioma Gallin* remained as the director of the Jewish hospital and of the *Linat Kholim* Organization until the destruction of the Volkovysk community by the Nazi murderers.

Up to the First World War, the head physician was *Dr. Galai*. The *Feldscher, Lyubich* (from Grodno) who also served as the pharmacist, also worked there. After the First World War, *Dr. M. Weiner*, who had previously been the Kozioner Rabbiner, was the head physician of the Jewish hospital. After him, the direction of the hospital was taken over by *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky*, who held the position until 1932, when *Dr. Menashe Niemchik* was appointed to the position. The activity of this energetic and skilled physician, and activist, is worth expounding upon at greater length.

The *TOZ*[126] Organization in Volkovysk

TOZ Activities Under the Leadership of Dr. Menashe Niemchik

Page 183: *The TOZ Summer Colony in the Year 1932*
In the back row, standing are: Slova the Bialystoker Baker's daughter), Engineer Yaakov Shipiatsky, Dr. Menashe Niemchik and his wife Clara.

Page 184: *Activists of the Children's Society of TOZ, 1932*

Among the activists are found: Sioma Gallin, Mrs. A. Shlackman, Nieta Khvonyik, Nieta Kaplan, Khien'keh Galansky, Henya Lisky, Miss Yunovich.

Page 185: *Activists on Behalf of the Kinderschutz Organization*

Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: Miss Avramitsky, Dina Einhorn, Miss Schwartz, An'dzheh[127] *Lev*
Second Row: *Two teachers from the Tarbut School, Avreml Novick, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Milia Khirurg, A Teacher.*
Third Row: *Zelig Kagan, Mrs. Pitkovsky, Mrs. Yunovich (Friedman), Unknown, Liza Yudzhik, Masha Yunovich, Feygl Galiatsky Unknown, Mrs. Rubinstein.*

Page 187: *Physician and Nurse Personnel of the Jewish Hospital*
(Before the Outbreak of the last [Second] World War)

Right to left: Dr. Feinberg, Dr. Menashe Niemchik, Dr. Adele Markus, Dr. Joseph Ravitz, a Nurse, Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg, Dr. David Kaufman, Gruna Halpern (midwife), Dr. Markus, Dr. M. Melzack, a Nurse,

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126 Abbreviation for *Towarzystwo Ochorny Zdrowia*, or *Society for Preventative Health*. Formed with the establishment of the Polish Republic, with a national mission to promote improvement in sanitation and hygiene as a deterrent to disease.

127 Affectionate diminutive for Anna, and hence also Chana.

Kham'eh Lipiak (a Nurse).

Page 188: *The Clinic for Pediatric Consultation*
(In the picture at the entrance, are standing Milia Khirurg and Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky)

Page 189: *Children at the Kinderschutz Summer Colony*

Right to Left: *Rebbetzin Tzippora*[128] *Kossowsky, Milia Khirurg, Hadassah Gershovsky*

With the arrival of *Dr. M. Niemchik* in Volkovysk, an especially fruitful epoch in the area *social medicine* activity was initiated in Volkovysk. Dr. M. Niemchik, who held his post until August 1939, when he was mobilized into the Polish Army as a doctor – comes from Warsaw, where he was born and studied medicine, and worked as a doctor in the Warsaw Jewish hospital until 1918. He was then retained as the head of the municipal hospital in Skidel, and in 1932 he was retained by Volkovysk. Dr. Niemchik obtained his position in Volkovysk through a competitive process. The Jewish public organizations in Volkovysk gave Dr. Niemchik a joyous reception, at which time their hope was articulated that under his leadership, the Volkovysk *"TOZ - Organization"* – which had assumed all of the social medical activities of the *Linat Kholim* organization – would be built up to benefit the entire Volkovysk Jewish population. The hope of the Volkovysk activists were realized, and Dr. Niemchik developed a multi-branched social-medical infrastructure, and the TOZ Organization grew vigorously during his tenure.

The Hospital received subsidies from the Volkovysk community and from the central TOZ organization in Warsaw. In the internal diseases division, there were two rooms for children. Patients would arrive daily at the Jewish hospital from the surrounding towns such as Lisokovo, Amstibova, Porozovo, Zelva, Rosh, and others. About 15-20% of the patients were Christian, who paid for their hospital care, and these funds were allocated for the Jewish poor. Apart from Dr. Niemchik, *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg* and the young doctors, *Dr. Joseph Ravitz, Dr. David Kaufman, Dr. Velvel Velvelevsky,* and both *Markuses*, worked in the Division of Internal Medicine *Dr. Feinberg* worked in the Maternity ward; Dr. *Yaakov Sedletsky* worked in the Pediatric Ward.

With the help of the central office of *TOZ-OZA* in Warsaw, it became possible for the activists in Volkovysk to place the Volkovysk hospital on a higher level. An X-Ray laboratory was installed, and a microbiology laboratory also functioned effectively. The well-known surgeon, Dr. Melzack from Warsaw, practiced in the Surgery Division – and all this drew patients not only from Volkovysk and its surroundings, but also young doctors who had studied medicine abroad, who would come to Volkovysk to round out their professional training. Everyone from Volkovysk remembers the beautiful building on the Hospital Street, surrounded by a well-endowed garden, where the sick would be taken out on special beds, so they could get fresh air – and thanks to this, they would heal much faster.

M. Niemchik would make an annual trip abroad for several weeks to acquaint himself with the latest techniques in hospital management. Dr. Niemchik gave special emphasis to the kitchen and made a personal effort to assure that the food should be tasty and dietetic.

In the hospital there were courses for nurses, and we must, at this opportunity, recall the committed work of the nurses under the direction of *Mrs. Lipiak,* who was herself a student in these courses. *Goshchinsky* also did much work for the hospital in addition to the previously mentioned *Sioma Gallin.*

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[128] Referred to in other locations by her Yiddish name, *Feyge* or *Feygl*.

It is therefore no wonder that the Volkovysk hospital developed a name throughout all of Poland.

At the same time, the Volkovysk activists – spearheaded by their top leadership, consisting of *Ephraim Barash, the Lawyer Bliakher, the Engineer Shipiatsky* and *Sioma Gallin* – carried out a broad set of activities in the Volkovysk chapter of *TOZ-OZA*. The activity branched into handling children of school and kindergarten age, hygiene, food distribution to the underweight, fish oil, vitamins, dental services (the lady, Dr. *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky* was a great supporter of this area), and "*Drops of Milk*."Every year, rest camps were organized for poorer children during the summer months in the *Burkeh* Forest – under the supervision of a specially trained staff. *Clara Niemchik* (wife of Dr. Niemchik) provided considerable help with this undertaking. During the last six years prior to the last [e.g. Second] World War, 82 children were sent to summer bungalows. There were also sick children who were sent to the sanatoriums in *Druzgenik* and *Chekhotchinek*.

A kitchen was run on a systematic basis for over 100 poor children, where every child received a lunch of meat and bread. *TOZ* carried on a campaign against uncleanliness and lice infestation among the children by means of bathing and haircuts prior to the holidays, and towards the end, it was decided that the schoolchildren would be washed and bathed every two weeks.

A Report from Sioma Gallin Concerning *TOZ* Activities in Volkovysk For the Year 1939

In an article by Sioma Gallin, which appeared in the *Volkovysker Leben* of June 16, 1939 – only a couple of months before the outbreak of the Second World War – several interesting details of the *TOZ* activities of the year 1939 are reported:

1. The *TOZ* group has rented a very practical location , to which the existing functions of group were transferred from the hospital, and a row of new sections were opened up.

2. In the last couple of months, 342 patients were taken care of in the newly opened *dispensary*.

3. An *examination facility* was opened for pregnant women.

4. The *children's consultation office* took care of 76 patients under its aegis. In the course of three months, 422 cases were tended to. Almost *ten thousand portions* of milk supplements were provided for nursing children.

5. After considerable difficulties, and colossal stress, the *TOZ* was able to buy a house in the *Burkehs*, with 1,700 square meters of space, in which it is intended to organize the *TOZ*-colony for the poor, weakened children. Because of a series of unforseen difficulties, it has not yet been possible in that year (1939) to utilize the premises as a convalescent facility for children, but the *TOZ* activists were certain, that with time, these difficulties would be overcome.

6. In the course of the past budget [cycle] (the year before the War), 898 patients were treated in the hospital for a total of 7444 patient-days; there were 518 instances of distributing medical equipment and ice; there were 420 cases of practical hygiene distributed, 60 cases of social medicine, and 125 calendars. There were 570 attendees at three lectures about hygiene, arranged that year by *TOZ*.

Three Jewish schools were visited, and 690 school age children were examined, and as a result, 210 children were sent to the summer colony in the *Burkehs*, and 5 children to the *TOZ* winter colony in Bialystok. Three children with lung ailments were transferred to the "*Marpeh*" sanatorium in *Otvotsk*, and two children with lung ailments to the *TOZ* sanatorium in Vilna. In the radiology facility, 40 images were made with quartz lamps, 200 images with electrical baths and 68 roentgen grams [e.g. X-rays]. A cleanup campaign was conducted, soap, soda ash and lime was distributed to 80 families. A nutritious meal program was carried out for over 100 school children.

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In this fashion, the social-medical activity in Volkovysk on behalf of the Jewish populace continued to grow – under the leadership of *Dr. M. Niemchik* – until God's wrath spilled out onto the Jewish people, and together with all of Polish Jewry, Volkovysk too, went under, along with all its organizations and institutions.

Dr. Niemchik, as previously noted, who was mobilized as a doctor in the Polish Army, went over to Latvia and Russia after the conquest of Poland, and there after many wanderings, and tribulations, finally in the year 1945, came to the Land of Israel, where he is actively practicing as a doctor in *Ramat-Gan* and takes an active role in the community life of the settlement.

The Volkovysk Old Age Home

Page 193: *The Volkovysk Old Age Home*

Right to Left, First Row Seated: Ahareh the Shammes, L. Ein, Meir Shiff, Esther Weinstein (die Podriachikheh), Abraham Nissan Kronberg, Tuvia the Smith (from Zamoscheh).

Second Row, Standing: Herschel the Wagon Driver, Two unidentified Wagon Drivers, Gutka (Mendel the Dayan's daughter), Unknown, Wife of Yankel the Smith (from Zamoscheh), Mikhlah, the Blind Man's wife, Chaya from the Laundry, Unknown, Aydeleh Mazover, Chasia Pozniak, Nionia, the wife of the Wagon Driver, Tzipa, wife of the Shammes, Dina Leah Jesierski (the Dye-Maker), Unknown.

Last Row: Shimon Ada's, the Melamed, Eli Dina's (the Melamed), Unknown, Unknown, Tzal'keh the Wagon Driver, Yankel the Smith, The Blind Pauper, Moshe Goshchinsky (The Blonde), Alta's brother, from under the Barg, Shimon the Chimney Sweep, Unknown

Page 196: *The Old Folks at the Old Age Home, Prior to the Second World War*

Volkovysk, like many other important Jewish communities in Eastern Europe had its own, well-organized *Old Age Home*, in which old Jewish men and women without family were supported in dignity, in which all of their material and spiritual needs were attended to.

The residents of the Volkovysk old age home came from all classes and walks of life: former storekeepers, workers (hat-makers, tailors, bakers, chimney sweeps, etc.), and near-clergy (shamashim, teachers). Here were found people who were born in Volkovysk, and grew up as the city itself developed, spent their entire lives there, transacted and worked there, brought children and grandchildren into the world, raised and married off sons and daughters, and remained alone in their twilight years: children went away into the

greater world, their own energies waned, and it became difficult to make a living. There were among them, people who were not entirely impoverished, or they received a fixed stipend from their children in America, but they were very lonesome, they were either widows or widowers, they did not have the capacity to prepare their own meals, or take care of themselves, especially on days when they either felt weak or unwell, as happens so often during old age.

For this class of people, the Old Age Home was both a residence and a club at the same time. They had their friends there, people of their own age, with whom they could converse about the "good old days." They had comfortable quarters there, where tasty and nutritious meals were prepared for them, where their laundry was washed; they also had their own synagogue there, a place for prayer and study. In the Old Age Home, they could live out their years in dignity and tranquility – in their own city, which was so deeply imbedded in their hearts, where that had lived through so much joy, and suffering, and where the graves of their parents and grandparents were located, and those of their near and dear relatives and friends.

The Volkovysk Old Age Home developed a good reputation for itself, and during its final years it attracted many of the elderly from surrounding towns, who [also] came there.

For this high level of regard achieved by the Volkovysk Old Age Home, thanks are due to its loyal activists: the three presidents – *Meir Shiff* and (after his death) *Mr. Yaakov Winetsky*, the pocketbook maker from the Wide Boulevard – *Manya Galai, Leib Heller (Weiss), Yaakov Weinstein, L. Ein*, *Mrs. Esther Weinstein, A. Offenberg* (Secretary), and others. These active members spared no effort and energy in placing the Volkovysk Old Age Home on a healthy foundation, so that it will engender respect for the Volkovysk Jewish community.

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The Volkovysk Old Age Home was founded in 1908 (5668) at the initiative of Reb *Schraga Feivel Heller.* In 1927 there were 18 aged men and 17 aged women who were being cared for along with the others: three meals a day were prepared for them daily, and tea with sugar was given to them on request, at any time. Expenses, except for wood, was covered by America – was about 800 zlotys a month. Income came from the following sources: 1) monthly fees from the residents – 150 zlotys a month; 2) from the city administration – 80 zlotys a month; 3) from various contributions. This, however, could not cover all the expenses of the Old Age Home, and a large portion of the income came from Volkovysk *landsleit* in America.

Under the direction of the very energetic president, *Meir Shiff*, the facilities and appearance of the Old Age Home were greatly improved. A substantial renovation of the building and its rooms was carried out, which gave them an entirely different appearance. This attracted financial resources from a variety of sources. Many solitary old people from families who previously had means, came with requests to the Old Age Home administration that they be taken into the institution. But this revealed that there were no free places available for these new candidates for the Old Age Home. Mr. Shiff then decided to put up another building, in order to be able to accommodate everyone who had a need for such an institution. Through his good relationship with the authorities, it became possible for him to acquire a supply of wood from the municipal forests that was needed for the construction of the building. Contributions for the new building also came from other sources, and the building was erected in a matter of several months.

We find an interesting portrait of the Volkovysk Old Age Home, under the direction of Meir Shiff in an article by *Alexander Kalir* that was published in the *Volkovysker Leben* of 1930. The writer describes how he went for a visit to the new building of the Old Age Home with the director, *Mottel Leib Kaplan*, over

which appear the words: “An Old Age Home – Cast Us Not Into Old Age:”

“A clean, neat yard with the old building of the Old Age Home on one side, and on the second side – a spanking new just-completed wooden building, with an attractive porch, a regal facade, which brings to mind an inn or a pension in *Otvotsk* or *Schvieder*.

We go inside. Through a corridor, we come into a wide, open and well lit eating room: three large, long tables are arranged in a “U.” An eight-branched candelabra hangs over them – on the wall is a large circular clock. A large coal stove spreads an inviting warmth [throughout the room]. A spigot juts out of the stove that dispenses tea all day long. At a side – in a wall, is a square little window, through which food is served from the kitchen.

We went into the kitchen: A big cooking surface, and surrounding it are tables covered with metal pots. Solitary ladies stand about, and are rolling out rolls of noodles. It is a midday week, and we wondered: “Are you making noodles already for the Sabbath?” – we asked them – “No” – they answered us – “We are preparing the evening meal – dairy noodles.” “Are these the cooks?” I simply tossed the question at her, not having anything else to ask. “No, no – the two elderly Jewish ladies quickly answer to “assure” us, – the cook is a [much] young[er] person!”... We smiled at the answer, and went into the “pantry:” There is a variety of foodstuffs, sacks of flour, a crock of cucumbers, and other things to eat. In general one sensed the skilled hand of a capable homeowner, with a strict economical discipline wherever we turned. From there we come out into a large fenced yard. Several sheep were grazing on the lawn, chickens and roosters walked about.

– These have already been provided for *kapores*[129] – the President, Mr. Shiff explained, pointing to the birds, and then led us to the brook.

–What is there? – A beach perhaps, also?...-- director Kaplan says jokingly – but instead of a beach, we see a setup for handling the laundry for the old folks, and a place for summer wood.

Turning back, Mr. Shiff points out the bell, which joins the two buildings, and pulls on the handle ... the oldest residents begin to come out, appearing in the yard. They have the ‘privilege’ of eating their midday meal earlier. May they eat in good health.

In the old building we meet with old people from many places. Every visit bears witness to the type of life the individual lived, and what sort of 70 years have transpired for him.

Here, we meet an old man who greets us with a broad ‘bonjour’ and immediately as he sees us begins to recite declensions: *Imenitelny – kto chto, roditelny – kovo chevo, datelny – komu, chemu...*[130] – and if you are interested, he will recite by heart the poem Чиж и Соловей[131]... many years before, he studied in a

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129 The purification ritual before the *Yom Kippur* fast, where the sins of an individual are ‘transferred’ to a rooster, which is then ritually slaughtered and cooked. A variant of the ritual of the scapegoat. In the absence of fowl, coins are often substituted.

130 The speaker is showing off his knowledge of Russian. These are respectively the nominative, genitive and dative case endings for Russian nouns.

131 The Finch and the Nightingale

Приходский Учи́лище[132] he recalls (*kein ayin horeh*).
– Who is this man? – director Kaplan asks.

– Reb Shimon the oven cleaner – President Shiff answers.

– The chimney sweep – Reb Shimon corrects.

We take our leave of him with a friendly 'au revoir' wishing him long years...

We peek into the rooms. Here, an elderly couple is conversing so friendly and lovingly, but they are sitting – back to back with each other.

In a second room – two elderly Jewish women. One is lying down on the bed asleep, a second is sitting on her hand deeply concerned, bitterly worried.

What is this poor lonely old woman thinking about? – the question enters my mind – about her long gone youth? About her children who are spread all over creation? About her lot... I get choked up just looking at her, and it is at this point that I am reminded of the [High Holy Day Prayer] "Cast Us Not Into Old Age," and it is here that the line becomes completely clear to me...

But Mr. Shiff doesn't permit us to think, he takes us into the office... In the office, *Abraham Offenberg* the secretary, receives us in a friendly manner, who informs us about the features with which the new building has been equipped: the foundation was donated by the recently deceased *Reb Sholom Barash*; 500 dollars – *Horaczy Heller* (the House is named for him); the *Grafina*[133] *Bronitska* – nine square meters of lumber; the well-known alderman *Shirayev* – an overcoat The Rozher Cement Factory – 15 'rounds' of cement, A Warsaw Company, *Degenschein* – a case of glass; Mrs. *Fradl Shiff* – the Candelabra; A Warsaw Company, *Applebaum* – the clock...

Everything was acquired through the efforts of President Shiff – our friend Offenberg explains – he traveled everywhere personally, and at his own expense.

We leave the office. In the *Bet HaMedrash Room*, the old men are already seated around a table and are studying a chapter of the *Mishna*[134]. The ritual slaughterer *Reb Reuven Kagan* is leading the lesson...

We thank president Shiff, and leave the institution.

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132 A Parish School

133 Wife of a *Graf* – a nobleman

134 The first part of the codified Oral Law, preceding the *Gemara*, but together with it, forming the *Talmud*.

For his dedicated work on behalf of the good of the institution, it was decided after the death of President *Meir Shiff* to place his portrait in the new building, which was constructed as a result of his efforts.

After the death of Mr. Meir Shiff (in the year 1936) it was decided to appoint the retiring, shy pocketbook maker *Yaakov Winetsky* as president of the Old Age Home, whose wife was the cousin of the well-known Volkovysk activist and merchant Moshe Zelitsky. The pocketbook maker was a noteworthy person, a common man of heart, who with his effective activity on behalf of anonymous charitable giving (the institution that had the purpose to secretly assist those who had fallen from positions of means, and for a variety of reasons became impoverished, but were to ashamed to ask for help) endeared himself to all classes of the Volkovysk Jewish population.

After the Russians entered the city, the Old Age Home functioned in a normal fashion. However, at the time of the German bombardment the Old Age Home was entirely burned down. The old folks were dispersed into various homes, to their relatives or simply to people who knew them.

Under the German occupation, a portion of them died from the difficulty of living circumstances. When the forced expulsion to the bunkers took place, only the strongest among them were able to go away with their families. The weaker ones, who could not come along, were gathered on *November 2, 1942* in the Talmud Torah, and shot by the Germans. The remainder of them, who survived the period in the bunkers, before the forced expulsion from the bunkers, were brought together in the notorious Bunker Number 3 where they were gassed.

The Volkovysk Fire-Fighters

Page 199: *An Appeal to American Landsleit After the Second Great Fire of 1908*

Page 201: *Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse Before the First World War*
On the right side of the picture, the old Firefighters Headquarters Building can be seen

Fires, and fear of fires, occupied a prominent place in the lives of the Jewish towns in the former Pale of Settlement in Russia, and in the lives of their Jewish residents.

In addition to all the other calamities such as epidemics, anti-Semitism, czarist decrees, and other tribulations and aggravations, fires belonged to the class of irremediable aggravations in the Jewish *shtetl.* Often, on a beautiful summer day, in the span of a few hours, such a fire would transform tens and hundreds of *balebatim* and merchants into paupers, who had no other alternative but to go out into the world with a letter from those who were burned out, in order to beg for a living.

It is necessary to take into consideration, that in those years the concept of insurance "*Strakhovka*" was not a widespread concept. When a calamity occurred, and a fire broke out during the summer in a *shtetl*, where most of the houses and stores were constructed out of wood, and they were dried out on account of the summer heat – the cry of "*Pozhar! Pozhar!*" (*Fire! Fire!*), alone would instill fear and panic among the residents, because it wasn't possible to tell when and where the fire would be stopped. If a fire broke out at one end of the city, immediately at the other end, people began emptying out furniture, bedding and other possessions from their houses. Mothers would run off to gather to locate their children, and a pall would fall over the city.

In every Jewish *shtetl*, fires would occur periodically, some smaller, some larger, that would etch themselves so strongly into the memories of the populace, that the resident Jews would use them as the principal markers in reckoning time: "before the great fire," and "so many and so many years after the great fire"...[135] Volkovysk also had such fires: The first was in 1886 and the second fire in 1908. It is therefore no wonder, that the establishment of the firefighters organization was received by the Volkovysk Jewish populace with great joy and satisfaction. Jews from all classes and walks of life belonged to the fire-fighting organization, and the fire-fighters organization grew from year-to-year, it developed and took over a more prominent place in the lives of the Volkovysk Jewish population.

The story of the Volkovysk *Firefighters Organization* also provides an insight into the lives of the Jewish people of Volkovysk. Despite the fact that the Firefighters Organization was a general, municipal entity,-- almost all of its members were Jews, and among the approximately two hundred members that the organization counted in the years up to the Second World War, there were barely a handful of Christians. One could also see this in the names of the members who belonged to the Volkovysk fire brigade at various times, who protected the lives and property of the residents. Among the members of the fire-fighters, one could find men from all walks of life and professions: glaziers, musicians, watchmakers, bakers, butchers, storekeepers, barbers, shoemakers, tailors, garment seamers, *shokhatim*, dry good storekeepers,

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135 How well I recall, while trying to fix my grandfather's age, I asked him "When were you born?" He answered: *nokh dem ershten Pozhar* (after the first great fire). My grandmother was equally helpful, when asked the same question: *nokh dem tzvayten Pozhar* (after the second great fire).

metalworkers, ironmongers, hired hands, hoteliers, metalworkers, cigarette makers, artists, hat-makers, etc.

Also, the firefighters' orchestra, which was founded later, consisted mostly of Jews, and during its time developed itself to a high level of quality.

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After the first great fire, *Tuvia Fenster* tells, *Koppel Isser Volkovysky* proposed that a fire brigade be established. The proposal pleased the people, and they went to the governor of [the] Grodno [province] to learn about the necessary formalities.

The first meeting about this matter was held in the yard of the elder *Jesierski*. The town officials came to this initial organizing meeting: *the Pristav, the Notary Beyrashevsky, the Postmaster Schwab, the Tax Inspector Zhdanov, and the Doctor Olshevsky.* All the details were worked out, but regarding the question of uniforms for the firefighters, there was a difference of opinion. An agreement could not be reached whether the firefighters should wear badges, or could discharge their responsibilities with only a red hat, or perhaps just with an armband, and whether they can wear these emblems all week, or only during the time they were involved in putting out a fire. The elder Jesierski helped to arrive at a compromise, and Koppel Isser's proposal was accepted.

The first firefighter in Volkovysk was *Mottel Kilikovsky* (who is also known under the name *Motkeh Pas*). He was all of seventeen years old when he – the first – came to the office, and volunteered to become a firefighter. Mottel Kilikovsky, who is today in America (Hartford, Connecticut), provided us with a number of interesting details and episodes in the history and development of the Volkovysk firefighters organization.

The first chief of the firefighters was tall *Zhdanov*. During his time, the firefighters were divided into several sections – bucket brigade, mechanized brigade, and ladder-climbing brigade, the *Lazarshchikehs* , as they were called in town. Kilikovsky was the leader of the *Lazarshchikehs*, who would climb up onto the roofs. His ambition was to become the top commander of the fire brigade, and he achieved this.

The fire chiefs, in chronological order were: *Zhdanov, Rusanov,* two Christian chiefs, *Abraham Neiman* (with him, the tradition of Jewish fire chiefs began), *Abraham Galiatsky* (the barber), *Motkeh Kilikovsky*; the last fire chief was *Melekh Khantov*.

At the beginning, the fire-fighters command post was in a small house. However, later, a large building was put up with a jail and with stores. There was also a large 'garage' called the '*pozharny serai*[136].' There was a machine in the garage with a wheel which turned itself in all directions in order to spray water in all directions. Eight men would pump, four on each side. Water was carried in 4-5 barrels.

Establishment of the Fire-Fighters Organization and Command

Page 202: *The Jewish Commandants of the Fire-Fighters Brigade*

Top: (Left to Right): *Abraham Galiatsky, Abraham Neiman*

[136] Literally the 'Fire-fighters abode.'

Bottom (Left to Right): Melekh Khantov, Mottel Kilikovsky

Page 205: The Firefighters Organization Under the German Occupation In the Time of the First World War

Right to Left – First Row from the Bottom: Epstein (from the Glass Store), Chaim Galiatsky, Langbord (from the Duners[137]).

Second Row: Mushatsky (the Metalworker's), Shmuel Shkolnik, Essmont (a Christian), Shmuel Kaplan, Tishkevich (the Burgomaster), Abraham Galiatsky Commandant), Marantz, A Christian, Mottel Kilikovsky (Assistant-Commandant), Herschel the Tinsmith's son, Langbord, Yoss'l Pikarsky (Poliak).

Third Row: Leib Ein, Mazya (The one with a limp), Alter Galai, Galiatsky (The Shoemaker's son), Feivel[138], the Ironmonger's grandson, David (of the Matchases), Berel Epstein (The Metalworker), Ephraim Yelsky, Slutsky, Yoss'l Boyarsky (The Hatmaker), Moshe Winetsky (The Watchmaker), Shchupak (A son of Noah the Shokhet), Langbord (from the Duners), Stein (The Butcher), Shipiatsky (The Garment Seamer), Galiatsky (a second son of the Shoemaker).

Fourth Row: Shchupak, Dubinsky, Shim'keh Levkov (The Musician), Leizer Shiff, Yoss'l Davidovsky (The Garment Seamer), Motkeh Leib Kaplan, Moshe Pripstein, David Pripstein, Langbord (from the Duners)[139], Mottel Kaplan.

Last Row: Shevakhovich, A Christian, Moshe'keh Rutchik, Leizer Sokolsky, Pesach Galiatsky, Israel Yellin (A Musician), A Christian (Yodzhik's son), Epstein (from the Glass Store), Mushatsky (from the Matchases).

At the end of the previous century, in 1898, instructions arrived from the governor of Grodno to establish a firefighters organization in Volkovysk. The seat of the municipal government was then found on the *Ostroger Gasse*, near the "*Weissen Ostrog*[140]". The young Jewish people reacted vigorously to the appeal of the city government, and volunteered as members in the newly founded fire-fighters organization.

As previously noted, the first to sign up was the seventeen year-old Mottel Kilikovsky. And here is how it happened:

One fine summer day Motkeh Kilikovsky was taking a walk in the street with a couple of his friends, when

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137 A Volkovysk Family

138 Possibly a typographical error. More likely, *Feivel*.

139 Likely counted twice, given the configuration of the rows.

140 Reference to the White Jail building at the corner of Kosciuszko (a.k.a. Aleksandryjska) Gasse and the Poritzisheh Gasse (a.k.a. Dworjanska), as marked on the map in the Wolkovisker Yizkor Book.

they saw a circle of people clustered around Chafetz's stand where soda water and ice cream (*marozheneh*) was sold, and because of this, it was a sort of 'center' a place where young people would gather, talk and pass the time. When Mottel approached in order to find out what was going on, he saw a policeman (*strazhnik*) tacking up an announcement (*obyavlenya*) onto a telegraph pole, in which it is declared that, in connection with the order of the governor, a Fire Brigade is being established in Volkovysk, and volunteers are requested to come sign up at the "*Oprava*." When Motkeh read this over, he immediately went to the *Oprava*, and signed up for the Fire Brigade. When the young Kilikovsky came into the secretariat to sign up, *Bolodkov* the secretary went over to the other officials saying with wonder: *smotrityeh, gospoda, ietcheh nye viklieli, a uzheh yavlisya adyin vpisatsiya* (look, good sirs, we haven't yet posted all the announcements and already someone has come to sign up). He then opened up a new ledger and entered the first volunteer – Mordechai Kilikovsky.

Only a few weeks later, the first meeting of the fire-fighters took place. Approximately forty-five young people, almost all Jewish, joined up. Zhdanov also came to the meeting. He was the city inspector. He was tall, and heavy, he lived on Karczyzna [street] near the white jail. He was responsible for controlling the licenses and permits for the stores – but he would reach an understanding with his clients... he thanked all the members for their interest, and the firefighters organization then elected him as the first chief. The chairman of the firefighters organization was *Andreyev,* the Volkovysk investigative judge.[141] Shortly thereafter, the firefighters met again, and a special officer of the 16th Brigade (artillery) was invited to muster the firefighters. Zhdanov organized the group, and everyone received an assignment: a group for the machines, a group for water, a group of "*Lazarshchikehs*," who climbed up to roofs on ropes. Motkeh Kilikovsky became the leader of the climbers. He oversaw a group of twenty men. He was always the first and fastest one to enter into a fire.

Zhdanov then brought new pumping equipment from Warsaw, the number of barrels was increased to fifteen, and the "*Izvoshchikehs*" were mobilized who were responsible for hitching the horses at the first fire alarm. Those would arrived first at the scene received a special double reward.

Founding of the Fire-fighters Orchestra

Page 207: *Fire Fighters Command and Magistrate's Building*

Page 208: *A Fire Drill by the Fire-fighters on Poliachek's Building*

Page 209: *A Drill by the Fire-fighters on the Grodno Gasse*
(The house in the picture was the property of Yankel Palteh's father-in-law's parents and lastly belonged to Adin).

The commander after Zhdanov was *Rusanov*. Before this, he was the police inspector's assistant (Помощник Исправник). As a result of his initiative, a firefighter's orchestra was established. He developed an understanding with Mottel Kilikovsky, and gave him the responsibility for the organization of the orchestra. Kilikovsky really took to this task, and he invited many residents of Volkovysk who had musical talent, such as *Yisrael Nakdimon, Yankel Hurwitz, Rutchik* and select members of the Volkovysk musical troupes. There was no cornet player in Volkovysk, so Mottel Kilikovsky went with *Kereyevian*, the oldest policeman, to

[141] Possibly a District Attorney, or equivalent.

Volp and they brought back a cornet player from there. *Yisrael Nakdimon* became the bandleader. From that point on, they worked speedily for a few weeks on rehearsals and marching practice. When everything was ready, the fire-fighters appeared in the streets, marching and playing. They traversed all streets: *Grodno*, the Wide Boulevard, *Ostroger*, and the *Schulhof*. The city abandoned its normal daily work routine, and the entire population participated in this important holiday of the fire-fighters organization in Volkovysk. The following summer, a special *park* was rented, near Jesierski's house, behind Chaim Warshawer's abode. The firefighters' orchestra would play there twice a week during the summer months. A buffet was installed there with all manner of beverages and ice cream (*marozheneh*). Almost all the young people would come to these concerts. The girls would pull the uniform buttons off the fire-fighters...

A few years later, a new place was rented for the fire-fighters orchestra. This was on the *Poritzisher Gasse*. From there it was possible to walk over to the Volkovysk Municipal Park, on the Piesk road, in the vicinity of the Zamkov Forest, near *Bulharin*. The Yiddish theater troupes would meet in that park. That was the center of all celebrations in Volkovysk. When the circus came to town, it would arrange to have its shows there. The orchestra developed considerably. All its summer engagements were held there. All this took place during the time that Rusanov was the chief commander.

At that time, the fire-fighters organization had already grown, and consisted of two hundred men. An associate membership program (Членй) was also implemented, that is, apart from the volunteers, who had to participate in fire drills and operations, many *balebatim* assumed responsibility to act as overseers of possessions that had to be put out into the street during a fire. Several months later, the active fire-fighters received caps with blue bands, and the associates – caps with red bands. There was a drill every week.

The Jewish Fire Chiefs

Page 211: *Funeral of the Firefighter Zilberman in the Year 1920*

The funeral cortège stretches from the Schulhof in the direction of the cemetery; the stores (to the right), are all closed.

After Rusanov, there were two Christian fire chiefs, and then *Abraham Neiman* became the fire chief – the first Jewish commander of the fire brigade. After him were *Abraham Galiatsky* (the Barber) and *Mottel Kilikovsky*, the first fire-fighter in Volkovysk. In the time that Mottel Kilikovsky was the commander, he instituted a stringent discipline and allocated a great deal of time to drills, and the fire-fighters would climb on Poliachek's three-story building. The entire city, young and old alike, would come to observe these drills.

In the time of the Russian regime (under the Czar), Mottel Kilikovsky was the assistant commander, and also during the time of the German occupation in the First World War, and also a short time thereafter (under the Poles) – the chief commander of the Fire Brigade.

The extent to which the firefighters organization was beloved by the city, can be seen from the fact that when in the time of the First World War, a firefighter died, Ephraim Zilberman's son, a large funeral took place, and the entire city came to show its respect for one of its own loyal servants and overseers.

When Mottel Kilikovsky left for America in 1924, the fire-fighters orchestra came to see him off at the train station, together with a large crowd. It was in this fashion that Volkovysk took its leave of, full of love, for its first volunteer member and important activist on behalf of the firefighters organization.

The Fire Brigade Under the Leadership of Melekh Khantov

When the merchant, *Melekh Khantov* (Poliachek's son-in-law) took over the leadership of the fire brigade in 1919, it had altogether, a couple of wooden barrels with a broken machine (e.g. pump). Under Khantov's leadership, the firefighters organization grew vigorously. Thanks to his ever-present leadership, even under the most difficult circumstances, this institution was put on a higher plateau during Khantov's administration. In the year 1926, the Fire Brigade consisted of ninety members with military training, and a well-rehearsed orchestra, under the direction of *Mot'yeh Zilberman*, who was famous throughout the vicinity. The brigade at that time already possessed a variety of firefighting equipment, among them, five machines of the latest design, ten metal barrels, a larger number of ladders and six horses.

In 1929, the fire brigade acquired a second motor-driven pump, which was significantly larger than the first. It had four nozzles, such that in case of a fire, it was possible to spray water through four separate hoses. This modern pump cost $1,400 on order. Shortly thereafter, the brigade acquired a large reservoir truck, with a capacity of three thousand liters of water, which had two separate pumps with which to spray the streets, in line with the practice of larger cities.

Celebration of the Thirtieth Anniversary in the Year 1929

Page 213: *The 30th Anniversary Parade of the Firefighters in the Year 1929*

Page 214: *Volkovysk Firefighters*

Right to Left: *Leizer Shiff, Chaim Velvel Klatshkin, Yankel Goldberg (Husband of Shosh'keh Kvachuk), Itcheh Botvinsky, Moshe'l Shakhnovich, Ephraim Yunovich and Melekh Khantov (The Commandant).*

Page 215: *The Firefighters' Orchestra*

Right to Left – First Row, Seated: *Yankel Goldberg (Kvachuk), Mot'cheh Zilberman (The Conductor), Melekh Khantov (Commandant), Ephraim Yunovich (Adjutant), Avreml Kilikovsky, Tzal'yeh Kilikovsky, Yankel Pereminsky, Shalkovich, L. Travinsky.*

Second Row, Standing: *Shlitt (A Christian), Yud'l Pereminsky, Yankel Beckenstein, The Barber, Y. Nakdimon, Zapoliansky, Lichter (from the Orphanage), Kossowsky, Podolinsky (The Carpenter), L. Shifran, Mopsik;*

Third Row, Standing: *Rubinstein, Becker, Y. Tkach, Leizer Shevakhovich.*

In 1929, Volkovysk celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of its fire-fighters organization, which had reached a high level of proficiency in these thirty years, under the leadership of Melekh Khantov, who gave this work his entire energy and full time. The adjutant of the Fire Brigade during Khantov's tenure was *Ephraim Yunovich.*. Also, the former magistrate, Mr. Eustakhevich related to the Fire Brigade with great interest. And it was not only in the area of developing a modern and well-stocked inventory that Melekh Khantov excelled. He especially focused on the training of the firefighters, and to achieve this goal, he established special

training courses. It was during Khantov's tenure that water was transported by motorized truck instead of by horse-drawn wagon, as had been done up to that time.

That the Volkovysk Fire Brigade stood on a higher level and was no ordinary small-town amateur organization, is demonstrated by the fact that it received a certificate of honor from the central organization of Fire Brigades in Warsaw (*Volkovysker Leben*, June 21, 1929). According to that same publication, the leadership of the Volkovysk Fire Brigade was the only one of the institutions that received such a certificate. The certificate was presented on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the organization. The anniversary was celebrated in an imposing manner. Government officials and representatives of fire brigades from the neighboring towns came to the celebration. The celebration was conducted in accordance with a prescribed program. The demonstration drills and outstanding use of the newly acquired tools and modern equipment to rescue the helpless in the event of a fire, from the highest houses, demonstrated the high level on which the Volkovysk Fire Brigade had been placed.

In the evening of that day, a general richly served meal was provided in the yard of the train station, where individual guests stood up and offered greetings to the magistrate and commandant Khantov for their leadership given for the benefit of the Fire Brigade.

Fifteen people were given citations from the central organization: For thirty years of active service – *Commandant Khantov, Essmont, Moshe Pripstein, David Pripstein, Ephraim Yelsky;* for twenty years – *Berel Weinberg*, and *Moshe Weiner*; for fifteen years – *Yitzhak Levin* and *Myrim Stein*; for ten years – *Ephraim Yunovich* (adjutant), *Leizer Shiff, Zaydl Guralnik, Hirsch Orinovsky, Hirsch Gurevich*, and *Yaakov Pripstein.*

Apart from this, the central organization in Warsaw established that gold medals would be awarded to the above mentioned fire-fighters for their service during the ten years of [newly] liberated Poland.

To see how far Khantov excelled as the commandant of the fire-fighters we can see from a news item, which was published in the *Volkovysker Leben* of May 7, 1937:

> "After the exercises of May 3, a fiery decoration ceremony took place in front of the personnel. In the presence of Poviatov, the commandant of police, and an instructor of the firefighters, the magistrate expressed his recognition of commandant Melekh Khantov for his long years of service for the benefit of the local firefighting personnel. Thanks to Khantov's leadership – the magistrate said – personnel were developed with a strong discipline, and well trained in technical readiness, so much so, that they can be considered number one in the district. The population of Volkovysk needs to consider itself fortunate in having such an energetic commandant, who stands on his watch to guard the city from the danger of fire.
>
> Wishing him many more long years of remaining in his post, the magistrate decorated him, accompanied by the sounds of the orchestra, with the highest decoration – a gold medal.
>
> The fire-fighters *Zaydl Mopsik* and *Yaakov Weiner* were decorated with bronze medals; *Meir Krum, Israel Koss* and *Shmeryl Minkovich* – with service certificates."

The orchestra also developed very well during Khantov's tenure. *Mot'cheh Zilberman* was designated as the bandleader, and the orchestra would perform at all celebrations and festive occasions. Grandiose balls were arranged in those years by the fire-fighters orchestra every Saturday night, and young people were eager to attend, and took good advantage of these events. Proceeds went to the fire-fighters organization. The orchestra would also arrange concerts and often traveled to the surrounding towns on various evenings, and

inj this way, it would increase the income to the Volkovysk fire-fighters organization.

It is appropriate to delineate the role the Fire Brigade played during the time of the First World War, when sovereignty turned over, and often the city would remain without anyone in charge, and those individuals who under the thunder of artillery, risked their lives and maintained order and guarded the belongings of the residents, were the fire-fighters.

In the year 1915, when the Czarist regime left Volkovysk, and the German military had not yet appeared to enter the town and take over control – the city remained without government for a couple of days. The only protectors of the city at that time were the fire-fighters, who organized themselves into a militia. They were dressed in their fire-fighting uniforms with white armbands. And also after this, when the Germans entered the city, the fire-fighters remained inn the municipal militia.

The Role of the Fire-fighters Organization in the Unrest After the First World War

Page 217: *The Firefighters Organization with the Orchestra in the Year 1929*

Right to Left – First Row, from the Bottom:

Shevakh, A Christian, Yoshpeh, Yud'l Podolinsky, Mopsik, Avreml Kilikovsky (behind the last person), Mot'cheh Gurevich, Pripstein, Pereminsky (behind the last person), A Christian, Itcheh Rubinovich, Mot'cheh Zilberman (The Orchestra Conductor), Yitzhak Levin (The Medic), Shlitt (A Christian), Mendel Rutchik, Yankel Weiner.

Second Row:

Goldberg (standing), Mulya Einhorn, Ephraim Yelsky, 'Niomka Solkovich, Yud'l Shpak, Velvel Klatshkin, Motkeh Kilikovsky (Former Commandant), Melekh Khantov (Commandant), Pavensky (Burgomaster), Essmont (A Christian and Assistant-commandant), Nionia Fuchs (Adjutant), Aizik Werner, Ephraim Yunovich, Moshe Yanovsky, Pereminsky.

Third Row:

A Christian, Yankel Weiner, Stein (A Grandson of Yaakov Abraham the Dayan), Itzel Tchopper (?), Gandz, Zaydl (Bontsheh the Shoemaker's son), Uryonovsky, Pripstein, Moshe'l Movshovsky, Avreml Yunovich, Fishl Goshchinsky, Langbord (Graf), Aizik Pappa, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky (in mufti), Volya Lazarovsky (in mufti), Unknown.

Fourth Row:

Abba Berman, Pripstein, Shifran, Beckenstein (?), Zaydl, Gabriel Yellin, Nakdimon, Il'keh Lev.

Page 218: A Group of Volkovysk Firefighters

Right to Left, Seated: Pay'eh Yunovich, Chaim Velvel Klatshkin
Standing: Leizer Shiff, Moshe Yanovsky

Page 219: *A Group of Firefighters*

Right to Left Standing: *Aizik Werner, Yud'l Shpak, Velvel Klatshkin.*
Seated: *Nionia Fuchs*

At the time the Germans left Volkovysk in the year 1919, when the Polish legions stood on one side of the city, by the *Narew River*, and the Russian Red Guards stood on the other side at the *Shchara River* (Slonim), the Volkovysk population found itself in a conflicted position, not knowing which of the two warring factions would take control of the city. News then arrived that Polish nationalists, with the help of Polish peasants, were carrying out pogroms against the Jews, especially in the villages and smaller towns, the discharged Jewish soldiers gathered themselves, along with the members of the Fire Brigade, and they decided to form a private self-defense group in Volkovysk itself. An effective action plan was then worked out. Arms were procured from the Germans, who had left the city, because they wanted the Jews to be able to confront the Poles and not let them take control, in order to make the retreat of the German military possible (the path from Volkovysk to *Druzgenik* was their only way out). The self-defense organization decided to cache the arms, and utilize them only against the Polish brigands, and not against the regular Polish legions, in order not to endanger the entire Jewish population. The members of the Jewish self-defense group were Jewish youth who came from all walks of life, and was made up mostly of Fire Brigade members.

The Fire Brigade Under Polish Rule

Page 221: *The Firefighter Command in the Year 1934*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Bassin, Vi'tcheh[142] Kalir, Mopsik, Itcheh Botvinsky, Noah Fuchs, Yitzhak Levin (Medic), Mottel Halpern, Pereminsky.*

Second Row: *Itzel Tchopper, Moshe Moshkovsky, Yankel Weiner, Nionia Khvalovsky, Ephraim Yunovich, Nionia Fuchs, Itzel Bereshkovsky (in mufti), Viktorovsky (a Christian), Melekh Khantov (he Commandant), A Christian, Christian, Essmont (Assistant-Commandant), Einstein (from Zelva), Yankel Goldberg (Kvachuk).*

Third Row: *Lisitsky, Kushnirovsky, A Christian (der Struzh), Avreml Podolinsky, Leizer Shiff, Itcheh Rubinovich, Berel Davidovsky, Zaydl, Moshe'l Savuolsky, Shepsel Feitelevich, Katz, Simcha Shevakhovich, Unknown, Langbord (Graf), A Man from Zelva, A Man from Zelva, Herschel Weiner.*

When the Polish regime took control of Volkovysk, it wanted immediately to disband the Jewish Fire Brigade and establish a Polish fire-fighters organization. A significant struggle then ensued. At the head of the fire-fighters organization stood *Melekh Khantov*, and his adjutant *Nionia Fuchs*. The entire Jewish population of Volkovysk, which knew the unqualified [good] relationship of this institution well, addressed the negotiations. *Sholom Barash*, a member of the municipal administration, and *Mikhal [Zohn]-Mazya*, secretary, turned worlds upside down, and did not permit the firefighters organization to be disbanded. The Poles, seeing the great resistance on the part of the entire Jewish population, then were forced to establish

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142 Nickname for *Avigdor*

a second Fire Brigade on the new side of town (New Volkovysk), which took on the mission of integrating the two organizations, with the sole purpose of such a union being the elimination of a Jewish majority among the firefighters. In the eyes of those not familiar with the situation, this proposal had a very democratic appearance. But the Jewish masses instinctively felt that a danger lurked for the Jewish firefighters organization. Already, at the time of the first fire, which broke out in the city at that time, the Poles felt the strong fist of the Jewish firefighters – the butchers, porters, millers, carpenters and shoemakers – and in the end they were forced to abandon their plan. It was in this fashion that the Jewish Fire Brigade remained independent under its own command, which at that time, consisted of eighty loyal young men of the Jewish faith.

The Fire Brigade and its orchestra occupied a highly visible place in Jewish community life right up to the final years. But it is interesting to note that close to the outbreak of the last [sic: Second] World War, the anti-Semitic attitude toward the Jewish population had begun to affect such issues as the firefighters organization. Thus, the following news item was printed in *The Volkovysker Leben* of May 6, 1938 concerning the holiday of May 3:

> " At ten o'clock in the morning, prayers of joy emanated from the houses of worship of all faiths. In the Large Synagogue, the cantor and choir chanted the relevant verses from the Psalms, and the Rabbi spoke on issues of the day.
>
> What made a great impression was the fact that the cohort of the Fire Brigade, in contrast to prior years, was this time not led by the Jewish Chief, M. Khantov, but by the former magistrate, Mr. Wolsky. Also, the standard was taken out of Jewish hands and carried by Christian firefighters. In general, it was noted that there was a sudden influx of new faces among the firefighters – a large number of Christians..."

In September 1939, when the Poles retreated from Volkovysk, before the Russians showed evidence of occupying the city, Volkovysk once again remained without rule. And at that time as well, the Jewish firefighters protected the Jewish population from pogroms.

When the Nazis occupied Volkovysk, they also appointed *Khantov* and *Fuchs* the leaders of the Fire Brigade, as leaders of the Jews in the *Judenrat.* Other senior members of the firefighters were also appointed to the Jewish police under the German occupation. All of this is indicative of the significant role that the firefighters organization played in the life of the Jewish community of Volkovysk..

The Volkovysk *Maccabi*

All the developments and initiatives, that arose in the larger Jewish world, found leaders and followers in Volkovysk. The great national movement, which in the last several decades has spread all over the world, and which advocated: the development and strengthening of the Jewish physical being through sports events – the *Maccabi*[143] – also had a branch in Volkovysk, which was very active in a number of areas, and focused considerable energies to the realization of the motto: " A healthy spirit and a healthy body."

Establishment of *Maccabi*

Page 224: *The First 'Maccabi' Soccer Team in Volkovysk*

Right to Left, First Row Bottom: *Mulya Schein, Yankel Goldberg (Kvachuk), Yud'l Shpak*
Second Row: *Yud'l Rip, Min'yeh Goldenberg, Pay'eh Yunovich*
Third Row: *Volya Lazarovsky, Yankel Zuckerman, Shlomo Shipiatsky, Nionia Khvalovsky, Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Sholom Hubar.*

Page 225: *Members of 'Maccabi'*

Right to Left, First Row Seated: *Malka Polonsky (Shalakhmones's), Malka Rutchik, Miss Lipiak, A grandchild of Voliarsky, Gittl Ein, Nechama Lipiak, Chay'cheh Sokolsky, Sakhar Enosh, Joseph Mordetsky.*

Second Row, Seated: *Chaim Khvonyik, Joseph Mostkov, Kalman Bialosotsky, Nionia Khvalovsky, The President, Dr. David Trop, Vice-President Mulya Schein, Saul Markus, Moshe'keh Movshovsky, Avra'sheh Offenberg, Tzirulnitsky (in uniform).*

In the top rows can be found: *Bashitsky, Israel Tchopkin, Mottel Levin (Koval), Moteleh Shifran, Milikovsky, Lastovsky, Moshe'l Liev, Yehoshua Patsovsky (The Barber's Son), Zaydl Marotchnik, Mopsik, Weinstein.*

The Volkovysk [chapter of] *Maccabi* was founded in the middle of the twenties of the current [sic: twentieth] century. The love of sport had already begun to put down roots among various circles of Jewish young people, only there was nobody to offer encouragement to these young people, and show them the way to the organization of national Jewish sports development. It just happened, that *Min'yeh Goldenberg* came to Volkovysk at that time from another city, who married a Volkovysk girl, *Milia Khirurg* (from the mill). She worked as a nurse[144] in the Jewish hospital, and belonged to a *kruzhok* of young people – a group of Jewish young folks in Volkovysk. Min'yeh Goldenberg, who involved himself deeply in sports activities in his home town, through his wife, became friendly with the coterie of her Volkovysk friends, and he began to teach them to play soccer, and he organized matches between them and the Polish soccer group which existed at

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143 Based on information I received from *Yankel Zuckerman* and *Moshe'l Shereshevsky*, and from news articles that were published in *The Volkovysker Leben.* – *Dr. M. Einhorn*

144 It is interesting to note that the name *Khirurg*, is the Hebrew word for a surgeon. It underscores the taking of last names that relate to actual occupations.

that time in Volkovysk. At that time, *Dr. David Trop* (the Dentist), *Dr. P. Bebchuk* and *Mulya Schein*, came and organized these young Jewish sports lovers into a *Maccabi* organization. *Sioma Gallin* approached the "Joint," and was able to secure funds with which to buy the necessary sporting equipment.

At first, the *Maccabi* membership would meet in private houses. They would practice in the large field behind the Hebrew *Volksschule* near the Jewish hospital. During the period when *Maccabi* developed and expanded its activities, it rented its own quarters. The headquarters of *Maccabi* at various times was at Zilberman's (on the *Millner Gasse*), in Khvonyik's house (on the *Millner Gasse*), at Yanovsky's of the tobacco business (on the Wide Boulevard), and on *Kosciuszko (Ostroger) Gasse*.

Maccabi Divisions

Maccabi began modestly. With a soccer team, and little by little, it grew until it encompassed all manner and forms of gymnastics and sports. The Volkovysk *Maccab*i had divisions for ping-pong, tennis, fencing, basketball, hockey, running, ice-skating, bicycle racing, Swedish gymnastics, and light athletics (discus throwing, pole vaulting) swimming, etc. Development continued uninterrupted until the Bolshevik occupation in the last [sic: First] World War. A "Junior Division" (for 12 year-olds) has also existed in *Maccabi* since 1936 for training. In the year 1938, a year before the outbreak of that gruesome war that led to the annihilation of the Volkovysk Jewish community, *Maccabi* established a boxing section. In that same year (1938), *Maccabi* also founded a training section for women. The women's division would often arrange get-togethers for the groups, meets and discussions. Among the active members of the women's division were: *Shifra Rubinstein, Nechama Lipiak, Chay'cheh [sic: Chaya] Sokolsky, Malka Polonsky* (from the Shalakhmoneses), *Nechama Bitensky, Riva Mordetsky, Golda Eisenstein*, and *Sonya Goldrei.*

The *Maccabi* Activists

Among the leaders and directors of Maccabi, at various, times were: *Dr. David Trop,* president of *Maccabi* in the last years before the War; *Dr. P. Bebchuk*, the *Maccabi* doctor; *Mulya Schein*, vice-president; *Tzirel Tzirulnitsky*, instructor for light athletics; *Moshe Shereshevsky*, instructor for the cycling division; *Lieutenant Khoronzhy*[145] *Shivak* (of the Third Polish Battalion, stationed in Volkovysk), fencing instructor; *Ehrenburg*, soccer instructor; *Min'yeh Goldenberg*, captain of the soccer team; *Joseph Mordetsky*, head of the soccer players in the final years before the war; *Israel Turiansky*, sports leader in *Maccabi* (in the final years); *Waklik* (a Christian), instructor for the boxing team.

At various times, the following were in the leadership: *Yankel Zuckerman, Nionia Khvalovsky, Joseph Dworetsky, Prof. Bazer, Chaim Khvonyik, Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg, Director H. Grossbart, Mostkov, Moshe'l Matskevich, Davidovsky, Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Yitzhak Tchopper*, and *Mordechai Lev.*

The Volkovysk *Maccabi* chapter also developed a visible cultural program. It arranged for lectures (about

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[145] Despite the explicit presence of the word 'Lieutenant' in the text, there is some question as to whether this representation is accurate. A *Khoronzhy* originally meant a person who carried the flag in a military procession. In modern Polish military parlance, it is a very high form of non-commissioned officer, something like our sergeant-major or chief warrant officer in the army. A *khoronzhy* is not a lieutenant. A first lieutenant is a *porucznik*. An under-lieutenant, similar to our second lieutenant is a *podporucznik*.

sports topics, Zionist issues and issues of general Jewish interest), gymnastics courses, presentations, and instituted a reading room. But the principal activity of *Maccabi*, understandably, was sports. It demonstrated the capacity to attract about two hundred young people from all walks of life into active membership – apart from a set number of patrons and supporting members who helped *Maccabi* with its important program.

The Soccer Team

Page 227: *One of the First Soccer Teams of Maccabi*

Right to Left, First Row Bottom: Yud'l Pereminsky, Boruch Beckenstein, Shaul Markus (Medic).
Second Row: *Unknown, Simcha Goldberg, Moshe'l Weinstein, Beckenstein.*
Third Row: *Berel Davidovsky, Gershon Burstein, Moshe Langbord, Tzal'yeh Kilikovsky, Paveh.*

Members of the *Maccabi* Soccer Team at various times were: *Volya Lazarovsky, Yankel Zuckerman, Shlomo Shipiatsky, Nionia Khvalovsky, Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Sholom Hubar, Pay'eh Yunovich, Yankel Goldberg, Yud'l Shpak, Shaul Markus, Yerusalimsky* (son of the *Shokhet*), *Yud'l Pereminsky, Yankel Shipiatsky, Yankel Gershuni, Archik Podolinsky, Ben'yeh Berg, Tzirel Tzirulnitsky, Sakhar Enosh, Abraham Bayer, Ravitz, Zapoliansky, Liova Glickfeld, Yitzhak Alpert, Hertz, Yosh'keh Galiatsky, Yehoshua Patsovsky, Moshe'l Lev, Zaydl Marotchnik, Mopsik, Lastovsky, Milikovsky, Bashitsky, Yisrael Tchopkin, Mottel Levin* (Koval), *Kalman Bialosotsky, Avra'sheh Offenberg, Moshe Movshovsky, and Yisrael Markus.*

The well-known soccer players among the *Maccabi* membership were: *Joseph Mordetsky, Moshe Langbord* (Graf), *Yisrael Turiansky, Shlomo Shpak, Moshe'l Weinstein, Ozer Khmelnitsky, Yud'l Pereminsky, G. Kaplan* (from Svislucz), *Boruch Beckenstein, Mordechai Mordetsky, Mottel Shifran, Herschel Volsky, Vi'tcheh Kalir, L. Leferer, and Tzirulnitsky*.

Other *Maccabi* Divisions

Page 228: *A Maccabi Soccer Team from the Year 1926*

Right to Left, First Row Bottom: Shlomo Shpak, Boruch Beckenstein, Hertz.
Second Row: *Moshe Langbord, Captain of the Team (a Christian), Berel Davidovsky.*
Third Row: *Liova Glickfeld, Chaim Khvonyik, Yitzhak Alpert.*

Page 229: *A Maccabi Soccer Team*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Berel Davidovsky, Boruch Beckenstein, Moshe Langbord.*
Second Row: *Yud'l Pereminsky, Mulya Schein, Yankel Shipiatsky, Yankel Gershuni.*
Third Row: *Moshe'l Weinstein, Ozer Khmelnitsky, Shaul Markus, Aryeh Yerusalimsky (Yerushalmi), Herschel Volsky.*

Page 230: *A Maccabi Boxing Team*

Right to Left – First Row, from the Bottom: *Eliezer Sukenik, Moshe Kovensky.*
Second Row, Standing: *Eliezer Pitotsky, Nachman Shalkovich, Zalman Marantz.*
Third Row, Standing: *Kalman Shalkovich, Mendel Steinman, Chaim Scharf, Aharon Grodzhensky, Moshe*

Moorstein, David Shifran.

Page 231, Top: *A Race of Maccabi Cyclists on the Grodno Gasse*

Bottom: *The Maccabi Cycling Division*

Right to Left: *Zlotnitsky, Applebaum, Mottel Levin (Koval), Einstein, Kossowsky, Yankel Zuckerman, Chaim Kaplan, Yankel Botvinsky, Shifran, Moshe Shereshevsky, Geller, Yos'keh Galiatsky, Chaim Khvonyik.*

In 1932, in the Hockey Division, the following were active: *Mottel Shifran, Joseph Mordetsky, Moshe Shereshevsky, Moshe Katzin and Yisrael Tchopkin.*

The following participated in the Boxing Team: *Moshe'l Shereshevsky, Zapoliansky, Tzirel Tzirulnitsky, Lapin, Pesach Segal, Yankel Kaplan, Tzemakh* and *Mazya.*

In the Cycle Racing Section, the following took part: *Zlotnitsky, Mottel Levin* (Koval), *Kossowsky, Yankel Zuckerman, Shifran, Moshe Shereshevsky, Geller, Yos'keh Galiatsky, Shifran, Chaim Khvonyik, Yankel Botvinsky, Einstein*, and *Simcha Gandz*.

The following took part in the Skiing Division: *Enosh, Leibush Levin* (from the finished goods), *Chaim Pines, Tchopkin, Sakhar Enosh, Miunik*[146] *Zilberman, Archik Podolinsky, Volsky, Zapoliansky, Chaim Mordetsky, Vakulik*, the Instructor, *Mulya Schein, Grisha Kaplan, Boruch Beckenstein, Yoss'l Galiatsky, Chaim Kaplan, Lastovitsky, Vi'tcheh Kalir, Pesach Segal and Moshe'l Shereshevsky*.

In addition to *Maccabi*, in Volkovysk there also were: the '*Morgenstern*' Sports Organization (offered by the Bund); the *J.K.S. Sports Organization*, and a revisionist soccer team, called '*Nurdiyah*.' Among the active members of *Nurdiyah* were: *Mrs. Rachel Lev, Dr. Menashe Niemchik, Appl[icant]. Mezheritzky, Prof. Birnbaum, Abraham Offenberg, Chaim Pines, Tzirulnitsky, Daniel* and *Sukenik.*

Notwithstanding the fact, as you can understand, that *Maccabi* was suffused with nationalist and Zionist ideology, and that its members wore blue and white shirts as a uniform, it was nevertheless not a purely Zionist organization. And, indeed, for this reason, it drew members and sympathizers from all elements of the Jewish populace – of all ages and both sexes. The language used by *Maccabi* during practice was either Polish or Yiddish. The *Maccabi* budget was covered from the following sources: membership dues, balls, music and dance evenings (with invited performers), 'Fifes' with special programs arranged by *Maccabi* in their own Hall, lotteries, sporting events (ice hockey), *Maccabiahs*, various undertakings in honor of Jewish festivals, matches with other sports organizations, etc.

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146 A variant of Munya, used with either Shlomo (Solomon), Mordechai, or Asher.

Soccer Matches

Page 232: The Volkovysk Maccabi Soccer Team Before the Second World War

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Israel Turiansky, Unknown, Kaplan, Zapoliansky, Joseph Mordetsky (with the Soccer Ball in the center).
Second Row: Mulya Schein, Dombrovsky, Archik Podolinsky, Genya Berg, Tzirel Tzirulnitsky, Issachar Enosh, Abraham Bayer, Weinstein, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown.
Third Row: Nionia Khvalovsky

Page 233 Top: A Maccabi Boxing Team

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Yankel Kaplan, Tzemakh, Mazya.
Second Row: Mulya Schein, Moshe'l Shereshevsky, Zapoliansky, Tzirel Tzirulnitsky, Lapin, Pesach Segal, Vakulik (The Instructor).

Bottom: March of the Soccer Team on the Wide Boulevard

The Volkovysk *Maccabi* Chapter developed itself to such a high degree, that it was able to participate in matches not only with the other *Maccabi* chapters and other Jewish sports organizations from Grodno, Baranovich, Slonim, Bialystok, Suwalk, Lomza, Svislucz, Lida, and other cities, but also with Polish sports organizations from Volkovysk and the vicinity. The matches, which mostly took place on Saturday and Sunday, would attract a large audience (a crowd as large a 1,500 people would often come to the matches), which would incidentally bring its own enlivenment to the city. When a match was scheduled with a Polish sports organization the city would start to bubble, and the emotions would start to run high. Everyone awaited the outcome of the match with great impatience, and everyone whispered a silent prayer in their hearts that our *Maccabi* team would emerge victorious, and thereby bring glory and prestige to the Jewish sports initiative and to the Jewish name. And the Volkovysk *Maccabi* team mostly endured this test with honor, and it would frequently beat well-known strong sports organizations. Thus, for example, The *Volkovysker Leben* provides a news report of a match that took place between Volkovysk *Maccabi* and the strong Volkovysk Polish sports organization, 'Pszisziucz' – *Maccabi* winning 4 to 1. In that same previously mentioned newspaper, news is reported concerning a match that took place between Volkovysk *Maccabi* and the military sports club of Grodno, and about yet another match between the Volkovysk *Maccabi* and the '*Morgenstern*' sports organization of the Bund.

The matches took place on the field near the barracks and on the municipal sports field (near the *Poritzisher Gasse*) on the road to Izavelin.

Volkovysk *Maccabi* had great visibility, not only among the Jewish populace, but also among the non-Jewish residents of Volkovysk and in district circles. *Maccabi* was invited to participate in all official state holidays, such as May 3 (Official National Holiday of the Polish Republic) and on Pilsudski's birthday – *Maccabi* was invited and would participate in the parades that were held, together with all other organizations, who marched in their official uniforms.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Maccabi* in Volkovysk, a large parade was held through all the streets of the city with the participation of the *Maccabi* orchestra. The leaders of all sports organizations in

Volkovysk and vicinity attended. By official invitation, which was arranged in honor of the tenth anniversary, there were official representatives of the Polish government and the military in attendance.

Volkovysk *Maccabi* continued to exist and make an impact until that time when God's wrath was poured out on our beloved city, and annihilated all the Volkovysk Jews, and along with them, Volkovysk *Maccabi*.

Amateur Theater in Volkovysk

Page 237: *Mottel Kilikovsky*

The history of Jewish theater-lovers [147] in Volkovysk is strongly tied up with a Jewish man of the people, *Mottel* (Cohen) *Kilikovsky*, who was known for his productive activity on behalf of the Fire Brigade. Mottel Kilikovsky, who was orphaned and brought up by relatives, – first in the home of his grandfather, Sholom Potshter (whose son, Tzal'yeh was Mottel's father), and later, after his grandfather's death by his uncle, Leibeh Potshter, and his wife Bob'cheh *die Zogerkeh,*[148] already as a child, manifested an affinity and love for the theater. He would gather up the neighboring children, and he would muster them in Russian like soldiers. At that time, a Polish doctor named *Jeletsz lived* in that neighborhood, on the *Ostroger Gasse*, who was amused by the children when every time Motkeh would muster his 'troops' near his house, and he would give Motkeh, the leader, a small sum of money – and Motkeh used the money to buy toy trumpets and drums and created a children's military orchestra. At Purim time, Motkeh would get the children together and perform Purim skits such as "The Binding of Isaac," "The Selling of Joseph," and others.

A little later, at the age of ten years, Motkeh became a helper to Moshe Meir the Melamed (whose daughter he married many years later), and at the age of thirteen, Motkeh left to travel into the outside world – first to Grodno, where he worked in paving streets with bricks, and afterwards in Kovno, where he learned to become a barber. Later, he returned to Grodno, where he worked in a hairdressing salon, which was located not far from the theater and where the actors would often come. In those years, the Jewish troupe of Abraham Fizhon came to Grodno to give guest performances. The young Motkeh made the acquaintance of the actors, and in time, he began to participate in their productions – first as a substitute, and later also in small parts.

The Establishment of the Amateur Theater

When Motkeh was 16 years old, he returned to Volkovysk. At that time – the final years of the 19th century – an organization called '*Linat Tzedek*' was founded in Volkovysk, which had a need for money and medical supplies, and seeing as it was several weeks before Purim, the new group decided to approach the young people in town proposing that they put on a Purim-play whose intake would be donated for the use of the newly founded organization. An assembly of young people was called, in which the following participated: *Shalakhman* the shoemaker, *Itcheh Mot'cheh's, Vashchinkeh* the shoemaker, *'Nioma Chaim Archeh's, Leizh'keh Chaim Archeh's, Motkeh* (Cohen) *Kilikovsky, and others*. Motkeh proposed, that instead of a Purim-play, which was suitable for children, that they put on a real theater production, and after a discussion, Motkeh's proposal was accepted, and it was decided to put on the play, '*Shulamit*' under the direction of Motkeh Kilikovsky.

It was characteristic of the times that it was not possible, under any circumstances, to find young women in Volkovysk who would consent to participate in a theater production, and therefore some of the boys had to take female roles. *Sholom Kilikovsky* (Leibeh Potshter's son, and a cousin of Motkeh's), played the part of

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147 According to the information that I received from *Mottel* (Cohen) *Kilikovsky, V. Uris* (Yerusalimsky) and *Yoss'l Pikarsky* (Poliak) – *Dr. Moses Einhorn*

148 A literate woman, who would recite prayers in the women's gallery on behalf of those women who could not read the prayers for themselves..

Shulamit; *Leizh'keh Ripsky (Chaim Archeh's son*), played the role of Absalom. *Il'keh the Baker* – the role of Manoah; *Motkeh*, the director – the role of Tzigentang; *Shalakhman* the shoemaker – the role of Nathan the Priest. The entire cast consisted of sixteen people, and the play was presented on Purim in the old hospital (*Bolnitsa*), on the *Schulhof. Zus'yeh the Shammes*, who was a carpenter, put together the stage sets, and benches and lamps were taken from the *Batei Medrashim.* A very large audience came to the presentation. As soon as the play began, a gendarme came running into the premises, and came up to the prompter and took the script for '*Shulamit*' from him to determine if the text had been approved by the censor. When he saw that it had the censor's permission, he gave the script back and said that the play should not be presented again without a permit.

The troupe presented the play a second time the next day, on *Shushan-Purim*. The Hall once again was packed, and the '*Linat Tzedek*' organization earned handsome revenues.

From that time on, Motkeh thought and planned about how to present legitimate theater in Volkovysk, with women in the female roles, and with all the necessary theater equipment – until an auspicious hour came for Motkeh.

The Amateur Theater Up to the First World War

Page 241, Bottom Right: *A Scene from the Play, "The Selling of Joseph"*

Bottom Row, Right: *Reuven Rutchik (Later to be the Editor of Volkovysker Leben), plays the part of Joseph; Znaidin – plays the part of Judah, and Galai – plays the part of Simeon.*

The Two Left Pictures present scenes from the Play, "Uriel Acosta"

Top: From Right to Left, the Women: Leah Scher and Taib'l (A daughter-in-law of Sholom the Scribe).
The Men: *Lisitsky, Peremolnik, Yaakov Fisher.*

Bottom, Standing: Leizer Shiff, Shepsel Ravitzky, Yoss'l Pikarsky (Poliak), Chaim Rubinovich.
Underneath: Yaakov Fisher and Leah Scher.[149]

A couple of years later, a Fire Brigade was established in Volkovysk, in which Motkeh was very active. In those years, the important leadership of the Russian community, and the prominent members of Volkovysk belonged to the Firefighters Organization, and among them was the 'Revizor' *Zhdanov* who was also the chief of the [Firefighters] Organization, and the deputy, *Ivanov*. Motkeh approached the chief, and told him that he wanted to act with a Jewish theater troupe, and the revenues raised would be for the benefit of the firefighters organization. He asked the chief to obtain a permit for him. The chief told him to go to the deputy and ask him, in his name, that he should issue the permit. To the deputy's question – as to which language would be used in the play, Motkeh replied, in German – and the deputy issued him a permit for four performances.

It was at this point that Motkeh set about assembling the cast, and since he could not find two female

[149] No captions are given for the top right photo.

performers in Volkovysk for the troupe, which were needed for the performance of '*Shulamit*,' he traveled to Bialystok and brought back a young lady named *Chay'keh Weissenberg*, who had a good voice and sang well. Motkeh hired her for twenty rubles – a pretty sum for those years! – with lodging and food for the duration of her stay in Volkovysk. Motkeh rehearsed Chay'keh in her role. He then approached *Moshe Aizik* the bandleader, and sang the songs of '*Shulamit*' for him, which Moshe Aizik then transcribed into musical notes. When they completed the transcription, the local musicians were assembled, and they began to practice. The parts were distributed as follows: The Director – *Motkeh* (Cohen) *Kilikovsky; Absalom* – played by a young fellow with a good tenor voice (not from Volkovysk); Shulamit – *Chay'keh Weissenberg* from Bialystok; Tzigentang – *Motkeh Kilikovsky*, the Director; Manoah – *Il'keh the Baker*; Avigayil – *Leah Chisterazus* (from the ironmonger's store); Yoav Gideoni – *Shlomo'keh Lev* (Shmuel the Artist's son); Avinadav - *Shmuel Petikier*; Nathan the Priest – *Moshe Ar'keh Bulansky*.

The total of the participants, together with those who played minor roles and with the musicians, came to 25 people.

Since the performance was for the benefit of the fire-fighters organization, the troupe could make use of the Bulharin Park. The chief of the fire-fighters organization, in response to Motkeh's request, ordered material to be brought into the park for a stage. Afterwards, *Meisel* the printer ran off placards that were pasted all over the city. All four performances were rewarded with a large turnout. People also came from the surrounding towns to see the presentations. The public demanded that the play be put on yet again, but the deputy did not want to issue any more permits; he said that he suspected there were presentations of [subversive] political propaganda, and that is why the play attracts such a large audience.

A year later, Motkeh wanted to produce the play, *Die Kishuf-Makherkeh* [150] (*Bubbeh Yakhneh*). Again, he went to the deputy for a permit, but the deputy did not want to issue it, and advised him to go to the governor in Grodno. Motkeh traveled to Grodno, where he received the permit, and simultaneously brought back a young lady from Grodno with a good voice, for the role of *Mireleh*. There was only one performance – in Bulharin's Park – and this was the last time the Jewish amateurs performed Yiddish theater in Volkovysk before the outbreak of the First World War in the year 1914.

Amateur Theater Under the German Occupation During the First World War

HaZamir and *Harpeh*

Page 243: The Drama Circle of Kibbutz Tel-Chai in the Play, "Greenfields" in the Year 1934

Right to Left, in the Center are standing: Abraham Galiatsky (The Barber) and Leizer Shiff.

In the beginning of 1916, during the German occupation, a group of Jewish boys and girls, lovers of the Yiddish theater, created in Volkovysk – under the leadership of Motkeh Pas-Kilikovsky – a Jewish amateur theater group, *HaZamir* which continued until the end of the War.

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[150] Literally, The Sorceress. Called, *Koldunya* in Russian.

Among the founders were: *Leizer Sokolsky, Leizer Shiff, Rash'eh* (the daughter of the Tailor from Rosh), *Yoss'l Pikarsky* (Poliak), *V. Yerusalimsky* (son of the *Shokhet*), *Israel Schein* (the doctor, son of Jedediah the *Shammes*), and others.

The Jewish residents of Volkovysk were starved for Yiddish presentations, for Yiddish theater, and as a result, the reaction of the Jews to the newly established theater was a very warm one.

The theater began to perform Goldfaden's plays, such as "*Shulamit*," "*Bar Kochba*," "*Die Kishuf-Makherkeh.*" Initially, Botvinik's cinema theater served as a playhouse for the theater group, and afterwards the troupe relocated to Poliachek's building, and some time after that, the troupe again moved [back] to Botvinik's cinema theater, in which there was a ready-made stage and seating for several hundred people.

The principal players were: *Leizer Sokolsky, Motkeh* (Cohen) *Kilikovsky, Leizer Shiff*, and *Yoss'l Pikarsky* (Poliak). The orchestra leader was *Israel Schein* the furniture finisher. Among the actors in the troupe were: *'Niomka Solkovich* (the Tailor), *Motteh, Ahareh's son*, *V. Yerusalimsky* (son of the *Shokhet*), *Rash'eh* (the daughter of the Tailor from Rosh), *Tzivia Kaminsky* (from the *Kholodoisker Gasse*), *Israel Weiner* (from the *Grodno Gasse*), *Jesierski's* daughter (from the Wide Boulevard, who later married Sokolsky), *Pes'sha* (David Hirsch'l's daughter), *Yoss'l Shkolnik*, and *Yoss'l Boyarsky*.

The initial performance drew a large audience. There simply was not enough space in the theater to accommodate everyone who wanted to attend, and the performance of "*Shulamit*" had to be given several times. The same was true of "*Bar Kochba*" and *"Koldunya* [151]." The audience absorbed each performance with great savor.

The Jewish intelligentsia initially maintained some distance from the amateur theater. However, when they saw the reaction and interest it generated among the Jewish populace for a pure Yiddish theater, the intelligentsia slowly began to draw closer to the theater, and many offered their services to it.

Mr. *Galai*, who remained in Volkovysk during the time of the occupation, and was a professional Russian actor, later became the director of the theater. Also *Marian*, a professional Russian actress was drawn to the theater. The Jewish writer *Jedediah Margolis*, and the outstanding chanteuse *Liotsha Glembodska* also supported the theater. In time, the theater began to put on productions of the plays of Sholom Asch, Nomberg, Peretz Hirshbein, Yaakov Gordon, etc.

The amateur theater would put on evening mini-performances which were no less well-attended than the regular performances.

Young people from the surrounding towns used to travel to the performances in Volkovysk, and the theater received invitations to come to the towns in the vicinity in order to put on their performances there. However, afterwards, the German authorities forbade the theater from traveling about (as it happens, there was an incident in Svislucz: a number of the members of the troupe were set upon and beaten by drunken German soldiers; among those who were beaten, was *Leizer Sokolsky*, who was seriously hurt).

A number of the members of the troupe later began quarreling over the allocation of parts, envy, personality clashes, and other reasons – which led to the formation of another theater group under the name "*Die*

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151 Russian for '*Die Kishuf-Makherkeh*,' or Sorceress.

Harpeh."[152] The leaders of the *Harpeh* were *Motteh-Leib Kaplan, Motkeh Kilikovsky* and others. The troupe began to put on Goldfaden's plays in an impromptu manner.

There was no peace between the two theater groups. They would engage in heated disputes. As Motkeh Kilikovsky relates, both organizations finally looked about them, and they concluded that it made no sense to be constantly at odds with one another, and they decided to reunite into one theater troupe. There was only one question, what shall the unified organization be called – *HaZamir* or *Die Harpeh*. It was decided to cast lots. After the lots were drawn, it was decided to adopt the name *HaZamir*. After this reunification, a new director was also appointed.

Leah'keh Scher a truly talented actress with a pleasant voice was among those who contributed a great deal to the development of the Yiddish theater in Volkovysk.

In time, the troupe also brought in actors from Bialystok, and successfully performed several plays and operettas. *Zevkina,* a Jewish girl from Bialystok who came from a poor household, used to take Volkovysk by storm with her performances on stage. She was a beautiful mezzo-soprano with a fine voice. And *Greenhouse*, a well-known Yiddish actor, excelled in the plays of Gordon and Hirshbein. Together with newly acquired resources from Volkovysk, the Yiddish theater became truly a fine institution, which occupied an important place in Volkovysk.

Not looking at all the difficulties of that time – of the German occupation – the Yiddish theater, which only existed for a couple of years, helped energize the Jewish residents of Volkovysk , and created for it a great cultural sense of satisfaction.

Amateur Theater after the First World War

Page 245: *The Dramatic Section of 'Tarbut' in the Year 1925*

Right to Left, First Row, from the Bottom: Yaakov Einstein, Herschel Werner, Shaul Mazya.
Second Row, Seated: *Boruch Beckenstein, Elkeh Ogulnick, Liebeh Kaufman, Yaakov Fisher (Head of the Group), Sarah Slapak, Hanokh Winetsky.*
Third Row, Standing: *Unknown, Yud'l Shklavin, Avreml Wallach, Moses Mandelbaum, Kantor (from Svislucz), Natan Davidovsky.*

A short time afterwards, already under Polish rule, Motkeh Kilikovsky – at the request of the Zionists, who had asked him to arrange a performance to benefit the Zionist movement – organized a troupe of young boys and put on the play, "*Zerubabel*." In the troupe, which consisted of thirty people, the following participated: A son of *Alter Galai* (the Butcher), *Klatshkin* (a nephew of Avromsky the Pharmacist), who is today a member of the "*HaBima*" theater group in Israel, *Znaydik, Bon'yeh from Zamoscheh, A son & daughter of Mottel Kilikovsky,* etc. The performance was given in Botvinik's cinema theater.

A short time afterwards, Motkeh Kilikovsky left Volkovysk and went to join his relatives in America.

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[152] The Harp.

HaZamir under the Direction of Yaakov Fisher

Page 247: *Botvinik's Cinema on the Wide Boulevard*

HaZamir was later revived and carried out theater activities under the direction of *Yaakov Fisher* (his wife was Kham'eh Yudzhik, the daughter of Yudzhik the Expediter [153]). During his tenure, the plays "*Uriel Acosta*," "*King Lear*," and "*The American Lady*" were produced, and also many Russian plays, which were translated into Yiddish. Performances were given twice a month in Botvinik's cinema house – and the revenues went to the benefit of those Volkovysk institutions that cared for the needy, such as the orphanage, the old age home, *Linat Kholim*, and also to benefit individual needy people on a private basis.

Among those who took part in theater productions were: Ladies – *Scher, Yelsky* and *Ziskindovich*; Men – *Ripsky, Yoss'l Pikarsky, Chaim Rubinovich, Leizer Shiff, Shklavin,* and *Yud'l Rutchik*.

It is interesting, that at the time when Joseph (Yoss'l) Pikarsky emigrated to Cuba and then to North America, the following notice appeared in the *Volkovysker Leben* of June 27, 1930, under the title, "*Oy! Oy! Yoss'eleh is Leaving!*":

> "On Tuesday, the darling of the circle of local young people *Joseph Pikarsky*, known to us as *Yoss'eleh Poliak*, is leaving for Cuba. Pikarsky endeared himself through his many performances in many productions put on by the local Drama Circle. His participation always drew a large audience, who immensely enjoyed and laughed heartily at his comic roles, in which he excelled most of all."

After Fisher emigrated from Volkovysk, and a portion of the players also dispersed – nevertheless, productions still took place, put on by the young people (the Drama Circle of *Tel Chai*), under the direction of *Leizer Shiff*.

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Thanks to this well-developed theater activity, Volkovysk became very strongly interested in Yiddish theater and in Yiddish art, and as a result, every important Yiddish theater troupe from the large cities would often come to Volkovysk to put on guest performances. The Jewish Volkovysk public received these Yiddish performers with great warmth, and gave them a hearty reception.

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153 The exact nature of this occupation is not completely clear, but the name suggests either jobbing or distribution.

Personalities

Volkovysk was a vibrant town with much community activity, and had many people who were activists, important *balebatim*, and interesting personalities who put their stamp on the town and its development. In all the memoirs submitted for this book, there are portraits of a variety of Volkovysk personalities – dreamers and builders of our beloved home town. Nevertheless, there remain many of Volkovysk's doers, and unique personalities that have not been described for this book – simply because there was no one to be found who could do the writing. I will, therefore here briefly portray a number of Volkovysk personalities , a number of whom I personally knew, and a number for whom I received reliable information.

Nakheh & Hinde Heller

Page 249: *Nakhum Heller and His Wife Hinde*

The *Heller* family of Volkovysk, whose name was associated with so many Volkovysk institutions, traces its origins to the *shtetl* of Amstibova (near Volkovysk), and consisted of six brothers – *Velvel, Feivel, Yisrael-Aharon, Moshe, Nakhum (Nakheh), Leib* – and two sisters.

The name of *Reb Nakhum (Nakheh) Heller* was especially held in esteem in Volkovysk. During the last years of his life, he was considered by Volkovysk Jews to be a sort of Angel of Redemption, a mystery man from afar. He lived in faraway Berlin, and yet his heart beat so warmly and loyally for the needy and helpless of his home town.

Thousands of strands tied and bound Volkovysk to this great philanthropist all year long. Many legends encircled his luminous personality, woven from a silken pedigree, aristocratic and genteel; the name *Heller* shone brilliantly far and wide, and elicited feelings of respect and honor.

The name, *Nakheh Heller* was a symbol of great Jewish wealth and unbounded philanthropy, to the Volkovysk Jewish community, that grew in parallel. Nakheh Heller was a unique sort, a legendary Jewish magnate with a generous hand, that was never closed to anyone.

Nakheh Heller passed away at an advanced old age. For all his years, he led a far-flung lumber business on a grand scale. Hundreds of Jewish families were in the employ of his branches in Poland and other countries.

It was characteristic, that a position with Nakheh Heller was considered as secure as a government job. He never dismissed an employee, and at the time of the outbreak of the First World War, when borders were closed and transit across them was stopped, Nakheh Heller ordered his branches to continue paying monthly salaries as usual.

He lived in Volkovysk until the year 1892, and then moved to Warsaw. In 1889, he constructed the Jewish hospital in Volkovysk which was of great importance to the city. At the time, the impressive hospital was one of its kind in the entire Grodno province. It was furnished with all required equipment and supplies – linens, furniture, medical devices, an operating theater with many expensive modern pieces of equipment. Construction of the hospital cost abut thirty thousand rubles – a very sizeable sum of capital for those days.

Nakheh Heller especially hired the local farm people to plant the large bounded area around the hospital with trees and all sorts of plants – a project that ran into a lot of money because of the any soil. When the Germans

retreated from Volkovysk at the time of the First World War, they took all the expensive contents of the hospital with them, and left only the bare walls.

Nakheh Heller also established a "*Bet Lekhem*" (Free Kitchen) on the *Schulhof*, where poor children who attended Talmud Torah, up to the time of the First World War, would always receive a free breakfast and lunch.

From the year 1905 on, he lived in Berlin, from where he would send a couple of thousand zlotys every holiday season – as support for the poorer families to buy wood, potatoes, etc.

Being very attached to Volkovysk – Nakheh Heller showed an interest in the periodical, *Volkovysker Leben* and helped it out from time to time.

Nakheh Heller's wife *Hinde* was no less committed to Volkovysk than her husband, and she helped out the poor and needy of the city a great deal.

Above all, the Heller family was greatly respected and treasured in Volkovysk. The warm feelings that the Jewish Volkovysk residents had for the Hellers would surface whenever a tragedy or misfortune befell the Heller family, when one of its members would pass away. For example, it was in this fashion, that the entire city went into mourning when the news came from Warsaw (in 1929) that *Horaczy Heller*, son of Feivel Heller and a nephew of Nakheh Heller, passed away at the age of 57.

Horaczy Heller was the greatest lumber industrialist inn Poland, and was considered one of the richest men in the country. He concentrated in dealing with British firms. His lumber exports were so large that he was a force to be reckoned with in Polish government circles.

Horaczy Heller never broke off contact with his former home city of Volkovysk and participated by making large contributions to support Volkovysk institutions.

As soon as the Volkovysk Rabbi received telegraphic notification from Warsaw about the death Horaczy Heller, a whole contingent of representatives from Volkovysk institutions immediately departed for the funeral in Warsaw, led by the Rabbi and the president of the community, Mr. Bykovsky.

Eliyahu Shykevich

Page 253: *Eliyahu Shykevich*

Eliyahu Shykevich was known in Volkovysk as an important member of the *balebatim,* and a visible and active person, who whenever possible worked on behalf of important community and charitable institutions of the city.

Mr. Shykevich was born in 1872 in a small *shtetl* in the Poltava province[154], and received a traditional education in the *Heders* and also graduated with distinction from a Russian school in 1886.
Because of the poor state of his father's health, Eliyahu was unable to continue his education, and already

[154] In the Ukraine.

in his early youth, as the oldest child of the house, was required to run his parents' small business, in order to support his ailing father, his mother, and younger siblings. The father then passed away and the situation in the household worsened. The young Eliyahu was compelled to take a job in the commercial city of Romny, in a large manufacturing facility, in order to generate income for the orphaned family.

Eliyahu's youth, which was spent in a strenuous struggle to earn a living, influenced his entire life, and implanted in him a deeply rooted sympathy for the suffering of all needy people, and especially for solitary orphans. He never forgot that difficult period when he too was an orphan – and therefore later, when he became an independent man of means, he dedicated much of his time and energy to lightening the sad plight of poor orphans.

In the year 1893, when Eliyahu became 21 years old he began military service as a soldier, and he was sent to his post in Volkovysk – where, indeed, he later settled, married and became a permanent resident.

In time, Eliyahu Shykevich became friends with the lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn*, who apart from his law practice, also ran an agency of the St. Petersburg Fire Insurance Company. Because of his poor health, Chaim Ozer Einhorn was compelled to travel for several months to a sanatorium in the Caucasus, and he invited Shykevich to run the agency during the time he would not be in town. When Chaim Ozer Einhorn returned to Volkovysk, he found the business to be in top shape, and in addition the amount of insurance in force had increased. In the year 1907, after deciding to pull back from running the agency, he therefore proposed to the St. Petersburg company to turn the agency over to Eliyahu Shykevich. Shykevich then took over the agency, and ran it with great enthusiasm. In the year 1908, Shykevich received a second mandate from the Russian Transport and Fire Insurance Company, which he also organized well. He was also the founder of a sewing machine business.

Having set himself up well in material means, Mr. Shykevich immediately undertook a multi-faceted set of community activities. His first initiative in community affairs was the establishment of the Volkovysk Loan & Savings Society, which helped out those parts of the Jewish community who lacked means with loans.

At the time of the First World War, in the year 1915, on the eve of the German occupation of Volkovysk, Shykevich left for the Ukraine, the land of his birthplace. It was his good fortune to establish himself well in Dmitrikova, in the Chernigov province. However, these good times did not last long. The Russian revolution precipitated a bitter civil war, and there was a great deal of bloodshed and pogroms instigated against the Jews. Political power changed hands frequently – each one worse than the one before. The 126 Jewish families from Shykevich's new home lost their livelihoods. Commerce was forbidden; merchandise, that had not been hidden away, was 'requisitioned.' The only way to survive was – collectivization. Here, Shykevich again demonstrated his brilliant organizational skills. He placed himself at the head of the cooperatives, and organized sections for each branch, and put those merchants in charge of those sections that matched their skills. In this manner, life gradually returned to normal.

Meanwhile, elections were held in Dmitrikova, and Shykevich was elected as a member of the community council, which afterwards elected Shykevich as the chairman of the community. Such a respected position, in those days was also accompanied by danger to one's life, because each government authority came with its own barbaric demands to the chairman of the community, and if these demands could not immediately be satisfied, the chairman would be identified as disloyal to the regime in power, and was sentenced to death.

Shykevich also learned that a danger was lurking for him, and he decided to flee Dmitrikova, along with his

wife and five children, and return to Volkovysk. In December 1920, after much difficulty, he was able to arrive safely with his family in Volkovysk.

A new period commenced in his life – both in the field of commerce and on the community front. With his innate energy and skills, Shykevich – who before the war owned a sewing machine business – at the direction of the international firm Singer, in 1924 organized a Volkovysk branch of this world famous company in a superb fashion.

Shykevich was one of the founders of the Volkovysk Cooperative Merchant's Bank, who also helped the storekeepers, that didn't have means, with interest-free loans in order to enable them to obtain their annual selling permits ("patents").

Through his sensitive handling of all the people with whom he came in contact – his many customers and employees – Shykevich attained a good name in the commercial world, and the Volkovysk Jewish community related to him with great respect and consideration.

Shykevich received a great deal of recognition for his many-faceted and committed public service. Shykevich was involved with many national and charitable institutions, and he did good work on behalf of the Zionist funds. He energetically implemented, during the winter of 1936-7 "Project Trees," whose purpose was to supply the poor Jewish families with wood for the winter. But, the crown jewel of his community activity was his long years of work on behalf of the Volkovysk Orphanage, of which, in the end, he was the president. He put his entire soul in to this sacred work on behalf of these unfortunate orphans, his great loving heart, and he did not rest until he had put the orphanage on a higher level.

Shykevich himself – in a highly informative memoir, which he prepared for this Yizkor Book – portrayed the development of this important Volkovysk institution, in which he played a meaningful role. [Therefore] we will not dwell here on Shykevich's totally dedicated work for the Volkovysk Orphanage, and will satisfy ourselves with conveying the specific details (according to an article by *David Novick* in the *Volkovysker Leben,* Number 521) about the highly emotional evening of farewell that the administration of the orphanage arranged – along with personnel, friends and children from the institution – in August 1937, in honor of Mr. Shykevich, prior to his departure for the Land of Israel:

> The hall of the orphanage was full of all manner of specially invited people, men, women, old and young, and among them the children of the orphanage, and many of them who at one time grew up there and had been independent for a long time.
>
> The evening was opened by the chairman of the event, *Mordechai Giller*, who read a written greeting from the Volkovysk rabbi, *Rabbi Yitzhak Rubinovich*, and a greeting from the Senior Committee in Bialystok. Farewell remarks were given by: the previously mentioned *Mordechai Giller*, the community leader *Salistovsky*, who offered his farewells to E. Shaikevitz on behalf of the entire Jewish Volkovysk populace, and also as president of the Merchant's Bank, *A. Smazanovich, A. Bliakher*, the teacher, *A. Lev*. All of the speakers portrayed the great expenditures made by Eliyahu Shaikevitz on behalf of the institution.
>
> In the midst of these greetings, a gold medal was given to Shykevich by M. Zelitsky, on behalf of the Orphanage organization.
>
> He was also given a handsomely printed certificate that was read for everyone by Giller.

A highly touching moment came when one of the oldest children, *Mereh*[155] *Ehrlach* said farewell, in the name of the children, to their friend who had committed himself to their welfare for so many years, and in this fashion expressed their gratitude, longing, and hope to meet up with him in the Land of Israel.

The moment was impressive when the House Mother of the Orphanage, *Gittl Ein*, presented Shykevich with a beautiful album containing photographs of the children who had grown up in the institution and also of the children who were still there. Of greatest interest in the album, were pictures of orphans who had themselves married and now had children of their own.

A deeply-moved Mr. Shykevich replied to all of the greetings he received, and thanked everyone for their recognition and regard for his effort and for their good wishes. Shykevich also promised, that he will not terminate his relationship with his dearest life's-work, the institution, and that he will also0 continue his work in the Land of Israel for the children of the orphanage, and would exert himself to bring them there.

The farewell evening, so full of praise, came to a conclusion with applause, and singing by the children.

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In the Land of Israel as well, Mr. Shykevich demonstrated his very much needed community activity, and he most likely would have been able to make good on his word to bring the children of the orphanage to the Land of Israel, if the Second World War had not broken out, which brought death and extermination to all Volkovysk Jews and along with them the poor orphans, Eliyahu Shykevich's beloved children.

To this day Shykevich, at the age of 77 years, is very active on many fronts in the burgeoning life in Israel, and he occupies the position of President of the Volkovysk Society in Israel (*Irgun Olei Volkovysk*).

Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz

Page 258: *Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz*

Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz was born in Suprasl, near Bialystok. His father as the *Shokhet* and Cantor of the *shtetl.* As a youth, Abraham Zalman studied at the Bialystok Yeshiva, and with the *Chafetz Chaim* in Radun. He married *Yenta Fraydeh*, a daughter of Tzipa, Mendel Riva's from Volkovysk, who had a restaurant across from the market storefronts. After his marriage, he once again returned to his studies at the Kovno Yeshiva, where he received his ordination from Rabbi Hirsch Rabinovich (the son of the Kovno *Gaon,* Rabbi Isaac Elchanan) and the Slobodka Rav, Rabbi Moshe Danishevsky. He then returned to Volkovysk, where he lived on the *Grodno Gasse*, in Moshe Yunovich's house. He went into business, and opened a manufacturing concern, and also committed himself to a great deal of community work.

During the time of the First World War, Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz did a great deal on behalf of the impoverished Volkovysk Jewish populace. Immediately at the outbreak of the war in 1914, there remained

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155 A variant of Mireh, a nickname for Miriam.

in Volkovysk many needy families, the wives and children of soldiers who went away to the front, and Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz – along with *Joseph Rudy* and other *balebatim* – organized a low cost commissary store, in the home of Yoss'l der Birrer (Berestovitsky), on the Church street. The funds for this undertaking came from donations made by the *balebatim* of the city.

Later, in 1915, when the Germans began to occupy the environs and many Jews fled their homes and traveled through Volkovysk on the way deep into Russia, Rabbi Kurtz organized a committee, who would receive these displaced persons at the train station, and bring them food and other necessities. One of the leading activists on this committee was *Gedaliah Pereshetsky* , the Tailor. The following also joined the committee: *Joseph Rudy, Herschel Sufris, a grandson, a Son of Kalman Galiatsky, Lisa Einhorn-Kharakh*, and others.

After the Germans occupied Volkovysk in the time of the First World War, there was a shortage of bread in Volkovysk, and the peasants used this opportunity to raise their prices for grain – and this had a deleterious effect on the condition of the impoverished Jewish Volkovysk population. At that point, Rabbi Kurtz – together with *Joseph Yunovich* (Yoss'l Tamara's) – went to the magistrate and negotiated that the magistrate should allocate fifty *pood*[156] of corn for the baking of bread which would then be sold at low prices. This undertaking was so well received, that the magistrate allocated several hundred additional *pood* of grain to these energetic activists, and they distributed bread to the populace, Jews and Christians [alike]. At the price of three kopecks a pound, 468 families received rations of bread. As the peasants saw the bread shortage ease a bit, and that the demand on them was not so intense, they lowered their high prices – and circumstances improved a great deal.

Rabbi Kurtz was one of the leading activists in the *Linat Kholim* and the hospital, and active in the orphanage, the project to provide wood in the winter, and in the *Khevra Shas* (A formal Talmud study group). He was also active in the Volkovysk organization *Malbish Arumim*, whose purpose was to provide clothing to the poor Jewish populace. In prior years, before the First World War, this organization – in which *Zalman Leib Slutsky* was very active – limited its work only to providing clothing for Talmud Torah children; however later, during the period of the German occupation at the time of the First World War, the organization greatly expanded its activity and looked after a wider segment of the poor Jewish populace. Thus, at that time, the group received nineteen hundred requests for shoes. *Shmuel David Yunovich* and *Avreml Zakheim* played a significant part in the work of the organization at that time. They collected donations in the city, and they personally bought leather from *Avigdor Bloch* and turned it over to Joseph Shipiatsky the Seamer, and then divided up the work among a number of shoemakers. All these workmen did this work at no cost or at very low prices. And it was in this fashion that the members of this organization were able to create the means by which to provide shoes to those who needed them.

A number of years after the First World War, in 1923, Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz emigrated to America, where he occupies the pulpit in Rochester, New York – and he is also very active on the American scene in a variety of community and charity initiatives, and is well regarded by the Rochester community.

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156 A local unit of weight.

Sarah Perliss (Sarah the Fishmonger)

Page 260: *Sarah Perliss*

Sarah the Fishmonger lived in Volkovysk on the *Lazaret Gessel*, near Shifmanovich's house. She comes from a family of fish merchants, and both she and her parents, *Yankel* and *Leah,* were born in Volkovysk. Her parents lived on *Kholodoisker Gasse*, and her father, *Yankel* the fisherman had river leases. Her two brothers *Abraham Hillel* and *Chaim Moshe* – were also fishermen. Sarah's husband, *Bezalel* (Tzal'yeh) *Pertzovich*, who later changed his name in America to *Perliss*, came from a fishing family in Kosovo, and after he married Sarah and settled in Volkovysk, he also became a fisherman. The principal commerce in fish was conducted on two days a week – Thursday and Friday – when the Volkovysk housewives would buy their fish for the Sabbath. Saturday night, the fishermen would leave the city in order to begin work to provide the necessary fish for [the following] Thursday. On Monday, the wives of the fishermen and their children, would go around to collect the money owed to them by those who bought fish for the prior Sabbath.

Sarah the Fishmonger had a lady partner, *Esther the Road Paver*, and a male partner, *Leibl the Fisherman*, and she was very involved in her business; nevertheless she showed herself capable of raising a fine family. She also committed herself greatly to charitable work. She was intensely involved with "provisioning brides;" she would receive contributions and organize everything necessary for the weddings of poor young girls. She would help people in need, and she would provide daily meals in her home to poor children. Sarah would give fish free of charge to the regimental kitchen and for reception of guests, and for the old-age home.

In 1917, Sarah came to America with her husband and three children – to her other children, who were already living in Chicago. Sarah's husband later passed away in America.

In Chicago, Sarah the Fishmonger showed her community activism for the benefit of her home town, and founded the Chicago Volkovysk Ladies Society, that would remit between $1000-1200 to Volkovysk for a variety of charitable causes. In the founding of the Volkovysk Ladies Society in Chicago, she was already being assisted by her daughters: *Frieda Berlinger, Lilian Rosenstone, Ziss'l* (Sylvia) *Louis* and *Hilda Liss*. Among the other women who helped with the work of the Chicago Volkovysk Ladies Society were: *Sarah Rivka Bart* (A daughter-in-law of Ronya the Baker), *Mrs. Michalsky*, with her daughters, *Masha Levin* and *Kayla Meizer, Lila Bart, Tzipa Geller, Becky Zeidel* (Zerakh's daughter), *Gussie Bain* (A daughter of Isaiah the Beer Brewer), *Mrs. Gandz, Lina Rimzon, Esther Popper, Martha Penn, Ida Solomon, Ida Getner, Tanya Rubinstein* (One of Tzipa's daughters), *Hinde Heitovsky, Esther Siegal, Sam Siegal, Sarah Leah Moskowitz, Tzil'yeh Levin* and *Henya Root.*

Sarah Perliss is also active in various other Chicago charitable organizations, but first and foremost, but in the end, she gives her time and energy on behalf of her needy *landsleit*, the unfortunate victims of her beloved hometown of Volkovysk, which is now destroyed.

Bob'cheh Kilikovsky-Cohen

Page 262: Bob'cheh Kilikovsky-Cohen

Bob'cheh was Sholom the Postman's daughter-in-law. Her husband was named *Leibeh* and he dealt in wood products. Her father was David, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva. Her brother was Fishl, a Hebrew Teacher. She was capable of learning a page of the *Gemara,* and herself composed a book of Hebrew prayers – and Herschel the Scribe wrote it out by hand. During the High Holy Days, she was the reciter of prayers for the women, and at the *Tashlikh* service, the women would gather around her and she would read to them. Because of this, she was also known as *Bob'cheh die Zogerkeh.* When a wedding took place in the city, in which the bride was an orphan, it was Bob'cheh who would always bring the prospective bride to the cemetery to plead that the deceased come to the wedding ceremony. In the case of a serious illness, when it was necessary to measure off a burial plot, they would ask her to do it as a mitzvah. Everyone had respect for the good-hearted Bob'cheh.

She raised an orphan in her own home until he married. In her later years, she emigrated to live with her children in America, and even in the new country, remained active in charitable causes. She helped establish an old-age home in Bayonne, NJ, where she lived with her daughter, *Dob'eh Fink.* She passed away in 1934 at the age of 81 years. The entire community of the city of Bayonne participated in her large funeral, where she was eulogized by Rabbi Chaim Siegel and two other Rabbis.

Bob'cheh's son, Hyman Cohen, who lives in New York, is the founder and President of the New York "Volkovysk Center," and is very active in the aid work done for Volkovysk *landsleit.*

Moshe Shapiro

Page 263: Moshe Shapiro

Moshe Shapiro was a son-in-law of Shepsel Glembotsky. He dealt in forest products, and owned a lumber working facility near Bloch's house. He was a well-known merchant and a worker for the Zionist cause. He was a member of the Zionist Committee, a leader of *Keren Kayemet*, a director of the Free Loan Society, a founder and developer of the Merchant's Bank – an idealist, who dedicated his life and way of living to nationalist work, especially the national funds and nationalist education. There was never any question as to his own business or health if an initiative on behalf of *Keren HaYesod* or *Keren Kayemet* came along – when it was necessary to bolster the funds. Understanding the importance of educating the coming generation in the nationalist spirit, he dedicated a considerable amount of energy and effort to the Hebrew School. He was one of the founders of the Hebrew Gymnasium. He was a man of good character, constantly striving for peace: but he knew no compromise with anti-Zionists.

He passed away in the year 1929 in Warsaw. When this tragic news reached Volkovysk, the Volkovysk Zionist Organization held a special gathering to mourn, at which it was decided to bring the body of the deceased back to Volkovysk for burial in the Volkovysk cemetery. A funeral committee was appointed, which distributed notices of mourning throughout the city, and requested of all members and friends to pay their last respects to the deceased.

The deceased was brought to Volkovysk, and his funeral was attended by an extraordinarily large group of attendees. The casket was carried by pallbearers from the Zionist Organization for the entire distance from the train station to the cemetery. The procession was led by the students of the Hebrew School and of the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium, of which the deceased was one of the founders. In the new *Bet HaMedrash*, he was

eulogized by the Yerusalimskys, Zvi Inker and Ben Zion Lifschitz, who portrayed the loss that Volkovysk had sustained, with the passing of Moshe Shapiro, in touching words.

In Issue No. 100 of the *Volkovysker Leben* of that year, an article was printed by the Engineer, *Ephraim Barash* in memory of the deceased. Among other things, it says there: "This week, we escorted to his final resting place, the best, most dedicated and most loyal friend, Moshe Shapiro, ז"ל.

> "We have lost not only a Zionist, an idealist, but a practical person who with his body and spirit was a committed activist on behalf of Zionist causes, especially the Zionist funds. His commitment to Zionism was self-understood: Zionism was integral to him, and was a part of him, and motivated him to work for his people and his Land."

Reb Joseph Yerusalimsky

Page 266: Reb Joseph Yerusalimsky

Reb Joseph Yerusalimsky, the *Shokhet* and *Mohel* of Volkovysk, was a highly visible participant in a variety of Volkovysk community, religious and charitable institutions.

During his youth, he studied at the Yeshivas in Eishyshok, and Novogrudok, and was known as the *Novogrudker Baki.*[157] He received his rabbinic ordination at the hands of some of the greatest of *Gaonim,* among them from Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, Rabbi Yekhiel Mikhal Epstein (author of *Oraykh HaShulkhan*), Rabbi Abraham Burstein (the *Tavriker Rav*), etc. He was a prodigious scholar, being a *Baki* in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud, *Poskim*[158], and Medieval Jewish Philosophy. He had a remarkable memory, and remembered everything that he had learned at one time. He knew the *Tanakh* by heart.

He was also a progressive thinker. He was well-acquainted with the new Hebrew and Yiddish literature, and also read the Russian and German literature in their original languages.

Apart from his education, he was a man of good deeds, self-effacing, and someone who satisfied himself with less rather than more. He never sought public acclaim, and never held himself aloof from the general populace. For this reason, common people held him in great regard. He was a man of progressive inclination, and for this reason, members of the radical parties related to him with great respect.

He came to Volkovysk as a ritual slaughterer in 1912, and won the respect of people from all walks of life in the Volkovysk Jewish populace. He studied Torah with the Jews in the *Ein-Yaakov Schul*, and he was also an active Zionist and spoke often at Zionist gatherings. He was quite a good orator, and he excelled in delivering eulogies which he gave at funerals of important Volkovysk personalities. He was also the Torah

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157 The Hebrew word used to describe someone who was thoroughly versed in a subject, usually the Talmud. Another appellation was *Harif*, the Hebrew word for 'sharp' indicating superior analytical talent. Someone who was both a *Harif and a Baki* was considered exceedingly rare.

158 The Lawgivers of record, whose opinions formed the Jewish canon, or *Halakha.*

Reader of the *Ein-Yaakov Schul*.[159] He was, for a time, a member of the Bialystoker Central Zionist Committee and he was sent to surrounding cities and towns to speak in front of Zionist audiences.

Reb Joseph Yerusalimsky passed away at the age of 63 – on March 16, 1936. At the time of his funeral, all the stores in the city were locked and shuttered. The Nazis murdered his wife, along with a daughter.

Of the remainder of his family – his two sons, and one daughter [are] in Israel. Another son, *William Uris* is in Philadelphia, where he, together with *Noah Pines* were co-founders of the Volkovysk relief organization in Philadelphia, which provided a great deal of support to surviving Volkovysk *landsleit* after the Second World War. His son, *Dr. Eliezer Yerushalmi,* was a teacher in Volkovysk, Volp and Sukhovolya. He later taught in Lithuania, ands was the Headmaster of the ORT school in Shavel. He survived difficult years in ghettoes and concentration camps during the years of the Nazi occupation, where incidentally, he gave himself over to the collection of archival documents, and himself kept a daily diary. Since the liberation, he lives in Italy, where he is the director of the Culture Department of the Central Committee of Jewish Refugees. There, he is also the Chairman of the writers organization, and a co-director of the literary journal, *Der Gang* as well as the correspondent for the Tel-Aviv daily newspaper, *Davar*.

Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky

P. 267: Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky and His Wife, Chana

Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky was a son of the Warsaw Yeshiva head, Rav Joseph *Harif*, and he was a noteworthy type of individual, a uniquely gifted individual, in whom truly, both Torah and greatness were found in one place. He was a councilman of the old council of Volkovysk, and apart from his great [Jewish] scholarship, he was strongly steeped in secular education, and was fluent with ease in six European languages – both orally and in writing.

Occupying himself with the Law, he came to everyone's assistance with his advice – both in word and in writing. Wherever there was a heavy heart, a quandary, a dispute – one went to Khmelnitsky. Because where else could one go and unburden one's self and be so well heard out, patiently for hours at a time, for no charge (and quite often just for a 'thank you') and leave with a stone removed from one's heart, if not at the good-natured Khmelnitsky's?

His urbanity and education did not stand in the way of him rising daily at 5 AM and go to the neighboring Lev's *Bet HaMedrash*, where he had for a time served as the *Gabbai*, and sit down and study a page of the *Gemara* out loud.

His death – in August 1928 – elicited great sorrow in Volkovysk, and several eulogies were delivered in his memory by Rav Yerakhmiel, the Yeshiva Head, Yerusalimsky (the *Shokhet*), L. Shaliota, and Y. Levin. Out of respect for the deceased, all the stores were closed during the large funeral.

His wife, *Chana*, was also very popular and beloved in the city. She was active in many charitable organizations, especially being active for the benefit of the orphanage. After her husband died, she emigrated

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159 No small mental feat either, since it was the practice of the Reader to have committed the entire repertoire of musical notes, or *trop*, to memory.

to Montreal, Canada, where her children live. She passed away there several years ago.

Zerakh Moshkovsky

Page 269: *Zerakh Moshkovsky*

Zerakh Moshkovsky was a tailor by trade. He was a very serious and honest individual. He lived very modestly, since he earned very little because of his fragile health, but he was never bitter, and his home always stood open to poor people. He would share his last bite with them. To this end, he would go about the city and collect alms on behalf of the poor. To this end, he set himself the task of providing locations for the Yeshiva students to take their "day" meals, and if a few were left over for whom he could not find a spot, he would take them to his own home and he would feed and board them until a place could be found for them to stay. Every Friday night, after prayers, he would go through all of the houses of worship, and gather together the individual Yeshiva students, and see to their needs. Several times a week, he would go to the *Schul* in the middle of the night all alone, and recite psalms.

He lived in his own house that he inherited from his wife's parents. Later on, he sold the house, and used the money to build a *Schul* on the New Street, *Tiferet Bakhurim*, and he became the *Shammes*.

His wife was named *Sarah*, and he was called *Zerakh*. He emigrated to America with his wife in 1910. In Chicago, where they lived for a longer period, they were known by the name, *Moskowitz.*

Tuvia Fenster

Page 271: *Tuvia Fenster*

Tuvia Fenster was a well-known personality in Volkovysk. In recent years, he has also become recognized among Jewish literary circles as a result of his journalistic activity in the Belgian *Yiddisher Presse* and other periodicals. He lived on the Grodno Gasse in Volkovysk, and was active as a banker.

Tuvia Fenster, who lives today in Antwerp, wandered a great deal in his life, learned a great deal, and saw a great deal – and all this helped to enrich his talented, full personality. He belonged to a class of Jewish people that practically do not exist any longer in this generation: a progressive thinker of the old school, a scholarly sage, knowledgeable in European literature, and a man of good works.

Tuvia Fenster was born in the year 1864 in the village of Szumowo, near Lomza. He comes from a well connected, scholarly and business family. His uncle, Rabbi Chaim Leib, is the author of the book, *Shaar Bet-Rabim*, well-known in the scholarly world. Tuvia's father, Rabbi Yaakov Moshe was a forest products merchant – a well educated Jew, who was seasoned in worldly knowledge. Reb Yaakov Moshe would take Tuvia along on his business trips, and along the way, the father would study the *Gemara* with his son, and relate tales of Jewish life to him. On these trips, the young Tuvia had the opportunity to listen to and observe a wide variety of people – and this was of great value to him in his emotional development.

A pleasant impression – that had a great influence on him – remained with Tuvia from his youth: in 1876, his father, *Rabbi Yaakov Moshe* took a pleasure trip to the Land of Israel, and returning home in peace, he brought back presents for the family. In those days, [such a trip] was a rare occurrence – and the Hebrew periodical, *Hatzefira,* published in Warsaw, wrote about this trip. Many people from the surrounding area

came to Reb Yaakov Moshe's in order to hear his wondrous descriptions about this risky trip that he made over the sea. Reb Yaakov Moshe subsequently wrote about his trip to the Land of Israel in a highly descriptive Hebrew.

Tuvia Fenster served as a soldier in Tambov in 1885, and in 1887 he arrived in Volkovysk as the son-in-law of the well-known merchant, *Reb Yitzhak Aizik Edelbaum*. Afterwards, he lived in Warsaw, and under the sponsorship of his father-in-law, near Suwalk. In the year 1895, he returned to Volkovysk, where he engaged in the forest products business, and banking. He traveled frequently to Russia and Finland on behalf of the fabric company which has developed considerably in the Volkovysk area, because the local management had appointed him as a representative of their fabric factories.

At the time of the First World War, there was a great crisis, and Tuvia Fenster lost his entire net worth. At that time, he left Volkovysk and lived in a variety of cities – Odessa, Archangelsk, and Moscow. In the year 1924, he arrived in Germany, where he lived for two years, and from there he went on to Belgium where he settled in Antwerp. There, he begins to write about the old Jewish way of life. He describes the silent Jewish souls in the local *Yiddisher Presse*: simple craftsmen, hewers of wood, and drawers of water – their joys and suffering, gentleness and goodness. He publishes several larger historical novels about Jewish life, works through the novel, *David Alroee* and gives lectures about different periods in Jewish history.

Tuvia Fenster enriches Jewish Antwerp not only with his words and writing, but also with his fine personality, with his proud aristocratic mein. Experts marvel at his "hobby" of painting. The renown Antwerp publisher, *Plantain* wants to purchase his "Flag of Israel" painting for the museum, – underscored in a mosaic of colors following the *Medrash Rabbah.*

An interesting portrait of Tuvia Fenster appeared before the last [sic: Second] war in the London periodical, *The Times:* {Here is] Y. Bialsky, who visited Antwerp and had a meeting with Mr. Fenster:

> " — Imagine an elderly man, tall, thin, very much like a thin Englishman, practically a quintessential "old man," dressed in an enchantingly esthetic manner, with a European bearing, and reserved. – and he speaks only as if he has selected each word from a lexicon – that is Mr. T. Fenster, the popular Hebrew-Yiddish author, historian and lecturer of Antwerp. —
>
> The gentlemen is a veritable cornucopia of literature. He is a walking encyclopedia, with historical names, dates and facts brimming all about him – having seen much, met many, and everything stored away in his memory...
>
> I have already met with him a number of times. I have periodically read his rich and highly interesting articles. I also know that he has written several works in Russian, in Hebrew. One thing I had not yet discovered as of my last visit, and that is – his gift for painting. I saw the three works that he had created in the last few years. These are writings accompanies by his own illustrations and coloring. I am not an expert on art, but the rhythm, the symmetry that strikes the eye, the wondrously esthetic penmanship of the Hebrew – all of this together left a very strong impression on me.
>
> *The first work* is about the Jewish sculptor Antokolsky. With rigorously circumscribed critique and in artfully- styled language, the author shows the extent to which Antokolsky's Jewish soul shined through in such subjects as his 'Ivan the Terrible,' Yermak, and others. As a contrasting example, he presents Antokolsky's colleague, the great Russian artist Riepin.

The second work is: The ensigns of the Twelve Tribes, drawn and colored in accordance with Midrashic sources, with Hebrew commentaries. *The third work* is – his own personal recollections, accompanied by illustrations, landscapes, etc., all in color."

During the Second World War, in the year 1940, Fenster fled Belgium along with other Jewish refugees. He ended up in a small town in France. On one occasion, standing abandoned and alone, under the bullets of Hitler's armies, a Jew approached him that he did not know, and said to him:

– Come with me!

The unfamiliar Jew, also from Antwerp, brought Fenster to a convent, where the nuns made him the gardener, and in this way rescued him.

Since 1946, Tuvia Fenster again resides in Antwerp.

At this opportunity, I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Fenster for his interesting memoir, "In Those Times," which he contributed to the Yizkor Book.

Reb Aaron Lifschitz

Page 274: *Aaron Lifschitz*

Reb Aaron Lifschitz (Aaron Zelda's) lived at the intersection of the *Tzerkovna* and *Millner Gassen*. He owned a large manufacturing business. Later, when the business grew larger, he moved it to the building that housed the fire-fighters. He was a reliable merchant, and people treated him with great trust. The smaller storekeepers from the surrounding villages would buy merchandise from him on credit, and his word was sacred to them.

He was a formidable scholar, being a *Baki* in all the corners of our literature – the *Shas* and commentaries, the *Zohar*[160], books on the analysis of modern Hebrew authors – and the same time, he possessed a broad awareness of secular education and in European languages.

He came from a prominent family and had an incisive mind and was truly a walking encyclopedia. Additionally, he had a good and sympathetic heart and was an ardent nationalistic Jew. He is one of the few surviving members of *Bnei Moshe,* founded by *Ahad HaAm.*[161]

For his entire life, Reb Aaron Lifschitz took a leadership role in all Zionist and community institutions.

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160 The principal Kabbalistic work of *Rabbi Simeon bar Yokhai.*

161 *Ahad HaAm* (Pen name of Asher Ginsberg) (1856 - 1927). Born in Skvira, near Kiev in the Ukraine, Asher Ginsberg became the central figure in the movement for Cultural Zionism. Although raised in a Hassidic family, *Ahad HaAm* was soon exposed to secular studies. The impact of modern philosophy and the sciences led him to abandon his religious faith and observance. Nonetheless he remained deeply committed to the Jewish people. It was his attempt to find a synthesis between Judaism and European philosophy.

Before the First World War, he was the *Gabbai* of the Talmud Torah, to which he offered both is being and money, and the children saw in him – someone who was like their own father. He was also one of the founders of the *Bet Lehem*, which existed in Volkovysk before the First World War. With is support, the *Oneg Shabbat* was founded in Volkovysk, where for the entire time, he took a substantial part and demonstrated – by answering a variety of questions – great knowledge of Torah, wisdom, and secular education. Also, in his later years, not mindful of his own fragile condition, he was active in the work of the Volkovysk Orphanage.

In old age he felt alone, because his children had spread all over the world; he then decided to settle in the Land of Israel with his wife, where his daughter *Rosa Lokhovsky* already lived. To this end, he sold his house, and sending his baggage ahead, set out on his way. But death struck suddenly (at the age of 71) in 1929 in *Otvotsk*, where on the way to the Land of Israel, he had stopped for a short while to recuperate from his lung ailments. In this manner, merciless Death took him from this world on the threshold of realization of his dream.

The deceased was brought to Volkovysk in a special conveyance, and his funeral was accompanied by a large procession, among which were also the students of the Hebrew schools, of the Talmud Torah, and the children of the orphanage, etc.

The deceased was eulogized in the Great Synagogue by: The *Shokhet* and Meat Inspector Yerusalimsky, Schwiff (a member of the central committee of the Zionist Organization) and Zvi Inker. The warm eulogies touched the audience greatly, and elicited tears and sorrow among everyone.

Reb Aaron Lifschitz's son, the engineer, *Joseph Lifschitz,* saved himself from the hands of the Nazis, and today lives in Belgium. A daughter of Reb Aaron Lifschitz, *Rosa* , as previously mentioned, is found in Israel today. A second daughter of his lives in Moscow.

Reb Aaron Lifschitz's wife, *Leah* , delayed her move to the Land of Israel for a while because of the loss of her husband, and she dedicated her free time to community work. Later, she did move to Israel, where she passed away.

Reb Israel Efrat

Page 276: Israel Efrat

The lawyer, *Reb Israel Efrat* was a remarkable sort of person. A great enlightened Hebrew scholar of the older generation yet, a type of person that no longer exists in our generation. He was thoroughly suffused with Torah and wisdom, a man, who despite the fact of never having had a formal education at a university or even at a gymnasium, stood higher in his knowledge than his fellow lawyers. He acquired his education through his own efforts, and thanks to his great skills, he reached the rank of "Assistant Certified Lawyer" and occupied a highly visible place in the legal circles of lawyers and judges of that time. Were it not for the discriminatory decrees of Czarist Russia prior to the First World War, it is certain he would have achieved the rank of "Certified Lawyer" and possibly a very important government position. However, being Jewish stood in his way. He was a good and committed Jew, and he took part in all community affairs – not only on behalf of the Jewish community in Volkovysk, but also on behalf of all Russian Jewry. He was a totally committed and ardent Zionist, and because of this, he was very active in all the Zionist organizations in his

city, as well as in the vicinity. He would often speak at Zionist meetings, and his wise and spiritually rich speeches were received with great affection and respect. He was very active in the Volkovysk Jewish community under the Polish regime.

Volkovysk and The Land of Israel

In Volkovysk, as an old and prominent Jewish community, that lived a full Jewish life and also felt itself connected to Jewry of all ages, the sentiment toward the Land of Israel was always strong. Even in olden times, the name *Eretz Yisrael* evoked a deep resonance in the hearts of Volkovysk Jews, who always would respond to the needs of the ancient Jewish *Yishuv*, and were broadly generous in supporting the old houses of study and *Yeshivas* in the Land of Israel; in Volkovysk, there was always to be found Jews, who in their older years would liquidate their businesses, and would move to the Land of Israel, to spend their last days in Torah study, performing service in the Holy Land, and not needing to have to show any regrets. *Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin,* the son of the Volkovysk Rabbi, Reb Benjamin Diskin, moved to the Land of Israel in the mid-nineteenth century, and founded the renown orphanage that carries his name to this day.

Chaikel Shiff

Page 279: *Chaikel Shiff*

Page 281: *Sarah Tovah Shiff*

The first sprouts of the modern Zionist emigration to the Land of Israel appeared in Volkovysk towards the end of the last [sic: nineteenth] century. The harbingers for the later, larger Volkovysk *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, were a young couple, *Chaikel Shiff* and his wife *Sarah Tovah,* who moved from Volkovysk to the Land of Israel.

In that time, fifty-five years ago, it was necessary to be a real idealist, and be full of energy and the pioneering spirit, to make the decision to leave behind a deeply-rooted life, and settle in the Land of Israel, which in those days was very poor and primitive. To get from one point to another, one rode through deserts and over stones on donkeys, and the Jewish population in those days consisted mostly of old, broken people, whose principle striving was for – a burial place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem...

Chaikel Shiff, the son of Tuvia Shiff, came from an important family of *balebatim* in Volkovysk. He worked with timepieces, but was also well-schooled – who received a good Jewish education in a Yeshiva. Shortly after finishing Yeshiva education, while still a young boy, he decided to settle in the Land of Israel and to make his home there. He put his thoughts into action, and even 55 years ago, he went to the Holy Land, where he became of the very first builders and founders of the modern *Yishuv*.

Before he left, he married *Sarah Tovah Lev* , from the little *shtetl* of Piesk (28km from Volkovysk), who came from a very orthodox home, and was the daughter of one of the important *balebatim* of Piesk, *Moshe Shimon Lev.*

In the Land of Israel, Chaikel Shiff initially made a living from his trade of watchmaking. But he did not abandon his Torah study, or miss his *Daf Yomi.*[162]

When I came to the Land of Israel in 1910, Chaikel Shiff had his watch business in a corner of Willner's furniture store in the center of Jaffa (near the home office of the former Anglo-Palestinian Bank), where he

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[162] The daily page of the *Gemara* studied by committed Jews.

engaged in real estate business, and also owned a vineyard in Rehovot. The former center for Jewish commercial activity was concentrated in the Central Bustros Street in Jaffa, and Willner's furniture store was close to the center. Chaikel Shiff – like most of the other Jews of Jaffa – lived in the Jewish Quarter of *Neve Shalom.*

The doors of his guest-friendly home were always open to visitors who came to the Land of Israel, and needed protection and help. Foremost, he would receive his own *landsleit* with much grace, and he offered them assistance in whatever way he could. Understandably, this expanded his circle of friends, which grew and branched out with the passage of time. In the ensuing years, Shiff became a vegetable grower and a substantial merchant. He sub-divided and distributed the entire property of what is now the Montefiore Neighborhood. At that time, young people from Volkovysk and other cities in Poland began to arrive in order to attend the newly founded Hertzeliya Gymnasium. Shiff's house was transformed into a center for these young *olim* and gymnasium students from Volkovysk, who felt like they were at home there – thanks to the warm relations extended by Chaikel Shiff and his wife.

It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that the Shiffs were of an older generation, their children created a Hebrew [language] atmosphere, and Hebrew was the language of daily discourse.

Also, in their house, one could find out about everything that had transpired in connection with *landsleit*, because *Mottel Epstein* (*M'shiyakh*) about whom I will write later, who loved to stroll around town and gather news, was a member of their household, and he would bring all the news there that he had gathered from around the city.

I recall, that as a young gymnasium student in Tel-Aviv, far from my parents, I really loved spending time at the Shiff home. When I would have to go from my separate room (in the Yemenite Quarter) to the Bustros Street (in Jaffa), to buy something, I would make a detour, over the sands, and stop at the Shiffs, because there, his loving and willing wife would always ply me with good things to eat, and one could meet Volkovysk *landsleit* and hear news.

The Shiffs always provided Volkovysk *landsleit* with a small loan of money until funds arrived for them that was sent from Volkovysk.

The Shiffs always invited the Volkovysk young people to their home for the Sabbath and Festivals. I was always at the Shiffs for the Passover *Sedorim*. Despite the fact that the Gymnasium would arrange very suitable *Sedorim* for all of the students, and also the teachers and many residents of Tel-Aviv would invite the Gymnasium students to their *Sedorim* – I selected Shiffs' house from all of these, because there I felt as if I was at the home of my parents.

Later on, *Chaikel Shiff* became *one of the founders of Tel-Aviv*, and built his home on Lilienblum Street (on the corner of Herzl Street).

Chaikel Shiff fulfilled the commandments requiring to do what is proper between one man and his friend, in the old-fashioned way – he gave a great deal of charity, he gave out loans, and helped people with whom he dealt. He also took an active role in the construction of the *Great Synagogue* in Tel-Aviv.

Sarah Tovah Shiff

Sarah Tovah Shiff, who quickly acclimated herself to the Land, was known for the considerable extent of her charitable and community activities. She not only gave charity to the needy, but also founded important institutions for helping take care of the poor by providing them with sustenance.

She took an active role in the founding of the Free Loan Bank. She was an active member of the *B'not Zion* and *B'not Brit* organizations, and using her own resources, she founded a "charitable fund" (under *B'not Brit*) in her own name: "The Sarah Shiff Charitable Fund." She also took part in the founding of a trade school for newly arrived immigrants, in order to facilitate their assimilation into the Land.

When in the year 1929, during the unrest,[163] the *HaYarkon* organization was founded by Dr. A. Greenberg for the purpose of increasing the availability of vegetable produce to feed the Jewish community, Sarah Shiff stood by this organization and did a great deal of good work for them.

Apart from her multi-branched activity on the community front, Sarah Shiff was also well-known for her good works in "Anonymous Charity." She never revealed the extent of her support for those in need, and she would quietly give out help to many people and even in old age, when she was mostly confined to a sickbed, she nevertheless continued to manage her welfare work.

In 1945, when I visited the Land of Israel, I went to see this good-hearted elderly lady, Sarah Tovah Shiff, who at that time lived with her daughter, Malka, in Jerusalem. Chaikel Shiff had already passed away years ago, and Sarah Tovah passed away in 1949.

The Shiff children, who received a good Jewish and secular education, are following in their parents' footsteps, and participate in a variety of community and charitable institutions in the Land. The daughter, *Malka*, is a teacher, and her husband *Abraham Tatenbaum* is a senior official in the colonial ministry of the English regime. The second daughter, *Deborah*, also completed the teacher's seminary, and her husband, *Joseph Mendelson*, is an engineer in Haifa. The third daughter, *Chana* lives in Tiberias.

Their only son, *Moshe Shiff*, is an agronomist. For many years he occupied an important post in the Chief Secretariat of the Land of Israel Government in Jerusalem. His wife, *Nechama*, was from the prominent Jerusalem family, *Amdursky*, and she distinguished herself through her good works, grace and education. Later on, she died in the childbirth of her first child and left behind an orphaned son and a stricken loving husband.[164] At the first anniversary of her death, the relatives of both families (*Shiff and Amdursky*) erected a two story building: *Bet Nechama Shiff*. The objectives of this institution were to take care of children orphaned under such circumstances, and to provide those things that they required for all of their needs.

I have spent a little more time on the Shiff family here, because as stated previously, it was the first leading edge of the later larger Volkovysk *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, which began in the year 1909 and continued up to the last few years.

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163 Reference to the Arab riots and massacres.

164 The seeming contradiction of leaving an orphaned son when she died giving birth to her 'first child' is not resolved here.

The First Volkovysk Youth *Aliyah*

Page 283: *Top:* *The Hertzeliya Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv*

Bottom: *As Students in the Herzteliya Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv*
Right to Left: *Moshe Einhorn and Yankel Neiman*

Page 285: *The First Volkovysk Group in The Land of Israel in the Year 1911*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Mottel Epstein ('Moshiach'), Leizer Golomb, Shmuel Golomb.*
Second Row: *Yankel Neiman, Jekuthiel Zusmanovich (Yekutieli), Moshe'keh Einhorn, David Golomb.*
Third Row: *Eliyahu Golomb, Avreml Sukhovolsky, Sholom Bialsky, Jekuthiel Neiman, Moshe Kaplinsky.*

Page 287: *The First Group From Volkovysk in The Land of Israel in the Year 1913*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: *Leizer Golomb, Lipa Zusmanovich (Yekutieli), Joseph Zusmanovich (Yekutieli).*
Second Row: *Avreml Velvelevich, Jekuthiel Neiman, David Golomb, Yitzhak Kaminer, Eliyahu Golomb, Lieber Shereshevsky's son, Zus'keh Berman.*
Third Row: *Velvelevich, Moshe Kaplinsky, Israel Zusmanovich (Yekutieli), Moshe Einhorn, Mottel Epstein ('Moshiach'), Yaakov Rabinovich, Avreml Sukhovolsky.*

Page 288: *A Class at The Hertzeliya Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv with Dr. Joseph Luria*

In the year 1909, the so-called "First Volkovysk Youth Aliyah" began. These were young people from Volkovysk who went to the Land of Israel to study in the newly-founded first Hebrew Gymnasium, *Hertzeliya*. I wish to cite a few memories here of that romantic time.

One fine day in Volkovysk, a noteworthy idea was spread about: *Eliyahu Golomb*, the son of Naphtali Golomb (who lived on the *Ostroger Gasse*, near David Hubar's house), had left Volkovysk and had gone to the Land of Israel, to study at the newly-founded Gymnasium, *Hertzeliya*. Eliyahu Golomb was the pioneer who paved the way for other young people from Volkovysk.

Eliyahu Golomb's letters from the Land of Israel awakened an interest among many other residents of Volkovysk to follow in his example. After Eliyahu, his brother *Leizer, Zus'keh (Ne'eman) Berman, Yankel Neiman* and the writer of these lines – *Moshe Einhorn*.

At that time, at the beginning of 1910, the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium was still in a building opposite the German colony, not far from Bustros Street in Jaffa. I used to take my lunch from Dov Hoz's mother, who has a sort of private lunch table in *Neve Shalom*, where all the one-time literati, teachers and writers – and among them Y. K. Brenner, and to separate the living, Nissan Turov – used to eat. My gymnasium classmates would eat lunch in different places. We would take our remaining meals together in our so-called "commune."

At that time, a large area of the sands around Jaffa were cleaned off and leveled. Many houses were constructed on both sides of Herzl Street. The new building for the gymnasium was almost complete, and it was supposed to open for the new semester. Every week, new students came to the gymnasium, and in one

house in the Yemenite Quarter, between Tel-Aviv and *Neve Shalom*, the few Volkovysk Gymnasium students lived together: *Eliyahu and Leizer Golomb, Yankel Neiman, Zus'keh Berman*, and this writer.

Every evening, we would stretch out on the sand and read the letters from home, tell a variety of stories, or listen to Zus'keh Berman's music. Zus'keh loved to play the mandolin. Mostly he would play love songs to his paramour, who had remained behind in Volkovysk.

Tel-Aviv grew up in the space of one year. Two more streets were appended to Herzl Street. The small kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard with its soda water and ice cream was the focal point for the younger generation.

The gymnasium students from Volkovysk largely lived off of the stipends they received from home, and partly from giving hourly lessons in Hebrew to beginning students.

After the summer, the Gymnasium moved over to Tel-Aviv, and classes began in the new building. Together with the gymnasium, Mrs. Hoz's restaurant also moved to Tel-Aviv. At that time, our "commune" dispersed, because its members moved from the Yemenite Quarter either to Tel-Aviv or to *Neve Tzedek*.

At the end of 1910, the family of *Eliyahu Golomb* arrived in the Land of Israel. They bought a mill, and settled themselves in the Land. In those times, the families of *Benjamin Kalir* (they settled in *Petakh Tikva*), *Boruch Zusmanovich* the teacher (settled in Jaffa) – his three sons, who today live in Israel use the name *"Jekuthiel"* – and *Eliezer Lieber Shereshevsky* (also in Jaffa), came [to the Land]. Later, in the year 1912, the family of *Mordechai Chafetz* came and settled in *Petakh Tikva*.

In the summer of 1911, several students at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium, who were from Volkovysk, took a vacation trip to Volkovysk – and their enthusiastic descriptions of their new life that was unfolding in the Land of Israel, impressed many other young and adult people in Volkovysk – to go to the Land of Israel.

In the years 1911-1912 the Volkovysk colony in the Land of Israel grew significantly. Apart form the previously mentioned families, the following came to the Land of Israel: *Moshe Kaplinsky, Mottel Epstein* (*Moshiach*), *Jekuthiel Neiman, Israel Hubar, Mordechai Chafetz* (Zalman Chafetz's son), *Zvi Weinstein-Carmeli* (Esther the lingerie seller's son), the *Velvelevich* brothers, *Yitzhak Kaminer, Abraham Sukhovolsky, Sholom Bialsky* and *David Epstein.*

Every *Shabbos* afternoon, Tel-Aviv was visited by many guests. The Sephardim from the Jaffa ghetto, the Ashkenazim from *Neve Shalom* and *Neve Tzedek*. Also, colonists from nearby settlements would gather together in Tel-Aviv to observe the great miracle, how the first one hundred percent Jewish city was being built. Herzl Street was full of people. At the same time, the young people from Volkovysk would gather on the sands near Tel-Aviv. We would spend a few hours together, sing Hebrew songs, and then we would form ranks and march off to Herzl Street. Near the gymnasium, we would regroup anew into a single line, hand-in-hand, singing, and all at once, broke into couples.

– Make way, here come the Volkovyskers! – could be heard from our comrades.

The onlookers were not opposed [to what we were doing]. On the contrary. People stopped and watched, making the way clear for us. All of Tel-Aviv knew about us and wondered, how did such a comparatively small city like Volkovysk send such a large number of students [to the Land of Israel].

When a Festival holiday arrived – *Simchat Torah, Purim, Khol HaMoed Passover* – many from Volkovysk would get together to keep company at Eliezer Shereshevsky's house. Ever person would contribute a set amount, and Mrs. Shereshevsky would prepare, with the help of several other women, a really fine meal with good dishes, and delicious drinks – and the Volkovyskers made merry. It was sort of a "get-together party" of *landsleit* from Volkovysk. The author, *Yaakov Rabinovich*, ז"ל, who was a *landsman* from Volkovysk, would come to these gatherings from *Petakh Tikva.*

At this time, I would like to provide a few short character profiles and biographical insights about a number of those from Volkovysk that could be found in Tel-Aviv at that time. I will begin with *Eliyahu Golomb*.

Eliyahu Golomb

Page 289: Eliyahu Golomb

Eliyahu Golomb who came to the Land of Israel in 1909, was a good student at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium, and had a very acute facility to grasp things. As is known, in those years there were not enough Hebrew textbooks for all the students, and the students would have to write up the notes from the teachers' lectures and review them very thoroughly. Eliyahu Golomb rarely had to review anything. He [simply] remembered everything by heart. He was fond of doing independent reading – not necessarily following the syllabus. It was typical of the future leader of the Jewish self-defense army, the *Haganah*, that as a youth, while a student, he did not like any form of discipline, and did not want to participate in the regular hours of the Gymnasium. And the Gymnasium teacher, Zvi Nishri (Orlov), wanted to resort to extreme measures against the "recalcitrant" student, and a special committee of teachers was called together about this matter – but the issue, in the end, was straightened out.

He loved to walk alone by himself – sunk in his own thoughts. When I once encountered him during such a walk on the sands, and asked him where he was headed, he answered me, "I'm thinking."

He became very friendly in the gymnasium with *Moshe Shertok* and *David Hoz* – and it was this small group of three friends that later played such an indescribably important role in the life of the *Yishuv*, in the Zionist movement, and in the *Histadrut.*

After spending time at the Gymnasium, Golomb was one of those who organized a small group of students – with him as the leader – that set itself the purpose of leaving the Gymnasium and to go work at [Kibbutz] *Bet Shemen.* For a variety of reasons, apart from Yitzhak Turner – the group later returned to the Gymnasium.

In 1913, Eliyahu Golomb completed his studies at the gymnasium. There was no higher school of learning in the Land of Israel at that time, and it was necessary to travel abroad to study [at that level]. The world was open – one could travel to Berlin, Paris, or to Switzerland. But a specific, small idealistic group of this first class of graduates of the gymnasium could not easily conclude the appropriateness of the intent – to leave the Land. They continuously conducted heated discussions about what to do. They once carried out a walking discussion for an entire night, and concluded that they should call a meeting at the house of David Hoz, in order to adopt a final decision. At this meeting, in which Ne'eman Berman participated, Eliyahu Golomb came out strongly against those with career ambitions that sought to leave to overseas universities. He underscored that it is the obligation of the first graduating class to set an example to the coming graduates of the Gymnasium, and to show them a path of constructive activity on behalf of the nation and the Land. The activity must be comprised of land reclamation and pioneering work, and the mobilization of the masses

for *aliyah* and colonization in the Land of Israel. The objective of the graduates must be: *to work amidst the people* – and not to study at universities for the fulfilment of personal needs. It was also discussed that the security in the colonies must be entirely in Jewish hands. Because, apart from those Jewish points that were under the aegis of "*HaShomer*" (the well-known Jewish Guard Organization of those times), there were other places where the security was not entirely in Jewish hands.

Among the two dozen students that had graduated at that time, seven students agreed to the proposed program – and it was these seven men who founded the *Histadrut.*

Eliyahu Golomb was their leader, the one who showed them the direction, set out the way – who will become a Histadrut activist, who will lead institutions and undertakings, and who is to engage in *Haganah* activity. Eliyahu was a leader and someone who could show the way in the Israeli Labor movement, and many people undertook work and land reclamation under his influence – joining the camp of Labor in the Land of Israel.

In 1913, Eliyahu Golomb and David Hoz appeared in *Degania*. At that time, *Moshe Barsky* and *Zaltzman* were killed, and a conscription of the workers in the Galilee was arranged, in order that they organize themselves to fight for their lives. The management of that conscription was given over to Eliyahu, for his opinion and direction.

A conflict then arose between *HaShomer* and prominent circles of the community in the Land of Israel, who demanded that the ranks of the Jewish self-defense forces be expanded. Eliyahu Golomb stood at the head of those who put forth that demand, whose thought was to take the matter of protection and self-defense out of the hands of the few, and put it in the hands of the entire *Yishuv.* Golomb's demand received a great deal of support – and in the end *HaShomer* conceded the point and relinquished its brief to an expanded community circle of participants.

Within a one to two year period, Golomb was already running the *Haganah* on a local basis.

During the years of 1914-1915, he would ride on a white horse, delivering *Haganah* supplies to various points. All the Arabs knew exactly who it was that rode around on a white horse, and many were concerned that he would become the target of violence for Jamal Pasha (the senior Turkish commander on the front in the Land of Israel, who was superb at promulgating bad decrees against the *Yishuv*), but the energetic Eliyahu was fearless, and went on with his important work, and continued to ride around alone on his horse over ways that at the time were full of Turkish soldiers.

Eliyahu's activity branched out extensively and broadened itself: he was active in the *Jewish Legion;* he was one of the founders of *Ein-Harod*; one of the founders of *Knesset Yisrael;* a member of the *Vaad Leumi*; a leading member of the *Histadrut*; one of the founders of *Akhdut HaAvodah*; a delegate to *Zionist Congresses*; he was very active on the issue of *aliyah*, and traveled all over Europe – Poland, France, Austria, Belgium, England – in order to organize the *aliyah,* and to call upon the youth to commit themselves not only in an ideological sense in party work, but that they should personally come to the Land of Israel and take an active part in the building up of the Land.

His work in the *Haganah* strengthened his position as a national leader, that the entire *Yishuv* valued and respected. He was the *mind*, the *heart* and the *hand* of the Jewish defense force. Eliyahu's deeply held belief in the necessity for the existence of a strong, independent Jewish force, which should stand guard over the *Yishuv* and all interests of the people, gave him the energy to continue with his work for the *Haganah,* despite

all the pitfalls that stood in the way of this grand Jewish undertaking, and despite the tribulations that he had to endure. Eliyahu took part in the pacification of the uprisings that broke out in the Land of Israel at different times – in the years of 1920, 1922, 1929. When in 1936, anti-Jewish riots broke out again – which stretched into 1939 – the *Haganah* was strengthened and further armed through Eliyahu's initiative. When it came time to colonize a new area in the Land, and were prepared to establish *Hanita,* – Eliyahu was the organizer of this work. He specified who would become part of the cadre of settlers, and who would be held accountable for carrying out the plan – and he personally went with the people who had to "take control" of the point for the purpose of *"Jewish Settlement."*

During the time of the last [sic: Second] World War, Eliyahu participated in the *Jewish Brigade*. He was, and remained, until his last day, the principal individual who was vested with the entire creation of the Jewish system of defense – indeed, this very same great defense army, that gave the *Yishuv* the wherewithal to combat its enemies, to secure and consolidate the Jewish positions and emplacements, over the entire Land.

It is worth noting, that even though Eliyahu Golomb was thoroughly immersed in his important work of greater general national significance – he never forgot his home city, Volkovysk, where he was born, and on various occasions demonstrated his ties to Volkovysk and its residents. In this connection, we will provide here several excerpts from the article *Son of the City*, that *Azriel Broshi* published in *Davar* on June 19, 1946:

> "After the [First] World War, the first group of *halutzim* arrived from our town (Volkovysk). We found our *landsman*, Eliyahu, in the front ranks of those who were realizing the ideal of Socialist-Zionism – and we were very proud of him. And how happy he was, when he saw that his very own *landsleit* were paving the Haifa-Jeddah highway, smashing rocks in *Beit She'An*, and building the *Sarafand-Lod* railroad line.
>
> During he frequent trips abroad, Eliyahu would from time-to-time drop in and visit Volkovysk, and meet with the friends of his youth. He helped a number of them – when they came to the Land of Israel.
>
> A few days before he died a message was given to the secretariat of the organization of his *landsleit*, that he wished to meet with one of them. I met him at the *Vaad HaPoel* building of the *Histadrut*. As was his habit, he placed his good hand on my shoulder, carefully reviewed the list of those *landsleit* who escaped [the Holocaust], remembering a goodly portion of the names recorded on the list, and in the end, let out a bitter sigh: "Of my friends, not even one remains: where is Tevel Smazanovich, where are you, all my landsleit?"
>
> So I said to him: I remember when you made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, Eliyahu! Now we are here by the hundreds – spread out in cities and villages, we have organized ourselves to provide help to those survivors from our town. We chose not to invite you to the initial meeting of our *landsleit* in Tel-Aviv, because we know the burden of work, meetings, and assemblies that you must attend to, but from time-to-time, we want to keep you advised of our activity. He stopped and thought for a short while, and then said: "It is indeed good that you have the list of the survivors in your pocket. Do you really believe that Lev (the Bialystoker baker) is still alive – he must be an incredibly old man by now?" What a good Jew he is! Joseph Ein is on the list – he was called Yoss'eleh Ein in town. I remember every street and every byway of my town. The fate of the Volkovysk community is no better than that of other Jewish communities in Poland. I beseech you, let me know if added news becomes available about survivors."

In the end, it was not possible to fulfill his wish, because, as was said, he died several days later at his home

in Tel-Aviv.

His health was bad during the last years of his life. He suffered from high blood pressure. The doctors warned him not to work so hard. But he could not tear himself away from his highly responsible work, and resumed his activity as usual – with assemblies, and meetings lasting late into the night. The doctors also forbade him to drive his own car, because it was too stressful for him. For a short while he had a chauffeur for his automobile, but afterwards, he resumed driving his car by himself, traveling all over the country – going to all points that needed to be visited in the interests of security and defense. This high stress work in the end drained him of his strength, and he died of a heart attack. Thus Eliyahu fell at his post – standing the watch over his Land and its people.

The day of Golomb's funeral (June 11, 1945) was transformed into a national day of mourning. His casket was brought to the main hall of the *Vaad HaPoel* of the *Histadrut.* Soldiers, sailors, the women's army corps, and "watchmen" provided an honor guard all night long at the casket. There was an honor guard at the casket from all branches of the *Haganah*. Thousands of Jews, residents of Tel-Aviv and also representatives from many other places in the Yishuv – participated in this grandiose funeral.

Eliyahu was buried near the graves of David and Rivka Hoz – who were his loyal friends during their lifetime.

In this fashion, a young man from Volkovysk rose to the level of national leadership in the *Yishuv.*

Zus'keh Berman

Zus'keh Berman, or as he was called in Hebrew, Ne'eman, was the leader of our "commune." We listened to him, because apart from the fact that he was older than all of us, he was also wise, and strong in character. In general, he had unusual skills. Being a diligent student and a good-natured man, everyone loved him: whether by the teachers in the gymnasium, his friends, or his *landsleit.* Had he lived, he would have contributed greatly to the building of the Land of Israel, and he would have been a crown for his parents, for the gymnasium, and his comrades. Regrettably, death tore him away from us at an early age, during the time of the First World War, when he was a student in Berlin.

Yaakov Rabinovich

Yaakov Rabinovich, the renown Hebrew author, was born in Volkovysk in the year 1875. His father, *Rabbi Abraham Aaron,* who was a prominent scholar, and compiled a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud Seder, *Zera'im*, died at a young age. His grandfather, *Rabbi Meir Jonah* – who published the book, *HaItur*, *Har HaMoriah*, with *"Corrections of Errors"* and *"Thoughts on the Rambam"* – was, for a short time (less than a half year) the Rabbi of Brisk, and for most of his years – in the *shtetl* of Svislucz (Grodno Province). His mother, *Chaya Hadassah*, was from the *Vinogradsky* family.

Yaakov Rabinovich received a traditional Jewish upbringing in his home town, in *Heder* and Yeshiva, and afterwards began to study general subjects. He left the country, and studied at the University of Bern (in Switzerland). Before leaving the country, he spent two years living in Vitebsk, where he was involved with teaching. He began his Zionist activity there. He studied in Switzerland for four years (1900-1904) and lived in Bern and Geneva. His literary activity began in those years. In the year 1904, he moved to the city of Odessa, which at that time was the center of the *Hibat Tzion* movement, and in 1907 he was elected to the

committee of the *Hovevei Tzion*, and he worked in the information bureau of the committee. He visited the Land of Israel twice, and a short time after 1910, he settled there permanently.

His first literary creation was published in the year 1901, and he immediately took a visible place in Hebrew *belle lettres*, and publicity. His first efforts, – the stories, "Trial" and "Life" – were published in David Frishman's *HaDor*. He then also published children's stories and legends in *Olam Katan.* He then began to write for *HaShaluakh*. Later he contributed to *HaZman*, and to the Warsaw [publication] *HaTzofeh.*

In the Land of Israel, he contributed to *Hapoel HaTza'ir* for all the years that the journal was edited by Joseph Aharonowitz. His articles – which were written in a light and popular style and in a discursive form – had a great influence. Yaakov Rabinovich fought for the practical [brand of] Zionism and for exclusively Jewish workers in all aspects of the transformation [of the land], and he was an opponent of political Zionism during the Wolfson era. He also participated in conferences of *HaPoel HaTza'ir*. In the years between 1910-1923 he lived in Petakh Tikva, where he acquired his own plot of land and planted a vineyard, but for a wide variety of reasons, his "career" in land reclamation didn't last for any length of time.

In the summer of 1912, he joined with the agronomist, *Dr. Eliezer Khaniel* (Pickholtz) in founding a *Land Reclamation School in Petakh Tikva,* and he became a member of the Steering Committee of that organization together with Yeshayahu Shitrit, Peretz Pascal, and Boruch Golomb. In 1923 he moved to Tel-Aviv.

Apart from publicity and stories, he was also creative in critique and poetry. He would sign his poems with the pseudonym *M. Zatory*. A collection of his poems, titled '*Stav*' (i.e. the Fall), appeared in 1947. His short stories that appeared in a variety of periodicals – *HaShaluakh, HaOlam, HaDor, Hapoel HaTza'ir, Revivim, HaTekufah, Gilyonot, Moznaim, Bustena'i,* etc. – appeared in book form: A Collection of Short Stories through Tushya-Verlag 1904; *Be'en Shoresh* (Without Roots) 1914; *Or VaEd*, 1922; *Nodedei Amasay HaShomer* (Wanderings of Amasay the Watchman) – in which the author portrays life in the Land of Israel before the First World War; *Neve Kayitz* (The Summer Place) – in which the life of Zionist youth is portrayed in Russia after the first Russian revolution and the pogroms of October 1905. In 1935, through Neuman-Verlag, his book appeared under the name *Hasagot* – in which he treats a variety of aspects of the human spirit: philosophy and psychology, biology and sociology, etc. A number of years ago (1945) an historical biblical novel of his appeared through Neuman-Verlag under the name, *BeMot Amim* (When Nations Fall), in which an epoch is portrayed to which the *Tanakh* dedicates only very few lines. An entire cohort of Jewish men and women, and neighboring peoples appear before the eyes of the reader, who finds a distinct parallel to our times in the happenings and the heroes of the novel.

Rabinovich also composed dramas, of which one, titled *Bet HaKharavot* (The House of Destruction) was published in *HaOmer* and two in *Hedim.*

He also wrote a bit in Yiddish. Apart from a number of propaganda brochures – which he mostly signed with pseudonyms; *Tziyoni Pashut* (The Simple Zionist), *Tziyoni Proletar* (The Proletarian Zionist), etc. – he also published articles in the New York *Yiddisher Kempfer*.

In 1922, he founded the bi-monthly journal, *Hedim,* together with his friend the writer, Asher Barash, which distinguished itself with its fine literary and publicity content. This journal appeared for a period of six years. For a period of time, he also contributed to the newspapers, *HaDoar HaYom*, and *HaBoker.* In the last years, he was a permanent employee of the daily Hebrew Labor newspaper, *Davar,* and in the monthly Journal,

Gilyonot, which appears in Tel-Aviv under the direction of Yitzhak Lamdan.

In the last years, he also carried out a program of strong propaganda on behalf of practical Zionism – he was an opponent of the division of the Land of Israel – for unity among Jews, and he was a protagonist against extreme class struggle in the *Yishuv*. At the time when the sharp conflicts came about in the Lands of Israel between the revisionists and the left wing of Zionism, he published in *Moznaim* and *Bustena'i* – extensive articles, in w3hich he called the *Yishuv* to peace and understanding of opposing views.

He also translated various works from French, German and Russian into Hebrew.

As previously mentioned, Rabinovich was active in the Zionist movement even before he came to the Holy Land and he participated as a delegate in a variety of Zionist congresses. He participated in the conference of the *Tziyonei Tzion* in Vilna (in the year 1925) and in the Zionist conferences in Odessa in the years 1906-1909. He was over the period of many years, a member of the committee of the *Agudat HaSofrim* (The Writers Organization of the Land of Israel) and a member of the committee of the Hebrew Pen Club. He was, for a number of years, a teacher at the Petakh Tikva Gymnasium, named for *Ahad HaAm*, and at the evening Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv. He was also a member of the committee of *Brit Rishonim* (The union of the first Zionists) – from the first day that the union was founded.

On April 5, 1948, the seventy-two year-old Yaakov Rabinovich – one of the most popular and beloved Hebrew writers, and a veteran of the Israeli Hebrew press and publicity – was killed in an automobile accident. It was characteristic, that in such a stormy time, when in the Land of Israel many fell in battle with the enemy, that Rabinovich would be a victim of an 'ordinary' misfortune – in the middle of the city, in one of the most populated streets of Tel-Aviv. The death of Yaakov Rabinovich can serve as an epilogue to the drama of his life – to one whose poems and stories are suffused with such sorrow, to the sense of futility that dominates so much of his work – a resignation from one who recognizes the degree to which arbitrary fate rules peoples' lives.

The death of Yaakov Rabinovich elicited an outpouring of great sorrow from the *Yishuv.* He was interred in the old Tel-Aviv cemetery beside the graves of the greatest Hebrew writers. Among all the people who took part in the funeral, the sorrowful faces of his Volkovysker landsleit in the Land of Israel stood out, who with bent heads and aching hearts escorted their prominent 'City Son' to his final rest.

Lieber Shereshevsky was born in Zelva and he was a lumber merchant in Volkovysk. His wife was a sister to *Zus'keh Berman*. Originally, he came to the Land of Israel as a tourist, but he then settled there. He was skilled and quick-minded. He adapted to the Land quickly, and began to do business – and he was successful. He had a large business in finished clothing on the Bustros Street in Jaffa – and he sold items of clothing to his Volkovysk *landsleit* at cost, without any margin. His home became the center for the Volkovysk *landsleit* If one of the Volkovyskers was short of money, he could always count on getting an extension of credit from Shereshevsky, until such time that money was sent from his family in Volkovysk. Lieber Shereshevsky was one of the founders of the Cooperative Banking Organization in the Land of Israel (1929-1939). In the last years, he was Vice President of the *Brit Rishonim* (a union of the first Zionists in the Land of Israel), a member of *Mishpat HaShalom HaElyon* (A higher justice court), one of the directors of the *Stein Factory* (for iron products), and Chairman of the Tel-Aviv bank, *Halva'ah VeKhiskun*.

Boruch Zusmanovich was one of the most important Hebrew teachers in Volkovysk many years ago. He was active in the field of Hebrew education and in the progressive school movement. He put together a

Hebrew grammar, and also wrote short stories. In the Land of Israel he became a teacher at the *Takhkemoni* School of the *Mizrachi* [movement].

His three sons – *Yisrael, Lipa and Joseph* – who changed their last names to *Yekutieli*, were members of our group of Volkovysk Gymnasium students in the Land of Israel.

The oldest son, *Yisrael,* was a very devoted member, and an ardent Zionist. He emigrated to America even before the First World War, and when I came to America, we became very close. In New York, he worked body and soul for the Zionist movement. After the First World War, he returned to the Land of Israel. In these last years, he lives in Haifa, where he is the director of the Aliyah Section of the Jewish Agency. He is also active there in the *Histadrut HaPekidim* (Organization of Elected Officials).

The second son, *Lipa*, is the director of a school in Tel-Aviv. The third son, *Joseph,* was perennially active in the *Maccabi* movement, and he was one of the initiators of the *Maccabiah* competitions in the Land of Israel. He served in the Turkish Army in the years 1917-1918. He edited the Journal, *Maccabi from 1924-1929. Since 1931,* he is occupied with being the secretary of the swimming division of the *HaNoteah* Society.

The Brothers, Yankel & Jekuthiel Neiman were the children of Hanokh Neiman (whose father was Aizik Neiman). *Yankel Neiman* was a friend of mine, and when we were children, in Volkovysk, we studied together in the same *Heders.* Yankel came to the Land of Israel a couple of months before I did, and when I later got there we lived together, until his brother *Jekuthiel* arrived. His father Hanokh Neiman was a rich man and dealt in wire mesh metal fencing, and the Neiman brothers would receive quite a bit of money from Volkovysk, more than the other Volkovysk students who studied at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium in those years.

In 1913, both brothers traveled to make a visit to Volkovysk, and Yankel chose to remain there – at the request of his parents – to help with his father's business. Jekuthiel returned to the Land of Israel where he remained until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 – and then returned to Volkovysk. He is now in New York with his family, and runs a large drug store.

Israel Hubar was the eldest son of the renown wealthy Volkovysk magnate, David Hubar. He came to the Land of Israel (in 1913) with the objective of entering the Hertzeliya Gymnasium, but for a variety of reasons, he remained in the country for only a short while, and then went to Paris, and there, after a few months, returned to Volkovysk.

In the time he was in Tel-Aviv, he lived with this writer in one room. He led the "transformation." He used to prepare and cook the food. All day long, he would assume the role of a woman and homemaker – but at night, he would disappear from the house, in the role of a man... his letters from the Land of Israel to home, made a very strong impression on his father, and kindled his Zionist soul. Israel loved to tell us about his conquests of the fairer sex. He would fondly recall the girls of Slonim, who studied at the Volkovysk Gymnasium. None of us were skeptical of his stories. We believed him. He was a handsome young man, tall, blond, and on top of that, with romantic tendencies – it therefore made sense that he had great appeal to the 'weaker sex.'

Yitzhak Kaminer – A son of a Volkovysk merchant, who had a clothing business in the market square stores. He was quiet, taciturn, always sunk in thought, and he was admired by everyone for the fierce love that he showed towards the Land of Israel. He studies at the Jerusalem Teacher's Seminary. After that, he settled in Tel-Aviv. He was an elected official of the PIKA Society in the Land of Israel – and is today a real

estate agent in Tel-Aviv.

Moshe Kaplinsky was one of the scholars in our group. He was constantly occupied with study, and when he was done studying, he would read. He was seen as a walking encyclopedia, and it was a pleasure to talk to him. At the end of 1914, he received a letter from Volkovysk asking him to come home as quickly as possible, because his mother was gravely ill. He immediately traveled back home, but did not find his mother alive. He then remained in Volkovysk.

During the time of the First World War, under the German occupation, Moshe Kaplinsky took the position of teacher in a German Volksschule for Jewish children. After that war, he traveled to Russia with the objective of being admitted to the medical faculty at Moscow University. However, he fell ill there with intestinal typhus, and died.

Avremi Velvelevich was the oldest son of Mrs. Velvelevich that owned a paper processing business across the street from Feinzilber's house (at the corner of the Grodno Gasse). He had a phenomenal memory and was a substantial linguist. He even knew Turkish. He was one of the first *Esperanto speakers* in Volkovysk. He couldn't sit still in one place. He constantly went from place to place, having such a restless nature.

Page 303: Nachman Moshe Epstein (Moshiach)

Mottel Epstein – A son of Nachman Moshe Epstein (known by the nickname *Moshiach*). This Mottel was one lovely young man, a good friend and a fiery Zionist. Even while still a young boy, he worked extremely hard at earning a living. In those years, connections between the various parts of the country were quite bad, and one would have to drag for hours by wagon to reach Jaffa. Mottel then hit upon an idea – to deliver necessities directly to the homes of the colonists. He began to travel through the settlements, and sell all manner of merchandise. Since Mottel was such an upstanding and cheerful young man – he quickly won favor, and the colonists from Judah would view Mottel, with his pack of merchandise as if he were the Messiah. All his brothers and sisters lived in Canada, and Mottel went there (in 1913) to see them. In Canada he became very friendly with the famous author Reuven Breinin. He worked energetically and diligently – in order to set aside a specific sum of money with which he could establish himself in the Land of Israel.

When the Jewish Legion was formed he joined the Legion – and immediately after the war remained in the Land of Israel, where he worked himself into a parcel of land in *Ra'anana* and he has his own farm.

When I visited Israel in 1945 I, naturally, met with Mottel, and to my great satisfaction, saw that Mottle hadn't changed a great deal, and he had remained the same cheerful, lively, laughing and devoted friend. As we both walked by the Tel-Aviv seashore, he constantly reminded me of our wonderful young years together in Tel-Aviv. He brought me to all of the Volkovysk *landsleit*, and communicated highly relevant details about each and every one of them. He knows all the latest news today – just like before!

The Kalir Family

Page 305: Benjamin Kalir

Benjamin and *Rachel Kalir* came to the Land of Israel from Amstibova (near Volkovysk), and settled in Petakh Tikva. At the time, they were among the first of the families from our area that settled in Petakh Tikva, and not in Tel-Aviv.

Benjamin Kalir's three daughters – *Chana, Sarah* and *Rivka* – who came with him to the Land of Israel, were very attractive girls. They all quickly adapted themselves, learned Hebrew, which a little at a time eventually became the language of discourse in the house. The oldest daughter *Sarah,* quickly married a prominent merchant, Shaul Harberg (whose brother, Israel Harberg was a classmate of mine at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium). All the Volkovysk *landsleit* came to the wedding, and made exceedingly merry.

In those years, the connection between Jaffa and Petakh Tikva was by means of a coach that would take passengers once a day from Jaffa to Petakh Tikva. Such a trip in those days was a big deal. One had to trek for hours in the coach, and often the passengers, begging their indulgence, would have to get down and help push the coach through the sands – because otherwise, the horses would simply refuse to move from their places. The arrival of the coach in Petakh Tikva at nightfall was an "event" that the entire colony looked forward to. The coach would come to a stop near the small Petakh Tikva garden. The postal office was there as well. The residents of Petakh Tikva would wait for the coach, taking a stroll in the garden. The young people were especially curious to see what new faces had arrived from the city. Kalir's house was exactly across from the coach station, near the small garden.

We Volkovysk Gymnasium students, whenever we had the time, would grab a break and go to the Kalir's house in Petakh Tikva, and we felt like we were at home there – eating, drinking, and taking a stroll in the previously mentioned garden, with Kalir's pretty daughters, Rivka and Chana. All the young men from the best and most well-connected families in Petakh Tikva would come and beg us to introduce them to Kalir's daughters.

Rivka Kalir later married Mr. Dukar – a musician in Petakh Tikva. *Chana Kalir* married Mr. Khupi, who is a high-ranking administrative official in Jerusalem.

One of Benjamin Kalir's sons, *Moshe,* left for a number of years going to Brazil, and afterwards returned to Israel, where he is active as an agronomist.

A second son, *Aharon*, is one of the most prominent labor leaders in the land – a member of the Central Land Development Organization, *Mercaz Khakla'i* and a founder of the *Yakhin* Society.

Eliezer Kalir, a third son, remained in Volkovysk. He was very active in many Volkovysk charitable organizations – the orphanage, *Linat Kholim*, the hospital, etc. – and worked extensively on behalf of the Zionist institutions (*HeHalutz*, etc.). He also occupied a distinguished position in the cultural activities of Volkovysk, and arranged for a variety of lectures by prominent Yiddish authors which he brought to Volkovysk.

He was also one of the founders of the *Volkovysker Leben* (in 1926), and he frequently published articles there about a variety of subjects – of local and general interest.

His wife was *Pay'keh Markus* (the daughter of Abraham Eli Markus). After his wife's family (her father and brothers) emigrated to the Land of Israel, he also went to settle there (in 1935) – where he lives to this day in Petakh Tikva.

In his first impressions of the Land of Israel, which he published in the *Volkovysker Leben* (of May 6, 1938), Eliezer Kalir describes the emotions that dominated him, when he finally met with his own kindred after having been parted from them for so many years, and the thoughts that were awakened within him on arriving

in the ancient Jewish Homeland. We will quote a little of this very characteristic "First Impressions:"

"I am approaching a great and unique privilege, to a dream that has unfolded into reality. I longed for them a full 25 years: for 25 years not seeing my father and mother, brothers and sisters; not seeing them, except perhaps once in a dream. I have already forgotten what they look like, their appearance. I no longer believed that I would once again see them...and now...soon...soon...

I am disoriented. That so many close but unfamiliar people fall upon you... kiss you and weep... kiss you and weep... the father (I understand that this is the father) recites the *SheHekheyanu* prayer.. I weep spasmodically and kiss his hands... *Tatinkeh!...Tatinkeh!...* (when he emigrated, he took his leave of me, saying: we will see you soon!. . . and that "soon!" lasted 25 years!. . .).

– I ask everyone: – who are you? ... who is that... and once again we fall upon each other and once again we weep. I took leave of them when they were small, scrawny children – now, grown people stood before me – people of middle age, who if I did not know who they were, I would never have recognized... I remark that my youngest sister, at least whom I think is my youngest sister, – she is still small and somewhat nervous – with an entirely gray head of hair...

– Rivka'leh, I say, Woe is me! You are all gray!...

– It is nothing! – she answers with a smile – it happened a long time ago, when I was young, there was a fever in the valley, in the Galilee!...

My heart is stopped up – the youngest has become the oldest!...

Having now sated myself with everyone – I see a broad-shouldered handsome man with a smiling tanned look, with a full head of hair – he approaches me and laughing, greets me with *Sholom Aleichem*!...

– And who is this? – I ask

– This is Aharon!...

– Which Aharon?!...

– Our Aharon – *Archeh*!...

– Your kidding me, – I say, – this is *Archeh*?!...

In no way do I want to believe this... for a long, long moment, we look into each others' eyes, until we fall into each others' arms .. I simply could not imagine that such a man could develop out of that thin, weak Yeshiva student, such a persona, such an appearance, such a bearing, such a figure!... – – –

Only a few minutes in a taxi, and – the entire enchanting city lays before you, with wide streets, wondrous palaces, with a fast pace, impetus, luxury...

A light ecstasy fills you, and pours out over your entire soul... Once again, tears come to your eyes from emotion.

– Greetings to you, Tel-Aviv! The first Jewish city in the entire world, the fragile flower in the

dryness of Asia! – – –

It is late at night, but I cannot fall asleep. The first night in the Land of Israel, the first night in Petakh Tikva. Through the open window comes the constant sound of singing, songs – that are new, unfamiliar to me, energetic, pioneering songs.

Young people, Halutzim promenade about, traversing the streets and singing the entire night, free, unencumbered, like the great white moon over the free starry heavens of the Land of Israel. They sing – because they are young, because they are free, because they are in the Land of Israel.

I look out onto the streets – laughter...laughter....all around, totally around you, like the Song of Songs – his arm around her shoulders, her arm around his waist... (Ah, love is strong in Petakh Tikva!...).

I think: what I shame that I came so late, so old. If only I had come a little sooner, a little younger, I too could have savored the taste of the Land of Israel!...

Slowly, the streets become more quiet, the couples more sparse, I drowse... But I don't get to finish even this first little nap – a yell, an alarm, a mass-hysteria, a wailing! .. I jump off my bed, neither alive or dead: – what has happened?!... a fire?!...an attack?!...

– Don't be afraid, don't be afraid – my mother soothes me – it is nothing – those are the jackals howling in the nearby parks! It is said, my mother adds, that they wail over the destruction of the Holy Temple!... – – –

I get calmed down from the howling of the jackals and close my eyes and it seems to me I am ready to drop off to sleep again... suddenly – again strange sounds, just as if you were sawing a tree trunk with a buzz saw, or if you were using an axe to cut into a dried wooden wall.

And what is this concert yet again?... – I cry out in confusion.

– Sleep, sleep! – the residents say, in a calming tone – that's the donkey braying.

Aha, – I say, that is the donkey! ... Not a bad voice!... I never imagined that the animal that was to bear the Messiah would have such a dry, hacking cough, such a whooping-cough! . . . – – –

Ah, Land of Israel – that Holy and Sanctified Land! . . .

But.... Sustenance! . . . Bread! . . .

It is almost a month now that I traverse the streets of Tel-Aviv, knocking on doors, visiting all the bureaus, covering the institutions, looking for work, business – all in vain. My breast pocket is getting thicker and fuller with paper, references, letters of recommendation from one person who knows me to another, and from one important person to another – but as to a meaningful outcome – it is still a long way to go! I am given good hopes, promises, commitments – but there is no salvation...

Oh, you searching, oh, you pleading, oh, the burdens of the Land of Israel! . . . – – –

But I go around with my head held high, because no matter what it is, or no matter what it will be – *The Land of Israel is our Land!*

It would appear that the profound belief in the Land of Israel gave Eliezer Kalir the strength and energy to overcome all these trials and tribulations, which are associated with the 'burdens of the Land of Israel' – and in the end, settled properly in the Land, and became employed in a bank. In these last years he has been active in the Israel organization of the Volkovysk *landsleit* (*Irgun Olei Volkovysk*) and he is a member of the newly created committee that has the objective of providing help to the [Holocaust] survivors of Volkovysk.

Eliezer Kalir published a book several years ago in the Land of Israel, called *The Fathers of the Nazis* – in which he portrays the period of the German occupation during the First World War – which was well received by the critics. He recently published a second book, *Worlds* – which is comprised of a complete range of stories, analyses, portraits of many writers, and other interesting personalities. This book was very beautifully printed and was richly illustrated by the artist, *Toshavi.*

Page 310: *Mordechai Chafetz*

Mordechai Chafetz was a son of Zalman Chafetz, who was one of the most prominent of the Volkovysk *balebatim* and had a factory that produced soda water. Zalman Chafetz lived in a beautiful house, across from Dr. Galai, not far from the cemetery. There was a beautiful fruit orchard around the house. Zalman Chafetz's children spent most of their time in Baku (in the Caucasus) because of their business, and in the summertime they would come to visit their parents and spend time in their beautiful garden.

I recall, when during the time I was a student in the Hertzeliya Gymnasium and came to visit Volkovysk in the summer of 1912, I was invited to the Chafetz home, and Mordechai Chafetz asked me to tell them about life in the Land of Israel. I, the young gymnasium student, told them as much as I knew, but when Mordechai Chafetz began to question me about the economic conditions of the Land, I told him that the best thing would be for him to personally come to the Land of Israel and to familiarize himself with these details personally on the spot. He actually took this advice, and several months later he came and bought a large orchard in Petakh Tikva, and also brought his family to the Land of Israel.

Also, his house became a meeting place – along with Kalir's house – for the Volkovysk *landsleit* who visited Petakh Tikva.

Mordechai Chafetz put down deep roots in the Land, and became an important figure in the life of the colony. He, was for a time, the head of the governing committee of Petakh Tikva and also helped to arrange the security of the colony.

A number of years before the Second World War, when Mordechai Chafetz paid a visit to the United States, in the interest of the Israeli orchard-growers – he was one of the founders and leaders of the society of orange grove owners – I arranged a get-together with the Volkovysk *landsleit* who were in New York, in his honor, and we spent time together with our beloved guest from the Land of Israel, for whom it was such a pleasure to meet with his friends and acquaintances from our beloved city of Volkovysk.

Mordechai Chafetz passed away in Petakh Tikva in 1945. His father, Zalman Chafetz, passed away in the Land of Israel at the age of 97. *Anna Chafetz-Skvirsky,* (a sister of Mordechai Chafetz) is a well-known midwife in Petakh Tikva. Mordechai Chafetz's daughter, *Dina* holds an appointment in the Petakh Tikva Technology Division of the city government. His son, *Eliezer*, also lives in Petakh Tikva.

This *aliyah* of the first Volkovyskers, up to the outbreak of the First World War, was just a beginning. In the period between both World Wars, in the years of 1918-1938, there was an unending stream of emigration from Volkovysk to the Land of Israel. The new immigrants put down roots in the Land, but they did not forget their old home town, and often visited their relatives in Volkovysk in the summertime. Also, many people from Volkovysk would come to the Land of Israel to visit their kinfolk who had settled in the Land, and make plans for the eventuality of how to liquidate their businesses and to establish permanent residence in the Land of Israel.

When after the war in 1945, I visited the Land of Israel, I estimated that to date, there are in the Land approximately *five hundred* Volkovysk families, of which the majority belong to the organization of Volkovysk *olim* in the Land of Israel.

The "committee' that directs this "organization" consists of the following members: *Eliyahu Shaikevitz*, President; *Yehuda Novogrudsky* (the son of Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's, who had a wine business in Volkovysk), *Yitzhak Yehuda'i* (the son of Reb Akiva Joseph Yudzhik), *Azriel Broshi* (Berestovitsky, the son of the Dayan), *Shlomo Bereshkovsky*, Secretary (his father had an iron goods store in Volkovysk), *Shmuel (Mulya) Schein,*
and *Eliezer Kalir*.

In 1945, the Volkovysk landsleit in the Land of Israel called together a conclave of all the *olim* from Volkovysk and its vicinity – in order to establish a relief effort on behalf of the Holocaust survivors on a responsible basis. The organization of Volkovysk *olim* published bulletins, which contained information about the activities of the Israeli organization of Volkovyskers, and news about those who remained alive.

I am certain that Volkovyskers around the world will be interested to know who the Volkovysk residents are in the Land of Israel, and what they do for a living there. It is *technically impossible* for me to record this information about all the Volkovysk *olim* who are found in the Land of Israel; however, I will undertake the effort to tell about a large part of them. My overview is based first and foremost on the information sent to me by the previously mentioned important *landsleit* from the Land of Israel – *Eliezer Kalir, Yitzhak Novogrudsky, Azriel Broshi* and *Shmuel Einhorn*.

The Yudzhik-Yehuda'i Family

Page 312: *Members of the Committee of Volkovysk Émigrés in Israel*
With Dr. Moshe Einhorn and 2 Survivors

Right to Left, First Row, Seated: *Shlomo Bereshkovsky, Yitzhak Yehuda'i (Yudzhik), Moshe Einhorn, Eliyahu Shykevich.*
Second Row: *Eliezer Kalir, Zvi Roitman, Azriel Broshi (Berestovitsky), Joseph Kotliarsky, Mulya Schein.*

The *Yudzhik Family,* that calls itself *Yehuda'i* in Israel, is a very prominent family from Volkovysk that settled in Volkovysk four hundred years ago. *Reb Leizer Yudzhik* was a highly enlightened man, who had ordination as a Rabbi but did not want to earn his living from his Torah scholarship, and as a result did not take a pulpit position. He made a living from warehousing and manufacture (he had a soap manufacturing plant, candles, etc.). He was involved in a variety of Volkovysk welfare institutions, such as the old age home, receiving guests, and others. He died in 1917 at the age of 83.

Reb Leizer's oldest daughter, *Yentl Malin* emigrated to the Land of Israel with her entire family in 1914, a short while before the outbreak of the First World War, where she lives to this day with her extensive family of sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Also, two other daughters of Reb Leizer Yudzhik – *Laskeh Serlin* (and her family) and *Taib'l Goldberg* (with her son and daughter) – live in Israel. Only Reb Leizer's youngest daughter, *Rivka*, stayed behind in Poland with her husband and daughter – and it appears that they perished. Rivka's second daughter is in Israel.

Reb Leizer Yudzhik had two sons – *Reb Asher Naphtali* and *Reb Akiva Joseph* – who I remember quite well. Reb Asher, who was a lumber merchant, lived in the same house where the *Heder* of my teacher, Reb Nachman was located (at Mottel Lapin's, near the river), and Reb Asher's wagons full of lumber, which were parked outside, used to block the entire Wide Boulevard during the winter. His wife, *Bat-Sheva* would always treat us students with good things to eat (Latkes, candies, etc.).

Reb Asher Naphtali Yudzhik, who was a great scholar and a God-fearing man, came to the Land of Israel in 1925 with his entire family – except for his eldest daughter who remained in Russia since the time of the First World War. On arriving in the Land of Israel, Reb Asher set up a steam generating plant in *Afula*, and afterwards managed large businesses in Haifa. He radiated both wisdom and charity, and built a Yeshiva in Haifa, and set aside a substantial sum of money for the synagogue. Reb Asher passed away in Haifa a couple of years ago.

Reb Asher's wife, *Bat-Sheva Yehuda'i* is a formidable scholar in *Tanakh* and Hebrew language and in general is involved with charitable work.

Reb Asher Naphtali's sons – *Yitzhak, Yud'l* and *Moshe* – are prominent people in the country: Yitzhak is the owner of the largest power plants in Israel, and Vice President of the *Afula* municipality; Yud'l and Moshe are large-scale merchants in Haifa.

Reb Akiva Joseph Yudzhik, Reb Leizer's second son, came to the Land of Israel with his wife *Chaya Sarah* in the year 1935, after their two sons, *Yitzhak* and *Shimon*, and their younger daughter *Esther* had already been in the Land previously. Their older daughter *Leah*, who remained in Poland appears to have perished along with her husband and three children.

Reb Akiva Joseph was an important active citizen in Volkovysk. Being a committed Zionist from his earliest youth, and a member of the "Lovers of the Hebrew Language" (founded by the well-known teacher, Reb Nakhum Halpern), he always found the time – despite the fact that he was very busy as a prominent merchant – for Zionist and community affairs. He was a member of the city Zionist committee of Volkovysk, Vice President of the community, a member of the *Keren HaYesod* committee , a member of the rabbinical search committee, etc. Reb Akiva Joseph passed away in Haifa in 1937.

Reb Akiva Joseph's wife, *Chaya Sarah*, (the daughter of Reb Mordechai Janovitz of Pruzhany) was a very intelligent woman: she was fluent in any number of languages – Hebrew, German and Russian – and knew the entire *Tanakh* by heart. She was also active in community affairs – a member of the orphanage committee, Vice President of the Zionist Ladies Society, WIZO, and others. In 1939, Chaya Sarah traveled to Poland on a visit, to see her oldest daughter, and because of the outbreak of the war, was unable to9 return to the Land of Israel, and apparently perished along with her daughter and family.

The children of Reb Akiva Joseph and Chaya Sarah followed in their parents' ways, and took an active role

in Volkovysk cultural and Zionist life. The oldest son, *Yitzhak*, was very active in the Volkovysk Zionist youth movement, *Herut U'Tekhiya* (Freedom and Rebirth) from his earliest years on, he was active on the committee of the Hebrew Library, and on the committee of the *Tarbut* organization. He was the secretary of the municipal committee of the Jewish National Fund, Keren HaYesod, and the Palestine Committee – until finally in 1925, he made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, where he holds an important position with the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Tel-Aviv. He provides a great deal of support to the victims of the war, and helps them get settled in the Land.

The second son, *Shimon* took an active part in the Volkovysk revisionist organization. He is a bookkeeper in Tel-Aviv.

The daughter, Esther, was very active in the Volkovysk *HaShomer HaTza'ir,* and in Tel-Aviv, she is employed by the Anglo-Palestine Bank.

Azriel Broshi is a son of Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, the *Dayan* of Volkovysk. He is one of the most beloved people in the Land of Israel. During his younger years, he was a Hebrew teacher in his hometown of Lisokovo (near Volkovysk). Having arrived in the Land of Israel many years ago, he joined the labor organization, *Histadrut.* He also devoted a considerable amount of time to scholarship, and with time became one of the unique experts on the Land – its history, geography, and ethnography. There is no byway of the Land where Broshi has not set down his foot; there is no corner of the Land that is not familiar to him. With a *Tanakh* in hand, he can traverse the entire Land of Israel and point out with his finger, each and every place where the important chapters of Jewish history were written – of Jewish heroism and pride, of independent Jewish sovereign life. It is not for nothing that Broshi is one of the trailblazers in the Land of Israel. The most significant excursions through the Land of Israel are conducted by Broshi. But apart from the excursions in the Land and the neighboring Arab lands, Broshi conducts a systematic educational effort about the Land of Israel within the Land itself. Very often, you can meet up with Broshi traveling to a colony to lecture about a faraway corner somewhere in *Beit She'An* or the *Negev,* and he takes along his slide machine to illustrate his talk with pictures.

Sitting in Broshi's office in the large building of the *Vaad HaPoel* of the *Histadrut*, one can meet Jews from all over the world – from America, South Africa, Argentina, Brazil. All come to Broshi to get the proper directions and information. Broshi's work is substantive and has a wide range.

Broshi is loved by everyone not only because he is so meaningfully learned, but also because of the large degree of his good works and his modesty – simply a good, heartfelt companion and friend. His is a great Jewish patriot and an ardent Zionist and he is always prepared to offer himself on behalf of the Land of Israel and the *Yishuv.* He is also a devoted and loyal son of Volkovysk to this day. Broshi helped me a great deal in my work on the *Volkovysk Yizkor Book*, and made an extra effort to assure that the Volkovysk settlers in the Land of Israel would send me photographs and materials. As previously mentioned, he is also active in the organization of Volkovysk *olim* and is constantly trying to find work for the newly-arrived Volkovyskers.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Broshi visited Poland, where he gave a series of lectures in his area of expertise – The Land of Israel. During his trip, he also visited Volkovysk, where he was received warmly by all his friends and listeners. *Moshe Broshi*, a brother of Azriel Broshi, also lives in Israel, and is an elected official in the cooperative in *Holon*.

Raphael Klatshkin is a son of Chaya Klatshkin the dentist, and a nephew of Avromsky (who had a drug

store). As a youngster, Raphael studied in the *Heder* run by Skop the Melamed, and in other *Heders*. At the age of 9 years, together with his brother Natan, he traveled to the Land of Israel accompanied by his aunt Khien'eh Avromsky – in order to study at the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium. But the First World War started (in 1914) and Raphael and his brother, together with his aunt, returned to Volkovysk. In 1915, when the Germans occupied Volkovysk, Rapahel entered the Hebrew *Volksschule* that had been founded at that time. Already at that time, the young Raphael exhibited his capacity for absorbing knowledge and his talent. Together with Joseph Galai, he published a magazine for children – originally in Yiddish, called *Dos Yingl,* and afterwards in Hebrew, under the name, *HaTekhiya.* [Sic: The Rebirth].

In 1920, Raphael Klatshkin again traveled to the Land of Israel – together with his brother *Natan* and with his aunt *Khien'eh Avromsky* – and he entered the Hertzeliya Gymnasium where he studies until 1923, when he left in the seventh grade and went to work in *Mikveh Israel*. Later he worked on the Tiberias-Tzemakh highway, and afterwards he returned to Tel-Aviv, where he worked on housing construction.

At that time he began to take an interest in dramatic acting, and he joined the *Teatron Ivri* [Hebrew Theater] under the direction of David Davidoff. After the Teatron Ivri closed, Raphael Klatshkin went over to the *Amanut* Theater, which operated under the direction of Y. M. Daniel. Later he was taken on by the *KumKum* Theater which operated under the skillful direction of the well-known Hebrew author Avigdor HaMe'iri. In 1927, Rapahel Klatshkin traveled to Europe to study theater in Berlin and Paris. He would give evening performances, from which he gradually came to make a living, and the remaining time he studied and broadened his knowledge of the theater. Shortly after his return to the Land of Israel (in 1928), he was accepted as a member of the famous Hebrew Theater, *HaBima*, with which he is associated to this day.

Raphael Klatshkin traveled with *HaBima* at those times when that world-famous Hebrew theater troupe performed in various European countries. In 1929, Klatshkin visited Volkovysk, where an evening was arranged on his behalf, whose ticket revenues were donated on behalf of Volkovysk institutions. In 1937, when *HaBima* did guest appearances abroad, Klatshkin again came to Volkovysk, and gave an evening performance for the benefit of the Volkovysk institutions. In 1938, *HaBima* returned to the Land of Israel, where it gave performances continuously up to 1948, at which time it was invited to give a number of performances in America – also then, Klatshkin traveled with the *HaBima* ensemble to America, and distinguished himself in the roles that he played.

In the years that Klatshkin performed in *HaBima*, he developed a reputation as a fine actor. He was especially sought after for comic roles, because he has a special knack for capturing the specifically comic aspects of life and in human character. Klatshkin also composed a large number of humoresques and songs, which had a great following on the stages of Israeli revue theaters and in cabarets. He is a very talented orator, and is very much loved by the broad mass of Israeli youth. Apart from this, he is also a beloved and heartfelt man – democratic, approachable and friendly to everyone. It is therefore no wonder that Raphael Klatshkin is very much loved by the Israeli public, and especially by young folk, because Klatshkin himself is perpetually youthful, and he bristles with an artistic temperament and genuine joy of life.

Raphael's brother, *Natan Klatshkin* lives in Haifa where he is involved with the Haifa municipal water supply authority. His mother, *Chaya,* lives with her daughter in Australia.

Shmuel Einhorn (also known in Volkovysk as *Mulka*) is a son of Yankel and Rivka Einhorn. Yankel, a first cousin to me, has a small general store which expanded significantly thanks to the efforts of his wife, Rivka, who was very focused and through her energy and spirit of commitment, transformed this little business into

a wholesale warehouse. As a young child, *Mulka* stood out because of his business skills – and already demonstrated his skills as a buyer, in obtaining merchandise for his parents during the difficult times of the German occupation, during the time of the First World War, when there was a great shortage of all kinds of goods. It would appear that he inherited these skills from his mother, who as previously mentioned, showed considerable strong will in business.

When Mulka grew up a bit, he participated, like many young men in Volkovysk as a member of the Fire-fighter's Brigade, and he would take part in arranging its various undertakings and evening dances. An evening arranged by Mulka usually attracted considerable participation, because Mulka was very energetic and knew how to arrange such an event such that it would attract a large audience and bring in a good amount of revenue, and apart from this, Mulka – who was a very lively and energetic young fellow, and a good dancer – was dearly beloved by the youth. He was also active in the Zionist movement.

Mulka served in the Polish Army, and after his discharge as a non-commissioned officer, he founded a Jewish War Veterans organization in Volkovysk.

After Shmuel Einhorn came to the Land of Israel, he married a cousin of mine – a very intelligent, well-educated young lady – Helen Kagan.

For the first few years in the Land, Shmuel worked very hard to make a living, but afterwards – thanks to his extraordinary energy and innate business sense – he worked himself up and became the director of the well-known trading company Oxhorn in Haifa. Today, he occupies a prominent position in Tel-Aviv as a substantial merchant, connected with a large import/export firm. He participates in the important work of the Jewish national institutions, in order to regulate the food situation of the *Yishuv*..

Shmuel's sister, *Shayn'dl* (Sonya), lives in Petakh Tikva with her husband, Jonah Wolansky – an accountant – and her two children.

The Bereshkovsky Family

Page 321: *A Volkovysk Group in Jeddah in the Year 1926*

Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: *Manya Markus (wife of Shlomo Markus), Yitzhak Bereshkovsky, His wife Rachel, and their children.*
Second Row, Standing: *Shlomo Markus, Shlomo Bereshkovsky, Fishl Mirsky, Archik Markus, and Z. Wilk.*

The head of the family, Reb Yud'l Bereshkovsky, the son of Reb Shlomo the Head of the Yeshiva, had an ironmonger's store at the entrance to the '*brom*' (in the market square stores, near the Wide Boulevard). It was his custom to pray in the Wooden Synagogue, and his 'spot' was near my father's 'spot.' Later on, he was successful n his business, and bought out Barash's large ironware store. He was a Zionist and an important one of the *balebatim*. His wife, Aydeleh, was the daughter of the great scholar and merchant, Reb David Feinzilber. The children of Reb Yud'l Bereshkovsky grew up in an really nationalistic atmosphere from their early childhood on, and they absorbed the fine humanitarian and Zionist spirit that reigned throughout the household.

Reb Yud'l Bereshkovsky made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel in the year 1929, and he died at the age of 73, in Jerusalem, in the year 1944. Feygl, a daughter of Reb Yud'l Bereshkovsky lives in Tel-Aviv and her husband

is employed as a musician in the Israeli Symphony orchestra. Reb Yud'l's son, Shlomo Bereshkovsky, lives in Tel-Aviv where he has a translation service bureau. He is the secretary of the organization of Israeli Volkovyskers. He is an unusual community activist, and first and foremost a unique person and a committed friend to all the Volkovysk residents in Israel. When in 1945, I visited Israel, I would often come to Shlomo Bereshkovsky's translation service bureau (at 138 Allenby Street), which developed into a center for Volkovysk landsleit – sort of a Volkovysk consulate in the very heart of Tel-Aviv. No matter how busy Shlomo'keh was, if a Volkovysk landsman comes in, he drops all his personal business and dedicates himself to his landsman and exerts himself on his behalf.

Yitzhak Bereshkovsky, the brother of Shlomo Bereshkovsky, was known in Volkovysk for his multi-faceted community activities. He did a great deal for the '*Linat Kholim*' and took part in all of the important city institutions – 'the merchant's guild', People's Bank, Fire Brigade – and also in the government defense committee. Yitzhak Bereshkovsky played a special role in the charitable donation fund, which helped rescue many young Volkovysk residents, whose parents, thanks to the long-term interest-free loans they were able to obtain from the fund – obtained the means by which to send them to the Land of Israel, America and Argentina.

Yitzhak Bereshkovsky's material situation in Volkovysk was a good one, and he also had good relationships with important Christians in the city, but he could not stand the anti-Semitism of the elected Polish officials and their lack of faith and falsity towards Jews – and he therefore decided to settle in the Land of Israel.

Hundreds of people came to take their leave of this beloved activist prior to his departure to the Land of Israel and gave him their heartiest wishes and blessings for his journey to the new land.

He arrived in the Land of Israel in February 1926. Initially he did not have an easy time in the Land of Israel, but despite this, he immediately began to expend effort to extract his entire family, and he expended a great deal of energy to bring them also into the Land – by all sorts of means – tens of young boys and girls from Volkovysk and its vicinity. His father, and Yoss'l Berestovitsky (*Yoss'l der Birrer*) helped him a great deal in this effort, who guaranteed notes at the fund for many young people who then made aliyah to the Land of Israel. These boys and girls married one another, and settled in the Land, and they always receive Yitzhak Bereshkovsky with the greatest respect, like their own father, when he comes to visit. They comprise thirty-eight families who are found in various locations throughout the Land.

Yitzhak Bereshkovsky is active in the Land of Israel in many organizations and institutions. He was secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Jerusalem, and lately he is an active member of the Agricultural Organization, *Histadrut HaKhakla'im*.

David Hubar and his family lived in the big wooden house in Volkovysk that was near our house, up to the great fire of 1908 (after the fire, the Hubars moved to the Ostroger Gasse). The children in our family were friends with David Hubar's older children: *Yisrael, Paulia* and *Liza*. David Hubar was a big merchant in general store goods and kerosene. He was active in the Zionist movement, and in the Hebrew school leadership, and he also took part in a variety of municipal institutions, such as the Volksbank, the charitable credit union, the various *Batei Medrashim*, etc. David Hubar's old and pious father went to the Land of Israel during the first years of the current [sic: 20th] century. All of David's children were Zionists: the daughters were all married to Hebrew teachers, and cultural activists. His younger sons, *Yaakov* and *Sholom* were active in the Zionist movement in Volkovysk. David Hubar's children – both the sons (except for Yisrael) and the daughters along with their husbands – took up residence in the Land of Israel. David Hubar, along with his wife, *Pelteh* came to the Land of Israel later, and bought a large orchard in Ness-Tziona, where they passed away not long ago.

David Hubar's daughter, *Paulia* is a Doctor of Bacteriology, and lives in Tel-Aviv. David Hubar's son, *Sholom* is a member of the Israeli *Khen* Autobus Cooperative. Sholom's brother, *Yaakov Hubar* served in the Jewish Brigade, and is now a member of the *Yael* Taxi Cooperative, and is today in Yad Eliyahu – a place where the discharged veterans of the last [sic: Second] World War reside.

Yud'l Novogrudsky was one of the most important Zionist activists and cultural leaders in Volkovysk. At the time of the German occupation during the First World War, together with Moshe Rabinovich, he established the Hebrew school directorate in Volkovysk: first a kindergarten, afterwards a Volksschule, and later a Hertzeliya gymnasium. He was also very active in the [Jewish] National Fund, Keren HaYesod, HeHalutz, and others.

Shortly after he arrived in the Land of Israel himself, he brought his father over, *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky* (Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's) – who passed away a number of years later. Yud'l (Yehuda) Novogrudsky is a member of the administration of the daily Tel-Aviv newspaper, *HaBoker.*

The Markus Family

Shlomo Markus, the son of Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus, was the first member of the prominent Markus family of Volkovysk who took up residence in the Land of Israel. In Volkovysk, Shlomo Markus absorbed the finest and most elegant of Jewish traditions in the house of his father, the great scholar and doer of works for the public good – and because of this, he was among the very first of the Halutzim from Volkovysk to make *aliyah* to the land of Israel. On arrival in the Holy Land, he worked on highway construction and in maintaining security. After contracting malaria, he was compelled to return to Volkovysk for a number of years, in order to recuperate – but he later returned to the Land of Israel with his brother, *Aaron* (Archik). Upon his return, Shlomo once again undertook his work as a pioneer, and over a period of time, dried out the malaria-infested swamps in the Jezreel Valley. Today, Shlomo Markus is the director of a bus transport cooperative in *Bnei Brak.*

Archik Markus, Shlomo's brother, was very active in the Zionist movement in Volkovysk, in the *Linat Kholim*, and most prominently in the hospital. After arriving in the Holy Land, he worked on the highways of Jeddah and – together with his brother – draining the swamps of the Jezreel Valley. Whoever knew Archik form Volkovysk, could not cease wondering how, this onetime "dandy" with his polished boots and ruddy cheeks, stood almost naked in the malarial swamps and eradicated mosquitoes. Later, Archik applied himself to cattle breeding, and thereby demonstrated how to be a role model for hard labor – and today he owns a nice, large factory in *Kfar Ganim* near *Petakh Tikva*. In the Land of Israel, Archik is also a substantial donor and is involved in public undertakings. In all aspects of his many-sided undertakings, Archik is assisted by his wife, *Rivka,* who being herself a diligent and work-oriented woman, who is quite occupied in her factory and barn all day and night, nevertheless doe not forget community needs, and she encourages her husband in his community undertakings.

The two brothers, *Shlomo* and *Archik*, carry on a fine cultural life in Israel, also welcoming *landsleit* from Volkovysk with great joy and respect – and at every opportunity sing one of their father's hearty tunes.

In time, the daughters of Abraham Eliyahu Markus also came to the Land of Israel, and later, Reb Abraham Eliyahu and his wife, *Chana* also came. All of Reb Abraham Eliyahu's daughters are married. One of them, *Rivka*, is married to Mr. Bakhar, an elected official in the *Petakh Tikva* municipal government. The second daughter, *Golda* is married to Mr. Graf – and they have a bakery in *Petakh Tikva*. A third daughter, *Pey'keh*,

is married to *Eliezer Kalir*.

The head of the family, Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus, was a merchant and manufacturer in Volkovysk. He ran a tannery and leather business. The tannery was located beside the river. Reb Abraham Eliyahu lived in his own house on the Wide Boulevard. Reb Abraham Eliyahu who was a truly God-fearing man, was also a formidable scholar and a distinguished leader of public worship. Apart from this, he also excelled in his artful reading of the Torah. His reading of the Torah always made a strong impression on everyone. His reading of the *Megillah* of Lamentations [on *Tisha B'Av*] and of Esther [on *Purim*] stood out above all. He would recite the blessings over the reading of the *Megillah* with such embellishment, that they rang like a fiery hymn. He was also a first-class explicator of Holy Writ.

He derived much *nachas* from his children in Israel. He gave a fine speech at the bar mitzvah of his first grandson (Archik's son) in Israel. His singing of the *SheHekheyanu* which he recited at that time, literally thundered with familial warmth off the audience, who were motivated to sing along, word by word. However, he took very much to heart the tragic fate of his son *Shaul* who remained behind in Volkovysk and was killed in the Holocaust, and this shortened his life, and he passed away. The wife of Reb Abraham Eliyahu, *Chana,* has a general store in *Petakh Tikva*.

Recently a terrible tragedy struck the Markus family. Two grandchildren of Reb Abraham Eliyahu – *Archik's son*[165] and the son of *Eliezer Kalir* – fell in the Israeli War of Independence.

The Epstein Family

Abraham Epstein (Der Shvetnitzer) lived on the Wide Boulevard in Volkovysk, and dealt in wire mesh fencing. He was a man of means, had his own home with a large yard, and conducted a fine Zionist home life. He had his own children, sons and daughters, and even the girls knew Hebrew – which in those days was a rare occurrence.

One of the sons, *David*, came to the Land of Israel shortly before the First World War to study at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium. After finishing his gymnasium studies, he studied in Paris, where he completed the course to become an engineer – and he settled in Haifa, where he is occupied in running a plant.

David's sister, *Yehudit,* also came to the Land of Israel after the First World War, and settled in Haifa, where she was very successful as a dentist, and also made a name for herself as a charity worker. She later married the well-known teacher and activist, *Mordechai Halevy*. Yehudit brought her father to Haifa, where he later passed away.

David Epstein's second sister, *Tzipa Katzin*, after her husband (Katzin of the beer brewery) passed away, opened a restaurant in Volkovysk in her father's house, to which the most prominent people of the area would come to eat – because Tzipa Katzin was a very sympathetic woman, and with her graciousness and friendly attitude, attracted many people. A number of years before the Second World War, she liquidated this business, and came to the Land of Israel with her children. One of her sons was a dentist, and he took over from his aunt Yehudit, who emigrated to America with her husband *Mordechai Halevy* – her office and practice. The other sons of Tzipa are engaged in the transportation sector of the economy in the Holy Land.

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165 This is *Yaakov Markus*, whose picture appears later on p. 341

Yaakov Einstein – His father had a haberdashery business on the Wide Boulevard and his mother was from the Zilberman family on the Millner Gasse. He completed schooling at the Volkovysk Gymnasium. He came to the Land of Israel as a *Halutz*, and later on joined the Worker's Theater, *Ohel* in which he distinguished himself in the role of *Yoshpeh Kalb*. Today, Yaakov Eienstein is recognized as one of the best actors and orators in Israel. He is also active in the Israeli organization of Volkovysk *landsleit*.

Manya, Yaakov Einstein's sister, is also in the Land of Israel, and is married to Mr. Shakhra'i – a teacher in *Kfar-Ezer.*

Ben-Zion Lifschitz – A son-in-law of the wood turner Adelberg, who lived on the Wide Boulevard – and was recognized in Volkovysk as a very good *Baal-Tefilah.*[166] He was very active in the Volkovysk Zionist movement and dedicated a great deal of time and energy to the *Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael*. When he revealed his decision to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, the Volkovysk Zionists arranged a hearty farewell evening on his behalf. In Israel, he is occupied as an elected official of the Tel-Aviv congregational committee, and he is counted among the most important and prominent religious Jews of Tel-Aviv. One of Reb Ben-Zion's sons, *Yekhezkiel Lifschitz* – an engineer – is a director of the trade school in Tel-Aviv. Two other sons of Ben-Zion, *Moshe* and *Yisrael* – who also live in Israel – are owners of a lock manufacturing business. Ben-Zion's daughter, *Shayna Baylah Lifschitz*, can also be found in Israel. A second of Ben-Zion's daughters, *Dvora*, is in Haifa where she is married to Mr. Mandelbaum.

Shayna Lifschitz, Ben-Zion's niece – who is the only one who saved herself from the entire family in Volkovysk – was one of the first of the survivors to reach the Land of Israel after the last [sic: Second] World War, and she married her cousin, a son of Ben-Zion Lifschitz.

Abraham Novick is a son of the Volkovysk lumber merchant Yisrael Novick (who lived near Yitzhak Novogrudsky) and a brother of the prominent New York teacher, *Chana Novick*. Abraham Novick was one of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Volkovysk. He settled in the Land of Israel, where he was appointed to the directorate of the *Kupat Kholim*[167] in *Afula*. Most recently, he resides in *Hadera*. He helped me greatly in providing materials and photographs for this book.

Aharon Federman was nine months old, when his father, Reb Abraham settled in Jerusalem in 1877. His mother was a niece of the renown *Gaon* of Kovno, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor. His wife, Chana Reizl and her family, were among the very first *olim* from Amstibova (near Volkovysk, who many years ago settled in Jerusalem. When I traveled to the Land of Israel in the summer of 1910, in order to enrol in the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium, *Chana Reizl Federman* traveled with me – who happened to be returning at that time from Volkovysk to the Land of Israel, where she had come to visit her relatives – and accompanied me for the entire trip from Volkovysk to Jaffa, from where she continued her journey to her home in Jerusalem. When we, the Volkovysk Gymnasium students would come for a visit from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, we would visit the Federman's home – who were good-hearted people – and we were received there in a very friendly manner. The Federman's live now in Tel-Aviv, where they have a house on Dizengoff Street, and they are active in the Tel-Aviv branch of the Volkovysk *landsleit.* The Federmans have a daughter who is married to Mr. Khatzroni a director of the well-known medicine export firm of "Solomon-Levy-Ellstein."

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166 A lay member of the congregation who led in chanting the prayers.

167 The Labor Hospital Fund

Mulya Schein was an active member in the Volkovysk Zionist movement and foremost in the *Maccabi* in that location. Also, after he settled in the Land of Israel – where he works as a director of a trading company – he kept very close contact with his Volkovysk friends, and thanks to his efforts and influence, many people from Volkovysk came to the Land of Israel. He is very active in the Israeli Volkovysk *landsleit* society. When the first refugees from Volkovysk began to arrive after the last [sic: Second] war, who had survived the Nazi exterminations – Mulya Schein would travel to *Atalyat* to receive them at disembarkation, and take them to their dwelling places.

Abraham Schein A son of Schein the Hotelier of the *Grodno Gasse* – was sentenced to death under the authority of the British Mandate authorities in 1938 during the renown Ben-Joseph trial. His brother, *Nakhum*, who then lived in Volkovysk, sent false papers that represented that Abraham was a minor. This had the desired effect, and the death sentence was commuted to fifteen years of imprisonment. Abraham was freed a number of years later, and as of late, works as an appointee in the Tel-Aviv municipal government.

In connection with these falsified records, a sensational legal proceeding was instituted against Nakhum Schein in Volkovysk, who was accused of this falsification. The *Volkovysker Leben* of April 3, 1939 reported the following about this trial:

> "In the sensational trial against the local resident, Nakhum Schein, who is accused of falsifying his brother's birth statistics and sending them to the Land of Israel, the accused was defended by the lawyer Firstenberg. The accused declared that he did this in order to save his brother from hanging, and also in view of the fact that his aged mother was seriously ill, and would not have survived the knowledge of her son's death.
>
> The judge, Mr. Tolchko took this into account, and sentenced Nakhum Schein to six months in jail with the sentence suspended.
>
> In the motives, the judge held that Nakhum cannot be thought of as a lawbreaker, and that anyone else in his place would have done the same thing."

Abraham Schein's sister, *Zlatkeh* is married to *Sholom Hubar*. They have their own house in Tel-Aviv and are active members in the Volkovysk Society of Immigrants.

The Finkelstein Family – After the death of *Moshe Yaakov Finkelstein*, his wife and both daughters, *Dora* and *Liola* settled in the Land of Israel. His wife and daughter Dora later passed away. To this date, only his daughter *Liola* (Leah) *Vitensky* finds herself in Tel-Aviv.

The Rakhmilevich Family – The wife and children of *Nachman Rakhmilevich* are to be found in the Land of Israel, the former Minister in Lithuania, and the later Latvian Consul General in Lithuania, who passed away there several years ago. Nachman's sister, *Dr. Esther Rakhmilevich* is a well-known pediatrician practicing in Tel-Aviv.

The Family of Rabbi Kossowsky. The two sons of the former Rabbi of Volkovysk, *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* are found today in the Land of Israel: the older son, Sholom Kossowsky-Shakhor is a well-known lawyer and a prominent activist in the orthodox circles of Tel-Aviv; the younger son, *Chaim,* also a lawyer, took an active part in the Israeli War of Independence.

Rivka Borodetzky, a daughter of *Israel Rabinovich* (a son of the Rabbi of Amstibova) is a resident of Tel-Aviv for many years already with her husband, *Dr. Borodetzky.* He worked for the Hadassah Hospital for many years and is today the physician for the Tel-Aviv government administration.

Shoshana & Rivka Friedman – are members of the management of the daily Labor newspaper, *Davar* in Tel-Aviv.

The Saroka Family. *Hanokh Saroka* – whose father was a dealer in wagon loads of lumber in Volkovysk, – lives today in the settlement of *Tzofit*, and is a visible activist in the Israeli Mapai Labor Party. In the name of Mapai, he was also a delegate to the Zionist Congress. *Moshe Saroka*, a brother of Hanokh, is one of the senior directors of the *Kupat Kholim* (Labor Medical Fund) in Israel.

Hona Kavushatsky, who was very active in the banking business in Volkovysk, is together with his wife, *Frum'keh* , fled Poland during the last World War. They are today in Petakh Tikva, where Hona is employed by the Dan Bus Company.

David Linevsky – a son of the Hebrew teacher, Herschel Linevsky – was much beloved by his students and was active in the Volkovysk Zionist movement. *David* and his sister *Yamima* settled in the Land of Israel. For an extended period of time, *David Linevsky* had been sent (i.e. deported) to Kenya by the English government for his Zionist political activity. *Yamima Linevsky* lives in Tel-Aviv where she is an appointed official in the Histadrut.

The Ogulnick and Pikarsky Families. Shlomo Ogulnick's family from Ruzhany (near Slonim)[168] settled in Volkovysk shortly before the end of the First World War. The older daughter *Elkeh* emigrated to Montreal (Canada) many years later, where she married Mr. Ben-Zvi, and is very active in the Volkovysk Society. The younger daughter, *Chana'leh* was even as a relatively young girl, appointed as an assistant to my sister Pes'shka in our drugstore. She proved very apt to the work, and in the course of a short period of independent study she learned how to formulate a variety of salves and medicines. Many of the gentiles from nearby villages would come to consult her for advice on how to treat illnesses – just as they used to ask such questions of my father – and Chana'leh would answer them with understanding and common sense. She was active in the Zionist movement in Volkovysk, and indeed did go to the Land of Israel later, where she married a Volkovysk pioneer, *Moshe Pikarsky*. Today they own a well-run manufacturing facility in Herut, with all the currently modern equipment. Subsequently, Chana'leh brought her parents, *Shlomo Ogulnick* and his *wife,* to the Land of Israel – ands they also set up their own factory in *Herut*. But Chana never let the contact with our family in Volkovysk lapse, nor the contact with my sister Liza in Tel-Aviv, whom she would visit frequently. Chana was much loved by our family. When I visited the Holy Land in 1945, together with Mottel Epstein, we went to visit Chana'leh in Herut. She had given birth to a daughter that year, and had named her for my mother, whom she loved dearly and respected. Even though the years and the harshness of the climate took its toll on her external appearance, her lovely radiant smile remained on her face, along with her friendliness and grace – just as in the old days.

The Shpak Family – This is a large and well-branched Volkovysk family, from which many members emigrated to Argentina, the United States and Canada. But regardless of which land their destiny took them, they maintained an interest in their home town, and supported the institutions of Volkovysk. A part of this family did come to the Land of Israel, and spread throughout the land in various points.

Members of the Shpak family in Israel are: *Esther Shpak* and her sons, *Shlomo, Yehuda* and *Shabtai. Shlomo Shpak* lives in Hadera, where he is one of the managers of the South Judea Bus Company; *Yehuda Shpak* is

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168 An examination of a Belarus map suggests that the choice of 'near' is somewhat subjective. Ruzhany seems to be just as near to Zelva and Volkovysk as to Slonim.

a member of the Hadera Advisory Council. *Shabtai Shpak* has an appointed position in the city government of Tel-Aviv. *Shepsel* and *Yitzhak Shpak* (the two sons of Abraham Shpak the maker of wagon reins) Live in Ramat Gan.

The Family of Eliyahu Shaikevitz – his three sons, *Nakhum, Eliezer* and *Yitzhak*, and his daughter *Taib'l* were very active in the Volkovysk Zionist movement from an early age on. They emigrated to the Land of Israel many years ago. The *Volkovysker Leben* published a notice on September 20, 1929,concerning the fact that Shaikevitz's son is being cited as the "Hero of Jerusalem" during the time of the unrest. He had, at that time, demonstrated extraordinary heroism in connection with self-defense in the battle against the Arabs, and thanks to him, hundreds of Jews were saved from certain death.

Eliezer and *Yitzhak* are today employed by the Egged Bus Company in Jerusalem. Nakhum has a printing press business in Jerusalem. In the bombing attack on Eliezer Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem, the Shaikevitz's store was destroyed a piece at a time.

Taib'l Shaikevitz-Gravosky lives with her family in Tel-Aviv. Her husband is involved in the Tel-Aviv city government.

Eliyahu Shaikevitz is remembered in another chapter of this book.

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There is yet another whole cohort of Volkovyskers that live in Israel. Despite the fact that it has not been possible for us to get a full listing of everyone, the active members of the Volkovysk Society made every effort to provide us with a list of as many of the Volkovysk residents in Israel as they could under the present circumstances there. From the names that have come to us, we will here provide a note of those Volkovysk Jews who at various times emigrated to the Land of Israel; this note is organized by the streets and neighborhoods where these encountered people lived in Volkovysk before they voyaged to the Land of Israel.

From the Wide Boulevard (The principal street of Volkovysk) the following came to the Land of Israel: *Moshe Koss* – a mechanic; *Dr. Joseph Ravitz* (a son of Herschel Ravitz) – practices {sic: medicine] in Tel-Aviv; *Moshe Paveh* (A son of Dushkeh Paveh) – A storekeeper in Tel-Aviv; *Taiba Goldberg* (Yudzhik) – Lives in Hadera; *Leizer, David & Ephraim Goldberg* (Sons of Koppel Isser) – Live in Tel-Aviv; *S. Schwartz* – an appointee in the Rishon LeZion municipality; *Yeshayahu Lev* (Son-in-law of the furniture finisher) – has a clothing store in Tel-Aviv; *Leah Perekhodnik* (A daughter of Chaim Perekhodnik) – saved herself from the Nazis and came to Israel; *Leah Osherovich* (Leah Perekhodnik's aunt) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Aryeh Kraselnik* – a building contractor in Haifa; *Edna Gordon* (Of the Levin family) – Lives in Tel-Aviv; *Simcha & Yehuda Movshovich* (the sugar dealer's sons) – live in Tel-Aviv; *Moshe Weinstein* – Esther the Contractor's son – has a music instrument business in Tel-Aviv; *Moshe Lev* (A son of Dina the Baker) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Moshe Levitt* – lives in Hadera; Mrs. Kameny (from the Poliacheks) – lives in Tel-Aviv, and her husband is the chairman of the land committee of the Keren Kayemet.

From the Grodno Gasse the following settled in Israel: *Abraham Zelitsky* (A son of Reb Moshe Zelitsky) – a visible public servant in Tel-Aviv, and a director of the Technical Division of Rothenberg's Electric Works; *Abraham Makov* (Son of Alexander Makov of the manufacturing business) – lives in Haifa; *Yitzhak Goldrei* (Son of Ben-Zion Goldrei the Ironmonger) – an appointee of the Rehovot Municipal Committee;

Sonia Goldrei (married to Mushinsky), a sister to Yitzhak – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Zvi Dworetsky* – has a bakery in Kiryat Chaim; Eliyahu Shulrauf (A son-in-law to Shmuel Weiner) – lives in Petakh Tikva; *Binkovich* (A relative of Fruma Movshovsky) – an engineer in Haifa; *Joseph Berezinsky* – Lives in Kfar-Eta; *Shlomo Yelsky* – lives in Tel-Aviv.

From the Kholodoisker Gasse the following came to Israel: *Panter* – a teacher in Kibbutz Mesilot; *Sarah Uryonovsky* – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Shmuel Applebaum* – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Katriel Lashowitz* – fought with the partisans in Poland, and came to Israel after the War, where he opened a photography business.

From the Millner Gasse the following came to Israel: *Shprinza Bialsky-Sidransky* (the widow of Abraham Sidransky) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Bunya Turovich*, the wife of Dr. Zalkai of the Kupat Kholim – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Zalman Goldberg* (grandson of Hillel Koshchilker, and a son of Benjamin Goldberg) – a member of Kibbutz Ein-HaShofet; *Rosa Lifschitz-Lokhovsky* (A daughter of Aaron Lifschitz) – lives in Tel-Aviv (her husband is a well-known merchant).

From the Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse the following came to Israel: *Benjamin Galai* (A son of Kalman the Butcher) – has a meat business in Tel-Aviv; *Uziel Marantz* (of the clothing business) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Chaya'leh Weiner* – saved herself from Auschwitz and lives today in Tel-Aviv, where she married; *Chaya Daniel* (A daughter of Rabbi Yerakhmiel the Yeshiva Headmaster) – lives in Haifa.

From the Market (Rynkowa) Gasse the following came to Israel: *Mayer Feinstein* (A son of old Feinstein the tea merchant near Bliakher's) – a well-known builder in Israel and a director of the work at the firm of *HaBoneh*; Gedalyahu Pick (the Haberdasher's son) – a member of Kibbutz Amir in the Galilee; Moshe Shakhnovich (the wine storekeeper's son) – an employee of Rothenberg's Electrical Works; *Velvel Kaplan* (Moshe Shakhnovich's father-in-law) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Bluma Stolovitsky* (Daughter of Asher the flour store owner) – saved herself by fleeing into the forests, and finally came to Israel.

From Zamoscheh the following came to Israel: *Reb Leib Ditkovsky* – lives in Nakhalat-Yitzhak; The brothers, *Chaim & Yaakov Ditkovsky* – employees of the Dan Autobus Company; *A. Ditkovsky* – owner of a soda water factory in Tel-Aviv; *Yaakov Itzkowitz* (Velvel Kaplan's son-in-law) – who was a teacher at the Tarbut Gymnasium in Volkovysk, and is today a pedagogue in Haifa (he also prepared a substantial scientific volume on botanical life in the Land of Israel); Moshe Mytchik – Director of a consumer cooperative (*Tzorkhia*) in Israel, and lives in Be'er Tuvia; *Feygl Pines* – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Joseph Pines* (Feygl's son) – former secretary of the Volksschule in Volkovysk, and today one of the first specialists in digging for well water in Israel and also orchards in Hertzeliya. *Mordechai Pines* – a member of Kibbutz Mordechai Brenner; *Ephraim Rabinovich* (Nye'cheh's son) – An appointee in the Haifa bus station; *Shmuel Malakhovitsky* – is a locksmith in Tel-Aviv; *Joseph Mostkov* – secretary of a colony near Netanya; *Chaim & Miriam Milkov* (the storekeeper's children from Zamoscheh) – Chaim is active in the revisionist party; *Yud'l Pikarsky* – a storekeeper in Petakh Tikva; *Joseph Pereminsky & his brother* (they were active in the Volkovysk fire brigade) – they live in Petakh Tikva, where they have their own homes and are engaged in carpentry; *Naomi Grudzhik (Grodsky)* – lives in Netanya; *Dvora Hochstein & her children* – live in Tel-Aviv; *Chaim Rabinovich* (Nye'cheh's son) – a carpenter in Haifa; *Dora Averbukh* (Tarna's daughter) – lives in Kiryat Sefer; *Leah Tarma* – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Bluma Khananovich* – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Eliyahu Kushnir* (of the food preparers) – along with his wife, saved themselves from the Nazis, during the War, by hiding in the attic of a Christian [family]. They came to Israel after the War, where Eliyahu assumed a position as Provisor with the Kupat Kholim in Tel-Aviv.

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Others from Volkovysk who situated themselves at various times in the Land of Israel: *Eliezer Turiansky* (from the Mitzrayim Gessel) – lives in Hadera(his daughter is a teacher in Tel-Aviv); *Miriam Limon* (from Karczyzna) – lives in Tel-Aviv; *Shlomo Eliyahu Amstibovsky & his son* – live in Tel-Aviv; *Benjamin Levin* (a son of Feivel the Weaver) – a teacher in Mikveh Yisrael, and a member of the Language Institute of Israel; *David Moshe Rossiansky* (Israel's son) – A prominent public servant and a member of the municipal government in Ramat Gan. *Moshe Mendel Schwartz* – orchard owner in Petakh Tikva (his son Mordechai is a senior official in UNRRA). *Yitzhak Shalkovich* (son of Yehoshua) – A member of Kibbutz Mif'alei Yam in Atlit; *The Svetitsky brothers* (the teacher's sons) – owners of a bicycle factory in Tel-Aviv; *Mulya Markus* (Moshe's son) – part owner of an orchard in Geulah; Moshe Podolinsky (a carpenter) – has a house in Petakh Tikva; His brother, *Aharon Podolinsky*, also lives in Petakh Tikva; *Greenberg* (son-in-law of the felt tailor, Levitt) – an important and well-regarded public servant in Petakh Tikva, and a owner of orchards; *Mikhal Damashevitsky* – a bookkeeper (he was imprisoned for seven years because of his Zionist political activity); *The Malin Family* – settled in Tel-Aviv before the First World War; *Yehudit Kaminer-Glembotsky* – a nurse (her husband is a teacher in Ness Tziona); *Misha (Moshe) Gallin* (grandson of Bloch and a brother of Sioma Gallin) – a well-known merchant in Tel-Aviv; *Nechama Rothbart* (Mordechai Rothbart's wife) *& son* – live in Petakh Tikva; *Rosa Berg* (Simcha Berg's daughter) – and her husband, a bookkeeper, live in Tel-Aviv; *The Rosenblum brothers* – one of them lives in Petakh Tikva, and the second is an elected official in the Tel-Aviv municipal government; *Shlomo Leibovich* (Herschel's son) – an elected official in Rishon LeZion; *Shlomo Kavushatsky* (son of Yaakov Moshe the artist) – works for *Tenuvah* and lives in Tel-Aviv; *Gottleib Rosenblum* (son of Boruch Rosenblum) – a member of the Tel-Aviv municipal government.

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The following are found among the Volkovysk landsleit who settled in Jerusalem:

Yonatan Rubinstein a son of the teacher, Israel Rubinstein – is employed by the Histadrut HaPekidim in Jerusalem.

Chaim Mordetsky of the *Ostroger Gasse*, is a brother of *Joseph Mordetsky* who was active in the Volkovysk *Maccabi*. He lost his *wife and two children* in the great explosion on Eliezer Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem who were killed in the aftermath.

Dr. Yaakov Matskevich – who became prominent as a neurologist in Warsaw – practices his specialty today in Jerusalem.

Salutsky the Pharmacist – his wife, who is a dentist, comes from the Mirsky family. He has a pharmacy in Jerusalem. His son was recently killed in the Israeli War of Independence.

Among the others the following are found: *Dr. Shimon Tzemakh* (a son of Tzemakh Krupnik) – a dentist; *Ethel Fanar* from the Wide Boulevard; *'Nioma Schwartzberg (Tal-U'Mottor)* – a public servant in the Jerusalem quarter of Mea Shearim; *Aharon Levin* (son of Feivel the Weaver) – has an autobus garage; *Yaffa Resnick-Breslov* (Dr. Yitzhak Resnick's sister); *Zipporah Albreich-Tennenbaum; Sarah Galai-Haberfeld; Chana Kufi; Shlomo Ravitzky; Matilda Milkov-Liechtenstein; Moshe Langer; Lyuba Mostkov; Avro'cheh Mazur; Tuvia Mirsky; Miriam Goldberg; Z. Kottler; Esther Kutir; Shoshana Kirschenbaum; Anya Peisik-*

Rosenthal; Frieda Shapiro.

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Page 341: Yaakov Markus, son of Archik Markus
Fell in battle for Israeli Independence in the year 1948

The Volkovysk *landsleit* are strongly rooted in the ground of the Land of Israel, and they occupy a highly visible place among the warriors for the heroic *Yishuv*. The percent of those from Volkovysk found among the constabulary, in the various security groups of the *Yishuv*, and among those who volunteered for the Jewish units and the Jewish Brigade in the last World War is proportionally very high. But even larger until now, is the number of those from Volkovysk in the Israeli Army, which fights now for the independence of the nation. It remains difficult, even now as these lines are being written, to provide the precise count of those Volkovysk fighters in the Israeli Army, as well as the names of those fallen heroes from Volkovysk. We will nevertheless, provide here a partial listing of those from Volkovysk that have participated, or are still participating today in the ranks of the Jewish warriors and also of those who fell in battle (this list was sent to us from Tel-Aviv – by Azriel Broshi and Shlomo Bereshkovsky).

Colonel Ephraim Ben-Artzi , son of Shammai Kobrinsky – was a Major in the Jewish Brigade. He serves today as a military liaison officer from Israel in Washington.

A second son of Shammai Kobrinsky – who holds a post in national security – was a sergeant in the Jewish Brigade during the Second World War, and afterwards in the Israeli Army.

Corporal Yitzhak Barash – inherited the spirit of bravery and heroism from his father, the engineer, Ephraim Barash (who was the leader of the Bialystoker community and fell in the Bialystok uprising against the Nazis) and from his grandfather, Reb Sholom Barash. During the last World War, Yitzhak Barash completed a course in aviation and immediately was mobilized into the army. He proudly volunteered to work on the airfield, and very simply stated that his place was at the wheels of the bombers, and nowhere else. He became ill as a result of this, while he was in the army, and died as a young man.

Yaakov Berg, the youngest son of Herschel the contractor – came to the Land of Israel with the first of the Volkovysk pioneers, worked on the highways in the valley, and was among the first Jewish policemen in Jerusalem. At the time of the first call for mobilization of the *Vaad Leumi,* during the last World War, he joined the army and served together with his son in the Jewish Brigade. Today, he is serving as a sergeant in the domestic security forces of Jerusalem.

Corporal Moshe Berg, Yaakov Berg's son – worked on a Kibbutz. During the last war, he was mobilized into the army and served in the Jewish Brigade together with his father. After the war, he returned to the Kibbutz, but only for a short time. Today, he is once again serving in the Israeli Army.

Sergeant Aryeh Shpak, a son of Shabtai Shpak – is today a commander of a unit of the Israeli Army. He has a distinguished record in the defense of the Land of Israel. He was twice wounded in combat.

Sergeant Jonah Tzemakh – distinguished himself in the Jewish Brigade, and later in the Israeli Army.

Corporal Shtumer – served in the Jewish Brigade and in the Israeli Army and distinguished himself in

service.

Sergeant David Bereshkovsky (the youngest son of Yitzhak Bereshkovsky) – he entered the army at the age of seventeen years, and completed a special instructor's course, and became an instructor to new recruits in the Jewish Brigade. Even a Yeshiva student could be transformed into a hero at the front, after passing through the hands of this young instructor with his thunderous and penetrating voice. After the war, he took part in the great liberation parade. Today, he is an instructor with the Tel-Aviv police force.

Moshe Mazover , son of Herschel Mazover of the paper manufacturing business, and a brother of Ida Mazover – The young, highly talented lawyer decided that during wartime, it is better to be in the ranks of the combatants rather than being immersed in legal processes, and he joined the Jewish Brigade, where he distinguished himself. He is today in the service of the Israeli Army.

Yitzhak Kavushatsky (his wife is Poliachek's sister) – served in the Jewish Brigade during the last World War.

Zvi Kavushatsky , son of Yitzhak – completed study at the Hertzeliya Gymnasium in Volkovysk, and in Israel, he is a teacher in *Shfiya*. Today, he is in the Israeli Army.

Chaim Scharf (his parents had a shoe store in Volkovysk) – served in the Jewish Brigade, and is now in the Israeli Army.

Ze'ev (Volodya) Slutsky a son of the pharmacist Yitzhak Slutsky, and the dentist, Ida from the Mirsky family – was on a Kibbutz, and was mobilized into the Jewish Brigade. In the War of Independence for Israel, he volunteered for the defense of *Kfar Etzion*, and was killed in that battle.

Eliyahu Shulrauf & His Brother, grandsons of Sholom Weiner – are both in the Israeli Army.

Shmuel & Meir Pines, sons of Joseph Pines the former secretary of the *Volksschule* in Volkovysk – are in the Israeli Army.

Chaim Kaplan a son of David Joseph Kaplan, and a grandson of Kalman Kaplan of the *Ostroger Gasse* – a member of Kibbutz *Ma'aleh Ha Khamishah*. He served in the Jewish Brigade, and in the Israeli War [of Independence] he distinguished himself in the defense of his Kibbutz.

Moshe Kossowsky – Served in the Jewish Brigade, and is now in the Israeli Army.

Chaim Kossowsky, a son of Rabbi Kossowsky of Johannesburg – is a lawyer, and is today in the Israeli Army.

David Feinstein, a son of Shimon Feinstein (Yud'l Bereshkovsky's son-in-law) – was first mobilized at the end of the last World War, because of his young age he couldn't join any earlier. When he arrived at the Jewish Brigade, he was all of seventeen years old. He wrote home that he was pointlessly joked about, that he was entirely too young and unfit for the life of a soldier; quite the contrary, he is a brave soldier and an excellent marksman that had already developed quite a reputation as a sniper.

Kalman Shalkovich – joined the Jewish Brigade, and is now serving in the Israeli Army.

Celia Bereshkovsky, daughter of Yitzhak Bereshkovsky – served in the Israeli Women's Army Corps. She married Joseph Seltzer, who served in the Jewish Brigade. Today, they are in Tel-Aviv. Joseph Seltzer is once again in the service of the Israeli Army.

Ephraim Rubinovich from Zamoscheh – was one of the first who directed the first railroad service in the Land of Israel from Haifa to Hadera. The Israeli press published his name as one of the first of the pioneers in the railroad industry in Israel.

Miriam Zelitsky, the daughter of Abraham Zelitsky – an enlistee in the Israeli Army. She distinguished herself several times in this service.

Hillel Epstein, a member of Kibbutz *Negbah* – distinguished himself in an exceptional manner in the defense of this Kibbutz in the current Israeli War of Independence.

Magen Broshi, son of Azriel Broshi– a commander of an army unit of Israel. He participated in the battles of the Negev and the western Galilee.

David Kalir, a son of Eliezer Kalir and a grandson of Abraham Eliyahu Markus – served in the Israeli Army and fell in the battle of Latrun.

Izzy Kalir, a second son of Eliezer Kalir – a sergeant in the *Nahalal* ploce force.

Feivel Leibovich – was killed at the time that *Rishon LeZion* was bombed by Egyptian aircraft.

Abraham Hochstein's wife – was killed in the bombing of Tel-Aviv.

Moshe Langbord (Graff) , a son of Beligriftzikh – joined the police in the Land of Israel in 1928. He excelled in track and field and won several prizes in this connection. He was the commandant of the "special police force" in the Jezreel Valley, and is very popular and well thought of throughout the land. Today, he is a sergeant of police in *Nahalal.*

Zvi Markus, the only son of Archik Markus[169] and a grandson of Abraham Eliyahu Markus – born in Jeddah, near *Nahalal.* He joined the Palmach at the outbreak of the Israeli War of Independence, and participated in the battles for Jerusalem. He fell as a hero at the age of 19 in the battle for *Ramat Rachel*, near Jerusalem.

Arikha, son of Yaakov Arikha from Amstibova – fell in the battle of *Sheikh Jarakh* in Jerusalem.

Moshe Greenberg, son-in-law of the military tailor Levitt – a commander in one of the colonies in the Sharon.

Chaim Shpak, son of Eliyahu Shpak – took part in the battles of *Sajrah* and the northern Galilee.

Amnon Leibovich, son of Shlomo Leibovich from Volkovysk – born in *Rishon LeZion*. He took part in the great battle to secure the Negev, and fell in battle at the age of 18.

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169 There is an inconsistency with the photo of Yaakov Markus, also a fallen soldier, identified as a son of Archik Markus.

David Lazarovsky – arrived a short while ago in the Lands of Israel, and is serving in the army.

Sarah Herbrem, a daughter of Shmuel and Chaya Lazarovsky – currently serving in the army.

Dora Shykevich, a daughter of Yitzhak Shykevich and a granddaughter of Eliyahu Shykevich – currently serving in the Israeli Army. She has already received two citations and the rank of corporal.

Sergeant Aharon Yerushalmi, a son of the Volkovysk *Shokhet* Yerusalimsky – served in the British Army during the last war, and was captured and held as a prisoner of war. He could not, however, under any circumstances, make peace with the idea that he was a prisoner of the Nazis, and demonstrated legendary heroism and exposed himself to life-threatening danger with the audacity to escape from prison, and after passing through the proverbial seven circles of Hell, arrived peaceably into the camp of the Allied military forces, and was awarded a medal by the British King for his outstanding service during the War.

Eliezer Sukenik (son of Sukenik the teacher) and **Epstein** (a grandson of Chas'sheh Leah the storekeeper) – both served in the Polish Army and were captured by the Russians. After the War, they came to Italy, and from there they finally reached Israel after considerable tribulation, where they immediately joined the army.

Yaakov Hubar, son of David Hubar – went into service at the beginning of the last World War and was also captured by the enemy. However, he did not want to remain imprisoned until the end of the war, and even after his first opportunity to escape did not succeed, he still did not give up the idea of escaping, until it eventually became possible for him to free himself.

Chaim Davidovsky – served in the Jewish Brigade, and was imprisoned for a long time. Immediately after the war, he joined the Haganah and is currently serving in the Israeli Army.

Kagan – served together with Chaim Davidovsky in the Jewish Brigade and was imprisoned with him for a long period. Today her serves in the Israeli Army.

Nakhum Novogrudsky, son of Yehuda (Yud'l) Novogrudsky – serves in the Israeli Navy.

The following people from Volkovysk also have served in the Jewish Brigade, and are serving in the Israeli Army:

David Linevsky, Sola Sidransky, Binkovich, the Movshovich brothers, Bliakher, Fuchs (a brother of Noah Fuchs), *Shaliota, Katzin, Simcha Goldberg, Zalman Goldberg, David Rossiansky, Mordechai Galai, Zvi Epstein, Mikhal Damashevitsky, Hanokh Pick, [the] engineer Minkovich, Podolinsky* (son of Moshe Podolinsky) and others.

* *
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Because of the current war situation in the Land, and the irregularity of mail service with Israel, this list is far from complete. But it is already easy to see, from the provided list of those from Volkovysk who are participating in the War of Independence, that our *landsleit* in Israel occupy a respectable position among the warriors and builders of the Jewish State. The participation of our brothers and sisters from Volkovysk in the fateful War of Independence in Israel these past few years is worthy of special mention. In our

profound sorrow over the loss of the thousands of lives abruptly cut off in the Jewish Volkovysk populace at the hands of the Nazi murderers, along with hundreds of other Jewish communities in Europe, we must not permit ourselves to forget those of our Volkovysk kin who freely sacrificed their young lives in order to secure the nationhood of our people in our Land. May the sacred memory of these precious sacrifices live forever in our hearts!

My Forty-Five Years in Volkovysk

By Eliyahu Shykevich, Jerusalem

In memory of the destroyed Jewish community of Volkovysk, my entire family, and my children: *Yochanan, Sarah, Sholom Shakhna & Aryeh Leib Khasman* ז"ל.

When I was 21 years old, I was called up to military service, and in the year 1893 I was sent from my home town of *Pryluk* (the *Poltava Guberniya* of Ukraine) to my post that was designated as Volkovysk in the *Grodno Guberniya*.

I arrived in Volkovysk on December 22, 1893 with a military backpack, my sole personal possession on my back, and for the first time, trod Russian-Polish soil. Our train transport, on which we had arrived, continued on its journey. We saw no civilians at the train station, only the few military personnel that had come to meet us. But suddenly, I spied a well-dressed middle-aged man, who by his appearance seemed to be a Jewish merchant, whom the military personnel greeted. I took advantage of the opportunity and introduced myself to him. He gave me his address in the city, and he asked the military personnel to have me brought to his home later.

This meeting sealed my fate. The merchant was the local gold dealer, *Meir Shiff*, and in several years time, he became my father-in-law, and my best friend for my entire life.

We went into town, crossing all the streets: Kolyova (The Station Street), Zamoscheh, and the Wide Boulevard, with its small, wooden houses on both sides of the way. The Jews looked at us sympathetically – as human beings, who had lost their right to an independent course of [personal] development, in the clutches of a harsh czarist military discipline. Many elderly women wiped their tearful eyes with their aprons – being mothers of children [themselves], who had toiled under the yoke of life in military barracks. I proceeded, while still thinking about the new address: Meir Shiff, Watch works, Szeroka 98.

Volkovysk Schools and Houses of Worship at the End of the Nineteenth Century

Page 347: *A gathering on the Schulhof*
Right: The 'Ein Yaakov Bet HaMedrash; Left: The 'Mauer [Schul]'

In the course of a couple of days, I became acquainted, through my new friend Meir Shiff, with additional brotherly Jewish souls. For the first time ever, I saw before me a city where nearly all of the residents were Jewish. I decided to become more closely acquainted with the Jews of the city and the way they lived. The most appropriate day for this was the Sabbath. It was the day when we, the recruits, were off duty.

Friday evening, I went to the Schulhof with a newly found friend. On the left side stood the large *Wooden Synagogue* built in the old style. It was already, at that time, an old structure. Its interior was beautifully decorated. The Ark, the Bimah, the Seat of Elijah, were all wondrous to behold. On the east side, the Volkovysk merchants sat – all significantly visible *balebatim* of the city. My companion called my attention to the *Gabbaim* of the Synagogue: *Aaron Shifmanovich*, and *Moshe Yaakov Finkelstein*. He told me that they were the produce suppliers to the military forces. In the right corner, I immediately saw my friend, *Meir Shiff*,

carrying on a serious discussion with a number of people. Suddenly my attention was drawn to a new person, who had just entered the synagogue, who was greeted by everyone in a friendly manner. This was Daniel Matskevich, the representative of the large Moscow tea company, *Vogov*. Our guide added that it was being awaited that soon Matskevich would be appointed as City leader. Suddenly, a vigorous explosion of laughter erupted from the gathering – the two town wits had appeared – *Moshe Lapidus* and *Naphtali'keh the Melamed.* They, the two joke tellers, always brought a festive air into the town. However, the synagogue quickly fell silent with the arrival of the First Gabbai, *Koppel Isser Volkovysky*. He was dressed in a rich black overcoat, with a shiny top hat on his head. With his imposing figure and rounded beard, he looked like a very imposing figure to me. Then *Reb Aaron*, the City Shammes went up to the Bimah. And in his reedy tenor voice, began to chant *Lekhu Neranenah*. His constant companion, *Reb Jedediah*, the second City Shammes, stood beside him on the Bimah. *Reb Jedediah*, who was the chanter of the *HaRakhaman* prayer at all ritual circumcisions, would from time-to-time, chime in and help out his partner in his own full voice. The Sabbath Eve prayers were concluded. The festive "*Gut Shabbos*" rings in the air of the high-ceilinged synagogue, and we then take ourselves over to the Hiltzener (Wooden) Bet HaMedrash.

The Hiltzener Bet HaMedrash was packed full of congregants praying. There, family connection and money were closely interwoven. The prime seats on the east side were occupied by the genteel and well-connected families of the town – The brothers, *Schraga Feivel* and *Leib Heller*, as well as their father-in-law, *Shmuel Shapiro*, the Volkovysk genius. Additionally there were: the familiar *Dr. Benjamin Einhorn* (father of the author, David Einhorn), the city elder and great scholar, together with his brother *Hirsch Einhorn* (father of Dr. Moshe [Moses] Einhorn), the local pharmacist, who presented me with a synthesis of the Torah and general science; the lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn*, the distinguished progressive thinker, who was famous for his generous heart; *Koppel Isser Goldberg and his son, Zalman Isser*, hoteliers to the merchants; the prominent lumber merchant, *Eli-Leib Rakhmilevich*, and his son (later to become the Lithuanian Consul in the Land of Israel); Dr. Nachman Rakhmilevich; Joshua David Papa, the well-respected local merchant; the bankers of the city – *Tuvia Fenster, Yitzhak Weinstein*, and *Mr. Bass*, the chairman of Perliss et Ginsberg, and many more prominent Jews from the wealthy Volkovysk population segment. From the pulpit, wafted the sweet, beautiful voice of the familiar leader of the service, the town *Shokhet Reb Nissan Kahan*. The faces of the worshipers were turned to the entrance, and with a look of great deference and respect, they invited in the chaste bride, the beloved and holy Sabbath [Queen]; *'Bo'ee Kalah, Bo'ee Kalah!'* The congregation was almost entirely made up of the best of the town's population, Jewish men with large impressive beards, others with attractively barbered pointed beards, all wearing top hats.

The Talmud Torah. Somewhat off to the side, the Volkovysk Talmud Torah was found, whose students would subsequently go off to the Yeshivas of Volozhin and Slobodka, and other Yeshivas of great repute. *The Gaon, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor*, who would later become famous Rabbi of Kovno, went to school there. During prayers, only Torah scholars would sit on the east side, educators of the younger generation, together with their renown Headmaster, *Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel* at their head. There [also] sat the very committed *Gabbaim* of the Talmud Torah, *Rabbi Joseph Berestovitsky, Eliezer Yudzhik* and the *Gabbaim* of the committee that provided clothing to the needy, which looked after providing shoes and clothing for the poor children of the city.

Page 349: A General Picture of Volkovysk (Taken from the Schloss Barg)

We leave the Talmud Torah and continue further. In the distance, I see a sign affixed to a wall: "Cast Us Not Into Old Age." This was the building of the *Old Age Home*. To the right side, immediately on entering this building, was the Synagogue. The Sabbath candles were still burning. On the wall was a candid portrait of

the founder of this important institution, *Reb Schraga Feivel Heller*. We enter the dining room of the Old Age Home. Everything is organized in the same manner as it would be at the tables in the private homes of the Jews.

Saturday morning, we visited the only structure to occupy the Schulhof in those years, where the *Bet HaKnesset* [sic: The synagogue] was found. The prominent scholars of the Volkovysk community prayed there. On one side of the Holy Ark stood the wonderful, decent and outstanding personalities of the city Rabbi, *Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg*, and at his side, the *Dayanim* of the city – *Rabbi Menachem Mendel Volk* (Reb Mendele) and *Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky* (Reb Teveleh). On the second side – the veteran of the Volkovysk Yeshiva, *Rabbi Yehuda Bereshkovsky* (the son of the renown Yeshiva Headmaster, Rabbi Shlomo), the outstanding scholar, *Rabbi Moshe Feinsod,* the wood-turner, *Adelberg* from the Wide Boulevard, the brothers, *Asher & Akiva Yudzhik* (Yehuda'i in Israel), *Rabbi Shmuel David Yunovich, Rabbi Yitzhak Shmuel Jonah's Novogrudsky, Joseph & Schraga Feivel Yunovich*, the brothers, *Sholom & Joseph Vinogradsky, Eliezer Shaliota.* The 24-hour a day sitting scholar of the Synagogue, Reb Shmuel Dinnes, always with a book in hand, *Moshe Ze'ev Yudzhik*, the son of the Rabbi of Volp, *Reb Zvi & Moshe Zelitsky*. The eternal lamp in the synagogue never goes out over the heads of these scholars, who sit and pore over the arguments of the Talmud day and night. The sweet magical voice of the leader of the prayers wafted down from the prayer lectern. At this time, one of the *balebatim*, a merchant, stands at the prayer lectern, who counts not only money, but also the days of the *Daf Yomi* (the daily page of Talmud), in order to prepare a festive *Siyyum* (completion) of the *Shas.* This is the renown *Reb Abraham Eli Markus*.

Page 350: *The Wide Boulevard (From the train station into town – Feitelevich's building is visible in the picture.*

Page 351: *Entrance to the Kholodoisker Gasse (Right: Home of Sholom the Scribe; Left Heni'keh's House, of the Dye Store; Center: The Brook [Well]).*

The Ein-Yaakov Bet HaMedrash. The worshiper at this synagogue were members of the butchers organization, *Zovkhei Tzedek*, as well as people from other trades; workers, storekeepers, and just plain other Jews. One could never came late to this synagogue, because it was always possible to find a *minyan* (prayer quorum of ten men) to start prayers. The Gabbaim and builders of this synagogue were: *Reb Joseph Leib Shipiatsky* (the Garment Seamer), *Joseph Galai* (the Butcher), and others. Also there, the voice of the leader of prayer flowed out ,and from whose mouth the words of the prayer would emerge as if tooled – that was *Kalman Galiatsky* (the Shoemaker).

My guide then took me to the *Hayyatim [*Tailor's] *Bet HaMedrash.* The external appearance of this synagogue looked less prosperous than the others. But there was nothing deficient in the quality of the prayers offered by the worshipers within. Their leader in prayer, *Alter the Metalworker,* was not much less capable than other leaders of prayer. The congregation, after a hard week of work looked happy, scrubbed clean and wearing their Sabbath finery. Next to the Holy Ark sat a respected Jew who studied the *Mishna* with the congregation.

I stepped away from the Schulhof in order to proceed by myself to the home of the well-known *Reb Shmuel Shapiro* (the father-in-law of the Heller brothers), where I had been invited for the midday meal.

Saturday Afternoon, I once again took myself to have a look at the city. Following the Wide Boulevard, my newfound Volkovysk friend and I made our way to the *Klaynem Gessel* (the Small Street), at one end of

which stood the home of *Moshe Rutchik*, the magnate of *Zhelenevich*[170], and at the other end the newly completed *Bet HaMedrash*, "*Chayei Adam*." The less prosperous Jews of the Wide Boulevard prayed there. The donor and builder of this *Bet HaMedrash* was the well-known lumber merchant, *Jekuthiel Bereshkovsky*, who was recognized for his special interest in the poor people of the town. He therefore decided that he would build a *Bet HaMedrash* for their use, in order that they would feel that they too deserved their own place on the "eastern side." His home was always an accessible place for lodging available to the poor of the city. His wife, *Mikhlah* would provision straitened families with wood for the winter, and with food all year round, and she would always see to it that no one was short of a shoe or an article of clothing. She always sought to enhance a festive occasion in a less well-to-do home, and quite often would open the door to her own home to people who were alone, welcoming everyone with warmth and an open heart. She had the full support of her husband, Jekuthiel Bereshkovsky in undertaking this activity. The closest neighbor to the *Bet HaMedrash*, the teacher, *Herschel Linevsky*, who was also an outstanding leader of worship, took over the position of leading prayers at the *Bet HaMedrash Chayei Adam*, and the worshipers took great pride in having him.

After passing over the bricks that separated the city proper from the suburb of Zamoscheh, we approached from the left, the old and gray *Bet HaMedrash*, the old former *Bet HaMedrash* of Zamoscheh. There, all of the Jews who worshiped were thorough Torah scholars. The *Gabbaim* were: Reb Leib Ditkovsky, who brought with him a good reputation from his home town of *Ruzhany,* and the famous Yeshivas there; His father-in-law, *Reb Ze'ev Kaplan*, the mellifluous leader of worship and Torah Reader; and *Reb Joseph Leib Rubinovich.* They were the most serious and committed guardians of the old *Bet HaMedrash*, and possessed the thought, at that time, of re-building it and situating it in a newer, more attractive building. The first [formal] leader of the Volkovysk community came from that Bet HaMedrash, *Reb Ben-Zion Lifschitz*, to whom it fell to deal with all matters pertaining to issues affecting the Jews.

I made an arrangement with my companion to meet the following Saturday, and to continue our visits.

Page 353: The Grodno Gasse of Days Gone Bay
Right: The houses of Khemeh[171] *the Milliner and Shaliota; Left: Freidkeh's Flour store and Tamara's house*

The Second Sabbath

Lev's Bet HaMedrash. There was a *Bet HaMedrash* on the corner of *Dwortzower* and *Millner Gasse*, which was built, as was related to me,. By *Rabbi Abraham Shmuel* and his daughter, *Mindl Tzirel Lev*, and mostly from her own personal resources. It is for this reason it was called *Lev's Bet HaMedrash*. Despite the fact that this *Bet HaMedrash* was off somewhat to the side, nevertheless its worshipers were only from the intelligentsia. There, one not only found balebatim and Torah scholars, as everywhere else, but also doctors, lawyers, pharmacists and manufacturers. *Reb Shmuel Shapiro,* known as the genius of *Volozhin,* would worship there for the entire week, and after services would teach the *Daf Yomi* [daily page of Talmud].His wondrous ringing voice could be heard clear out into the street. *Israel Efrat*, the famous city lawyer also worshiped there, an outstanding personality, who would always be the one called upon to frame issues at important community gatherings, especially those issues of community importance. He was an expert in both systems of law – Jewish law which he had studied in the Yeshiva, and the secular juridical code of the

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170 Jewish rendition of the town of *Zeljanevičy,* north of Ruzhany.

171 Nickname for Nekhemya (rendered Nehemiah in English)

government that he had studied as a lawyer. More than once, at friendly occasions, he would express pride in the fact that he had often succeeded in court because of the training he had in the sharp-minded Talmudic arguments.

The genial lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* would visit this *Bet HaMedrash* during the entire week, who when court was not in session, would come and study a chapter of the *Mishna* after services, demonstrating in this way, his respect for his very first school, the Yeshiva, where he was the best of the students. The well-known lawyer Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky would come there daily, the son of the renown Warsaw Yeshiva Headmaster Rabbi Joseph *Harif*. The lawyer, Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky was known for his exceptional relationship with the downtrodden, and he would defend them in court for a minor honorarium, or in many cases free of charge.

The distinguished lawyer, *Yaakov Grodzinski* occupied a prominent place on the eastern side. The midpoint of the worshipers was at the place of *Reb Zalman Chafetz,* who had a sense and a skill for implementing equality among the various classes in that *Bet HaMedrash.* No small amount of distinction accrued to the Bet HaMedrash in later years with the joining of the following worshipers: the local pharmacist *Yaakov Avromsky*, the Provisor, *Nakhum Kroll,* son of *Yaakov Starinka*, the merchant *Leib Einstein, Yaakov Weinstein* the modest one, the wise and very learned man *Shabtai Ziss'l Lev*, the lumber merchant *Alter Glembotsky, Moshe Margalit*, the tobacco manufacturer *Nissan Yanovsky*, the renown *Dr. Hanokh Aaronson*, and *Reb Eliezer Salman*. The Head Gabbai of the *Bet HaMedrash* was *Reb Yitzhak Schwartz,* a prominent merchant and worker for peace. The intelligentsia of that synagogue was constantly demanding either the third or sixth *aliyah* to the Torah. And how does one provide these preferred spots in the service to everyone? And yet, with some cleverness, a way out was always found.

Page 355: The Wide Boulevard Near the Church (On the way to Zamoscheh)

The Bet HaMedrash of Reb Meir was on the *Ostroger Gasse*. This was the very generous gift of the fine Volkovysk scholar and merchant, *Reb Meir Rosenblum,* who donated his own home for use as a Bet HaMedrash. His wife, *Zelda*, was a formidable merchant, and mother of the well-known and scholarly *Reb Aaron Lifschitz*, who used to be called Reb Aharon Zelda's; also, his sister was the well-known figure in philanthropy in Volkovysk, who honestly earned a good name for herself along with her husband, *Reb Nachman Heller* – thanks to their good relationship with the needy in the city – they received suitable recognition by the entire Jewish populace.

It is appropriate here to mention the small *Bet HaMedrash in Karczyzna*, along with its *Gabbai*, the blacksmith of Karczyzna. That *Gabbai* would always keep the worshipers aware, assuring that they would donate to various institutions, and he would personally convey the assembled funds with great cheer.

The *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash* was an old, but beautiful and well proportioned building. Its *Gabbaim* were: *Reb Koppel Isser Volkovysky, Jekuthiel Novick* and *Ze'ev the son of Zvi Kaplan*, who jealously guarded the position of the *Bet HaMedrash* and its worshipers.

Tiferet Bakhurim Bet HaMedrash which in its time was constructed by the *Bakhurei Khemed*[172] – with its Gabbai – *Reb Israel Novick* – substantively graced the *Neuer Gessel*. A little further along, on the *Grodno Gasse*, was the *Grodno Bet HaMedrash*. A part of the *Grodno Gasse* residents concentrated themselves there

[172] Literally 'Sons of Love' implying a love of the faith and study of Torah.

as worshipers. The leadership of was initially accorded to the well respected and wealthy hotelier, *Reb Leib Schein*, owner of the Grodno Hotel. The eastern wall of this *Bet HaMedrash* was later graced by the intensely beloved *Dayan, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky,* who in fact served as a substitute for the town Rabbi, and who always, thanks to his great knowledge and scholarship, enhanced the life of the Jewish community in Volkovysk.
And the last – and dearest of all – *the Hassidic Shtibl*, with which I had a special relationship. The *shtibl* was located in an neighborhood close to the military barracks, and consequently I had the opportunity to visit it regularly. As the child of very observant parents, I was, in my army uniform, a constant participant in this *Bet HaMedrash.* My first priority was to be liberated from the diaspora in general, and that dark, feral military barracks in particular. In order to escape those barracks, I had to sacrifice four of the best years of my young life, but because of that, I was privileged to remain a resident of Volkovysk, a member of that fine city.

As demonstrated by the large number of schools and houses of worship, Volkovysk by the end of the nineteenth century, with its prominent scholars and exemplary beautiful Jewish way of life – occupied a respected place among the neighboring Jewish cities and towns. Entering the twentieth century, Volkovysk made a move primarily in a worldly sense, and its good name grew and was spread out to faraway places.

Volkovysk at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

Page 357: *A Corner of the Wide Boulevard*
Right: Perekhodnik's House; Center: The Newspaper Kiosk of Blond Kalman Lev

The Savings and Loan Bank

Volkovysk became enriched in the year 1906 with the establishment of a new institution: the Volkovysk Savings & Loan Bank.

The city had always felt a lack of funds that could be borrowed – especially by middle class and less prosperous laborers. The poorer classes were in the hands of usurers and weekly lenders who would soak the borrower for his entire week's wages. The Savings & Loan institution put an end to these practices. I was personally among the founders of this new financial institution. I developed an understanding with the directors of the JCA[173] and traveled in accordance with their direction to the Governor in Grodno. I brought the relevant local application to him, and received the necessary permissions. And we immediately undertook the realization of our goal. A leadership was elected that consisted of the following people: *Aaron Lifschitz, Yaakov Avromsky, Yitzhak Neiman, Yaakov Cantor, Jekuthiel Bereshkovsky, Shabtai Ziss'l Lev, Zvi Mazover, Dov Pinkhosovsky* and *myself.*

Our first difficulty arose from the fact that JCA demanded of us that we first needed to create an initial investment of capital, and only after that would they assist us – they promised – with financial resources. Based on my initiative, we floated 'shares' and set their value at 30 rubles apiece. For the less wealthy

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[173] The *Jewish Colonization Association* (JCA, in Yiddish ICA) was created in 1891 by the Baron Maurice de Hirsch. Its aim was to facilitate the mass emigration of Jews from Russia and other Eastern European countries, by settling them in agricultural colonies on lands purchased by the committee, particularly in North and South America.

participants, we arranged a payment of a monthly instalment for these shares. At the same time, we approached a number of wealthy merchants in the city, with the request that they buy shares outright to create loan capital, without demanding that the bank formally borrow from them. It was in this manner that we were able to amass the initially required capital. This undertaking proceeded well. I would like to mention here, to the extent that I can recall, with consummate praise, those people, who in their serious commitment to the new institution, helped so much in its establishment and development. Among them was the lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn*, who immediately contributed a sum of fifty rubles (all the members of the management contributed thirty rubles apiece). A number of the Volkovysk *balebatim* and merchants also bought shares. To this, was added the contribution of one hundred rubles from the *Heller brothers*. In this manner we amassed a sum of eight hundred rubles. JCA immediately forwarded its share of three hundred rubles, and the bank began to function. Thanks to the JCA, the bank was managed in a strictly cooperative fashion.

In the final years before the First World War, the loans of the bank attained the level of three hundred rubles per shareholder. This was a highly desirable outcome, being the first manifestation of a cooperative movement in Volkovysk.

The Second Large Fire in Volkovysk

In the great fire of the summer of 1908, almost the entire center of Volkovysk, including the Schulhof, was burned down. However, it didn't take long, about two years, and the city was newly rebuilt, even more beautiful and more modern. Many helped in this effort, beyond the Volkovysk Jewish community, including the Jewish communities of the surrounding cities and towns, who responded generously to Volkovysk's appeal for help. The Schulhof was entirely rebuilt. The new synagogue became the jewel of the city. Also the Talmud Torah, whose old building was almost entirely consumed by the fire, was completely rebuilt on a much stronger foundation thanks to the generous donation of the *Gabbai Joseph Berestovitsky* who donated a thousand rubles for this purpose.

The Creation of the Zamoscheh Neighborhood

In those years, Zamoscheh was built up. The Zamoscheh *Bet HaMedrash* was reconstructed and it was named '*Jeshurun*.' It is appropriate to recall the *Gabbaim* here*: Leib Ditkovsky, Ze'ev Kaplan and Joseph Leib Rubinovich*, who richly deserve a great deal of thanks for their energetic work. Many worshipers helped them, such as: *Ben-Zion Lifschitz, Abraham Milkov, Ze'ev Velvelsky, Moshe Avigdor Taran, Mordechai Tarma, Aaron Smazanovich* and others. Also, Volkovysk landsleit in America contributed to this effort.

The First World War

In the year 1914 when the First World War broke out, a sorrowful page was begun in the history of the Volkovysk Jewish community.

Volkovysk immediately fell into the occupied territories, and the conduct of the normal Jewish way of life came to a halt.

I fled by myself in 1915, on the eve of the arrival of German occupation forces in Volkovysk, and returned to my old home, Ukraine. A couple of years after the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution, I once again set out on the road with the objective of reaching Volkovysk. With a great deal of exertion I reached Minsk, and wished to set my course for Volkovysk from there. However, because of the Russo-Polish war, I needed to

detain myself in Minsk for a short while. In Minsk I then met a large number of young people from Volkovysk and the Volkovysk environs, who had been forcibly taken there by the Bolsheviks. Hungry, naked and sick, they dragged themselves around the Minsk streets. Among them at that time was *Moshe Rubinovich* – who would later be the last leader of the Volkovysk community, The teacher, *Sholom Rubinstein, Dr. Yanovsky* and his *wife* (from Grodno), *Yud'l Novogrudsky* and *Yaakov Gubar*. I helped them all as best as I could to return them to Volkovysk.

On December 26, 1920 after great difficulty, I finally returned to Volkovysk with all my companions.

Volkovysk After the War

When I arrived in Volkovysk, I found the city largely in ruins. Many merchants who were men of means had been impoverished. Poverty was unusually great in the Jewish streets. The new Polish regime was powerless to establish order in the city, and the Jewish population mostly had to fall back on its own energies. But it didn't take long before the energy and vitality of the Jews made an impact in every walk of life. Taking no note of the fact that the Polish government did not even accord the Jews equal rights as citizens, the Jewish masses managed to get back on its feet a little bit at a time, and undertook the work of reconstruction.

A new city council was established at that time, which was joined by: *Sholom Barash, Ephraim Barash, Yaakov Kantzopolsky, Alexander Makov, Joseph Leib Shipiatsky, Melekh Khantov, Yekhiel Pshenitsky, Shlomo Mandelbaum, Shmuel Kaplan, Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky,* and also *Rozhansky* (the Bialystoker Baker's son-in-law). They immediately undertook to secure the political and economic rights of the Jewish populace.

The Committed Public Servant, Engineer Ephraim Barash

Page 361: Ephraim Barash

After the First World War, when it was necessary to work exceptionally hard to revive the ruined city, and to put Jewish life back on its prior basis, the young, committed, honest engineer, *Ephraim Barash* stepped out into the arena of community action. With his great energy and skill at organization, and with his strong will, he threw himself into the rescue initiative on behalf of his brethren, the Volkovysk Jews. His popularity as a committed public servant, gave him the means to quickly focus the Jewish masses, and all the prominent activists of the city. He was elected as the Chairman of the City Council, where it fell to him to conduct a strong campaign against a variety of opponents and anti-Semitic elements – a battle from which he emerged the victor. And this battle was not an easy one for him, because his opponents were clandestine, and lacked the courage to come out into the open and expose their true identity. Thanks to the loyalty that was shown him by the Jewish masses, it fell to him, with substantial force, to contest the hostile position of the Polish regime, and also to vanquish the dark forces that wanted to undermine the existence of the Jewish settlement in the city.

Engineer Barash understood that without strong financial institutions, it will not be possible to rebuild the ruined commerce of the city, and put the workers back on their feet. Therefore, one of his first goals was to establish a financial apparatus, which would be the property of the Jewish community, and service all of its needs.

The Credit Unions[174] of Volkovysk

At the beginning of the year 1922, Engineer E. Barash visited the 'Joint' director Gitterman in Warsaw and engaged him in the serious issue of a credit union for Volkovysk. The 'Joint' required that initially the Volkovysk Jewish community first had to put together the initial capital for such an institution, and then it would contribute its share of the financing. The maximum contribution of the 'Joint' to such newly-founded banks at that time stood at between two and five hundred zlotys. But Engineer E. Barash convinced Director Gitterman through his stubborn presentation that he should, on an exception basis, support the Volkovysk bank with fifteen hundred zlotys, with the stipulation that the Jewish populace of Volkovysk would raise a matching amount of fifteen hundred zlotys for the initial capital. Ephraim Barash then returned to Volkovysk, called a special public assembly, presented the entire question to the gathering, and intoned the exceptionally great importance of founding such a financial institution. An enlarged committee of 41 people was immediately elected, among which I was the Vice-President. However, because of the great poverty in the city, there was no way the required sum of money of fifteen hundred zlotys could be raised. On his personal word, engineer Barash obtained a loan from a wealthy resident, *Hona Kavushatsky* in the amount of six hundred zlotys, which was in the amount of the shortfall in assembled funding. The remainder was raised among the members of the Committee – on the order of twenty zlotys apiece. And this is how engineer Barash came by the sum of fifteen hundred zlotys from the 'Joint' and with the initial capital injection of three thousand zlotys, the bank was founded. The energetic accountant, *M. Tarma* was designated as the Director of the bank (today in Haifa).

Shortly afterward a second such bank was founded, a *Small Business Credit Union* – also at the initiative of engineer Ephraim Barash. Before I emigrated to the Land of Israel I donated fifty zlotys to each of these previously mentioned credit unions.

The Plight of the Volkovysk Merchants

The credit unions were of great help to the Jewish populace, especially the small businesses, craftsmen and laborers. But engineer Barash did not content himself with the good, positive results from his first endeavor in this area, and he decided to approach the local Jewish merchants, who had not yet managed to recover their positions from the heavy consequences of the First World War. The Jewish bankers of Volkovysk from the pre-war years all had gone under. As a result, the Jewish merchants of Volkovysk lost their access to credit, which they had previously obtained from the local banks. The consequences of this were severe, because exchange credit was not re-established. Commerce had not yet stabilized after the great destruction wrought by the war. Warsaw, Lodz and other great commercial centers of Poland, conducted business on a cash-only basis.

The Banking Framework in Volkovysk After The First World War

The Polish regime issued an order from the first day that it came to power, to take control the foreign

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[174] It is not completely clear how to align this type of financial institution with modern American banking terminology. The Hebrew appellation, *'Gemilut Hasadim'* is used as a modifier of the German '*Kasse*' (bank). Such organizations always extended credit on a preferential basis, quite usually even on an interest-free basis. The term, 'Free Loan Society' could probably also be used with no loss of accuracy, however, the connotation associated with a Credit Union seems somewhat better.

exchange, especially American dollars, that used to be sent from relatives in America to the Jews for support. These dollars would first be exchanged by the government for [German] marks, and later – into local zlotys. In this way, the Polish government managed to accumulate a large foreign exchange position – thanks to its Jews – which served as the initial capital for the establishment of its central bank – Bank Polski. Branches of the bank were immediately opened in all of the larger Polish cities, but everywhere credit for the Jews was severely circumscribed – limited to the minimum. The chauvinist Poles hoped that in this way, they could interdict the ability of the Jews to conduct business, and thereby concentrate all of the Polish commercial activity in Christian hands. But the government forgot one thing, that beside requiring funds, this undertaking requires unusually strong energy, the right management apparatus, and most essential of all, business sense – a thing that Jews happened to have.

The Cooperative Bank of the Jewish Merchants

In 1926, engineer *Ephraim Barash* approached the task of setting up a Jewish banking framework in Volkovysk. In the course of a few weeks, he obtained the permits to open a cooperative bank for Jewish merchants. This required significant startup capital, and this was raised thanks to the dedication of the initiator Barash, who immediately proposed to the management that they lend the required sum of money to the bank for four months without interest. To set an example, he immediately provided, along with his father Sholom, the sum of one thousand dollars. It was in this manner that the required startup capital was raised, and the bank began to function in short order. This was a severe blow to the Polish bankers. The Jewish bank, form the beginning of its existence, manifested a formidable level of activity. It won the patronage of many other bank and business establishments, which trusted it with their banking accounts. The bank obtained re-discount credit facilities from the central mercantile cooperative, and later through the Polish Central Bank.

At the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of this Jewish banking institution, the statement of bank operations showed a turnover of several million zlotys, with its own independent capital base. At the suggestion of the founder and president, Engineer E. Barash, the founding members agreed to leave the annual shareholder dividends in the bank, in order to bolster the bank's reserves – an act, that along with the other earnings, placed the bank on a very sound foundation. In the years of 1935-1936, the time of the severe crisis in the Polish banking system, when many Polish and Jewish banks had to close entirely, the Volkovysk Jewish Merchants cooperative bank, thanks to its proper financial plan, that of its president, E. Barash, was one of the few banks in Poland that made it through the severe crisis and remained respectably in existence. In the management of the bank were: *Engineer E. Barash,* Director; *Shlomo Mandelblum, Ozer Kaplan, Moshe Rubinovich, Y. Medvedev, Eliyahu Shykevich, P. Kazatsky, Herschel Mazover, A. Velevelsky, Akiva Yudzhik* and *P. Kapchevsky*; On the Bank Committee were: *Milistovsky, Anshel Bliakher, Kalman Bartnovsky, Shimon Feinstein, Y. Dwortesky, Y. Inker, Hona Kavushatsky, Y. Lidsky, V. Potakovsky*; In the Revision Committee were: *Engineer M. Pshenitsky, Provisor Nakhum Kroll, and Hona Shiff.*

It is also appropriate to recollect here, the genteel lady *Fruma Kavushatsky*, who from the first day that the bank was founded, admonished the president to come to her for help in the eventuality of a financial need, should the bank require her personal support. Her commitment was sacred to her for the longest time, and she came through with substantial loans to the bank.

The bank demonstrated great cooperation and allegiance to the credit unions. And it is appropriate here to record the bank's support, which it provided to the credit unions in the form of interest-free annual loans for the purpose of assisting the poor shopkeepers each year to pay for their licenses on time, and thereby

avoiding a government fine.

The Cooperative Bank of the Owners of Fixed Assets [175]

Shortly after the founding of the first cooperative merchants bank, a second cooperative bank was founded by the society of Volkovysk property owners, at the initiative of the young banker, *Farber*. This bank also developed rapidly, and in 1938, it owned its own building which had previously been the home of Eliezer Shaliota.

Because of his substantial earnings in the banking business, in the year 1937, Engineer Ephraim Barash was elected as a member of the management of the central cooperative merchants society in Warsaw.

Engineer Ephraim Barash was counted as one of the most important public figures in Volkovysk. Apart from his outstanding activity as the chairman of the city, founder of the credit unions, and a variety of commercial banks, he was also the principal leader of the Zionist movement in Volkovysk and was very active for the benefit of all the important national Jewish institutions and funds, as also for the benefit of the Hebrew school system in Volkovysk.

Engineer E. Barash as Director of the Bialystok Community

In 1937, Engineer E. Barash was invited to take the position of Director of the famous Bialystok community. It was very difficult for him to leave the town where he was born with its very important institutions, of which he personally was the founder and which had developed so well under his sterling leadership. But he assumed the new position even though he remained a president of the cooperative merchants bank, and proposed that he take part in the Volkovysk municipal institutions, when occasions arose that he might be needed. In Bialystok also, he distinguished himself with his dedicated work to strengthen the social welfare of the working classes, and other less wealthy segments of the population. His popularity grew vigorously in the city, and when Bialystok went into the Russian sphere at the onset of the Second World War, the Russian regime took his popularity and activities in the city into consideration, and turned over the management of all the factories in the city to him. Thanks to his exceptional skills, he was able to satisfy both the workers and the industrialists. He created many places for work on behalf of the poorer Jewish populace. When the Russians pulled back from Bialystok, Engineer Barash, thanks to his accomplishments and good connections had every opportunity to leave the city and be evacuated to Russia. But he didn't do that, because he felt that the responsibility lay with him, as the leader of the Jewish community, to remain with his brethren in their time of need – and he remained in the city. When the Germans entered Bialystok, it was his fortune to be able to win their confidence initially, and it was in this way that he presented his influential work, maintaining order in the manufacturing system, and permitted no unemployment among the Jewish Bialystok population – a condition that extended the life of the Jewish community, and delayed the extermination of the Jewish population, which was a part of the Nazi program. His position was not an easy one. He had to constantly be on the alert and protect the local Jews – as well as the Jews who came into the city from the surrounding towns, who had been sent to the Bialystok ghetto – as a consequence of the severe decrees of the bloodthirsty Nazis.

An historical document, written by the well-known writer and editor *Pesach Kaplan*, was printed in the *Bialystoker Stimme* of *January 1947,* that had been found along with other archival material from the

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[175] In this context, it probably refers to those who owned real estate, probably in the form of buildings, land and manufacturing facilities.

Bialystok ghetto. The following is written in this historical document, among other things, about the leader of the Bialystok *Judenrat*:
Engineer Barash is regarded by the broad public as the dictator of the ghetto. He is in fact the only one who continuously holds the rhythm of the place, and unceasingly carries on the battle on both fronts: with the Germans, to satisfy, or reduce, or eliminate harsh decrees, and with the Jews – to satisfy deficiencies and grievances, for our own good. His principal virtue is his incredible energy, patience, stubbornness, unbelievable punctiliousness, and most essentially – clean hands. With a head held high, with pride derived from self-righteousness, he looks everyone in the eye and mercilessly demands the exact same thing from all his co-workers.

He is also characterized as a quick study, unusually straight-thinking, and logical in thought and word. His talks have impact, are short and substantive, without extra words, and with a marvelous integration and clarity. The dictatorial power is perhaps well suited to his character, but not with his political leanings. That is why, for every undertaking of responsibility, he consults with the Presidium, even up to several times a day. From time to time the governing council meets, with formal minutes taken (written by R. Gutman). And in very serious moments when a danger courses through the ghetto, and something needs to be addressed, large open meetings are called in the "*Linat Tzedek,*" where the principal event is the speech by engineer Barash which in the ghetto was always interpreted and repeated as if they were the words from *Urim and Thummim*.[176]

Subsequently, he was taken away, along with the other Jews, on one of the Bialystok transports to Maidanek and he met his end there. His two sons died with him. His wife, *Dr. Jocheved Barash* was later killed at Auschwitz. One son of his, ho at that time was already in the Land of Israel, and later served in the Jewish Brigade, upon learning about the fate of his family, took sick and died at the age of 28 years.

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[176] The biblical breastplate of the High Priest, from which oracular powers were believed to emanate, also requiring interpretation.

The Volkovysk Orphanage

Page 373: *Noah & Baylah Lev*

Page 375: *The Orphanage Building*

The plight of the Jewish orphans in Volkovysk was very sad for a long time. The orphans posed a demanding problem especially after the First World War, when their numbers rose significantly because of the War, and the city lacked any institution which could look after these unfortunate souls. These solitary orphans mostly wandered the streets – begging for handouts to sustain their scrawny bodies – without anyone to look after raising them and giving them oversight, and without a roof over their heads. Little by little, the Jewish populace began to understand the need and exigency to establish a special institution that would take an interest in the ever-increasing number of Jewish orphans. It was indeed decided to establish an *Orphans Welfare Committee* that would assume responsibility for the upbringing and care of abandoned orphans.

When I returned to Volkovysk with my family in *December 1920*, I was immediately struck by the large number of orphans and impoverished widows – victims of the war – and the idea of establishing an orphanage in Volkovysk was born in my mind at that time. The image of the bloodbaths in Russia were still fresh in my mind, where so many young lives were taken in the bestial pogroms of the Ukraine, and despite the fact that my economic circumstances were then bad, I decided to pursue the goal of establishing a *Jewish Orphanage in Volkovysk*, that will look after the solitary orphans.

When I communicated my decision to the Rabbi of Volkovysk, *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov*, he expressed his satisfaction with this objective that I had undertaken, and he wished me well in my efforts. I immediately made contact with a number of the prominent *balebatim* of the city, who promised to provide me with the required [financial] support. *Dr. Rosa Einhorn,* whom I knew as a gymnasium student in Grodno, gave me a great deal of help at the beginning. She had a good heart, and notwithstanding the fact that she came from a family with means, she was always prepared to do whatever she could to support the Jewish masses, for whom no task was too difficult for her to undertake. I was also assisted by *Mrs. Chana Sarah Yudzhik*, who had an inborn sense for community service; *Pearl Lev* (daughter of the Bialystoker Baker), who was distinguished for her good character, and the great scholar, *Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz.*

We then established a group that also had the following members: *Anshel Bliakher, Boruch Yunovich, Shabtai Gordon, Eliezer Kapelyushnik, Joseph Leib Shipiatsky, Mordechai Giller*, as well as the head of Huaver's kitchen – *Eliyahu Schlossberg*.

On *April 6, 1921* we had the first general meeting, in which the entire question of the welfare of orphans was examined from all sides. I declared for the assembly the urgent need to establish an orphanage for these homeless children of our city. A leadership was elected that included: *Eliyahu Schlossberg*, President; *Eliyahu Shykevich*, Vice-President; *Dr. Rosa Einhorn,* Treasurer; *Anshel Bliakher*, Recording Secretary; *Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz, Eliezer Kapelyushnik, Chaya Sarah Yudzhik*[177]*, Pearl Lev, Boruch Yunovich, Mordechai Giller* – members of the leadership.

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177 Elsewhere also named Chana Sarah Yudzhik. One or the other is a misprint.

As it happened, delegates from the Volkovysk *Landsmanschaft* in America happened to be visiting Volkovysk at this time: *Abraham Berg, Avigdor Perlmutter, Chanan Nakhumovsky* and *Berel Domovsky*. They took an interest in the issue of the welfare of the orphans, and allocated a sum of four thousand marks, and in this way assured us that they would take up this issue in earnest with the Volkovysk *landsmanschaft* in America. This sum of money was barely enough to renovate the *Guest House* that had been wrecked during the war, that consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. We immediately admitted 25 destitute orphans. It is difficult to communicate what we first went through upon opening this orphanage, so urgently needed at this time. The children were brought in singly, dressed in rags, and in horrifying sanitary condition. I immediately traveled to Bialystok, where I obtained a bit of goods, and light clothing from the "Joint," for the children, and a certain amount of foodstuffs. A little at a time, we also obtained foodstuffs from Huaver's kitchen. But things began to get better a little at a time, and we drew greater energy from this progress in order to enlarge on our work.

We sent our first appeal to the American Jews to accelerate the arrival of their help as much as possible. We met for any number of meetings at Dr. Rosa Einhorn's house, where we undertook the issue of whether we should buy a location where a planned orphanage could be constructed, even before we had any funds to underwrite such a project. We relied on our strong will, and the unshakeable belief, that we would find the necessary people who would come to our assistance. After a great deal of searching, we found a place in the city, on which there stood a destroyed, burned out building that had belonged to *Noah Lev* (son-in-law of Yaakov Ahareh), and his wife, *Bayl'keh,* who lived in America at that time. We decided to write to Noah Lev in America, and approach him with the proposition to donate this piece of unused property to us, on which we would build the first orphanage in Volkovysk. Initially, we were pessimistic about what results we would get from our proposal, because we know the owner of the property was not a man of means, but a hard-working man. But his positive response to our proposal overwhelmed us all. In addition, Noah Lev underscored his great satisfaction in his reply to us, that he had been accorded the privilege of providing this parcel and the burned out house, for such an important purpose as constructing an orphanage in the very home town, where he himself grew up as an orphan. As a supplement to his great gift, he also sent along a substantial sum of money.

Then it became clear for everyone that our dream would rapidly become a reality. *Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz* the serious and dedicated committee member, who received this answer from America, immediately came to tell us the good news, and heartily congratulated me for the good results of my effort.

In September 1921, with the consent of Rabbi Borukhov, the leadership of the Orphanage Committee decided to lay the cornerstone of the new building on the first day of *Selikhot.* We prepared the entire plan of the house, along with the building material, which we salvaged from the old burned down structure that stood on the parcel. A warm invitation was disseminated through all the Volkovysk synagogues to the entire Jewish population on the eve of *Selikhot,* asking people to partake in the mitzvah, by attending the laying of the cornerstone of the orphanage.

Quite early in the morning of the first day of *Selikhot* there were already set out well-provisioned tables on the site of the future orphanage, ready to receive the expected guests. The first places were occupied by the important guests in the persons of the Rabbi, *Abba Yaakov Borukhov* and the Dayan, *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*, and surrounding them sat the members of the committee. The Treasurer, *Dr. Rosa Einhorn* was there as well, and the secretary with the guest book, awaiting a large turnout. One could begin to discern a certain level of activity start to manifest itself on the usually quiet *Kholodoisker Gasse*. The Volkovysk Jews began to stream in – fathers, mothers and children – to offer their congratulations to the energetic

committee members on the future orphanage, and to wish them continued success. These were the Jews who were the first to respond so warmly to the call for assistance to "The Orphan and the Widow" with the unanimous answer, "We will do, and we will listen!"[178] The first to address the crowd was *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov,* and after him came the other speakers. The crowd absorbed every word intently, because everyone knew how to appreciate the importance of this planned institution for the Volkovysk community. Then the important and venerable community elder, *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky* stepped forward, with his wife, *Fradl*, and they approached the head table. He picked up the goblet, made the appropriate blessing, and added *SheHekheyanu* in honor of the new institution, and then in a loud voice, declared: "Mazel Tov, Jews! Help to support this cause. This is our great responsibility and honor!" He immediately tendered his own contribution, and in this way enhanced the auspicious nature of the occasion. The Jews began to crowd the table in order to give their contributions – each according to his own means. But everyone gave his contribution gladly, because they considered it a privilege and an honor to do so. In addition, it was a great mitzvah for the coming New Year. And this is the way it continued for the entire day. The leadership sat at the table, greeting the people with the greeting of "Happy New Year!"

It took a full year of very strenuous work before we reached the point of celebrating the dedication of the newly constructed building for the newly established institution of the orphanage, on the donated parcel provided by *Noah & Bayl'keh Lev*. The three-story new structure dominated the entire street. Also, the interior decoration was very good, comprised almost entirely of personal donations: twenty beds of nickel were donated by the philanthropist *Horaczy Heller*; thirty additional nickel beds were purchased with the funds sent by the *Volkovysk landsleit* in America; the beautiful and clean white goods came from the collected contributions of the *Volkovysk women*; the entire wardrobe for the children, costing one thousand dollars, was a donation of the American merchant and former Volkovysk orphan, *Matityahu Rutchik;* the isolation room and the Holy Ark were donations of *Saul Barash* (of America), given in the name of his parents, *Jekuthiel & Mikhlah Bereshkovsky;* the new equipment for the kitchen – a donation of the *Chicago Ladies Society* under the leadership of *Sarah Perliss* (Sarah the Fishmonger); the bedding and bed coverings – a donation of the *New York Volkovysk Ladies Society*; the sewing machine – donated by me; the plumbing – a donation of *Shmuel Malakhovitsky*; the ten sets of knives, spoons, forks and teaspoons – a gift of the *Volkovysk Youth*. The big hall with electric lighting, and modern decoration – everything, everything bore witness to the great and unrelenting effort and strain undertaken by the Volkovysk Jews on behalf of the institution.

Even more tangible testimony were the young orphan children themselves, who were taken in and raised there. For hundreds of abandoned street urchins, who were on the road to a certain death, or in the best case, to become a dark element in the underworld, the institution became their secure home, and the management committee – devoted step-parents substituting for their own parents who were taken from them so early. The devoted and committed personnel of the institution demonstrated, at all times, a great understanding of the responsibility to which they had been summoned, and carried out their duties with great dedication. The service of the dedicated head of the orphanage, *Shabtai Gordon*, and the Governess *Sarah Bibergalik* (today in *Rishon LeZion*, Israel) were especially substantial.

If our hearts were fearful, at the time that we laid the cornerstone of this institution, that we might not successfully carry out the construction of this three-story orphanage, then we had a completely different attitude at the time the building was dedicated. We came to that *dedication* with a track record of successful accomplishments. And if on that day, the first day of *Selikhot,* when we went to lay the cornerstone of the

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[178] Literally the reply of the Israelites to Moses when challenged to accept the Law.

institution, the abandoned orphans were still scattered about, suffering hunger and cold, by the time of the dedication of the building, they came well-dressed, with happy and healthy faces. They lined themselves up on the stairs in front of the entrance to the orphanage, and welcomed the guests, singing the psalm, "Let Us Sing a Song of Dedication[179]," with all their might.

The leaders of the surrounding cities and towns came to celebrate the festive occasion of the dedication of the building. Among these guests were members of the Bialystok Central Committee for Orphan Welfare, leaders of the Warsaw-based central "*Tzentas*," many leaders of a variety of orphan committees from the entire area, and also the leaders of all the local community institutions. The ceremony left a deep impression.

The management also decided to arrange a banquet for all the government leaders of the local military detachment, and the leaders of communal institutions, the purpose of which was to underscore to these military leaders, and the leaders of the communal institutions that this new institution had a right to demand their support, just like any other existing institution of similar character. *Dr. Rosa Einhorn* took on the responsibility of inviting many of her influential patients, and to explain the goals of the newly founded institution to them. The results of this effort were very good, and the banquet was very successful.

Initially, the Jews felt a need to set a good example, and they came forward with fine contributions, and at this point, the Christians donated generously to the institution. Also, the government leaders came forward with much praise for our accomplishment, and as a result, the orphanage was placed on the list of those institutions that received periodic support from the municipal government.

Cooperation with the *"Joint"*

Page 377: *Leadership and Children of the Orphanage in the Year 1920*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Dr. P. Bebchuk, Mordechai Giller, Batya Kovensky, Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Chana Kaganovich, Eliyahu Schlossberg, Eliyahu Shykevich, Chana Khmelnitsky, Mrs. Lev (Daughter of the Furniture Turner), Mrs. Mushatsky, Mordetsky's Daughter, Mrs. Yefim Renzon.

Second Row: *Aaron Smazanovich, Geller (The Garment Seamer), Unknown, Eliezer Kalir, Shabtai Gordon, the last four in the row are unknown.*

Page 379: *Persons Active on Behalf of the Orphanage*
In the management, seated right to left: Shabtai Gordon, Chana Kaganovich and Eliyahu Shykevich

Even before we approached the task of building the institution, the *"Joint"* already had provided us with certain subsidies. These subsidies, however, were very small, and this was because the *"Joint"* did not believe our plans would be realized, and that it would not be possible for us to put together such a building and its required appointments in such a short time. We therefore had to search for other sources and means. And as we have previously written, this happened to turn out well for us. The work was carried out with quite a rapid tempo, wherever we could see things through by ourselves, and in a short time, we were able to confront the leadership of the *"Joint"* with a substantive reality. And it was in this way, two months before the building was completed, that I made a presentation to a meeting of the Head Committee in Bialystok, and

[179] Psalms 30.

proposed to the Chairman, *Lawyer Guminer,* in the name of our Volkovysk-based management, that they visit Volkovysk at our invitation to inspect this self-constructed orphanage. He thought that it concerned a funding subsidy to build the institution. He was however taken aback, when he visited Volkovysk, seeing that the building was entirely complete. And before I even had the chance to take up the issue of subsidies from the *"Joint"*, he came out with the question: "And what do you think should be the Head Committee's share in this successful initiative?"

From year to year our monthly and annual income was always larger. We took over first place among all of the committees a little bit at a time. All our proposals received the most careful attention, and we served as a role model for many other institutions. After a while, we had become so independent, that the *"Joint"* no longer felt it was necessary for them to take a part of our budget. And in a communication full of praise for our accomplishments, they discontinued their part of the subsidies for our institutions, claiming that we were sufficiently endowed to carry on this community work on an independent basis.

With the growth of institutional activity, which continued to expand, monthly expenses understandably also rose. The management therefore needed to find other sources of income. It was decided to expand the management group and to draw in additional resources. The following members were elected to the management: *Eliyahu Shykevich*, President; *Mordechai Giller*, Vice-President; *Eliyahu Eliyovich*, Treasurer; *Shimon Feinstein*, Recording Secretary; members; *Lipman Itzkowitz, Moshe Zelitsky, Aaron Lifschitz, Sholom Lev, Naphtali Lisitsky, Shmuel Malakhovitsky, Dr. Jocheved Barash, Dr. T. Berman, Dr. M. Shlackman, Chana Khmelnitsky, Sarah Lev, Chana Heller, Chaya Sarah Yudzhik, Leah Lifschitz, Rachel Lev, Manya Meshengisser, Sh. Sedletsky, Dr. Press, Reizl Farber, Chana Kaganovich, Batya Kovensky, Bayl'keh Kaplan, M. Kaplan, Paulia Shkolnik, V. Shereshevsky, R. Renzon, Chana Mushatsky, Z. Gershuni*, and *Tz. Leibowitz.*

The oversight committee was joined by: *Dr. Rosa Einhorn, Mikhal Zohn-Mazya* and *Eliezer Kapelyushnik*. In place of the deceased *Dr. H. Aaron son, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky* was appointed as the doctor of the institution.

Following the example of the Ladies Society organizations of the Volkovysk Societies in New York and Chicago – whose good works were already well-known throughout Volkovysk for their fine monetary contributions, especially for the abandoned orphans – at the initiative of *Rebbetzin Kossowsky*, a *Society of Volkovysk Jewish Ladies* was established in Volkovysk as well, which set coming to the assistance of the orphanage as its first priority. The membership contribution of the Ladies in the first months came to between 200 and 300 zlotys a month, which was a very significant element of support for the orphanage. In time, the Ladies organized themselves into an independent institution, which concerned itself with a full spectrum of charitable initiatives. Despite the onset of several years of difficult crisis in Poland, and not counting the local tribulations, the management of the orphanage elicited considerable understanding on behalf of its objectives, and the institution made it through these difficult years unscathed, insulating the children in the institution and in private orphanages.

The First Objectives of the Orphanage

Page 383: *The Leadership of the Orphanage in the Year 1924*

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom:

Aaron Smazanovich, Reizl Farber, Chana Kaganovich, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Eliyahu Schlossberg (President), Lipman Itzkowitz, Eliyahu Shykevich (Vice-President), Levin (from the Kholodoisker Gasse).

Second Row, Standing: *Sh. Kapushchevsky, Mrs. Sh. Levin (Instructor for Ladies Tailoring), Sholom Lev, Eliyahu Eliyovich (Treasurer), Mordechai Giller, Miss H. Friedman (Governess), Eliezer Kalir.*

At the beginning, when we had just admitted the first 25 children, the first goal of the leadership was fix up the two rooms and the kitchen of the *temporary orphanage*, prepare good meals for the orphans, by cleaning the temporary quarters, install the requisite measures of sanitation, and to provide the children with decent clothing as a replacement for what they wore while wandering the streets.

The sum of a thousand marks, that was turned over by Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, who had received it from the American delegates for the care of the orphans, was far and away too small to cover all the necessary expenses. It barely covered the renovation of the small building. We therefore had to obtain loans, against which the management members gave their own personal guarantees, eliciting thereby their intense will to complete their work under all circumstances.

In order not to have to rely on the good will of others inordinately, we initially made do with putting up simple bunk beds made out of wooden boards, with a sack of straw underneath, one for each child. We did this, because we didn't want to impose on the populace with excessive demands. By doing this, we wanted to acquire additional supporters for our undertaking. The first who helped us were: the elderly ladies, *Sukhowalsky & Berg* from Zamoscheh; the elderly couple, *Hillel Lev-Koshchilker*; *Mikhlah Einhorn*; and *Fradl Shiff*. They donated small pillows and sheets for the children. We searched for bedding at the old age home from the elderly that had passed away. The president, *Meir Shiff* gave us several pillows, and after we carried out the appropriate disinfection of all the acquired goods, we attained the necessary number to give a pillow to each of the children. The ladies began immediately to respond with donations of towels and sheets. This substantially lightened our burden in caring for the orphaned children for the entire year before the new building was completed. There, all the appointments were already of a modern standard: beds made of nickel, fine bed linens with mattresses and other things.

In the *temporary orphanage*, the principal meals of the children were dairy. In hindsight, the dairy products from Huaver's kitchen were very useful to us. Because of supply shortages and a lack of ready cash, we were unable to purchase meat. However, the situation changes almost immediately. A number of the butchers took responsibility for supplying the institution on a daily basis with meat products. It was *Yehudit Yunovich*, the mother of Herschel Yunovich the butcher, who exerted herself especially in this matter. Thanks to them, the first Sabbath at the orphanage was inaugurated with a delicious *cholent* and a fat *kugel*, that the children ate for the first time in their lives since they were orphaned. The food situation got better with each ensuing week, thanks to efforts of the management embers, and from the Jews of Volkovysk in general. Shortly afterwards, a daily "menu" was worked out, which became a permanent feature, because the institution always had a reserve of foodstuffs that could last about three months. A Mothers Committee was also established which looked after all the small details that would give the institution a homey atmosphere.

Do understand, that no Jewish festival went by that was not celebrated at the orphanage. I took it upon myself personally as a sacred duty to arrange for the children at the institution every year at the time of the appropriate festivals, all the traditional Jewish foods, such as *latkes* on Hanukkah, dairy *blintzes* on Shavuot, and sugared *hamantashen* on Purim. All the workers and activists who supported the institution were invited to these celebrations, and these celebrations were conducted with great joy, including singing and dancing.

The First Fund-Raiser of the Orphanage

As quickly as an orderly routine was more or less established in the orphanage, the leadership decided to arrange a fund raiser in order to bring in a specific amount of money for the institution. We invited the Volkovysk community to come to the institution, to acquaint themselves with the local care of the orphan, with everything that the institution had been able to give to the orphan in the short time it had existed, and what yet remained to be achieved in this respect, in order to emphasize the importance of the fund raising goal. It is superfluous to add, that everyone who visited the institution and saw the good condition and appearance of the orphans, who had not long before been out wandering the streets, felt a very deep sense of gratitude to the committed workers, and donated a very fine sum to the institution.

The Sanitary and Medical Condition

After providing shelter and clothing, it was extremely important to assure the children have suitable sanitary and medical oversight. This demanded a permanent doctor for the institution and the required direction from a higher oversight authority, as for example, the "Joint." But this was before we had engaged together with the "Joint." We put a system in place, where we invited a different doctor each week, to examine the children in the institution. In the event of illness, the child was sent to the doctor under our aegis. It is appropriate to mention the very fine relationship of the doctors to the orphans. It was in this manner that, for example, when *Dr. H. Arianson* and *Dr. Rosa Einhorn*, – seeing one of the children in their waiting room – would let their other patients wait, and take care of the orphans first. A short time afterwards, *Dr. F. Bebchuk* came to Volkovysk, who assumed to the responsibility of examining the children on a weekly basis free of charge. When he was appointed to a permanent position in the community organizations, *Dr. H. Arianson* took over for him at the orphanage, who gave the Jewish orphans – without obligation – a great deal of his energy and paternal affection, cementing a friendship between himself and these orphans to the last day of his life. *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky* took over for him when he passed away, and also assumed the presidency of the institution after I left for the Land of Israel. He discharged the obligation of his post with great distinction.

The School System in the Orphanage

Page 386: *A Class in the Orphanage*
(In the picture is Miss Friedman, a Teacher)

Page 387: *The Leadership and Children of the Orphanage in the Year 1929*

Right to Left, from the Leadership, First Row, Seated:
Unknown, Reizl Farber, Chana Kaganovich, Mrs. Markus, Miss Alpert (from New York), Eliyahu Schlossberg, Mrs. Alpert (from New York), Chaya Sarah Yudzhik, Bayl'keh Kaplan, Paulia Shkolnik, Mrs. Sedletsky.

Second Row, Standing: *Unknown, Panter, Shepsel Gordon, Mrs. Zelitsky, Moshe Zelitsky, Aaron Smazanovich, Eliyahu Shykevich, Issachar Lidsky, Sholom Lev, Eliyahu Eliyovich, Mordechai Giller, Feinstein, Shchupak (The Tailor).*

The orphan, who had previously roamed the streets, was completely transformed in a very short time in our institution. The child immediately had a taste of and adult showing loving care on its behalf. He observed how his young body was freed from dirt, and parasites that had fed on his blood. He was no longer inhibited

and depressed, and learned how to express his concerns without tears, in a more cheerful childlike way, and often with a light and uninhibited humor. These were the good results of the dedicated care by the orphanage. The child no longer was ashamed of his appearance, clothing, coat and shoes, when he went out into the street, or when he went to school. He was on a par with all the other children – his friends. He no longer stood in any old place in the school, perhaps near a door, or in a corner, hungry, at the time when the other students with happy faces would be eating their meals that they had brought from home. He too had his lunch bag, that he had been given to take along by the orphanage.

The children of the orphanage went to the *Tarbut Schools* as well as the *Hebrew Gymnasium*, where they prepared themselves to be collaborators in the building of the *Yishuv* in the Land of Israel. We must here remember, to good purposes, the leadership of the Volkovysk schools, who discharged the children of the orphanage from paying any tuition.

Training in Craftsmanship at the Orphanage

Training in a craft occupied a special place in the institution. Each child, up to the age of fourteen, received an elementary education. A number completed the Tarbut School, and extended their education in the Hertzeliya Gymnasium, and others occupied themselves with developing skills for a specific trade. The leadership set itself the goal, that between the ages of fourteen to eighteen, each child would be trained in a specific trade, so he would become sufficiently skilled to be able to become independent, and take care of his own existence after leaving the institution. In a specific measure, we would already begin acquainting a child as early as the age of twelve, with a craft in which he seemed to show an interest, so that by the age of fourteen, he generally had a good idea for which trade he wished to be trained. Towards this objective, we established a sewing factory for ladies garments and underwear in the institution, under the supervision of the teacher, *Carmela Yushinska Slavin* (today in Haifa). Children from the institution of age fourteen were under her tutelage, as well as children of the same age from homes that gave private care, and did not cost the orphanage anything. The twelve year old children, after their days' study in the Tarbut schools, also had an opportunity to become more closely acquainted with this craft at our factory, during specific afternoon hours. Do understand that this was only a limited part of training in craftsmanship in the full sense of the word. This didn't touch on other areas, such as ladies coats, carpentry, mens' tailoring, lock smithing, photography, art and other areas of study, which at that time we were as yet unable to make available to our children.

Later on, we implemented a system where we would send the child to a good craftsman, whom we paid a specific sum of money, for example fifty dollars, and who assumed responsibility to teach the child his craft during the course of six months, after which the child would receive some wages. You can imagine that the craftsman took this obligation seriously, because he didn't want to have to pay a wage for nothing. After one year, the young person would become eligible for a permanent wage. For this reason, the members of the leadership always would maintain regular oversight of the craftsmen with whom they had contracts, and visited them quite frequently. During the training period, the child would take his meals and sleep at the orphanage, and would also receive clothing from there.

It is not for naught that the children of the orphanage entered the ranks of the skilled laborers as knowledgeable and respected craftsmen, in whom the institution took great pride. The great initiatives of the president of the Trades Committee, *Mrs. Chana Kaganovich*, and the vice president, *Aaron Smazanovich* (the shoemaker), must be recalled here, under whose guidance the craft training of the children was placed on a higher level.

The Religious Upbringing in the Orphanage

The children from our institution grew up in to good people with respect to God and their fellow man. There were among the orphans, children from strictly religious homes, and the leadership always took account of this. One of our children first received an education at the Talmud Torah, and afterwards, thanks to the efforts of our own Yeshiva Headmaster, Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel, was sent to Rabbi Yogel at the Slonim Yeshiva (born in Piesk and today in Jerusalem). The young man later received ordination as a ritual slaughterer. Also, a second orphan studied at the Yeshiva in Baranovich. *Reb Zvi Leibovich* (today in Rishon LeZion), took part in the religious committee of the institution.

Private Care for Orphans

There were instances when the leadership of the orphanage had to carry out a very difficult task: separating children from the same family who had the same parents. A child that was older than eight years could not be admitted to the institution. We would send our children to school at the age of five and six years of age, and therefore, the older children would have posed a problem in aligning themselves in the ranks of the orphanage activities. Nevertheless, we also took care of the older orphaned children. With help from the "Joint," with whom we were already cooperating at that time for a period of ten years, we arranged *internship facilities* in the city. We arranged *evening courses* there where the children would receive the necessary education, as well as meals. This demanded an even larger expenditure than maintaining the child in the institution. Nevertheless, even after the "Joint" discontinued its financial support to us, we took over the entire oversight of this home-based care of the poor orphans, giving them the appropriate education until such time that they could stand on their own two feet. And the results in this respect were very good.

The Children After Leaving the Orphanage

Page 391: *A [Passover] Seder in the Orphanage in 1930*

In the Center Standing, Left to Right: Shabtai Gordon, Eliyahu Shykevich, Mordechai Giller, Sholom Lev – Eliyahu Schlossberg Hosts the Seder

No child ever left the institution to return to the circumstances from which he or she came before entering the orphanage. The institution undertook the following important measures in order to secure the child's future:

1. Beginning at the age of twelve, the institution began to familiarize the child with a craft that the child considered appropriate to himself. And despite the fact that the work that the child produced during the first couple of years was not meaningful, the child would be subsidized by the Trades Committee in terms of a wage amounting to approximately six to ten zlotys a week, and didn't take note of whether the child did the work for the institution or for someone privately – when the child got older – the leadership would take the small wage and put it towards the child's account in a book at the bank. In this manner, after the passage of a number of years, from the age of twelve to eighteen, a significant sum of money would accumulate for the child's benefit.

2. The institution supported the child until the age of eighteen with all his needs, and in doing so, gave him the means to save his wages.

3. From age eighteen to twenty, if the orphan had not yet married, and needed a home, the institution would invite him for all holiday occasions as an extra guest, just as if he were going to his own parents.

4. Upon leaving the institution, the orphan received three complete sets of clothing, underwear and shoes, sheets and towels.

5. A farewell evening was organized for each child on the occasion of their departure. The entire leadership would take part in the festivities, and everyone would bring along gifts of necessities for the child. If it was necessary to furnish his room with furniture, the leadership would donate a specific sum of money for this purpose. The leadership normally paid one full year's rent in this instance. The relationship to the children who left the institution did not end even later. In this fashion, the leadership was always present at every celebration, such as weddings and birthdays. The orphan's joy was also the joy of the leadership. For children who had friends and relatives who wanted to take them to other countries where they lived, the orphanage would provide all the required documentation and funds for the trip expenses to their new homes.

Day Care for Indigent Children

Page 395: The Children of the Orphanage and the Leadership in the Year 1930

Right to Left, First Row Sitting: Aaron Smazanovich, Chana Kaganovich, Chaya Sarah Yudzhik, Eliyahu Schlossberg, Dr. Shlackman's wife, Mrs. Jesierski, Reizl Farber, Mordechai Moorstein.

Second Row: Khien'keh's friend, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Shepsel Gordon, Wife of Mikhl Zohn-Mazya, Mrs. Wilk.

A child of poor parents, even though not an orphan, had a full right to expect a specific measure of help for itself from the community. The poor home of such a child did not satisfy any of such a child's needs. His nourishment was meager, lacking the vitamins needed by an otherwise weakened physique. The sanitary conditions in his home were far from satisfactory, and not suited to prevent disease. His clothing consisted by and large of hand-me-downs from older children, which did not fit his smaller body. He was deprived of the happiness enjoyed by other children when they received a gift of new clothing. He didn't have the pleasure of playing in the kindergarten with other children of his age, he didn't have the privilege of coming out into the street in the company of his parents – who were perpetually driven and working. He, therefore, was compelled to spend most of his time without the nurturing effects of parental affection, along with the unsupervised and under-developed children of the street – in a neglected atmosphere of filth and cold. And even in the evening, when parents would return home, exhausted, hungry and angry with their harsh fate, he would get no attention from them – these poor, exhausted people wanted to rest, catch a nap. The child would receive a severe beating even for the slightest breach of discipline.

The Polish economic crisis of 1934-36 increased the number of such indigent children, and along with that the number of such children that would wander aimlessly about the streets of the city.

In 1937, a short time before I went to the Land of Israel, I was approached by the respected and loyal head of the orphanage, *Shabtai Gordon,* and presented me with a plan to establish a *home for indigent children*. This was to be my final good deed for Volkovysk before taking my leave of the city. I accepted this proposal with great happiness, and we decided to take the first step even before we would present the plan to a meeting of the leadership of the orphanage. We wanted to position the leadership with an already existing fact. We

therefore aligned ourselves with the local sawmill operators, *Abraham Shapiro*, and *Meir Seletsky* and the owners of lumber businesses, *Margalit, Movshovsky* and *Smazanovich*. We put forth our decision to come to the aid of the poor children of Volkovysk, and to erect a building for them. These people willingly volunteered to donate the lumber free of charge. Also, the Jewish carpenters volunteered to make the required benches, chairs and tables, and to construct the wooden building, adjacent to the orphanage. Only then, did we present the plan to the leadership of the institution, which gladly approved it. It was in this way, that a day care facility for poor children was opened at the side of the orphanage.

The beloved head of the institution, *Shabtai Gordon*, carried out the decision of the leadership forthwith. The poor children from the ages of four to six were immediately registered. Understand, that this did not necessarily please all of the parents, who also wanted to send their children who were older than six years. However, we were not then in a position to take them. However, we did work with the "TOZ" organization and the heads of the schools to have them assume oversight for these children who were over six years of age. We registered about *sixty* children. The first thing we had to do was look after their clothing, because they were almost all dressed in rags. We made purchases of the necessary quantity of merchandise, in the manufacturing establishments where the owners knew us well, and who gave us good prices, and the clothing initiative was completed in three days time. We made a special appeal to the Jewish populace, and the response was a glistening one. All our costs were covered by voluntary contributions.

We installed a special governess, who was dedicated full time, for the entire day with the small children. The parents would bring the children before eight o'clock in the morning, on their way to work, and came to pick them up at seven in the evening, on their way home. During the day, the children would receive three full meals a day and tea and cookies twice a day. They had appropriate toys and reading books, which they played with, sitting in painted little chairs beside little tables. Many of the toys, coloring and pens were donated by Jewish youth.

During the first days, the children received their meals from the orphanage. However, since the place stood as an accomplished fact, the leadership invited the steering committee to share a glass of tea in honor of the inauguration of the children's day care center. At the reception, the membership of the committee, led by *Mr. Domeratsky*, upon seeing the wonderful work, the existing institution for the poor children – and do understand, they immediately voted on a permanent monthly subsidy, which practically covered our entire expenses. The journalists also responded warmly to the establishment of the new institution, and much good was written in the local Jewish newspaper, *Volkovysker Leben* about the day care center. Many residents of Volkovysk began to visit the new institution, and understand, always with a donation prepared already and a package in hand.

The institution benefitted a great deal from the good and loyal leadership of *Shabtai Gordon*, and from the serious oversight given by the governess, and it developed quite rapidly. It was in this fashion that the poorer children received a fine upbringing and good preparation of elementary school, instead of being left to wander in the streets.

Sources of Support for the Orphanage

It is difficult to enumerate all the sources of the variety of support, incomes and gifts that were sent to the orphanage by organizations, societies, and individual friends of the solitary child. Here, I can only recollect the names of a few donors, whose contributions were substantial in this respect: *Matityahu Rutchik, Bayl'keh & Noah Lev, Saul Barash, the Volkovysk Synagogue* in New York, the *Volkovysk Society* in New York, the *Volkovysk Ladies Society* of Chicago, whose president was Sarah Perliss (Sarah the Fishmonger), and the

dedicated secretary *Liebeh Bartnovsky*, and also a large number of individuals from America, who donated generously on behalf of the institution, but whose names I cannot recollect. We went through a variety of times in the institution, also periods when circumstances were literally catastrophic in financial terms, but at not time did it have an impact on the solitary child. In those bad times of financial crisis, we always had a fine and generous response from the Volkovysk Jewish community, that would contribute in a broad-hearted manner. It was because of this, that we, the leadership, could always proudly carry our emblem "For the Orphan and Widow," which was never disgraced in our city.

The Weddings of Orphan Children

In order to properly round out the chapter about the orphanage, it is necessary to add a few words concerning the way the orphan children were married off. In this eventuality, the members of the leadership would look after the child as if they were the real parents. The couple was equipped with every possible item they might need. The Volkovysk Jews always had an open heart when it came to the needs of the orphans, but they were especially forthcoming in the instance of a wedding for an orphan, and helped to set the solitary ones up on a permanent basis.

The marriage ceremony under the *Huppah* mostly took place in the institution itself, with the participation of all the members of the leadership as the surrogate parents at the *Huppah*, taking the place of the prematurely deceased real parents. For me, as president of the institution, as also was the case of the other members of the leadership, the opportunity to participate in this joyous occasion was a greater happiness even than for our own family, because it was then that we would see the ripened fruit of our multi-year unrelenting work on behalf of that child.

I remember how the very first wedding ceremony was carried out to this day. At the request of one of the members of the leadership, *Zvi Leibowitz* (today in *Rishon LeZion*) it was arranged in his home. *Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky* (today in Johannesburg) was at that time the one who performed the wedding ceremony. The wedding couple was decked out in the best finery. In connection with the clothing and related appurtenances, I personally, together with *Reizl Farber,* visited a number of the members of the leadership, who responded to our appeal with great generosity. When I came into the home of *the wife of Dr. Press* in connection with this matter, she opened up her clothes closet, and directed me to take anything that I wanted. I pointed at an item of clothing with a trembling finger, which was a brand new overcoat, which she just had made for herself a short while ago. She immediately took the garment out of the closet and gave it to me along with a number of other items. *Velvel Kaplan* of the *Kholodoisker Gasse* (today in Tel-Aviv) made a donation in a similar fashion, giving a number of good dresses from his daughters. *Dr. Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitska* and her husband, *Engineer Pshenitsky* who donated the required dishes for the new home of the bride and groom; *Alexander Makov* who gave sheets from his business; *Leizer Zamoschansky*, who provided two bedspreads; *Yaakov Goldberg,* who donated tablecloths. Also, many other of the Volkovysk Jews brought their donations with great generosity.

The weddings themselves often evolved into city-wide celebrations, because apart from the relatives, and the members of the leadership, and friends, other Jewish residents of Volkovysk would come to partake in the festive occasion. There, they saw a sumptuous affair, that didn't come into being as a result of walking from door to door with an alms box, thanks to the responsibility assumed by the surrogates of the deceased parents, whose final wish was brought to fruition in this manner. We, the members of the leadership were the sponsors, and in these months, we would re-live the same joy as if we were escorting our own children down the aisle to the Huppah.

The American *Landsleit*

The sons & daughters of Volkovysk in America never forgot the city of their birth. They always had a warm and brotherly relationship to their relatives and *landsleit* in Volkovysk, and were always prepared to offer help to the Volkovysk community institutions. It is no wonder therefore, that there was a time when Volkovysk took great pride in its American *landsleit* who accorded it great deference.

The Volkovysk Jews on the American continent, in keeping with the old traditional ways, were close to one another, always remembering their kin and friends in the old home town. A number of individuals were philanthropically outstanding in providing donations for the necessities of their brothers in the old home town. Among them, it is worthwhile to record names such as that of *Saul Barash* – who inherited so many good traits from his parents, *Jekuthiel & Mikhlah Bereshkovsky* – who never forgot to send along their generous donation twice a year. Their donations went a long way towards supporting our orphanage and day care center over a period of many years. For this purpose, *Saul Barash* would also raise funds from other Volkovysk landsleit, and American Jews in general, whom he would interest in the Volkovysk Jewish undertakings. He would receive help in connection with his highly visible fund raising efforts from the late *Meir Segal & Matityahu Rutchik*, who thanks to their assistance, many people in Volkovysk were saved from going under. It would be appropriate in this place to record [the names of] a number of other Volkovysk landsleit, who always on a very regular basis, donated for the benefit of their brethren in Volkovysk, but I cannot recall their names.

Apart from individuals, we must here recall the united Volkovysk Societies, such as the former *Volkovysk Ladies Society of New York,* the *Volkovysk Ladies Society of Chicago*, the *Volkovysk Synagogue in New York,* and other Volkovysk societies in [North] America, such as the *Canadian Volkovysk Society* – who thanks to their strong support, many Volkovysk institutions and individuals owe them their very existence. The two ladies societies in New York and Chicago distinguished themselves in a special way by their support for the orphanage in Volkovysk, apart from their regular contributions which they gathered from among the Volkovysk *landsleit* and other American Jewish circles, through their generous response to our appeals for help. The two founders were very active in the Chicago Ladies Society – *Sarah Perliss* (the fishmonger) and *Liebeh Bartnovsky*, who at the time of their emigration from Volkovysk to Chicago, assumed the burden of helping as much as possible the poor orphans, the aged, along with all the other community institutions, that were struggling to survive. They fulfilled their promise by founding the *Volkovysk Ladies Society of Chicago* and drew upon the substantial Chicago Jewish circles for assistance in all support initiatives, not only people from Volkovysk. Active members with them were: *Sarah Rivka Bartnovsky, Sh. Bart, Mrs. Louis, Mrs. Berlinger*, and others.

I wish to recall here the *Canadian Volkovysk Society* for their help that they have already demonstrated for the benefit of a number of Volkovysk refugees, and refugees from other towns, since the end of the Second World War. The following people from Volkovysk showed an interest and were especially active in this connection: *M. Mirman-Shykevich, Abraham Shykevich, Khmelnitsky, Rip, Davidovsky, Koss, Yunovich,* and *Mrs. Ben-Zvi.* All of these people, who today live in Canada, were at one time active in Jewish community life in Volkovysk. They helped to build the city, took part it is happiness and its suffering. Thanks to their support, we have already, here in Israel, provided the first necessities, such as clothing and financial help, to the small number of refugees from Volkovysk, who after indescribable suffering during the final years of the last war, managed to finally reach the shores of our land. We are now in a position to accept in a fine brotherly fashion, additional people out of the very few of our brothers and sisters from Volkovysk who managed to stay alive.

The Volkovysk Synagogue and Volkovysk Relief Committee in New York

The Volkovysk Synagogue in New York distinguished itself with its substantial fund-raising activity on behalf of Volkovysk from the time of the First World War. At that time, it was [already] the center for help for the Jews of Volkovysk, who had suffered greatly because of the war. Delegates from the synagogue and from the Volkovysk relief committee would regularly come to Volkovysk with financial support for relatives, friends, and Jews in general, who had a need for help. And there was no lack of them in the city at that time. Tens of families that were completely ruined because of the war, were able to get themselves back on their feet thanks to the synagogue and the relief committee. Their substantial support came not only in the financial resources that they would personally bring to the Jews of Volkovysk, but also in the bringing together of relatives and friends from faraway places, and also for sending help remotely to the needy.

I am taking this opportunity to also recall the names of a number of Volkovysk women: *Malka Krinsky* (a relative of *Ephraim Beckenstein* the Veterinarian from the Wide Boulevard), *Dvora Weiner* (Shalkeh Yunovich the artist's relative), *Nye'sheh Shneur, Chava Asnes* and *Beryl Alpert* (the secretary), who helped put together the first fourteen hundred dollars for the orphanage, by arranging a theater benefit performance, whose entire proceeds went to the institution.

Also, after the Second World War, the *landsleit* in America showed themselves able to quickly put in place the necessary support mechanisms for the unfortunate remnants, for which a meaningful number owe them thanks for their quick absorption into the Land of Israel.

The Builders and Activists of the Volkovysk Orphanage

Page 402: *Abraham Kaganovich*
Page 403: *Chana Kaganovich*

Herschel Gordon (the Scribe) and Shabtai Gordon (his son) – the leaders of the orphanage – represented two different generations. The father, *Herschel Gordon,* thanks to his many years of multi-faceted activity, he accumulated an unusual amount of strong, enduring practical experience; the son, *Shabtai,* as was the case with most members of the younger generation, supported himself through theory. And even though they worked at the same profession, they got along famously.

The father, Herschel, was the kind of a Jew for whom one made way when encountering him in the street, and this was not only because of his beneficent appearance, but also out of fear that he wouldn't accidentally step on the feet of the passerby – so intent was he on what he was pursuing. He loved to hold himself out as the spokesman for the older generation, but despite this, he demonstrated a substantial understanding of the modern system of raising the orphans, with which his modern-oriented son *Shabtai* was concerned with leading. Both father and son excelled in their dedication to the institution and the orphans themselves.

Shabtai Gordon, the child rearer, occupied a distinguished place in the history of the orphanage. For years on end, he put his whole heart deeply into the development of the institution, into the rearing and welfare system for his children. Also, after I went to the Land of Israel, he would mail me regular long monthly reports about his love – the orphanage.

Abraham & Chana (Nechama) Kaganovich, strongly merited the privilege of being counted among the dedicated activists on behalf of the orphanage. *Nechama Kaganovich* herself, came from the village of *Bezvadnya*, near Zelva. Until 1915, she lived in Bialystok, and afterwards in Zelva. Despite the fact that she had not been born in Volkovysk and spent her childhood and younger years in other places, she nevertheless, from the very first day she settled in Volkovysk, was fully taken up with the founding and development of a number of Volkovysk community institutions, such as the Volkovysk Yiddish *Volksschule*, the Public Library, the orphanage, and others. In the area of the orphanage, she was active from the very first years of its establishment. Even before its establishment, that is to say, before the building of the institution was put up, and the orphans were temporarily quartered in private homes, Nechama Kaganovich would pay a visit to each and every one of these orphans in the various houses – from *Karczyzna* to underneath the *Barg*. She would do this without consideration of the weather – in rain and snow. Nechama Kaganovich was not the type of woman who had means, and engaged in community service as a way of killing the hours, so to speak. She herself was a working woman, who under the din of the new machines, and under the refrains of freedom songs, absorbed the love of all the afflicted, to all the poor and helpless. That is why she dedicated her few free hours after work to charitable causes, mostly on behalf of the poor and solitary orphans of the city. She possessed a high order of intelligence and a matchless maternal persona. As soon as she threw herself into the work on behalf of the orphanage, she became the Chair of the trades committee. She never missed a meeting of the leadership board, and she would often arrive with complete plans on how to help out this or that orphan, and how to equip him with the necessary trade skills, which would give him the capacity, once he left the institution, to stand independently on his own two feet. She, and her husband, *Abraham Kaganovich*, with the consent of the orphanage, took in two orphans, a girl and a boy, whom they trained, each in his own craft, and gave them a home with parental love, just as if they had been their own children. Mrs. Kaganovich never passed over an undertaking at the orphanage, and she would often spend an entire night there, and then, without any sleep, go off to a new day of work. Almost all of the girl orphans were employed in her sewing factory. She would train them well in their trade, and when they would leave her,

they already were quite skilled workers. With her whole-hearted dedication to community work, to which she dedicated eighteen years of her life, she always elicited the greatest respect from all sides with whom she made any sort of contact. And in 1936, after she and her husband emigrated to join their children in Argentina, with a new impetus, she immediately threw herself into this important work, and awoke, called upon, and stormed against the hearts of the Volkovysk *landsleit,* that they not forget the poor orphans on the other side of the ocean. Unfortunately, death brought a halt to her active and energetic life at the age of 53. She died in the year 1941 (19 Tammuz 5701).

This sad news about the dear woman that all held in affection, the former member of the leadership of the orphanage and president of the Trades Committee, Chana Kaganovich, cause me a great deal of suffering and pain. In her, I lost the best and most loyal friend, with whom I had worked together as president of the orphanage for many years.

Also he, *Abraham Kaganovich* was an important and very productive personality in Jewish community life from Volkovysk prior to the war. With his tall imposing figure, and good-natured smile, he already excelled in showing a deep instinct for culture, art, and community work, even as a young man. Coming from parents who were poor working people, he traveled to Bialystok while still a young boy and learned the trade of a metalworker. When he returned to Volkovysk in 1918 after the First World War, he found the city in ruins. The Jewish institutions were then in a shambles, and the energies of the populace were wholly unfocused. What was required was the skilled hand of a good organizer. He immediately threw himself with complete ardor into community activity, and was a leading personality in such institutions as the Manual Trades Society, *Linat Kholim*, the Jewish Hospital, the orphanage, the bank, etc. He is also active in Argentina for the benefit of the people of Volkovysk. He was elected as president of the Volkovysk Society of Argentina. After the Second World War, he led the relief campaign for the small number of those Volkovysk refugees that remained alive. He accumulated a sum of five thousand pesos, which was used to buy a variety of things for the refugees, and warm undergarments, who were scattered all over a number of countries: Poland, Italy, Austria and Germany. Every refugee received an allotment, shoes and warm undergarments. This initiative continues to be led by him today.

Hillel Lev (Koshchilker) and his Family – I knew the old Lev-Koshchilker couple from years ago on the Koshchilker plaza. In the last years, when I was occupied with the work on behalf of the orphanage our friendship became even stronger. When, because of advancing age, they were unable to partake fully in the activities on behalf of the orphanage, the helped out the institution with their big-hearted donations. After they passed away, their children took their place, and over a period of years, they were among the most active supporters of the institution. Lev's son, and his wife, Rachel (the daughter of Pomerantz[180], one of the finest and most popular Jews in *Krzemienica*[181]), as well as Lev's daughter, *Manya Meshengisser*, and the other two daughters, *Korotniatsky* and *Goldberg*, all did a great deal for the institution. Thanks to their great generosity, and constant willingness to help the orphans and the needy, as well as through their influence on other people to follow their example, they are counted among the supporters of the orphanage.

Apart from the orphanage, they were very active in helping out poor and solitary children. It is for this reason,
for example, that a young lady orphan was employed in their whiskey distillery, whose mother sold baked

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180 There is also a *Pomeranietz* Family in Lisokovo. It is not clear from the text whether these are the same family.

181 Pronounced *Kremianitsa.*

goods in the streets, that was given to her on consignment without money by the two city bakers, Abraham Lev (the Bialystoker Baker) and Zayd'keh Kaplan (the great *Hassid*), who would even take back the unsold baked goods in the evening. They did this to help her out, so that she could earn something of a living and support her orphaned children. When the oldest daughter of the widow, who worked for the Levs was to get married, the Levs treated her as if she was their own child. Lev's son gave her first class furniture as a wedding present, for her new home, the older Levs provided her with just about everything that she needed, and they served as the principal *Mekhutonim* at the wedding ceremony, greeting each and every one of the guests with happiness and satisfaction. Also, Lev's children came to take part in the great festivity, in whose preparation the elderly Mrs. Yunovich (Herschel the Butcher's mother) participated to a great extent, and I myself, by taking out a large loan at the bank, in order to allow the poor widow an opportunity to carry out the wedding in the finest manner. This modest wedding turned into a city-wide celebration. The happiness of the Levs was great, just as if they were making a wedding for one of their own children. Old Mrs. Yunovich, who had provided the wedding with meat, fish and baked goods, that she had procured in the city, was also a principal *Makhatenista* at the wedding. Her pride with the success of the undertaking could be seen in the fact that her kerchief had become disheveled over her forehead, and her indescribable joy – in the dance, with which she escorted the bride and her mother to the *Huppah*. As if by magic, everyone was immediately drawn into a dance that continued for an extended number of hours.

The good and big-hearted helpful work for the benefit of the poor orphans by the Lev family was intensified even further, when their son suddenly dies at a very young age. His widow, *Rachel* threw herself into the work on behalf of the orphans with great intensity, and her impact was uniquely substantial.

Velvel Kaplan & Akiva Yudzhik – These two Volkovysk *balebatim* were known in the city to be two people on whom one could always count in time of trouble. Their willingness, and constant readiness to come to the help of the needy, had no bounds. I remember once, during the crisis of 1934-36, a Jew in Volkovysk was severely impacted, and he had decided to commit suicide. He threw himself underneath a train and was killed, leaving a widow and small children. It just so happens that his eldest daughter was planning to get married, and the terrifying tragedy of her father's suicide almost caused the wedding to be canceled. I immediately contacted *Velvel Kaplan* from *Zamoscheh*, and *Akiva Yudzhik*, and as usual they came forward with substantive help. We reached a decision to see the daughter married under any and all circumstances as soon a possible after the thirty day mourning period, and wherever possible to financially provide for the widow. We immediately contacted the forest product merchant in Slonim, for whom her father had worked for many years, who only because of the crisis, found it necessary to dismiss him from his job, which indeed had led to the suicide. The merchant donated a sum of four hundred zlotys, which we deposited in the bank in the name of the widow, in order to provide her with an income that would support her and her children. We also initiated a help campaign aimed at all the Volkovysk Jews, who as usual, responded warmly to our call. *Yaakov Goldberg*, the manufacturer and merchant, stood out in his generosity on behalf of the young couple. It was in this manner, that we were able to come to the bereaved family at the end of the *Shiva* period, and present them with the required support to be able to put on the wedding for the daughter exactly after the end of the thirty day period of mourning. This was a complete surprise to the widow, who literally didn't want to believe our words, when it was proposed that she go out to the stores and begin to buy the necessary things for the wedding. We obtained a nice apartment for the young couple in Kushnir's house, and the orphanage immediately paid the sum of 120 zlotys for one year's rent. The groom was given a position at the merchants bank. I used this opportunity to obtain a new *Huppah* to replace the old and used one belonging to the Rabbinate – which was sewn by the children just in time for the end of the thirty days mourning for the bride's unfortunate father.

Chana Heller – Member of the leadership and the development committee. Chana Heller was the wife of

Leib Heller, of the well-known Heller brothers, the philanthropists. Even though she stepped into active work for the orphanage late in life, when she was 72 years old, in the last years of her life, for eight years, she worked actively on behalf of the welfare of the solitary child. In her eight years, she never once missed a meeting, and never once failed to participate in an undertaking. Leaning on her cane, she would come to the meetings, and go to the homes of her friends, whom she would arouse to do work and give contributions on behalf of the solitary Jewish orphan. She died in Warsaw, but before passing away, she asked to be buried in Volkovysk. In her will, she left all of her clothing and linens to the institution. The entire orphanage took part in her funeral, which was one of the most imposing in the city. Her husband, Leib Heller, who was also active in our institution, remarked at the funeral that he would count himself fortunate if he could know that after his death, he would have such a funeral, as if he could already see the black clouds hanging over the city.

Aaron & Leah Lifschitz – Members of the finance and development committee. The prominent family of Aaron Lifschitz (Aharon Zelda's) was well known not only in Volkovysk, but also far beyond the borders of their domicile. Reb Aaron and his wife Leah, were people who had an advanced education. He was a prominent activist on behalf of Zionist causes, dating back to the times of *Bnei Moshe*, and took an active part in all the city-wide initiatives. Himself a merchant-manufacturer, he would nevertheless diligently participate in all the assemblies of the Rabbinate, for whom he would always be one to show the way, relying on his well-reasoned and wise direction. Recalling the plight of the Jewish orphan from his own early years, he could not tear himself away from the activities of the orphanage, and he would often express his feeling, and despite the fact that his health would not permit him to work too strenuously, he nevertheless dedicated much time for the benefit of the institution.

Reb Aaron Lifschitz strove to settle in the Land of Israel, where his daughter Rosa already lived, but he passed away before he could fulfill his desire. His wife, Leah, postponed her own move to the Land of Israel for a time, because of the loss of her husband, and for a specific time, she extended her community efforts on behalf of the orphanage, as one of the most diligent members of the leadership. Even though her health was precarious, she never missed a meeting, and the members of the leadership, who were mostly younger people, used to place great weight on her ideas and advice. She also would not desist from attending every gathering in the city for the benefit of the institution, despite her advancing age and poor health, and she was always among the first to volunteer her active participation. Later on, she did settle in the Land of Israel.

Schraga Feivel Kazatsky – a member of the finance committee. He came to Volkovysk from Vilna in 1935 and opened a confectionery store in the location of Joseph Yunovich's shoemaker's store. With his undertaking, he quickly developed a good name in the city. He took a strong interest in all community initiatives, and his donations and contributions were among the most attractive. When he was first approached for donations he would open his wallet and say: "I am a stranger in town. I don't know how much one has to give for this purpose. Therefore, take what you think I should give, in order that my donation be appropriate." Shortly after his arrival in the city, he was elected as a member of the leadership of the Jewish Cooperative Bank, and shortly thereafter, also as a member of the leadership of the orphanage. Because he had no children himself, he adopted an orphan girl, whose parents were killed during the Russian revolution. He raised her, and gave her a good education. Unfortunately, at the age of sixteen, together with her adoptive parents, she was killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Zelitsky was a major contractor for lumber transport from Poland to Germany. He was a gentle, understanding and wise man. In 1924 he was selected to become a member of the leadership of the orphanage, and later as president of the building committee. He was always valued for his dedication to the institution and his great concern for the poor orphan. Because he could not dedicate as much time to the

institution as he would have liked, because of his own financial circumstances, he nevertheless served the institution with his word and pen. His invitations and articles in the *Volkovysker Leben* about the campaigns that were for the benefit of the orphanage would always bring good results.

Reizl Farber – A member of the committee for development, and clothing and finance. Reizl Farber was one of the most important of the community workers in the city. She was elected to the leadership of the orphanage in 1924, and was very active in the development-clothing-finance committee, where she installed a new system of providing clothes. In 1926, she was elected Treasurer of the institution, a position that she occupied up to the last day the orphanage existed. She was a great help to the development of the institution with he good economic sensibilities.

Mordechai Giller – A member of the building committee – was a merchant with a good education. He was elected to the leadership in 1921, and as Vice President of the institution – in the year 1924. He greatly helped the insti0tution with word and writing. His articles about the institution were carefully read by readers – and you can appreciate that this was of great benefit to the orphanage.

Lipman Itzkowitz – A member of the finance committee – was one of the biggest owners of oil wells in Baku, Russia, where his house was one of the principal meeting places for the young Zionist movement. His wife was born in Volkovysk, and never lost her love for her home town. Whenever she would come for a visit to Volkovysk, she would donate generously to the impoverished Jewish populace. In the time of the Bolshevik regime, Itzkowitz was relieved of his businesses and considerable assets, and only by a miracle, managed to save himself and come to Volkovysk.

By a coincidence, he established a close contact with the orphanage in Volkovysk. He saw the difference between the attention that the Jewish orphan received from the institution, in contrast to the aimless existence in the streets that the orphan had to survive in Russia, and he knew how to place a value on it. He decided to dedicate all his free time, until he went to join his children in the Land of Israel, to the orphanage. His advice and guidance on the issue of the orphanage were always highly valued by all the members of the leadership and proved to be of great importance to the development of the institution. He later emigrated to the Land of Israel. When I arrived there, he was no longer alive. His wife remains active to this day in community work in Israel.

Dr. Rosa Einhorn – A member of the Sanitary-Medical committee.

It is difficult to make peace with the thought that this young family – *Dr. Rosa Einhorn*, and her husband, *Engineer Pshenitsky*, and their lovely child *Dvora'leh* – are no longer alive. Dr. Rosa Einhorn was very active in the leadership of the orphanage and was a diligent member of the Sanitary-Medical Committee. She would take part in every new initiative on behalf of the institution – giving generously on her own, and influencing her friends to do the same. The institution always counted on her support, which always helped attain the objectives of the initiatives on behalf of the orphanage. She was always ready to help in connection with every need, and would always greet those who were needy with a smile on her face.

Chaya Sarah Yudzhik (Yehuda'i) – A member of the education committee. I have already written about her, but no matter how much I would underscore her efforts on behalf of the poorer sectors of the city, I would not do it justice. On the contrary, it is not possible to write enough about her exceptional work in this area. When I took leave of her, prior to my departure for the Land of Israel, together with her husband, my very important friend, *Akiva,* we took comfort in the thought that we would be able to transplant this good work to the Land of Israel and that her exceptional skills at community endeavors and great energy to do

work will be of great value to our Land. Regrettably, however, she didn't live long in the Land of Israel. She was active on behalf of the orphanage from the first day it was established, and gave it fifteen years of hard, strenuous and unrelenting work.

Chana Khmelnitsky was a wise lady. She distinguished herself by her gentleness and good nature. When it came to a difference of opinion in the Ladies Society, she gave up her active participation in the institution and helped it out only by giving counsel. Despite this, she felt a very deep sense of responsibility towards the orphanage, and up to her last day, prior to emigrating to Canada, continued to show a great interest in the work of the institution.

Sara Lev, Vice President of the Ladies Society, was also an active worker. Thanks to her deep understanding, she was always helpful in solving the difficult issues of the institution.

Aaron Smazanovich, "The White-Haired One," was a very accomplished person. Even though he made his living as a shoemaker (in *Zamoscheh*), he was involved in every municipal initiative. He carried the entire city on his shoulders. He was a member of the leadership in a number of the houses of worship, in the hospital, the old age home, the orphanage, a number of Talmud Torahs, and the societies of "clothing the naked," *"Maot Khittim*," "Provisioning Wood," the Society of Manual Trades, "*Gemilut Hasadim*," and as you can imagine, in the Shoemakers Society. He even made an impact on the banking system. There practically was no leadership body in the city in which Aaron Smazanovich did not participate. He was a very decent person, never once in his life ever saying something inappropriate about anyone else, and was therefore highly regarded in the city.

Dr. Jocheved Barash – A member of the education committee. Many people from the community were active on behalf of the orphanage. A number approached the task of leadership in a hesitating fashion, and left in an unremarkable fashion, leaving behind no trace that they had ever been there. This is because they lacked the necessary sympathy for the orphaned child. All these people did was increase the list of members of the leadership. There were however, among the leadership, members, who because of their commitment and willingness, carved their names into the history of the institution. One of these was *Dr. Jocheved Barash*. She worked for the institution for only two years, but in that short periods of time she was able to create a good name for herself by her committed work for the benefit of the orphans. By profession, she was a teacher, and as a result, she had the right kind of approach to children. She would often come to the institution in the late hours of the evening, and look over the record of a child, in order to find a way to help that child. She never came into the institution without a present of some sort for this, or that child. It was in this manner that she expressed her tie to the orphans – like a mother to her own children. Peripheral private demands unfortunately compelled her to give up her good work on behalf of the orphans. In 1937, she moved to Bialystok with her family, where her husband became the president of the Bialystok community. As is already known, her husband was *Ephraim Barash*, later killed along with his two sons in Maidanek, and Jocheved herself was killed at Auschwitz.

The wife of Dr. G. Berman & the wife of Dr. M. Shlackman – Members of the Sanitary-Medical Committee. I had only two years in which I had the honor and opportunity of working together with the above mentioned two members of the leadership. Their entry into the leadership brought with it an animate stream of necessary activities. They were active not only in the Sanitary-Medical Committee, but also in the main body of the leadership as well, and in general, their work made an impact in almost all of the other initiatives of the institution.

The Dreamers & Builders of Volkovysk

Zalman Leib Slutsky and his mother, Shifra, Reb Akiva's – Zalman Leib was a quiet and peaceful Jew, and a great scholar. His father, Reb Akiva, was at that time already one of the most important people in the city. Reb Akiva was the senior *Gabbai* of what was at that time the only Jewish institution in the city, the Talmud Torah and Yeshiva. The position of *Gabbai* was handed down to his only son, *Zalman Leib*. He guarded the Talmud Torah like the apple of his own eye. He had the oversight of the funds collected in all the charity boxes (*pushkehs*), and he would count those monies personally, covering the salaries of the teachers, and that of the Headmaster as well as all the other smaller expenses.

His mother, Shifra, Reb Akiva's was a robust example of a typical woman of the older generation. A wise and gentle woman, with good business sense, she thereby earned the trust of everyone that came into contact with her.

Meir & Fradl Shiff. – The Shiff house was close to the Slutsky's. Before the First World War, he was one of the most prominent merchants of the city. He had a very large business in timepieces and gold. Thanks to his extraordinary decent character, he earned everyone's trust, and he carried the greatest financial pledge in the city. He was a great donor to charity, and he would distribute his entire financial pledge, which amounted to five thousand rubles a month, among various charities. Despite the fact that he was very wealthy, he maintained an intimate contact with the less fortunate element of the city, and his home always stood open, on Sabbaths and festival holidays, for all the poor and strangers in the city. He was generous in providing help to the young Jewish people in other towns, who happened to be on duty in Volkovysk, and he would often invite them to his home. He would personally support them, and introduce them to other prominent Jewish people in Volkovysk, from whom they would receive financial assistance. Thanks to Meir Shiff, I became acquainted with the wealthy and well-connected family of *Reb Shmuel Shapiro*, the Genius of *Volozhin*, (a father-in-law of the prominent magnates and great philanthropists – the Heller brothers), and I was a constant guest there for Sabbaths and festival holidays, during the first time of my military service in Volkovysk.

Even in later years, when the substantive concern about receiving guests passed into the hands of *Gedalyahu Pereshetsk*y the tailor, Meir Shiff set himself a condition that he must bring home one or two guests for the Sabbath or a festival holiday.

He was a real man of the people in the full sense of the word. His motto was: "Let your hand be giving, and you will eat, spread your good fortune, and it will be good for you." It was because of this that the common man in the city had great respect for him and trusted him, and saw in him his own proud defender against the regime. And in general, one always took counsel with him regarding all municipal initiatives, giving great weight to his opinion.

He was disastrously ruined after the First World War, and because of his age, he turned over his businesses to his children. He dedicated the last years of his life to the old age home, where he took the position of President.

His wife, *Fradl* pervaded the city with her good-heartedness. She didn't care for the trappings of authority, but in her own quiet way, she donated a great deal for all causes of the needy, and would influence others to do the same. Her house was always open to the poor and hungry, where she would provide not only a complete and satisfying meal, but also provide a suitable item of clothing, and a generous [monetary] gift with a hearty blessing for the road. She took orphan children into her home that had been left abandoned,

after the death of her husband's brother and his wife, and raised them with great love and commitment, just as if they were her own children.

Hirsch & Mikhlah Einhorn. – The Einhorn family has a distinguished lineage. The evidence of a genuine *Yiddishkeit* were deeply rooted in the daily life of the Einhorn family, even after secular education had penetrated there. The study of the *Daf Yomi* (daily page of the Talmud) remained a sacred obligation to them, and worldly issues, in their house, were intimately woven into the doing of good deeds. Especially active in the family were: *the Pharmacist, Hirsch Einhorn, Dr. Benjamin Einhorn*, the Lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn*, the Dentist, *Dr. Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky*, and *Dr. Moshe (Moses) Einhorn*, and *David Einhorn*, who [both] live today in America.

I want to recall here a number of characteristic attributes of the pharmacist, Hirsch Einhorn and his wife, Mikhlah. Hirsch Einhorn was one of the most popular figures in the city. He was constantly occupied in his pharmacy. Not only did he prepare prescriptions, but he would often, literally take the place of a doctor. The poor people who didn't have the money to call a doctor, always knew they could come to Hirsch Einhorn in the pharmacy, tell him what was ailing them, and from him alone, obtain good advice together with medicine, for which he would usually charge a lower price, or – in cases of great need – give it away free of charge.

Also, in those years, when the number of people with any worldly education was quite small, he would help everyone with writing addresses and letters to sons in the military service, and to relatives out of the country. The good-hearted Hirsch Einhorn would do this with great love and great satisfaction. Many people, for whom he would write addresses, would, out of gratitude, throw a coin or two into the alms box for the hospital that hung in the pharmacy.

He was a quiet man by nature, and he would relate to other people with great deference. He would never get involved with politics. Nevertheless, during the First World War, he showed a great measure of interest in the course of the conflict. He brought a detailed map back from Warsaw, and on it, he would mark the positions of the Russian and German armies with pins. The Russian positions were marked with red pins, and the German – with black. And in this fashion, each morning after he finished reading the daily news, he would update the positions of each army. In the city, no one dared to breathe a prediction about a victory of this or the other army, prior to consulting Einhorn's "map."

During the time of the First World War, I was out of Volkovysk for a full five years. When I returned, Hirsch Einhorn was no longer alive.

Mikhlah Einhorn, Hirsch Einhorn's wife, who came from Lida from the very prominent Kagan family, was one of the most gentle and intelligent women in Volkovysk. She was beautiful and slender, she also radiated her goodness and fine character. She was always active in all help assemblies for the needy, among the wealthy Jews of the city. Even though the death of her husband took a great toll on her health, and curtailed her ability to take an active part in the variety of community initiatives of Volkovysk's Jewish community life, nevertheless, until her last day of life, she continued to demonstrate a deep interest in the development of many community institutions, especially the orphanage, where her daughter, Rosa already was playing such a dominant role. She would – apart from the monthly contributions made by her two daughters, *Rosa* and *Pes'shka* for the good of the institution – make her own very generous donation. I would visit her often at her home, and give her reports about our achievements, which gave her a great deal of satisfaction. When the sad news of her passing was announced, the leadership of the orphanage decided that they and the children would participate in the funeral, in order to pay final respects to the person who always showed such love and dedication to the poor orphan.

Dr. Feinberg – He came to Volkovysk while still a young man, and very quickly developed a good name for himself, thanks to his strong interest in the Jewish community institutions and his readiness and willingness to come and be generous at all gatherings. He looked upon his medical profession as a holy mission, and he was always foremost ready to treat the indigent sick with no charge. When I would come to ask him for a consideration on behalf one or anther poor person that was ill, he would say to me with a friendly look on his face: "I ask that you always feel free to present me with cases of the indigent sick, who are not in a position to pay for their visits, and I will take care of them free of charge."

Lawyer Abraham Bliakher – Thanks to his unusually great skill, he quickly gained a reputation as a first class lawyer. He also showed great interest in the community initiatives of the city, and would take an active part in them. The city came to see him as a natural successor to the deceased lawyers: *Chaim Ozer Einhorn, Y. Efrat* and *M.L. Khmelnitsky.*

Mikhal Zohn-Mazya and his wife Frum'keh – I knew him yet from his younger days. He was a peaceful and quiet man, and because of his diligent work on behalf of the public welfare, he was later on counted among the most important activists in the city. In his younger years, he was appointed in a Russian fire brigade, and later, after the First World War, he became a prominent member of the municipal government (magistrate), where thanks to his honest character, earned an exceptionally good name for himself. He was also active in the leadership of many Jewish institutions, where he was greatly respected and listened to. His wife, *Frum'keh,* exuded influence with her good and big-hearted character. She also was active in the leadership of a number of community institutions, where she occupied a very respected position.

Yitzhak Berman – He worked as a bookkeeper for me before the First World War, in my fire insurance office, and later became an employee of the firm, "*Kolontai*." Even though he was not a rich man, he always gave generously to all of the charitable institutions.

Dubitsky the Blacksmith from the *Grodno Gasse* – the good name of the blacksmith Dubitsky deserves to be recorded here, about whom I wish to relate the following incident.

It was in the month of November 1921, when we were getting ready to rent the building for the orphanage. We wanted to rent it as quickly as possible, because the biting winds already foretold of the onset of a difficult and cold winter. But we were missing stonework for the building. I went from house to house, and gathered up stones and pieces of brick that were strewn about. But this by itself could not solve our problem. Wending my way in the street, I encountered the *blacksmith Dubitsky*. I told him about our quandary, and he immediately responded that I should no longer worry. He just happened to have bought stones and bricks in order to build himself a forge, but, he said, these solitary orphans are much more important, and on the same day, in a couple of wagons, he sent us his own personal construction material, and the bottleneck was immediately removed. It is just because he was himself a modest laborer, that he understood the need so much better, and felt fortunate that he could provide this donation on behalf of the solitary orphan.

Shayna Chaya *die Yoreshteh* [182]**–** In her poor and old clothes, she looked like a beggar woman, but she was a leading figure in the organization to provide support for the downtrodden. She was the principal supplier of the poor and hungry. Herself scrawny, and with a bent figure, dressed in old clothes, ill-fitting shoes, with an old rag of a kerchief tied around her head, she always gave the impression that she personally was

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[182] It is not clear whether this is the same person as *Chana-Chaya die Yoreshteh*, mentioned before, but it seems likely.

suffering from hunger, and lived off charity. In the city, everyone knew her as *Shayna Chaya die Yoreshteh*. She was physically frail and didn't take care of her health, because she gave priority to the poor and needy, whose harsh plight she always sought to alleviate. She took a special interest in the *balebatim* who were at one time prominent but lost their wealth, who suffered from hunger and cold, but didn't want the public to know about their straitened circumstances. Over the course of many years, Shayna Chaya did many good things on behalf of the city's poor. She was known everywhere, and whenever she would come, she was greeted with fine donations. She would return home speedily, because in her poor quarters, she would yet prepare a meal for several poor people, in order to alleviate their hunger. She was one of those truly rare people in this world, who herself enjoyed very little in life, but because of this, gave so much to others. When she died, the Rabbi ordered that the table, on which she used to feed the hungry, be used as the coffin on which to convey her body to interment.

Moshe Lapidus – He was counted as one of the wisest men of the city. He made his fortune by acting as an intermediary on behalf of wealthy Jews who sought was of getting their sons excused from military service... There were a number of Jews in the city who made a living doing this, and Moshe Lapidus was one of them. He became rich, and arranged the construction of a two story building on the Wide Boulevard, along with several other buildings on the plaza. However, he had no children, and in old age, when he was already ill, he decided to give away his entire fortune to community institutions. He invited me into his presence, and presented his plan to me, after which he requested that I put together his will. My recommendation, which he approved, was to establish a committee that would work out all the details of his will. This committee consisted of: *Yitzhak Novogrudsky, Jedediah Marotchnik, Yaakov Lifschitz, Abraham Lifschitz, V. Kossowsky* and *myself.* The will was set up with the Notary Public, and legally approved. According to the will, the appointed people on the committee were given the right to manage the estate of Moshe Lapidus, and divide eighty percent of the net value among four institutions – *Talmud Torah, Hospital, Orphanage and Old-Age Home* – twenty percent to each institution, and the remaining twenty percent was set aside for the *smaller institutions* of the city, such as *Maot Khittim*, Provisioning Wood, Visitation of the Sick, Clothing the Bare – each receiving five percent. Moshe Lapidus was very happy with the way his estate was divided. He contributed to the writing of a Torah scroll, which he donated to the orphanage, where a large number of children would always participate in a *minyan* for prayer on Shabbat and on festival holidays.

Mrs. Clara Niemchik (the Doctor's wife) – She was an unusual woman. Even though she was never a member of the leadership in our institution, she nevertheless took part actively in all its initiatives. Concern for the less fortunate child was one of the great priorities of her life. Her joy was intense when the *day care facility* for poor children was established, because under the aegis of the orphanage, where it was located, she was certain that the indigent child would find a home. She was one of those on whose help the institution could always rely. Regrettably, she and her only son were brought down by the murderous hand of the enemy.

Bayl'keh Kaplan and her Daughter-in-law – *Bayl'keh Kaplan* the wife of one of the prominent *balebatim, Berel Kaplan*, and her daughter-in-law, the wife of *David Joseph Kaplan*, were both members of the leadership of the orphanage as well as the Ladies Society. She was one of the genteel Volkovysk ladies, who gave the greater part of their lives over to community endeavors. Apart from their continuous donations for the benefit of our institution, they practiced the custom of donating a tithe of the output of their flour mill produce for the orphans.

Two Community Institutions in Volkovysk

Discreet Charity

Volkovysk had always been replete with a variety of charitable institutions, where the needs of the poor of the city could be looked after. No one was permitted to go under from hunger and deprivation, and the poor of the city were not ashamed of coming for the help they needed. But a completely different problem was presented to us, by those *balebatim* who were abruptly impoverished, lost the source of their income, and were finally put out to hunger and placed in straitened circumstances. They could not come to grips with their new difficult circumstances and thereby come to the city charitable institutions for help and support. Too often, it led to suicides, and the disintegration of the entire family. Incidents of sudden loss of means among the Volkovysk *balebatim* was a very frequent occurrence in the city. There existed therefore a secret organization in Volkovysk under the name, *Discreet Charity,* who would, without visibility, come to the aid of those *balebatim* who fell from prosperity, and help give them a living. In most instances, they provided temporary sustenance, until such time that they were able to get themselves on their feet again. This support was always rendered secretly, with the utmost discretion, through especially trusted individuals, from whom it was known, no information would be received. For many years, the head of this Discreet Charity organization was the purse maker, *Yaakov Winetsky* of the Wide Boulevard. He lead, for meany years, with this discreet mission of the Discreet charity group and shared his confidence only with a few numbered people who were always prepared to provide a donation or a loan. The burden of the discreet and trustworthy Winetsky, who himself was not rich, was not a light one. These ruined people, whom the outside world often took to be people of means, would themselves never seek assistance. In fact it was the opposite, they would exert all their efforts to conceal their poverty and difficult circumstances from their friends and neighbors. The matter then had to be handled in a discreet and delicate way. And it was the self-effacing, quiet purse maker of modest means that was the most active member and the driving force behind the *Discreet Charity*. People felt a special power in him, that of a community activist, whom one could trust with the all of the most difficult issues, with complete assurance of discretion. Regrettably, her to was killed along with all the other Volkovysk Jews at the murderous hands of the enemy.

Provisioning Firewood

Every winter, after the holidays, the members of the Firewood Provisioning Society became active in meeting the objective of providing firewood for poor people for the winter season. A new committee would be elected, in which workers for the community would participate, as well as general individuals, who would look after obtaining enough wood for the poor dwellings in the city. This activity went on all winter, and the colder it was, the more intensively volunteer workers gathered wood, to alleviate the situation of the poor, so that at the very least, their poor homes would have heat. In this connection, Yaakov Winetsky the purse maker also participated in this activity with great deal of involvement, and without fanfare worked for the benefit of the poor.

I worked together with Yaakov Winetsky in both of these previously mentioned institutions until I emigrated to the Land of Israel in 1937. In that same year, on the Eve of Passover, the Rabbi nominated me to be Yaakov Winetsky's confidante. It was only then that I had the opportunity to become acquainted, at close range, with the full scope of the important and confidential work that this quiet purse maker carried out in both of these institutions. At one such confidential meeting, the purse maker revealed to me the names of the needy *balebatim* that the Discreet Charity was supporting. Most of them were thought by the city to be people of means. When the names were read out loud, I lowered my head, and a cold chill seemed to pass

over my skin. It was then that I understood why Yaakov Winetsky, the modest community worker was held in such high regard by so many people in the city.

The Educators of Days Gone By

Among the memories of every person, the teachers and pedagogues who gave him his very first education occupy an important place. From olden times on, Volkovysk always had many teachers, from whose ranks it is appropriate to recollect the following: *Reb Leib Roneh's-Bartnovsky, Reb Eliyahu Dina's-Lev, Reb Naphtali Hertz Nakhumovsky, Reb Zvi Yaakov Feygl's Rutchik*, and many others. *Khol HaMoed* Sukkot and Passover was always the time when students were recruited and signed up by the teachers. The teachers would call on all the *balebatim* whom God had blessed with little children, in order to recruit students for their Talmud Torahs. It is interesting to note from several of the names of the previously mentioned teachers, that it was customary for them to utilize the names of their wives, as for example – Reb Leib Roneh's, Reb Eliyahu Dina's, Reb Yaakov Zvi Feygl's. This was usually done by the less strong teachers, who needed the good names of their wives to bolster their popularity. Understand that this was also usually an indication of the atmosphere that was prevalent in their homes.

The better teachers strove to make an impression on the *balebatim* on the basis of their erudition, with the students that they had already attracted, and those who had gone on to become prominent Torah scholars. It is in this connection, for example, that I wish to remember one of them, *Reb Naphtali Hertz Nakhumovsky,* who even many years ago, mad such a strong impression on me. In intimate conversations with him, he loved to remind me of the fact that he had the privilege of teaching the Heller brothers (who were then already counted among the richest of the merchants in the city). Reb Naphtali Hertz Nakhumovsky was a very gentle Jewish man, with a weak physical appearance. Therefore, no one could suspect him of being capable of raising a hand against a child, which in those years was recognized as a unique characteristic of Jewish teachers, who then strongly believed in the discipline of beating children, in order to achieve better results. He was reckoned to be among the most popular of the teachers in the city, and enjoyed the loyalty of the best of the *balebatim*.

After the period of the *melamdim,* who were the principal educators of Jewish youth in Volkovysk, a new period of secular education was ushered in, with modern teachers. The first teachers in Volkovysk were from Piesk. From that group, it is appropriate to recall the following: *Nakhum Halpern, Israel Meir Rubinstein*, and a little later on – *Jesierski* and the prominent teacher *Linevsky*. They were operating already at the time of the opening up of the Zionist movement, and helped to spread it among the populace in Volkovysk. *Reb Nakhum Halpern* was actually the first Zionist in Volkovysk, and he not only taught scripture to his students, but also gave himself in an active way to the dissemination of Zionist thought in the city, and personally sold shares on behalf of the Zionist Bank, etc.

Volkovysk Landsleit in the Land of Israel

In a separate chapter by Dr. Moses Einhorn, an overview is provided of the first Volkovysk families to settle in Israel, beginning with *Chaikel Shiff* who was one of the very first from Volkovysk to leave their home city to settle in the Holy Land. Here, I will only write about a few people from Volkovysk who were very well known to me.

Leah Kharakh-Einhorn. – The unnatural annihilation of six million Jews drew into it many indirect

victims, who could not come to grips with the thought of this awful destruction. Profoundly shaken by the terrible loss of their nearest and dearest, they themselves died prematurely. One such victim was *Leah Kharakh-Einhorn,* a lady who was highly regarded by everyone. Even though she had lived in Israel for many years, she never broke off her contact with her old home town of Volkovysk, where her sisters lived with their families. She would often come to visit in Volkovysk, and carried on a continuous correspondence with her family and her friends in her home town. The war caused all contact to be broken, and the hard reality of the gruesome end of her dear sisters and their families, and of the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk, cut her life short.

Eliyahu Golomb. – I remember him as a small boy in his parents' home which I had the honor to visit. Already as a young boy, he was well-developed physically and emotionally. He did not wish to seek education in faraway places, and as a young man, emigrated to the Land of Israel, where he studied at the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium. From there he began his journey to his people. He gave many years of tireless labor to help build the country. His greatest accomplishment was the establishment of the Jewish self-defense force – *The Haganah* – which played such an important and large part in defending the *Yishuv*, and in the War of Independence of Israel.

The Destruction of Volkovysk

In September 1938, I said farewell to my daughter, her husband and her children, who to my great grief, remained behind in Volkovysk and were annihilated along with all the other Volkovysk Jews. I also took leave of all my friends and relatives, with the entire city of Volkovysk and its institutions, and also my beloved children of the orphanage. By the 25th of September I was already in the Land of Israel – the Holy Land, where I had striven to be my entire life.

Who then would have thought that it would fall to me to raise a memorial in writing to my beloved city of Volkovysk.

Volkovysk! A city that was known for the great impression it made on its entire environs, and whose children excelled in scholarship, secular education, and great skills in all walks of life, making themselves useful and beloved in general, wherever they happened to settle.

Volkovysk! A city where Jewish life was rich in Jewish traditions. A city with a large number of community institutions, charitable and philanthropic undertakings, that were built up with great effort by the best of her sons and daughters.

Volkovysk! A city where the Zionist concept, even in its first phase, elicited such a deep-seated response among the Jewish population there, the majority of whom were committed to this ideal to the last day.

Who could conceive that I would have to be the mourner! – Mourning not a few individuals, but the entire city and its entire Jewish population! Who could have set such a devastating picture before themselves, that an entire city, young people, old people and tiny children, would simultaneously all be annihilated!

I, who lived in Volkovysk for forty-five years, the most beautiful and best years of my life – must mourn for the sons and daughters of Volkovysk!

For my beloved children, the orphans, I paved a way to a better tomorrow, to a fortunate end, and now it is my fate to weep over the misfortune of their premature death – not even knowing where their graves might be!

God, from whence should I draw the strength to pour out my bitter heart, to shout my cry of pain!

In Those Times

By **Tuvia Fenster**, Antwerp

In memory of my brother *Joseph* from Lodz and my sister *Rachel* from Bialystok, who were killed by the Nazis.

The Old *Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk

The Rabbi of Kovno, *Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor* ז"ל, the Lithuanian ambassador *Dr. Nachman Rakhmilevich* ז"ל, the lawyer *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* ז"ל, who would write articles about jurisprudence for the Petersburg Senate-Journal during his study of the *Gemara*, and others like these with exceptional intellect blessed by God. All of these were students of the *Old Bet HaMedrash in Volkovysk*.

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One time, when there was fear of a fire in Volkovysk, and elderly lady of the prominent *Einhorn* family came to my father-in-law, *Reb Yitzhak Isaac Edelbaum*, ע"ה with a bound packet of papers, and asked if they might be stored in the iron safe. These were old letters of a member of the Einhorn family who years before had studied medicine in Italy.

There were about ten long letters in the packet, written in a wonderful penmanship. When I began to read the letters I was overwhelmed. Overwhelmed not by the beautiful calligraphy of the handwriting, and also not by the brilliant Hebrew style, but rather by little details.

The letters were written from Italy, from Padua, Rome, from a young student to his Einhorn father in Volkovysk.

It appears that the father took an interest in medicine. Because, in several letters, the son provides a scientific explanation about a variety of medicaments, preparations and prescriptions, peppered with very Latin terminology.

The significance of this is that next to each Latin word, there is either a Hebrew or Aramaic word, that is aligned with the Latin expression, and has the same meaning. These are rare and unfamiliar words, that one does not see even in the modern Hebrew literature.

The Italian student appears to have been thoroughly knowledgeable in the *Tanakh*, Talmud and an unusually accomplished scholar in our ancient literature – *Commentaries, Yalkut, Sifri and The Zohar*.

And there is something additional that is noteworthy:

And from the character of the letter, looking at the linguistic style and the composition of the writing, one can see that it was written as they say: lightly and extemporaneous without a need for great clarification, without using a dictionary, like a cascading fountain. That is the way a *Gaon* writes.

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On Saturday night, after *Havdalah*, two fiercely competitive chess players would come to my father-in-law's house, *Reb Nakhum Halpern* a wise old man and scholar, and *Reb Shmuel Feinzilber* a worldly educated Jewish man, possessed of great insight.

On one occasion, we chanced to discuss the writer of the Italian letters.

"That Italian student, Einhorn – said Reb Nakhum Halpern – was a student of Rabbi Israel Salanter, and all of Volkovysk took pride in him, and his name rang the length and breadth of Lithuania. He gave a sermon at the old *Bet HaMedrash* at the age of thirteen, the entire eastern side of the sanctuary began offering their congratulations in the form of '*Yashir Koakh*' to the thirteen year-old genius. It is necessary to take note of the fact that in the old *Bet HaMedrash*, there were Jews who were absolutely formidable Torah scholars, possessed of great insight, sharp-minded, and these cognoscenti said at that time, that finally, now, Volkovysk would become the equal of Vilna, because a second Vilna *Gaon* is growing among us...but it was not to be.

That Volkovysk genius became a military doctor and later on wore the golden epaulettes and bore the distinguished rank of – general.

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The students of the old *Bet HaMedrash* were varied:

A Jewish millionaire named *Skidelsky* lived in Volkovysk at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, whom the Russian regime held in high regard because of his great wealth. One of his acquaintances asked him once:

"Mr. Skidelsky, you come from a little Lithuanian town, Volkovysk, but you are a very well-informed man – where did you study?"

"In quite an old academy," – Skidelsky replied.
"In the Sorbonne in Paris, perhaps?"
"No, in the *Old Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk."

Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, ל"ז

Who does not remember the handsome appearance of the Volkovysk Rabbi, his bright and understanding eyes, the black beard, and his good-hearted smile? He was a worldly person, wise and intelligent. His weekly discussions were interesting and insightful. A word from the Sages, a sentence from the *Tanakh*, or simply some familiar words from the prayer book, took on a newly illuminated form and deeper meaning, as a result of his analytical explanation.

It happens many times that we wonder about an unfamiliar worthwhile thing, forgetting thereby that the matter is not really unfamiliar, but really something of our own. It was in such an instance that Rabbi Jonathan once performed the mitzvah of "returning that which is lost " in quite an original way.

There was a small gathering at the home of the Rabbi on a Saturday night. A Jew who had been to Switzerland, related how much of an impression the Swiss elementary schools had made on him, where children are given a marvelous education based on Prebel's methods.

"And on what principles are Prebel's methods based?" asked Rabbi Jonathan.

"The foremost principle of Prebel's method" – he answered – "Is that one must be with the child at every opportunity when there is time. That is the first responsibility of parents to children. And even little children, who seemingly do not understand, also need to be immersed in a large, spiritual atmosphere, in a Prebel-garten, because pedagogic science says, that listening by itself has a great impact on children. A child that simply hears, will later be more adept at learning later on."

"This is not Prebel's method" – Rabbi Jonathan said, cutting him off.

"But Rebbe, the whole world has accepted and designated this as Prebel's method?"

"The world also can be mistaken" – Rabbi Jonathan replied – "and it wouldn't be the first time that the world has so erred. Let us take a Pentateuch and explain a couple of words that all of you are familiar with. *And you shall teach them to your children.* How? With what method? – *Speaking them* – and being with them. When? Constantly, whenever you have the time. *When you sit in your house, when you go on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up.* Spend that time with your child. And later on in the Pentateuch, you will find a short postscript to this method:

"*And their sons who do not know*" – the small children – "*let them listen,*" – let them be present in a spiritual atmosphere, "*And learn*" – so that they may be able to learn better [themselves] later on.

"As you can see, my friends, this method is older than Prebel. This is not an unfamiliar method, but actually our own, this is the method of Moses our Teacher."

About *Batyushka* [183]

A rumor began to circulate in the city, that a pogrom against the Jewish population was being planned. We, a number of the community leaders to plead our case with *Batyushka.*

...it was a very hot day. The *Batyushka* with his wife, the *Matyushka,*[184] were sitting in their little garden drinking tea. On the table, among bottles of seltzer water and jars of confitures, a broad-bellied samovar was bubbling away. The *Batyushka,* wiping his perspiring face with a large towel, sipped his tea at great length from a flowered cup that he held, in the Russian manner, with all of his five spread out fingers.

After listening to our plea, we received an answer of this sort:

" What do you say, gentlemen, about the heat? Here this morning, we are drinking this seltzer, manufactured here by a Jew, and it doesn't help at all. Thirst only intensifies. The devil only knows what he mixes into his seltzer. I must tell you gentlemen, the *Matyushka* is right. She says there is no better beverage than our own Russian *kvass*. True words. But yes, you have related here something about Bialystok. Yes, I have heard a little. Certainly, certainly this was not done under orders, just like that to attack Jews. I know that there are decent people found among the Jews also, And the Holy Writ commands us to love our enemies. But to tell

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183 The term, 'little father,' in Russian, seemingly a paternal nickname for the resident Russian official.

184 'Little Mother.'

the truth, your are yourselves responsible, that is to say not you personally, but your young people. I really don't understand what your young people want. A responsibility is incumbent on you older people to restrain your young people and make them understand that they are going in evil ways. Yes, gentlemen, that is your responsibility."

After this piece of talk, we went to the General.

The Rabbi & The General

It is known that the Bialystok pogrom was carried out by the Bialystok military garrison, led by General Bogoyevsky. This was another dark nuance in the conduct of pogroms, and this new nuance threw a deathly fear over our entire area. We assessed the plague in Bialystok as only the onset of new troubles, that would soon reach Volkovysk.

At the initiative of the energetic *Koppel Isser Volkovysky*, a meeting was held at [the house of] *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov*, a meeting in which the *Dayans Reb Mendele* and *Reb Tuvia'leh* (Teveleh), the *Gabbai* of the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash Reb Joshua David Pappa*, the lawyer *Chaim Ozer Einhorn, Reb Israel Efrat* and other prominent *balebatim* participated.

After a give-and-take over a variety of projects and measures, that had to be undertaken against the larger danger, the entire gathering agreed to approach General Ivanov, the commander of the 16th Artillery Brigade, which was stationed in the new barracks, and ask him to protect the city from a pogrom. By chance, it happened that his wife had just gone off to Moscow to undergo a serious operation, and it was thought to use this matter as an opportunity to convey a blessing from the Jewish community , that God should send her a swift and complete healing.

The General, an old man, a veteran of the war with Turkey, received the Jewish deputation in a very friendly manner, which consisted of the Rabbi and a number of other *balebatim*, asked them to be seated, offered them cigarettes, and provided an assurance that he would not permit any unrest.

A couple of days later, the General paid a visit to the Rabbi, and once again stated that it is proper to rest easily.

The Rabbi lived in the second house of Zalman Isser's inn, and when the General's wagon, with horses attached in the Russian manner of a troika, pulled up to the Rabbi's home, the entire street came alive.

And at the time that the Rabbi greeted so prominent a guest among a throng of Jews that were standing about, *Leizer Shaliota* who could not let any occasion pass without some aphorism, made the observation that when one sees a Rabbi together with a General, it is exactly as the *Gemara* states: "The Book and the Sword shall be eternally bound together."

This visit made a good impression. The gathering concluded that the General's assurance was in earnest.

It was decided that something needed to be done to express thanks to the General.

The Rabbi wrote up a letter of thanks in Hebrew, from which we cite a short excerpt here.

"To the great honor above all, the Distinguished Hero, Whose Name is Known to Glory, etc.....Mr. Ivanov.

In the name of the entire Jewish community of Volkovysk, I have come to thank His Eminence for all the good and bounty that he has done for us, etc., etc.....may God bless him with Life, Peace, and hold him harmless from all Maladies ...and I finish here with the Priestly Blessing: May the Lord Bless You and Keep You; May the Lord Lift His Countenance Up to You and Be Gracious Unto You.

Rabbi Abba HaKohen Borukhov."

A day after this, I received a summons, for a meeting with the General, in connection with an urgent matter. *Mr. Zalman Chafetz* of the soda factory received the same invitation.

"I have received a letter from your Rabbi," – the General said to us – "and I request that you translate it for me, word by word, because this has great significance to me, as I will explain to you later."

I was very familiar with the letter, and I began a word by word translation.

The General listened to each word with a great deal of attention.

– Tell me my hearties – the General retorted, hearing the entire content of the Rabbi's letter while stroking his gray beard – does it indeed say in the letter the following: "that God will turn away all manner of illness from you?"

– Yes, that is exactly what it says.

– Interesting, how do the words sound in the original Hebrew?

"Yassir mimenu kol makhalah."

The General wanted to repeat it, but he found it somewhat difficult to do so.

– But tell me, my hearties – the General again asked – your Rabbi, who has the Russian name Borukhov, is he a real *Kohen*?

– A real one.

– From the *Kohanim* who are descended from the Patriarch Aaron?

– From that very one.

– And the blessing he bestowed upon me, is it the genuine "Priestly Blessing?"

– The real thing.

– And this was the manner in which the people were blessed in the ancient Holy Temple in Jerusalem?

– Exactly in this way.

– Ivan! – the General called out to his aide who was standing to the side for the entire time – bring me the small icon from my bedroom.

The aide brought and handed a small, very old icon to the General.

The contents of the Rabbi's letter reminded me of this very icon – the General said entirely seriously – both of them, the icon and the Rabbi's letter, are somewhat similar to me in a certain sense.

This might strike you as a little strange, and I must therefore give a short explanation. Listen to a story. This happened to me in the Turkish war near Plevno. I was in the service of General Skovlev. One day, I received an order to secure a certain point in the area. Good! I got on my riding horse, two Cossacks with me – and away we went. It was a quiet night. Osman Pasha the commander of Plevno, was inactive. Our commander Skovlev was also inactive. And here, suddenly, my horse comes to a dead stop and refuses to budge. The spurs don't help. He stands like he is planted, moving neither backward nor forward. Stopped. And you must know, that my horse was a mountain horse from the Caucasus, a daring creature that had no fear of fire or battle. What happened here? I order one of the Cossacks to have a look, and find out what's going on. The Cossack bent over, looked around, felt about where my horse was standing, and lifted up ... this very little icon. If not for this incident, we would have ridden into a Turkish ambush, and who knows what would have happened to us. This little icon saved us. I was reminded of this yesterday, when I received your Rabbi's letter. My wife was in serious condition. And at the same moment that I received the Rabbi's letter with the "Priestly Blessing," I received the telegram from Moscow, that the operation went successfully, and my wife is completely well. Today's educated people would laugh at me, but let them laugh. I am a believer. I have seen much in my life, and I hold that there are many things that today's educated people, with all their wisdom, cannot comprehend. And now there is this: I will put the Rabbi's letter in a beautiful frame, and I will hang it over my bed together with the small icon. And I would like you to convey my heartfelt thanks to the Rabbi for his "Priestly Blessing," and tell him that Volkovysk may sleep easily. So long as the brigade is stationed here, so much as a dog will not bark."

And that's the way it was. The Rabbi's letter and the small icon hung at the General's residence, and it was quiet, peace on Israel.

The General spent his final years in St. Petersburg, but he remembered Volkovysk very well, and at every opportunity he would ask about the Volkovysk *balebatim* and especially about Rabbi Borukhov, who remained very dear in his memory.

The Einhorn Family

There was a special archive in the Temple, where every Jewish family had its own genealogy, the book of its origins. After the first destruction of the Temple, Ezra the Scribe requested that these ancient books be found and put under control: "Seek and write down the relationships." Later, after the second destruction, the historically prominent Sephardic Jewish families, such as Maimon, Abarbanel, Halevi, Abulafia, and others, hid their family trees as if they were precious jewelry. A family tree, it would appear from the *Tanakh*, played an important role among Jews even going back even to ancient times.

The leader of the Sephardic community in London, the prominent scholarly Rabbi, *Gaster*, researched,

dedicated time, energy and money, in order to find old Jewish families.

The onset of the exile into the Diaspora wiped everything out.

Despite this, there are Jewish families today, whose ancient pedigree is recognizable, not from written documents, but from their good deeds and by their talented descendants who were blessed by God.

Volkovysk could take great pride in its beautiful Jewish families. One of these, was the genteel family of Einhorn.

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The Pharmacist

The pharmacist, a friendly well-tempered man, is to be found in his pharmacy, which was located in Meir Shiff's clockworks location. He is a good specialist at his profession. You can see how quickly and diligently he works. The time required to prepare your prescription – he tells you – must last a half hour. And in order that you not be bored, he asked you to sit down and engages you in a conversation. And when he sees that you are someone who has some understanding of rabbinical teachings, he interjects a few wise words about the *Gemara* or the Commentaries that is very relevant to the conversation, and at that point you don't see a pharmacist in front of you, but rather a wise, scholarly Jew. This scholar, who mixes various medicaments, is also is capable of weaving together the thoughts of the Sages, reminds you of those scholarly types who are able to integrate Torah study with secular thought. The Sages, who showed respect towards all craftsmen that brought benefit to the human community, and who are called by the name of their profession, such as Rabbi Yochanan the Shoemaker, or Rabbi Yitzhak the Blacksmith, have a special respect for pharmacological science, for the art of pharmacy, as is mentioned in the portion of *Ki Tissa,* and was already recognized in the time of Moses. The Sages said: "Fortunate is the one who is called by the name of his craft." The Sages were not referring to any simple cut-and-dry craftsman, but rather, one who not only understands the blending of his ingredients, but also the ingredients of Jewish culture. And *Reb Hirsch Einhorn,* the well-known and beloved Volkovysk pharmacist, was this sort of an accomplished and resplendent Jewish personality.

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The Doctor

On the east side of the old *Bet HaMedrash*, a Jew with a handsome beard sits deeply sunken in learning. By the radiance of his face, and piercing gaze, it would appear that he is either a Rabbi or the Head of a yeshiva. That is not an error. This Jewish man is indeed a great scholar, but in addition, he is a doctor of medicine. A short time ago, this very same Jew wore the golden epaulettes of a military commission in the Russian army. He was highly regarded in his regiment, not only as a doctor, but also as a human being, and a doer of good deeds. He had a wonderful future ahead of him. He could have continued to rise and have a major career. But because of specific incident that made a profound impression on him, he took off his uniform one day, entered the study of the *Gaon* in Vilna, sat down, and began to study. This man must have gone through a very deep spiritual experience at that time, to cut short his brilliant military future. A steely pride that was the legacy of generations gone by, a deep faith in something higher, more beautiful that the temptations of the everyday world of that time and place, must have driven him to that purpose, at the time when he went

through that difficult spiritual crisis, and leads him to lead a highly circumscribed life, speaking little, and remaining always sunken in his thoughts. He is now the official Rabbi of Volkovysk and also practices as a doctor. He writes no prescriptions on the Sabbath, and personally describes how the medicine is to be prepared. The city stands in awe of his strong spirituality, and relates with great respect to the tragic and pious Doctor Einhorn.

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The Lawyer

The St. Petersburg Senate from time-to-time publishes a special journal dedicated to a variety of issues in jurisprudence. Expert lawyers participate in writing for this journal. When you have an opportunity to visit the printing house of the Senate, and you notice that among the manuscripts that are prepared for printing, there is writing from a faraway Lithuanian town, Volkovysk, signed by a Jewish-sounding name, you are compelled to ask: who this small-town correspondent might be.

If you go into the old *Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk, you will meet him, where he is sitting at the book lectern, and studying something in a book. This is quite a handsome and lovely young man. You can engage him in a discussion of Torah, or about worldly Jewish literature. He is not university educated. He is one of those enlightened scholars, who mastered Russian grammar, Russian classics and general European knowledge, while studying the *Gemara*, You can also find him in the courts, where he appears as legal counsel. But you will do best to step into his house. He and his educated wife, *Esther* , receive all their guests in a friendly manner. Just about anyone you ask in the street can give you his address. Everyone knows the young lawyer, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn.*

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The Poet

This is the little boy that constantly visits the house of the dentist, *Leopold Halpern* and writes poems. *Mrs. Halpern*, who has an interest in Yiddish literature, and her closest friend, *Miss Olga Pappa,* are inspired by these poems. They help to create a good reputation for the young man in the city. They say that the young man will grow up to become a poet, and his name will become famous throughout Jewish literature. In a noteworthy fact, it appears that their prediction is likely to come to pass. The Warsaw newspapers are already writing about the young boy from Volkovysk , and the American papers are already printing his poems, signed by *David Einhorn*.

Reb Shmuel Feinzilber

At the time of the first great fire in Volkovysk in 5646 (1886), *Reb Shmuel Feinzilber*, along with the fire-fighters, was severely injured in the rescue work. He was still in the prime of life, but his legs were only partly functional. Because of this, he would sit on a stool during the summertime , in front of his small white house on the *Grodno Gasse*. But, he was never alone. He was always surrounded by a variety of people. Here is an emissary from the courts with a question concerning a community matter, here comes a municipal gendarme with a report, and here come some private individuals with papers and questions for 'Reb Shmuel the Clarifier.' Everyone makes their way to him, because he is expert in all the aspects of municipal operations. Because he is sharp-minded, has a clear understanding, and is bu nature a good politician and a wise administrator. One can say that many municipal improvements are implemented as a result of the initiatives of Shmuel the Clarifier.

In addition, Reb Shmuel was a deeply moral man, and a very warm Jewish person.

On the Sabbath and festival holidays, there would always be a *minyan* at the Feinzilber home. Prayers were conducted in the first room. Feinzilber sat in the open doorway to the second room. After prayers, the congregation would go into the second room, wish Feinzilber a *'Gut Shabbos'* and spend a little time there.

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One time, a young man attended the *minyan* who fancied himself as 'enlightened,' and he argued that he didn't place much stock in prayer, and other religious ceremonies. One could be Jewish without all this. It suffices to have that 'very essence of Jewishness[185]' within oneself.

"Would you be so kind, young man," – said Reb Shmuel Feinzilber, and opened up a prayer book – "as to read over these couple of words: '*How goodly are your tents, O, Jacob*.'"

The young man read it.

"Now," – Feinzilber continued, using his hands to cover up the letters above the vowels – "be so good as to read the vowels...."

The young man just stood there, since one cannot read just vowels.

"Can you see," – Feinzilber continued to explain – "letters with vowels can be read, letters without vowels can also be read, and have meaning, This tells us something. But vowels, dots without letters, tell us nothing. Our prayers, our customs, are akin to letters that inform us. They have deep meaning and a moral sense about them. Try, young man, to put those letters over your small dots."

Reb Shmuel Feinzilber was a wise man, indeed.

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185 Using the Yiddish phrase, '*Dos pinteleh Yid,*' literally 'that point which defines a Jew. The following text involves an analogy to the 'points,' or dots, that are the vowels in Hebrew writing.

The Rakhmilevich Family

Page 440: *Eli Leib Rakhmilevich*

The Volkovysk public had a great deal to tell about the expensive wedding that was given for eight days straight in Noroznitzeh proper. The elegant parents of the couple, the various guests, the musicians, and the world-famous raconteur *Reb Elyakim Tzunzer,* who was brought in from Minsk. This was the wedding put on by Reb *Aizik Edelbaum* for his daughter *Nechama.* The groom was held in great regard, a handsome young man, enlightened, able to competently study a page of the *Gemara*, possessed of sharp chess-playing skills, and also plays the violin – well-rounded, this young man from Slutsk, *Eliyahu Leib Rakhmilevich.*

Eli' Leib becomes a merchant in forest products, amasses great well and a great name. He does not use the lines of credit that the banks have opened on his behalf, he has, bless God, his own resources. His is smart, practical and has an analytical mind. He calculates the most complicated calculations in his head, by heart, without the need to write them down. In his stone house on the corner of the *Millner Gasse* and the Wide Boulevard, within the finely appointed residence, his wife *Nechama* carries on Jewish custom, the Sabbath and festival holidays celebrated in the old-fashioned manner, just as it was done in the home of her parents. The *Dayan*, *Reb Mendele*, is a frequent guest there, who is received with the greatest respect, and the *Shammes* of the old *Bet HaMedrash* is practically a member of the household.

Eli' Leib is constantly traveling – Vilna, Warsaw, Danzig, Berlin. And when he comes home, everything becomes especially lively: presents for his wife Nechama, presents for the children, the beloved guest is a cause for joy, and the time goes pleasantly. But Eli' Leib, the loyal husband and dedicated father can't spend much time with household matters, because his head is full of thoughts having to do with the forest, the floating of lumber, transport. Here already sits the overseer of all the forests, *Reb Shmuel*, a pious Jew with a black beard. The forest operations are extensive, and multi-faceted, but Reb Shmuel is avers to written records and thick books. Reb Shmuel has a small pocket notebook and a formidable Jewish memory – and that works. It is for this reason that Eli' Leib sits quietly, and listens carefully to the extensive report from Reb Shmuel, and has nothing to add, because there is nothing to add to the words of a Jew who is alert, and an expert in his chosen field, such as Reb Shmuel the overseer.

And here is the peaceful and composed administrator *Reb Yosh'eh Rogov* , a tall imposing Jewish man. They say that the rich publican *Stanislav Segen* has a good ministerial mind, but this same Segen cannot get by with out the advice of Reb Yosh'eh Rogov. And here is *Reb Itcheh Schwartz*, who speaks so quickly, gesticulating with his hands. Reb Itcheh is involved with all the nobility, and never has time. He wears a long black *kapoteh* and a cap, and his Polish speech is heavily laced with Yiddish. But it doesn't matter, the nobility must have him, this Reb Itcheh Schwartz, even with his *kapoteh* and cap.

And here is the lawyer and scholar, *Reb Israel Efrat*, thoroughly grounded in the Russian system of law. When contracts are written, it is necessary to have the services of this legal counsel, possessed of such strong common sense.

It appears that a contract is to be written with that German, sitting there and smoking a fat cigar, he is a representative of the Berlin lumber company, Albert-Levandowski.

And Nechama is very busy providing the gathering with tea and snacks.

And later, in the evening, there will be a presentation in the salon, where their only daughter Esther'keh, a pretty young lady with intelligent eyes, will play the piano. She is studying medicine at the University of Kiev, and later out of the country, will travel throughout Europe, and is well-endowed with good humor and wisdom.

All of Ren Eli' Leib's sons are talented children, handsome, intelligent and academically trained, and Eli' Leib arranged the finest and most important marriages for all of his children.

The firstborn son, *Dr. Nachman Rakhmilevich* was especially famous. Pious, educated, philanthropic, he plays a major role in Vilna and Berlin as a merchant in forest products and an energetic participant in community matters. He becomes the minister in Kovno, and he is later appointed by the Lithuanian government as a Consul General for the Land of Israel, Syria and Egypt. *Shimon* finished his studies and lived happily with his wife in Kovno, where he had established a paper factory. *Lipa* was the son-in-law of the wealthy sugar merchant Dobkin in Warsaw.

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The First World War breaks out. Eli' Leib, on business in Minsk, is mistakenly arrested by the Russian Army on the eve of Passover, is released, and dies on the same day at the first Seder. His wife *Nechama* dies ten years later in the home of her oldest son in Berlin. *Nachman* dies in his middle, best years, in Tel-Aviv. *Shimon* passes away young in Kovno, and *Lipa* and his wife *Sala* are shot in Warsaw by the Gestapo.

The only survivor of the rich and fortunate *Rakhmilevich* family is *Esther'keh*, who is in Tel-Aviv, long life to her.

Reb Koppel Isser Volkovysky

One of the most respected of the Volkovysk *balebatim,* regarded with affection and beloved by Jews and Christians was *Reb Koppel Isser Volkovysky*. With his handsome stature and sympathetic appearance, bordered by his blonde beard, always neatly and beautifully dressed, Koppel Isser made the good impression of an intelligent and proud Jew. His outward appearance harmonized very well with his gentle character and warm Jewish heart. He had a very deep feeling for charitable activities and a very serious attitude towards everything that took place in the Jewish world. Even though Koppel Isser was not counted as related to any of the forest merchants, and did not run any big businesses, his lifestyle was nevertheless of the aristocratic and wealthy. He hand a beautiful home and similar possessions. He had a comfortable home, modern furniture, a secretary's cabinet and a writing table, generous with donations, friendly in his reception, a place on the east side of the synagogue and on the Sabbath he wore a top hat.

His intelligent wife, and academically educated son, and talented, bright and only daughter, constructed a spiritual center, around whom the youth of Volkovysk congregated. The intelligent young lady, *Lisa Einhorn* the always happy *Esther'keh Rakhmilevich* and the modest *Rachel'eh Edelbaum* who was called 'the good Rachel,'were seen there frequently.

It was a great holiday at Koppel Isser's when his son-in-law from Pinsk, Reb *Shmuel Saltz* would come to visit, who was a well-known and much loved personality in Volkovysk. The name Saltz was famous in Vilna,

Munich and Gomel among the most prominent of the forest product merchants, who came to him with the most difficult issues, holding that Saltz was the best expert and mediator. And in this, they were not wrong. With his good Jewish mind, he could unravel the most convoluted issues and confused calculations, straighten out complaints and representations, and satisfy both sides involved. The special skill of a peace maker. To spend time with Saltz, who was familiar with the entire world, was a spiritual pleasure. The ladies of Volkovysk would cancel their card-playing evenings, because spending the time with Saltz was much more interesting. And even Reb Mendele [sic: the *Dayan*] was sad when this dear guest took his leave.

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After the first fire of 1886, Koppel Isser proposed that a fire-fighting command should be established. This proposal pleased the community, and the first gathering on this matter took place in the elder Jesierski's small garden.

All the important officials of Volkovysk were there: The *Magistrate*, *the Notary Beyrashevsky, the Postmaster Schwab, the Head Inspector Zhdanov, & Dr. Olshevsky.* All the details were worked out. Only the matter of uniforms for the new fire-fighters was there a difference of opinion. The question was whether the fire-fighters needed uniforms, or could they make do with just a red cap, or with only an armband, and would they be permitted to wear these insignias during the work week, or only during their work in putting out fires. There were sharp debates surrounding this question of garb. Only the elder Jesierski was able to straighten out the entire matter. Koppel Isser carried through his proposal, and Volkovysk got a fire-fighting brigade.

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The magistrate let it be known that the governor of the Grodno province, *Staliapin* would visit Volkovysk. And seeing that there would be several deputations at the reception, a Jewish deputation should also participate.

Apparently, Volkovysk took up the matter of Staliapin's visit quite seriously, because Koppel Isser had already visited his friend Reb Shmuel Feinzilber several times at that small house on the *Grodno Gasse.*

A message arrived that Staliapin had departed from Grodno. Today, or tomorrow, he will be appointed Prime Minister, and he is traveling now to say farewell to the province.

This was at a time when the St. Petersburg legislature took a strong interest in the Jews, when the anti-Semite Purishkevich took a leaf from Haman's book by proclaiming that 'they do not obey the king's law,' that Jews are opposed to land ownership and therefore are not entitled to citizen's rights. And his disciple Krushevan, wrote a new interpretation in his poisonous periodical, Знамя [The Standard], of the second half of that sentence, 'and the King has no cause to take comfort,' indicating that the Czar needs to liberate Russia from the Jews.

But there was some basis on which to feel that Staliapin, the European, has an entirely different opinion of the Jews. He was acquainted with Jews in Kovno, and kept contact with the Jews of Grodno – with the Landaus, Shereshevskys and Hellers. He also knew the name of Rabbi Nakhum'tzeh Grodner, whom

Christians held to be a great saint.

It is for this purpose that one needs to take advantage of this good opportunity. Remind him with a couple of warm words about the plight of the Jews, which can be controlled by the good will of this man, who is on his way to become the Prime Minister of Russia.

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The Jewish deputation consisted of three chosen *balebatim: Reb Koppel Isser Volkovysky, Reb Joshua David Pappa,* and *Reb Israel Efrat*. This three-part union was put together with a specific motive, with a specific calculation.

Reb Joshua David, the *Gabbai* of the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash* is a Jewish man with a pleasing appearance and a blonde beard, like Koppel Isser's. But this was not the point. The point was something else entirely.

These two Jewish men, Koppel Isser and Joshua David both have a pedigree that is greatly respected among people. The *Pappa* from Brisk, who had served the government as an officer in the Brisk fortress was Joshua David's father, and the *Pappa* from St. Petersburg who owns oil wells in Baku, and who is well-regarded in the ministry, is Joshua David's beloved brother.

And about Koppel Isser, we don't have to mention. [He is] a nephew of the Bialystoker philanthropist Reb Yekhiel Ber Volkovysky, to whom the Czar, Nicholas [II] granted a friendly audience.

And when these two presentable Jews with the blonde beards will present themselves to the Grodno Governor Staliapin, and should he take an interest and ask about conditions: who? What? There will be something to say, and something to indicate.

And above all them, the lawyer, *Israel Efrat*. With his wise head and his honed Russian tongue, he will be able to surreptitiously introduce a few warm and heartfelt words for the benefit of all Jewry.

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Three deputations awaited Staliapin's train at the platform of the Volkovysk railroad station: representatives of the surrounding peasant communities, in fur hats and brown overcoats, representatives of the municipal government with insignias on their hats, and the Jewish representatives in cylindrical top hats.

Staliapin came out of his car, and approached the fur hats, greeting them in a friendly manner, smiled, and posed several questions to them, afterwards to the insignias, with whom he spent a pleasant bit of time for a while, and only afterwards approached the cylindrical top hats.

Efrat greeted him beautifully, with the thanks of the Jewish community, who considers itself fortunate to have a visit from His Excellency.

Staliapin heard out this formality, nodded, and answered that the following day he would convene a sit-down with regard to municipal issues, asking that the Jewish deputation also attend.

Efrat wanted to say something more, but His Excellency indicated with another nod of his head to all three top hats that the audience was ended.

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– It's another world, my friends – Koppel Isser said sadly, – previous governors, when they would visit Bialystok, the first thing they would do would visit my uncle, *Yekhiel Ber* and spend some time with him; and one of them, when he was elected as a senator, made a special trip to Bialystok, to take leave of my uncle. Today, new winds are blowing above us, and who knows what they will bring...

Reb Naphtali the Melamed[186]

He drops into all the *Batei-Medrashim* on Friday evenings, listens to what the people are talking about, throws in a word, and moves on.

"Have you by some chance read in the newspapers , that it just so happens on the Seventh Day of Passover, the great battleship Petropavlovsk sank at Port Arthur along with Admiral [Stepan] Makarov?" – Reb Naphtali asks the people sitting on the east side.

"Yes, we saw it."

"And you remember that a year ago, exactly on the Seventh Day of Passover, the *Shammes*, Moshe Kiro was killed right in front of the Holy Ark during the Kishinev pogrom?"

"Yes, so what about it?"

"The incident at Port Arthur," – Reb Naphtali declares – this is the handiwork of Moshe Kiro, exactly on the anniversary of his death. 'Makarov' in Hebrew is spelled Mem, Kuf, Raysh, Bet. This is the *roshey tevot* (initials) for: *Moshe Kiro Rama BaYam* (Moshe Kiro drowned them in the sea)..."

"But, Reb Naphtali..."

"What 'buts,' I don't have time. I'm going to Lev's *Bet HaMedrash*. Have a good Shabbat."

"Myrrh" and "Sweet Cinnamon"

It is the Sabbath, and the Torah is being read. *Koppel Isser* bangs on his copy of the Pentateuch and exclaims: 'Quiet!' But the target of his exclamation, *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* is unable to remain quiet. Chaim Ozer is a lawyer, and must know everything exactly from its fundamentals. He has notices in this portion a certain 'Myrrh' and its companion 'Sweet Cinnamon' and it is necessary to elucidate what exactly these two items are, and what is their origin.[187] Chaim Ozer gets the congregation interested, and a murmur courses through

[186] This appears to be *Reb Naphtali-Hertz Nakhumovsky*.

[187] Exodus 30:23

the east side of the synagogue: *Rashi, Onkelos, Evven Ezra, Mendelssohn*,[188] and Koppel Isser's protestation goes unheard. A lively discussion ensues. *Herschel the Pharmacist* rises on the east side, and makes a quiet observation to his close neighbor, *Reb Yitzhak Aizik Edelbaum.* And the observation races across the entire east side, and Koppel Isser bombards his Pentateuch with further pounding for silence.

"As for 'Myrrh' and 'Sweet Cinnamon,'" – *Eliyahu Leib Rakhmilevich* remarks – "Reb Hirsch is better acquainted with these items than everyone else. These are ancient remedies used by apothecaries, and we do well to listen to the words of a practitioner." And the ruling is according to the word of Reb Hirsch.

The Forest Products Merchants of Volkovysk

In the dark forests of Polesia and Belorussia, across the Volga and near the Ural, the Jewish forest product merchants, their agents and representatives brought light to the local inhabitants, a living and sustenance. Many of them had forest merchants from Volkovysk, such as *Reb Itcheh Lev*, the *Hellers*, the *Rakhmileviches*, the *Jesierskis* – these were people of the Jewish Lithuanian intelligentsia, sharp-minded and with a great breadth of capacity. They spend a great deal of time out of the country. One sees them in the forest groves, the wood markets, in the bank. You see them in Carlsbad, or in Danzig, Tilsit, Memel, occupied with commerce, arranging deals and presentations. But they were people with a deep Jewish feeling, tied to and loyal to the old Jewish tradition. Among these forest product merchants were Torah scholars and good Hebrew stylists. On the subject of these merchants of forest products, coming together to straighten out certain disagreements, a Jewish Volkovysk forest Jew wrote an entire humorous poem, of which only the introduction remains in my memory:

Cedars of Lebanon, Ardent Torah scholars,
Masters of wooden slats and other sorts of merchandise,
Were invited to a meeting to adjudicate and direct,
A thing or two, disputes and transgressions,
Some sins and things not so,
Between all who partake in Torah study that rules,
In order to compromise, even out and eliminate conflict,
Everything was solved there at the sit down,
As it should be, on a seat of marble,
The deputy sat beside the Head,
Everything in order, with candles lit,
There are cups of warm brew, and even cooked food,
And the words of the wise are heard with satisfaction,
And the complaints are linked one to another,
And even riddles are told,
As is the custom among Jewish men.

"And You Shall Not Draw Near to a Woman"

[188] Some of the principal commentaries on the Torah.

It is Purim. At Reb *Leib Heller's* the meal has already been served. Presentations are about to be made. The gathering has already had a little to drink, and they are somewhat loosened up. A beautiful lady enters, who is known to everyone. One of the attendees offers her a compliment: "Madame, when you enter, the room becomes brighter. Beautiful eyes remind one of the phrase, *'Let there be light.'* "

"But," – a second guest adds – "In the *Gemara* there is a difference of opinion. What is the meaning of the word, *light:* 'Night,' or 'day.'

The 'madame' understood Hebrew, and this last remark did not please her.

The following morning, the guest who had made that second remark received a note, with the following 'gift of the season:'

The light of night or light of day,
Is a Talmudic dispute from days of yore,
But every gentlemen,
That knows at least something,
Of the rules of chivalry,
And rules of the salon,
Will not sully the honor of an ordinary woman,
Much less someone considered a lady.
Queen Esther is recalled with affection,
And because of here, all daughters of Eve,
Whosoever has forgotten and crossed the line
Here is the dictum of not to do:
And you shall not draw near to a woman.

Reb Benjamin Bialsky

In the preface list that *Reb Mendele* the *Dayan* set down in his book, there is a name, the magnate, *Reb Benjamin Bialsky* of St. Petersburg. The name of the Russian residence adds some noteworthiness. However, the truth is, that this merchant of St. Petersburg was, and always remained a son of Volkovysk.

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In the 1890's, the production of flour made from potatoes (*krochmal*) started to develop in the fields of the nobility in the Volkovysk ambit. This was a primitive production process, that had a very limited local demand, and could not count on a larger level of export.

It was known that Poniazovkin the *krochmal* merchant was in Yaroslav, who provided all of Russia with potato flour. One also heard, that Finland, with its paper and molasses factories uses a large quantity of *krochmal* which is imported mostly from Holland. Naturally, it would be good to get business from Finland. But who is in a position to compete with a Poniazovkin or a Holland, who provide first-class merchandise which is famous and held in high regard in all respects.

The ones able to effect such things, for the most part, were out of the country, and simply did not have the time to deal with such things, which was more the province of merchants and speculators, but not that of aristocrats. And the leading administrators, who should have been concerned about the development of the production, gave this as much attention as their principals.

A son of *Reb David Bialsky* , a talented young man named *Benjamin,* decided that it would be a good thing to take a hop over to Finland, and to have a look at the *krochmal* situation there. There is a problem with the Russian visa and the Finnish language, but perhaps the Good Lord will help.

Benjamin goes off to Finland, tours the factory works in Helsingfors [sic: Helsinki], Abba, Tamerfors [sic: Tampere], meets the directors, factory production heads, merchants, asks questions and does research. He studies, and returns with important ideas in his head, and with a Dutch document, a brochure printed in Amsterdam, dedicated to the subject of the potato flour industry. This brochure was very important resource, being a sort of summary document of the processes and procedures, with basic rules and regulations that relate to the manufacture of potato flour.

This was basic knowledge for the producers in the Volkovysk area. And it had a practical impact. The *krochmal* from Volkovysk improved, and with the intermediation of the reformer, Benjamin, the *krochmal* began to be exported to Finland a little att a time.

Later on, Benjamin Bialsky opens an office on the Suvorovsky Prospekt in St. Petersburg, brings his younger brothers there, becomes a first class St. Petersburg buyer, and plays a meaningful role on the Kalashnikov commodities exchange[189].

The *Bialsky Brothers,* all schooled in the Torah, energetic Volkovysk *Litvaks,* minds sharpened by the study of the *Gemara,* developed and invigorated the *krochmal* production in the Volkovysk area. Sitting in St. Petersburg, they had the opportunity to follow the course of the large *krochmal* transactions, and to place meaningful orders.

Their orders were short and to the point. Written in an abbreviated and coded Hebrew, with aliases as a protection against ill-intended eyes of competitors.

The renown Finnish firm of "Jokisokker Aktiabolazet" was known to them simply as 'Jokl.' The Finnish city of Helsinki was coded as the residence of the Patriarch Abraham, '*Elonei Mamreh.*' And the product *krochmal* itself, had to get by with the name, '*Korah.*'

A sort of telegraphic correspondence flowed from St. Petersburg to Volkovysk containing hidden messages, rhymes and riddles:

> "Jokl is occupied and is not seeking Korah,
> Because Mordechai came to him as a guest."

(What this meant was that the firm of Jokkis Soker did not require any *krochmal* at this time, since they had just received a shipment form Holland.)

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189 Referring to the Kalashnikov District in St. Petersburg.

The portion of Korah is completely stopped
Until we receive a message from Elonei Mamreh

(This means, do not close any new *krochmal* deals until we get a telegram from Helsinki).

"Peace be unto you! Korah as gone to heaven."

(This was a cheerful greeting, that the price of *krochmal* had started to go up).

The Bialsky Brothers ran a Jewish operation. The office was closed for the Sabbath. They had guests at their table, the wine was blessed, Sabbath melodies were sung, and words of wisdom from the Torah were exchanged. A slice of Volkovysk in St. Petersburg.

And when a Jew from Volkovysk had a need to be in St., Petersburg, he know that Reb Benjamin was there to help out with travel permits, because the 'angels of service' on the Suvorovsky Prospekt were good acquaintances of Reb Benjamin.

And when such a Jew would leave and return in peace from St. Petersburg, he would give Reb David regards from his children, and offer his thanks for the safe conduct.

Reb David was once asked how his little Benjamin had managed to work himself up to such a level where he could deal with the Czar's difficult rules concerning visas for travel?

– It's a simple thing – Reb David replied – Interdicting the Czar's obstacles is not hard for one who had to exhaust himself trying to understand a particularly difficult passage in the writings of the *Rambam*.[190] And besides, all those named 'Benjamin' enjoy a special privilege granted to them by Moses our Teacher, that they make dwell peacefully in general, even in St. Petersburg, since it is written in the last chapter of Deuteronomy:

"And to Benjamin he said, the beloved of the Lord shall dwell in peace."[191]

Saturday Afternoon – A Stroll Through Volkovysk Streets

When the new Bialystok-Baranovich railroad line was put through in the 1880's, Volkovysk began to grow. The renown contractor, *Tzigel* came to town, and he began to construct the new barracks with great intensity. Streets, squares, stores, imposing buildings, a new world, a new city. An entire artillery brigade will be billeted here.

The elder *Bloch,* a scholarly Jew who was a specialist in the leather trade, built a large tannery, that already had a large customer base in the world, and employed many workers. *Barash* is building the iron casting factory, *Ber'tzeh Mintz* plans a brick kiln in Dr. Yelitz's yard, behind the Swedish Hill. *The old water mill* with its great wheel, that rumbles day and night over there near the Polish church, will now remain only as

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190 The Hebrew acronym for *Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon* (Maimonides) the great medieval Jewish scholar.

191 Deut 33:12

a memorial to days gone by. Because at the Nasip's, there already stands a three story mill powered by steam. *Nakheh Heller* has constructed the beautiful modern hospital on the road to Rosh, as a gift to the city. *Perliss & Ginsberg* have opened a bank house. *Manya Galai* refurbished his hotel, because he anticipates guests. The Gabbai, *Aaron Shifmanovich* will re-decorate the old synagogue and paint the roof. There is talk of sidewalks and a telephone. Volkovysk is growing, with God's blessing, and becoming a center of distinguished people at the same time. We will be able to function without Bialystok. You can buy just about anything you need at *David Hubar's*. Perhaps you wish to buy a gift for as bride and groom, a golden watch, a signet ring, or altogether, a diamond, well then, kindly go into *Reb Meir Shiff*.

All of this is thanks to the new railroad, and that is why it is recalled with favor at every opportunity.

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It is the Sabbath, a nice summer day. The young people have gone for a stroll in the Zamkov woods. The older folks are sitting out in front of their houses carrying on a conversation.

At the house of the teacher, *Reb Nakhum Halpern*, on the high wooden porch, you can see a circle of Jews who enjoy listening to Reb Nakhum's explanation of the Torah portion of the week. Reb Nakhum is a sharp-minded and precise, knowing the *Tanakh* by heart, he conveys a point both in a knowledgeable and interesting fashion. Afterwards, there is a discussion about the new cantor, *Reb Noah*, whom *Reb Aizik Nachman'tzeh's* brought to Volkovysk, and who today really laid out an outstanding inaugural Sabbath service. Reb Noah's service is no small thing! A rendition by him of *Boruch SheAmmar*, or *Adon Olam* was capable of restoring the soul. And do you know with what he captivated the entire congregation? If you remember, it took place at the first night of *Selikhot,* when he came out with the prayer, "Hear my voice and see the tear in my eyes." Tears welled up in the eyes of all the congregants. You are toying with Reb Noah! There was no one like him. To tell the truth, were it not for the new railroad, we wouldn't have had him. Reb Aizik Nachman'tzeh's would not have gotten him to come in a horse-drawn wagon. We must thank the railroad, "And *Harbonah* is to be remembered to the good.[192] "

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You ask, what is that circle of Jews over there near the shuttered stores? You obviously don't see who is standing in the middle, speaking with such intensity and gesticulating with his hands. That is *Reb Leizer Shaliota*, an analytically minded Jew, a Torah scholar with a sharp intelligence. He is explaining to the gathering, that there is nothing to get worked up over the new railroad. After all, what is the concept of a railroad? It is to straighten out a way, cutting down a mountain, filling in a valley and digging a tunnel. Here, look in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 40: "Clear the way, straighten out a road in the desert, every valley will be raised, and every mountain and hill will be brought low." Here you have the entire purpose of a railroad. And if you think the telephone is an innovation, you are mistaken. Open up rabbinical texts that are from hundreds of years ago, you will find questions and answers about this very subject: Is it permitted to talk on the Sabbath over a given distance? What do we mean by "distance?" What does it mean to talk? My friends, this is the telephone. It is clear that there is nothing new here, there is nothing new under the sun.

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192 From the Purim story in the Book of Esther, recalling the steward Harbonah, who warned of the impending danger.

Do you know *Reb Yaakov Grodzinski* the lawyer? He is jokingly referred to as Ivan the Terrible[193]. And do you believe, God forbid, that he is really an angry and cruel Jew? God forbid, no! Grodzinski is a tall, strong Jew, who constantly demands justice from the public, the law, and righteousness. And he takes great pleasure in telling the truth directly to people, looking them right in the eye. And he says it out loud, in a voice, with no evil eye intended, that small town cantors may justifiably envy. There is a story that goes around, that when Reb Yaakov *Grodzny* whispers a secret into someone's ear in *Karczyzna*, it can be heard in *Zamoscheh*. It is because of these traits, that he was given the nickname, "Grodzny." It describes a strict Jew. But in reality, Reb Yaakov is a good-hearted man, who takes the obligation of entertaining guests very seriously, and is always ready to help out someone in need. Reb Yaakov has a beautiful house and a large garden. There, between the trees, around the table where Reb Yaakov's wife, that Woman of Valor, has set out glasses of tea, biscuits and other delectable items, all home made, a bevy of guests are seated, and they are talking about the Mammoth.

You don't know what the "Mammoth" is?

A fine state of affairs! The whole world knows about this already. Local and foreign newspapers have written about this already in great detail.

This happened at the time that the new railroad was being built. While digging for the foundation of the Volkovysk railroad station, the tusk of a [Woolly] Mammoth was found, that was believed to have lived before the Deluge. We speak of it as a tusk, but be a big shot and try to pick it up, which looks like the bent axle of a wagon. This 'little tooth' was placed under glass in a special niche the wall of the railroad station, accompanied by a writeup in metal letters nearby, describing the circumstances and time when the tusk was discovered, so that future generations will know what this Mammoth was. And now, we are sitting in Reb Yaakov Grodzinski's garden talking about it.

This very same Mammoth became sort of a possession of the Volkovysk Jews. It was revealed that this Mammoth may have had a connection to ancient Noah in the Bible. It is clear, that if the Mammoth survived the Deluge, he must have been a passenger on Noah's Ark, and must have traveled together with him to Mount Ararat. Today, we see only a trace of the Mammoth, who must have taken his leave of Old Noah, and undertook a journey, if you can imagine, from Ararat to Volkovysk – and spent his last few years here.

"You are right, my friends," – Reb Yaakov Grodzinski says – "but it has already been recorded by the newspapers, Kaddish has been said, and a nice gravestone has been placed in our railroad station. So now, be so kind as to partake in the tea and other delectable dishes that my good wife has prepared for you."

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There is still an hour to the *Mincha* prayer service. We can still make a visit to *Reb Yehuda Leib* the butcher. There he sits, in front of his small brick and stone house that he had built after the fire on the *Grodno Gasse,* and he is surrounded by his neighbors and good friends. Yehuda Leib is a wise Jewish man, who dislikes worries, always in good spirits, always ready to do someone a favor, and always with a smile and a suitable word. Yehuda Leib does not relate to the modern world. He says, once – now there was a world. The one

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193 The joke comes from the Russian name for that Czar, *Ivan Grodzny*. It is a play on the lawyer's last name.

time Volkovysk Jews were healthy as forest beasts and wise as the day is long. We no longer have *Simchat Torah* and *Purim* the way we used to, or the *Kiddush* put on by the *balebatim*, when a well-browned *taygakhtz* was served with real *gribbenes*.[194] I really don't care for these modern *shalakh mones* packages and their silly sweets. I send filled spleens[195] for *shalakh mones*. Eat hearty, children, enjoy and understand what a real Jewish delicacy consists of.

Yehuda Leib then tells the people what occurred to him during the time the new railroad was constructed.

– The telegraph poles – Reb Yehuda relates – were already installed along the entire length of the railroad line, but the wires ha\d not yet been drawn across the high porcelain glass conduits at the top.

In the villages that were privileged to get such a pole, the peasants believed that it would already be possible to communicate with St. Petersburg. One only needs to know the right word, the right language. Some jokester must have convinced them of this. I happen to have the need to travel through a village near *Berestovitz* where I get into an argument taking place between gentiles, where they are murderously assaulting each other.

– Stop it! I yell at them, stop hitting each other, because if you don't, I'll send a telegram and summon the soldiers. And I go the telegraph pole.

The gentiles stop and watch me, looking to see what I plan to do. Well, I say to myself, I will explain a sentence from the *Chad Gadya* to you in a minute.[196]

The gentiles continue to stand and look.

I quietly begin to recite the prayer, *Asher Yatzar*. Afterwards, I put my ear against the pole, and listen for a while. Afterwards, I strike the pole with my fist and shout out, "*Yekum Purkan min shemaya*?" Бунт! Прислат Войска! (Send the military).[197]

The gentiles were frightened.

Stop Leibeh! They began to plead, we will stop fighting, we will leave, call them off.

Nu, I say, good. I repeated the procedure with the *Asher Yatzar*, and again shouted out "*Yekum Purkan min shemaya!* " Stop! Не Нодо! Смирно! (We don't need them, it's quiet).

That's how I made peace among the gentiles.

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194 A browned potato pudding with cracklings fried in chicken fat.

195 Similar to a *heldzel*, or stuffed gizzard.

196 A metaphor, drawn from the need to explain the Aramaic allegorical poem at the end of the Passover *Haggadah.*

197 A random choice of a couple of prayers, in Hebrew and Aramaic, to create the illusion of a secret or mysterious ritual that could be ascribed to telegraphy by the ignorant or unknowing.

Jewish Tenant Farmers

In the high circles of St. Petersburg it was axiomatic that Jews had no talent for agriculture, despite the fact that in the Kherson Colonies of Poland one could encounter Jewish peasants and tenant farmers, who were both dedicated and loyal to tilling the soil. One could also see this in the Volkovysk area, where large tracts of land were leased to and developed mostly with Jewish intelligence and worked with Jewish hands. These Jewish tenant farmers never studied at any school of agronomy, but nevertheless were recognized by all the surrounding neighbors as good practitioners.

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Dr. Zhivotovsky, the land lessor from Levshovo near Berestovitsky, was a schoolmate of the Prime Minister, Staliapin. The latter invited him to be the editor of the periodical, "*Rossiya*." It was the time when the Black Hundred set the tone for Russia, and the editor of a patriotic periodical certainly didn't need to have any business with a Jew. Despite this, the estate manager of Levshovo was indeed a Jew, *Reb Jonah Khozeh*, who lived quite a comprehensively Jewish life in Levshovo: a *minyan* at his home, a study full of books, and a Rabbi who was a Torah scholar to instruct his only son. The editor of the patriotic periodical "Rossiya," and the estate manager of Levshovo were very close to one another, true friends and comrades. Staliapin's colleague had a high regard for the Jew, not only for his expertise, but also as a person and an intimate friend. Even the Rabbi of Reb Jonah's only son occupied a great place in the mind of the St. Petersburg aristocrat. The chancellery of the St. Petersburg municipal authority once received a telephone call from Zhivotovsky, to the effect that his friend was coming to St. Petersburg and would be staying at a certain hotel, and therefore the police should not disturb him with too many questions about documents. The functionaries thought, who knows what important personage is expected. But when Zhivotovsky spoke the Jewish name of his friend, the police had to bite their lips, and keep quiet.

The 'great personage' was the Rabbi of Reb Jonah's only son, who needed to be in St. Petersburg, but as a Jew, he had no rights to entry there.

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Reb Ber'tzeh Mintz, who lives on his property near Zelva, is known as a superb host to his guests. When you come to visit him, you have to at least spend the night. This is because Reb Ber'tzeh does not understand how you can let a guest out of the house without an afternoon meal and a good night's sleep. And should you show up on a Friday morning, you are truly lost. You are not going to get away before Sunday afternoon. Reb Ber'tzeh's son, the hearty and easy mannered Shaul'keh, will take care of that, either that, or they will take an axle off your wagon, in accordance with the old-fashioned custom of the village Jews, or Shaul'keh will think up some other contrivance. In short, you are staying for *Shabbos*. And truthfully, as Reb Ber'tzeh says, what's the rush? Thank God, there is a *minyan*, and as a guest, you deserve a fine *aliyah* [to the Torah], and should you be an expert on *cholent*, and should you be a connoisseur of the genuine Sabbath delicacies, prepared in the manner of our old grandmothers, then you will, with God's help have an opportunity to enjoy this, thanks to the lady of the house. God should only give you the appetite to fulfill the commandment to enjoy the Sabbath properly. Old Reb Ber'tzeh is right, because it is well-known what people say, that a *Shabbos* at Reb Ber'tzeh's gives you enough strength for the entire week.

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The land holdings of *Baron Bishping* in the Volkovysk area are extensive. The estate managers are Jewish.

When you look over the fields, you will see a rider, a broad-chested man with a black and silvery beard. When you examine the valuable riding horse and the beautiful saddle, you think that this must be the Baron himself. No, the Baron is in Paris or Italy. The rider is *Reb Meir Vireker* the manager of all the Vireker lands. You can come to visit him as well. You will be a welcome guest. In *Virekeh*[198] there is also a *minyan*, and a table set fit for a king. The silver service that one sees at the Passover Seder in Reb Meir Vireker's house will not be seen in the homes of even the richest city folk.

The famous Polish writer, *Aliza Arzheshkova,* who had a superb understanding of the live of the rural Jews, would always tell Nakhum Sokolov when he would visit her in her home in Grodno, that she is very happy when she sees that the rural Jewish type of person, that she wrote about in her books, continues to exist in real life, but sadly, this type of person no longer exists.

A Jewish Swindler

It was a biting cold frost, but the lumberjack inn was warm. The lumberjacks had just returned from the forest, laid down their saws, their small splitting hammers, took off their short parkas, wiped off their frozen beards, and sat down with the account books to copy over the number of units of wood, written down in their small notebooks, that they had harvested from the forest.

Feyge the cook had prepared the table, serving a hot cabbage borscht with potatoes and was getting ready to bring out the roast goose with beans and rice.

The group gathered, had a shot of whiskey, and a conversation ensued concerning the cutting and stacking of wood, sharpening tools, thresholds, standards, the weekly discourse of the trade of Jews who worked in the forest.

It happened that the conversation turned to the subject of forest merchants, today's and those of yesteryear. Take, for example a Jew like *Reb Itcheh Lev* , who had a very great reputation among us, and throughout all of Lithuania and in other countries. Reb Itcheh Lev was a Jew beloved by all of us.

"What is there to talk about," – the old lumberjack *Reb Motya* retorts – "but of course Reb Itcheh Lev was a very prominent Jew. But, in my case, he once deceived me about a couple of hundred *korb*."

"Who?" – the entire gathering shouted – "Reb Itcheh Lev? You? Deceived? Are you crazy, or have you lost your mind?"

"That is some nerve," – began a young lumberjack – "that a Jew should say...."

"Quiet!" – *Nachman* the overseer of the lumberjacks cut him off – "Reb Motya is no drunk, first we will hear him out."

"Well now, listen to a story." – and Reb Motya gave the gathering a smile – "It was after the great fire in Volkovysk (in 1886), God forbid it should happen again. It was as terrible time, even for a hale and hearty young fellow like me. For what good deeds, I do not know, but Reb Itcheh Lev drew close to me. How are you, Motya? How is it going? Here take this little nothing, we'll settle up at a later time. – And in this

[198] Called Vjarèjki in modern Belarus.

fashion, he would surreptitiously give me financial sustenance. I took it because I was in great need of money for food, and I knew that Reb Itcheh Lev gave it with all of his heart. Some time went by, and I took stock and realized that with all of his generosity I had become indebted to him for over two hundred *korb*. Bad! I needed to repay. So I somehow scraped together a hundred *korb* and I pay a call on Reb Itcheh Lev. As it happens, I run into *Mindl Tzirel* , a dear soul, just like her husband.

– How are you, Motya? – "So-so," – I say – "I've come to repay a debt."

– Have you forgotten – she points to me – it is just before a holiday, and before a holiday one must give but not take. My husband had just returned for *Sukkot* from out of the country, and he is quite busy. If you want to see him, it would be better if you came back on *Khol HaMoed*.[199]

– Good!

So I returned on *Khol HaMoed.* Reb Itcheh invited me into his office, asks for wine and refreshments to be served. Very nice.

I remind him about my debt, and put down the one hundred on his desk.

I observe that Reb Itcheh becomes very pensive, and stares intently at the one hundred.

– I would like an expert opinion – he says to me – exactly how much this one hundred actually weighs. After all, it is the product of mountains of hard work, sweat, worries. Who has the strength to lift up such a burden? Take it off the table, Motya, you have a couple of strong hands.

– But Reb Itcheh – I say – A debt for your considerations...

– Why are you trying to confuse me with talk of considerations! – he replied angrily – Who? What? When? Old wives' tales! I remember nothing, and it is forbidden to take back that which is forgotten. It is an explicitly referenced mitzvah in the Torah, and indeed, it is a great mitzvah, called *shikkhah*, that which is forgotten. What do you want me to do – transgress a Torah commandment? You can also fulfil this very same mitzvah. Such a beautiful, such a rare and such an easy and simple mitzvah, *shikkhah!* It is to be forgotten, and an end to it. Get what was done out of your head: I did not give, and you did not take. Forget it, and erase it. But, one thing you mustn't forget. When a consideration is needed, you shall remember that in Volkovysk there is Itcheh Lev.

"Exactly in this way, with biblical quotes and parables he got me good and mixed up, and left me speechless.

"In short, here, there, Reb Itcheh Lev 'deceived' me regarding over two hundred korb, and they have been lost ever since."

– They should only multiply! – Nachman the overseer of the lumberjacks shouted as he pounded the table with his fist. – God should provide only more of these sorts of wise guys and swindlers among the Jews. Feyge! Bring the samovar and the humidor of cigars from the top shelf! We have to honor Reb Motya!

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[199] The intermediate festival days for *Sukkot* and Passover.

Three Volkovysk Residents

By Rabbi Abraham Zalman Kurtz, Rochester NY

The city of Volkovysk excelled in the area of Torah study. A significant part of the Jewish population knew that it was an obligation to set aside time for Torah study. Torah was studied – whether alone, or – with assistance from a Rabbi. The first Volkovysk Jewish cooperative effort that was founded on a spiritual basis, on the basis of public Torah study. Even the ordinary, simple Jews had their own house of study, the *Bet HaMedrash, Ein Yaakov*, where they studied Torah daily – from before sunrise, and later, between *Mincha* and *Maariv.* The *Mishna* was studied, as were *Chayei Adam* and *Ein Yaakov*. Because of this, Volkovysk had rather simple Jews, such as *Moshe the Izvoshchik*[200] who had a good grasp of the *Mishna*, and was capable of posing difficult questions during study, that would cause the leader of the study group to struggle for an answer; or the righteous *Ephraim, the Carpenter*, to whom the *Dayan* of the city, Rabbi Gaon Reb Tuvia Ravitzky, came once for a blessing, to pray that his son would be excused from military conscription. And there were many such tradespeople among the Jews in Volkovysk, but who were good students and whose roots were in the common people.

By contrast in the more prominent *Mauer Synagogue*, or the Wooden Synagogue, they didn't rely on study leaders. *Mishna, Shas* – this was warmup stuff for them. In those houses of study, everything was studied – and the great scholars of the era studies there, such as the previously mentioned *Dayan*, *The Gaon Rabbi Tuvia* – or as he was called Reb Teveleh – who was formidably accomplished in Torah study, and in addition possessed an unerring logic that enabled him to innovate interpretations to the Torah, and *Reb Joel Azriel Shishatsky*, about whom I will write more extensively here.

Reb Joel Azriel Shishatsky

Reb Joel Azriel Shishatsky was blessed with two good characteristics: an unusual memory,. and a passion for scholarship. It was therefore natural that he became an unusually fluent scholar in the *Shas*, with *Tosafot* and *commentaries*. He studied everything and knew everything. In matters that were subject to opinion, even the city *Dayan*, Rabbi Tuvia, would turn to Reb Joel Azriel with questions. Reb Joel Azriel had only one shortcoming – he never appreciated his own importance, and therefore only a limited number of people knew to respect him properly. Most people didn't even know him by name, but rather as the son-in-law of Ephraim Hirscheleh the flour storekeeper. Indeed, this is how he made a living, and even though our Sages hold that there is a connection between Torah and flour, with him it was the reverse case – he had much Torah, but little flour. In order to buy flour, you need money, and by him, this article was always in short supply. He lived almost his entire life on good-will donations. When he would receive any such contribution, he would give it to his wife, *Feyge,* in order that she should go home, leaving the cold store and cook something to eat. During the later hours, he himself could be found in the Wooden Synagogue, sunken deeply in thick volumes, where he found his World of Today together with his World to Come.

It was only in his later years, under my influence and that of other supporters, did Reb Joel Azriel develop more popularity in the city, and was even accorded the title of "The Rabbi." He was once persuaded, against

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[200] An *Izvoshchik* is the person who tends the horses and hitches them to a wagon.

his will, to ascend the *Bimah*, and deliver a lecture on the occasion of the completion of a tractate of the Talmud, that lasted a full two hours, and was distinguished by its great thoroughness, and with innovative insights. Despite this, he remained largely in obscurity.

Reb Moshe Tzigelnik

Reb Moshe The Greek from the *Grodno Gasse* was an interesting personality, or as he was called, *Reb Moshe Tzigelnik* , because he was engaged in the manufacture of bricks. The nickname, "The Greek" followed him since the time that he was a soldier.

I first met him in the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash*, when he was already an older man. He was known as a stern man in the *Bet HaMedrash*, but in the city, he was known rather as a man of unusually good character. In the *Bet HaMedrash*, he was severely critical of anyone who made a mistake in the repetition of the prayers or in the reading of the Torah, but consequently, he was distinguished in his daily life by his goodness and his concern for the poor. He would ride around in his little wagon from house to house, gathering bread and food on behalf of the poor of the city, especially for those who lived on his street, which was a residential center for the poor.

The city knew little of his affairs. During his illness, from which he later died, I visited him several times, and it was only then that I became acquainted with the remarkable story of his life, especially his youth.

When he was a boy of eight, the *khappers* was very active in the city. Children were kidnaped from the home of their parents, and sent to faraway places, where they would be raised as soldiers from early childhood on.[201] Those responsible for raising these children, would also make a considerable effort to convert these victims. To this end, they would utilize the most terrifying forceful measures against the stubborn children, who did not want to submit of their own free will. Reb Moshe Tzigelnik, who was one of the kidnaped young victims, belonged to the class of the stubborn boys, and because of this, he had to endure seven circles of hell in his struggle against conversion. Once, he told me, he was taken into a hot bathhouse, where the heat was fierce. He was driven with whips to the highest bench, where it was unbearably hot, in order to impress upon him the need to convert. A simple consent to conversion would have liberated him from all these tortures. Reb Moshe Tzigelnik bore the tribulation, and refused to accept conversion. Once – Reb Moshe Tzigelnik presented in his narrative – The terrifying torture had such an effect on him, that for a moment, he said to himself, that if he is tortured one more time, he will submit. A while later, he thought it over, and just a thought of that nature was a terrible sin, and he began to bang his head against the wall: No! A thousand times, no! However, to his great fortune, this turned out to be the last time that he went through these terrifying persecutions. From that time on, he was left alone, and not tortured to accept conversion.

Years later, he ended up at the age of 18 as a soldier in Vilna. At his first opportunity, he went into one of the synagogues there, and when he opened up a prayer book, he did not know how to read it: from right to left, or the opposite. He then developed an interest in the study of the Torah.

He received a nice funeral after he died, and he was eulogized, in which his martyrdom on behalf of the Jewish faith was intoned.

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201 This was a consequence of the infamous anti-Semitic ukase of Czar Nicholas I, who saw this as a means to foster a breakdown and assimilation of the Jewish community into the body of the Russian masses.

Reb Aaron Leib Friedenberg (*Leib Ohreh der Melamed*)

Reb Aaron Leib Friedenberg was better known in the city as *Reb Leib Ohreh der Melamed*. Reb Leib Ohreh lived like a saint. Jews from all walks of life both honored and respected him greatly, because he was a man of great integrity and was a doer of good deeds.

He was a man with a force for getting things done, even if in small measure. In his youth, he worked at tanning leather. During the initial years of the First World War, during the German occupation, when it was difficult to obtain flour products, Reb Leib Ohreh constructed a small mill in his own home, consisting of two stones, which he turned with his own hands until he produced a little flour. When there was no soap in the city, he personally produced soap, which came out as hard as stone. The principal thing was his innovativeness. But, all of these business ventures brought him no good luck, and he turned to teaching. He opened a *Heder,* where he taught *Tanakh* and beginner's *Gemara.* In a short time, he developed a good reputation as a teacher. His system of teaching was quite different from the conventional approaches of the time, because he had a different approach to the issue of educating the younger generation. Above all, the child must grow into an adult with good manners, it must know how to speak properly among people, how to respect one's parents, and how to comport oneself in general. It is for this reason, that during the initial period, Reb Leib Ohreh dedicated time to the 'Torah' of good manners, how to behave at the table, etc. Children spent an entire day in his *Heder.* Lunch had to be brought into the *Heder*, in order to permit Reb Leib Ohreh to see that his lessons in table manners were being properly followed. He would not content himself with this, and every Sabbath at midday, he would come to visit a different child at his home, to see with his own eyes, how the child behaves at the table, how he addresses the members of the household, and how he eats. Apart from this, Reb Leib Ohreh dedicated much time to the analysis of a student's character, and at the end, he would give his opinion as to what type of work or profession he felt would be best suited for the child, as well as his prospects for success in life. His predictions would later be seen to have been correct.

Reb Leib Ohreh was the only teacher of his time who did not hit his students. The most severe punishment in his class was to get rapped with is rod across the hands. He was an impressive scholar, and taught with great zest and understanding, always underscoring the importance of the relationship of man to his fellow man.

He was never mindful of the implications for income, despite his great popularity as a teacher, but rather with the implications for charity, for which he was always among the first to give. Because of his penury, one didn't approach him for contributions. But he had a certain position, and immediately after *Sukkot*, he would personally come to the *Gabbaim* of the synagogues with his generous donations for clothing of the naked, for the old age home, and other institutions.

Zamoscheh

By Velvel Krinsky, Argentina

Dedicated to the martyrs of my street and my destroyed home town of Volkovysk

Page 467: *The Train Station (Ulica Kolejowa) Street in Zamoscheh*

Page 469: *The Train Station (Ulica Kolejowa) Street in Zamoscheh (Going from the Station to the City)*

Zamoscheh was considered a separate part of the city, much as Brooklyn is considered separate from New York [City]. The difference is that to reach Brooklyn, you only have to cross one bridge over the East River, but to reach Zamoscheh, it was necessary to cross two bridges: one over standing water, and a second over the small river, Volkova.... and if our bridges were not built as drawbridges, it was because no ships ever went through...Zamoscheh was at one end of the city, just as Karczyzna was at the other end...and when one wanted to give an indication of significant distance, one would say: "It's like going form Zamoscheh to Karczyzna...."

Zamoscheh was a separate republic, with its own *Bet HaMedrash*, and a separate local life. It was a long street with a number of smaller side streets, surrounded by swamp on one side, and on the second side – by the rail line. And indeed, it was for this reason that the main street was called '*Vogzalnoye*' by the Russians, and by the Germans (in 1915) *Banhofstrasse*, and *Kolejowa* – by the Poles. Zamoscheh started at the first bridge (going from the city, naturally). Between the two bridges, on one side, stood the smithy of *Yankel der Schmid* – a Jew with a sweaty beard that even on the holidays, he was unable to wash out the soot from the smithy, – and on the second side (the left), stood Tevkeh's smithy, which was some piece of work, a smithy even a light wind would blow through it, and it would get washed away in every flood...

Tevkeh himself was a small, thin Jewish man, with a short beard. When he got angry, you could think that he was out to destroy the world, but that's not what happened. He worked hard, day and night, in his smithy, with his wife, who assisted him with the heavy work.

After the second bridge, there were bogs on both sides of the street, overgrown with tall grasses, with *ahir*, as it was called, which we would go and tear up to decorate the house for *Shavuot*. From the street you could see a large park-like area, in the middle of which stood a small store, and afterwards a large garden, where radishes and cucumbers were planted in the summertime. Coming to the second side of the park area, one could see a low little building , its windows almost at ground level, its roof with many holes, and the walls dripped. We had to live there, what choice was there? ... Our father, for all his days, was chronically short of money, never having any real way to make a living, he would run around from place to place asking for a handout, and very often he never had the sixpence coin to give me for my daily allowance in *Heder*... He could never break free from his bad luck. Once, a long time ago, when I was still a baby, he took a chance and went to Odessa, to find his fortune, leaving the family without means. But in a while afterwards, he returned even more defeated, yet poorer.

Immediately after his weeding, my father became an elementary level teacher. As if through a dream, I recall a big room with many benches, where a mass of children would be seated. They were from all of Zamoscheh, boys and girls together. There were rich and poor children among them. Even the wealthy people, the Blochs, sent their children to him – Sioma Gallin, Dworetsky and others. Everyone sat and learned the *Aleph-Bet*,

and afterwards absorb Hebrew. Even after he had exchanged his Heder for a small pot store, after the Sabbath, the older girls would come to learn Hebrew, girls who were already gymnasium students, girls from well-to-do families, such as the Tarmas and Chana Ditkovsky, with whom I traveled in the Zelva train to Russia in 1920. They would come every Sabbath, recite some Hebrew from the prayer book, and then leave. In those days, every Jew took on himself a responsibility that even his daughters had to be able to recite prayers.

Our mother was a skillful, quiet Jewish lady, who had no quarrels with anyone. She wouldn't even harm a fly on the wall, but because of this, she waged a bitter war with poverty... The struggle was particularly keen on the eve of the Sabbath, or the eve of a festival, and especially on the eve of Passover... in the Synagogue she would pour her heart out completely on Yom Kippur during the Yizkor services.

Across from us lived the *Rutchiks – Feygl Bash'keh's* with the family. She was a Woman of Valor, who assumed the burden of working for a living, raising her children, and making decent people out of them. She kept her children close to her like a mother hen, and in their newly-constructed house, provided each of them with a place to live. Feygl Bash'keh's had other skills in addition to this: she could apply *bonkes*[202] and in general provide healing for a variety of ailments. If somebody didn't feel well, one would immediately say: "We need to call in Feygl Bash'keh's." This quite remarkable woman began to print Yiddish songs at the age of seventy (one of her sons, Reuven Rutchik was the editor of the *Volkovysker Leben*).

Further up the street, there lived almost all Jewish people. Here and there, there was a gentile residence. It was for this reason that the side streets were occupied entirely by Christians. There, it was extremely rare to find a Jewish home. Jews there lived from small-scale commerce, owned stores, and also to a larger degree, lived off the presence of the railroad. That neighborhood was populated by laborers, government-hired contractors, such as the families of *Herschel Berg* and *Leib Kalman Ditkovsky*. Among the stores were *Moshe'keh Velvel's tavern,* the bakeries of *Yitzhak Dereczinsky*, and *Rokh'eh* [203]*Siegal*, the meat store of *Chana Rachel* the butcher's wife, and the dairy store of *Ahareleh.*

Life went on as it did in all Jewish towns. The principal center was the Zamoscheh *Bet HaMedrash.*

The Old Zamoscheh *Bet HaMedrash*

Page 471: *A Picture from Zamoscheh Prior to the First World War*

The *Bet HaMedrash* was merely a couple of houses away from our home. After I left, a new stone wall *Bet HaMedrash* was constructed, but in my day, the old Bet *HaMedrash* was still standing, a wooden structure, with a separate little house for women. It was necessary to go over a bridge of stairs to reach it. When we were small, we were afraid of that little bridge, because they would frighten us into believing that there were demons hiding under the bridge, who could not get into the *Bet HaMedrash* because of the *mezuzah*...

Entering the *Bet HaMedrash*, on the right side there was the *shtibl*, where a supplementary *minyan* might be

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202 The legendary cupping process of Eastern Europe, which supposedly had the power to extract 'evil humours' from an ailing person's body. Treated with considerable skepticism and derision by modern medicine.

203 Diminutive of *Rokhl,* or Rachel.

held, or where one would go to smoke on the holidays, where the Torah was read during *Simchat Torah*, in order to be able to call people to the Torah as quickly as possible, as was the *Simchat Torah* custom, and also where one would go off to have a bit of a conversation while the Torah was being read.... on the left, was the body of the *Bet HaMedrash* itself. At the entrance, hung a copper sink, with quite a bit of green patina that had accumulated over its long number of years of existence... over it were shelves of books. There, researchers could find volumes by the *Rambam, The Ilfas, The Mishna Berurah*, and other books. After the big heating oven on the right, there were several additional closets packed full of books. Here, already, one could find the sets of the *Shas*, a couple of old editions, and a spanking new edition of the Vilna *Shas.* Everyone who came to study the *Gemara*, sought to be able to grab off a volume of the new Vilna *Shas* from which to learn. A large, circular Bimah (*Belemer*) stood in the center of the *Bet HaMedrash*, which was ascended by stairs from both sides. The *Genizah,* underneath the Bimah was packed full of books and pages deemed unusable.[204] More than once, I would go rummaging through that place, looking for specific pages of rare books, and also parts of secular books... but the Shammes wouldn't lt anyone go very far... to the east stood a nice Holy Ark, with a stand to the side, with all the suitable appurtenances. There was always a large *Kol Bo* edition of the *Siddur* on the stand. By the east wall, with its two side walls, there were wide benches arrayed with seats that had been either bought or handed down, with boxes under the sitting place, where prayer shawls were stored, a book and a candle for evening study. Some locked their boxes. At the side of each seat, there was a stand, which came in handy for us wise guys. We would stand them up in a row, one behind the other, and push the first one into the rest, making them fall like dominoes... but we would really catch it from the *Shammes* if he came upon us during our escapades.

The east side was occupied by the scholars, the *Mishna* study group and in general, the wealthier folk. Also, the middle and side benches were occupied in this fashion. More over to the west side, the seats were occupied by the working people. On the west wall, near the two big heating ovens, there were two large tables with crude benches around them. There, anyone who wanted to could sit, and whoever got there earlier. In wintertime when the frost would rage outside, and the ovens were good and heated up, the eastern wall folks would come over to the oven... remember, it was "first come, first served"... In the *Bet HaMedrash* there was never any lack of guests, poor people who would go from house to house, and sleep in the *Bet HaMedrash*. There also never failed to be a resident scholar, who would sit and constantly study, and naturally, also sleep there next to the oven. Frequently, the scholar would stay in the *Bet HaMedrash* on an irregular basis. On a good day, a young man with the beginnings of a beard might show up, and sometimes an older Jewish man. He would sit down at the table and begin to study. No one asked him who he was, or from whence he came, and certainly not for a passport... he was allowed to study and sleep in peace by the oven, and it was seen to provide him with a bit of food also. The neighborhood women would send in a little bit of prepared food for him, and every Friday a collection was taken up throughout Zamoscheh " [Sabbath victuals] on behalf of the Resident Scholar." This was mostly my task, accompanied by *Yoss'l Pines* (today in Israel). We had a special notebook with a list, and we would not miss a single Jewish house. Everyone gave something, whether a kopeck, a sixpence coin, and others a full tenpence coin... we would occasionally put together a sizeable sum, sometimes almost two rubles... we would immediately turn this over to the Resident Scholar, who would grimace a bit: "it seems like so little." We were then too young to think through what was going on in the Scholar's heart, and what kind of calculations he was making. Perhaps he was thinking how he would manage to support his erstwhile left-behind family in some other location, on such a small sum...

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204 The *Genizah* was a cache for storing sacred writings that had fallen into sufficient disrepair that they could not be restored. These writings, called *shaymos* (after the Hebrew word, *shem* – i.e. The Name of God), were deemed Holy, and it was therefore forbidden to destroy them. Hence they were cached in a *Genizah.*

From time to time, a *Maggid*[205] would visit the *Bet HaMedrash.* An ordinary itinerant preacher would come in during a weekday, slap a book stand near the holy ark, and announce: "Silence, a preacher is here." Such a person was not so erudite. He would take hold of a line from the Psalms, or a word from Ecclesiastes. The essential thing was that poverty shouted from every fiber of his being, his hungry family, which he had left somewhere or another... After the *Maariv* service, he would station himself by the entrance with a small bowl, with a candle by its side, and the departing worshipers would throw him a copper coin. He would make any big 'income' from this. A more prominent preacher would command enough attention to give a sermon on the Sabbath. By Friday evening, the worshipers would read, posted to the door of the *Bet HaMedrash* the already familiar refrain: "...with God's help, tomorrow on the Sabbath...the prominent preacher...will speak...about issues of the day." Such a preacher was awaited by the community with anticipation. One would get up a little earlier from the Saturday afternoon nap and go with some speed to hear the *Maggid.* Such a preacher was already a more erudite scholar. In his sermon, he would usually grapple with a concept from the *Talmud,* stopping at difficult points in the *Gemara*, and respond to them with a casuistic argument. No bowl was placed at the door, naturally, but on the following day the *Maggid*, accompanied by a couple of *balebatim,* would go through Zamoscheh to raise a little money for him...the world-famous preachers would not come to our *Bet HaMedrash*. When the prominent *Maggid* Rappaport would come to our city, he would speak only at the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash,* the biggest one after the Synagogue. One went to hear a *Maggid* of such stature from all ends of the city, even the girl students at the gymnasium...also the institutional liaison of the Yeshiva Mea Shearim in the Land of Israel would speak in the large *Bet HaMedrash*. His sermons tended to be Talmudic, and only the scholars would go to hear him. We did not get this caliber of speaker in Zamoscheh...

There were many prayer quorums convened during weekdays, with the working men starting earliest. The wealthier *balebatim* would not be in such a hurry, and they would pray with the last *minyan.* And afterwards, they would study a page of the *Gemara* or a chapter of *Mishna*. Between afternoon and evening prayers, the elderly *Reb Natan* would study the *Chayei Adam* or *Ein Yaakov* with the community.

The *Bet HaMedrash* was packed full on Friday nights. There were always plenty of guests, poor people from the surrounding villages, who were always provided with food and lodging for the Sabbath (my father gave a great deal of himself in this connection). On the Sabbath, a part of the congregation prayed at an early first *minyan*; the second *minyan* would pray thereafter. At that time, one would see masses of Jews on the city streets coming from their prayers, with their prayer shawls under their arms. A sanctity appeared to have been poured out onto everyone's faces, a deep spirituality... quite often, a group would gather to go have a piece of cake and a shot of whiskey to celebrate a *Bar Mitzvah*, or a *Brit Milah*. These celebrations usually took place in the synagogue because our worshipers were *Mitnagdim.*[206] Before the afternoon service, Jews would gather back into the *Bet HaMedrash* – some to study a chapter of the *Mishna*, and some to engage in conversation, talking about world politics or matters of Jewish concern. *Shmuel the Tailor*, a simple Jewish man with a large beard, wearing high boots, would gather a clutch of large and small children before nightfall on the Sabbath, and recite the Psalms with them, singing the last chapter with an especially hearty tune.

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205 A preacher, usually itinerant..

206 Literally, 'the opposition;' in this case to the Hassidic movement. The *Mitnagdim* were adherents to the ritual as espoused by the Lithuanian rabbinate, whose exponent was Rabbi Elijah, the *Gaon* of Vilna.

After the traditional third Sabbath meal, once again we would return to the *Bet HaMedrash* to get in a chapter of Psalms before the evening service. We then went home singly. There was no reason to rush. At home, we would then perform the *Havdalah* service, singing the *VeYiten Lekha* prayer, and the new week would begin with its day-to-day concerns, with the worry of making a living.

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The children and young folks naturally had a different agenda for the Sabbath day. The high-spirited youngsters would carry on competitions – Zamoscheh against the *Grodno Gasse*, once with the more distant *Kholodoisker Gasse*, and with the New side street. During the summer Sabbaths, the residents of Zamoscheh along with others from the city, would go to the *khmizhnik* (young woods). One would have to cross over the railroad tracks, and then you were almost at the little grove. It was there that activity first got underway. The voices of the children carried for considerable distance around the vicinity. The older boys would already be taking walks with the girls, going as far as the *Nasip*. Others had their organizational meetings, elections, etc.

The High Holy Days

Page 477: The Beginning of the Wide Boulevard (On the way from Zamoscheh into the city)

In the *Bet HaMedrash*, it was always evident where we stood on the calendar. When the gusts of Elul began to blow, it was immediately sensed in the *Bet HaMedrash*. The Jewish men would recite the Psalms with greater frequency. The onset of the High Holy Days would be felt even more strongly. The shofar would be tested frequently. We, the children, would try to lay our hands on the shofar at every opportunity that was presented. We would puff ourselves up like a balloon and still not be able to get a decent note out of it... but the *Shammes* would not let us practice. A week before *Rosh Hashanah*, the *Shammes* would begin making the rounds to wake people for [morning] *Selikhot* services. One would be in the best part of one's sleep, when suddenly tap-tap-tap on the shutters, and the *Shammes* would call out: "Awake, wake up for *Selikhot*!" We had no option. Sleepy-eyed, and shivering from the morning cold, we would run to the 'service of The Creator.'

On *Rosh Hashanah*, we first took to praying and repentance. One truly felt these to be Days of Awe. We did not have far to go to *Tashlikh*. The little river was only a step or so from us. When we were small, we would peer at the water with great intensity, to determine if it was really filling up with the sins that the Jews shook into it. The Ten Days of Repentance could be discerned on the face of every Jew.

On the *Eve of Yom Kippur* one could generally see the Jews performing the ritual of *Shlogn Kapores*, and reciting the accompanying prayer , *Bnei Adam*, with great conviction. The tumult in the streets was considerable. Jewish women would be carrying the large Yizkor candles from the stores. Others would be going to friends and acquaintances, to exchange sentiments of forgiveness over insults that might have been exchanged during the year, and in passing, take a taste of something, specifically because it was *mitzvah* to do so on that day. The afternoon service was conducted rather earlier. At the entrance of the *Bet HaMedrash*, a long table had already been set up full of donation platters from a variety of institutions, for all manner of purposes. And every Jew, even the poorest, made an effort to put something in each platter – 'Charity will rescues one from death".... to the side, the *Shammes* stood with a rod in his hand, applying ritual flogging, whipping each of the Jews without regard for whether they were rich or poor, learned or ignorant -- everyone

the same, and the same number of strokes. But, it is possible that the rich received a better quality of blows, since they paid more... at the final meal before the fast, not a word was spoken. The after meal blessing was recited with greater conviction than usual. One felt that this was no ordinary meal, but rather that one was eating prior to an appearance before the highest tribunal...

The *Bet HaMedrash* would become packed, having recited the confessional prayer previously in silence, almost internally. The Torah scrolls were removed and carried about, kissing them, reciting the prayer, *'Or Zaruah...'* until the chanting of the *Kol Nidre* prayer began. When the [first] words, *'With the knowledge of the Almighty...'* was recited, a trembling would seize everyone. We would see the Spanish Inquisition before our eyes, and the frightened Marranos and Conversos who gathered secretly in cellars, to pray to the God that they had been forced to abjure...

The Jews in the synagogue barely looked like earthly beings, but rather like creatures of heaven, at a great distance from the worldly affairs of daily life with which they were occupied during the entire year. They were swathed in their *kittels,*[207] others with their prayer shawls pulled up over their heads. All around, hundreds of long *yahrzeit* candles were arrayed. The floor was covered in straw, and when the cantor sang out the words, '*like clay in the hands of the artist...*' one felt insignificant, so helpless, indeed like the fragile potsherd... when I had begun to 'sin' on my own account (that is to say, after Bar-Mitzvah age), I, along with many others, would stay up all night in the synagogue, not even lying down to sleep...

During the entire day of Yom Kippur we did nothing but pray constantly. Sometimes, *Hilkeh the Shoemaker* would lead the prayer service, an impoverished Jewish man, scrawny, with a scraggly beard, who lived with his elderly wife and grandchild in a ramshackle little house. He would offer his prayers in a broken, tearful voice, pleading for mercy on behalf of all world Jewry.

The wealthy *Reb Shlomo Shaul Dworetsky* would lead the *Musaf* service. The walls of the Bet HaMedrash would tremble when he began the *Hineni* prayer. The *Mincha* service was mostly led by the *Shammes*. By the time of the *Ne'ilah* service, it became more difficult for the participants. We stood at the point where the final seal was to be applied to each individual's fate. An outcry would then truly begin. In a broken voice, the cantor would intone the prayer, '*Open the gates of heaven...*' it was the end of the day already, of the Day of Judgement. The sun was already far down, sending its last red rays of light on the ground. Outside, it began to get dark, the day was already over. The *Maariv* service didn't take long, it was gone through quickly. The shofar was blown, and wished for 'A Good Year' were exchanged and then we left for home, taking the stubs of the large *yahrzeit* candles with us. But we didn't run straight home. We still had to bless the New Moon. A Jew doesn't go running after food, even after a long fast.

Sukkot was already a happier holiday, we knew that judgement time was over, and we could make a little merry. On a portion of the houses, branches would 'grow' and when they were raised, one had a ready-made *sukkah*. Others would fashion a *sukkah* by nailing together spare boards, and putting some grasses on top. The *Shammes* would carry the *esrog* from house to house to give the men an opportunity to recite the blessing. On these occasions, one did not partake of food. *Hoshana Rabba* we stayed up for the entire night and read through the entire *Mishneh Torah*, and also recited Psalms. Others would stay up until midnight to see if the heavens really opened...

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207 A thin, white ritual robe, worn during prayers and religious ceremonies meant to separate the wearer from worldly concerns.

Simchat Torah was the merriest of the holidays. Celebration commenced immediately with the evening prayers. The *Shammes* became a completely different person. During the High Holy Days, he was stiff and serious: now he was laid back and jocular. He had most certainly already made *Kiddush* at the home of a couple of *balebatim*... the auction of the [Torah] *aliyot* for the entire year commenced. It became a real marketplace, Jews bargained, raising their bids one over the other, bordering on fighting with one another. It was no small thing to hold down the *maftir* for an entire year, or the lifting and binding of the Torah scroll.... it was only then that the *hakafot*[208] would begin. The first of these were taken by the 'prominent Jews,' with the Torah scrolls in hand, followed by the children with their flags, which had portraits on them of Moses and Aaron. On the top of the flagpole an apple was stuck, and on the apple, a lit candle. We would circle the Bimah, chanting '*Ozer dalim, hoshia na...*[209]' The Bimah was packed with children, and also with girls, who granted themselves a special dispensation to enter the otherwise male province of the synagogue floor. After all, it was *Simchat Torah*! The following morning, prayers services lasted a long time. It was necessary to call everyone to the Torah, even the small children. They would be enfolded in prayer shawls, and one adult (in charge of the ritual of 'all the boys') would chant the blessings along with everyone.

After eating, the community first got itself ready to attend the party that the Mishna study group used to put on every year at *Simchat Torah*. A long time ago, it was held at the home of *Reb Ephraim Sukhovolsky*, but after his tragic death at the hands of robbers, the party was held sometimes at the home of *Velvel Kaplan* and sometimes at *Shlomo Shaul's*. The Shammes would go into the streets, not missing a single house, and come in for a toast. At the same time, he would take out of the ovens everything that he could find: a noodle pudding, a potato pudding, a *tzimmes,* a torte, and whatever else he could lay his hands on... He was followed by a band of children. The Shammes would pause every now and then, turn and shout out at the top of his lungs: "Sacred sheep!" And the children would respond as a choir, in an even louder voice: "Baaa! Baaa!" And it was like this at every house along the entire street. No one objected. All the members of the Mishna study group came to the party. I would accompany my father. One would take a little strong drink, a bite of food, and discuss some Torah, except the more one ate and drank, the merrier it got. All manner of songs were sung, and in the end, everyone fell into a sort of ecstasy, and several individuals, being already quite drunk, used to get up on the tables and dance. Despite this, one never found a Jewish drunkard passed out in the gutter... and it was in this fashion that we made merry far into the night. After the holidays, the long winter began – for some difficult, and for some more bearable.

The Other Holidays

Page 479: The Barracks

Hanukkah would arrive, and the windows in Jewish homes would add a candle for each day. The little children would play with *dreydls*, and the older ones would play with cards. During the cold winter evenings, the Jews would sit by the ovens in the *Bet HaMedrash.* They were in no hurry to go home, and once the Shammes filled the place with [Abraham] Mapu's *Ahavat Zion* from which he read a chapter out loud each evening. Even the resident scholar would lend an ear, and quake with tear over whether Tamar would be able to find Amnon in the twisting streets of Jerusalem, and bite his lip when he heard about the intrigues of

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208 The ritual processionals during which the Torah scrolls are carried around the synagogue.

209 The beginning of the verse for one of the *hakafot*, whose meaning is: "He who gives succor to the poor, help us now..."

Zamir...

The frost would abate at *Purim* season. People became lighter hearted. The days began to get longer, the sun warmer, melting the snow and ice, giving the area the feeling of spring. Purim was celebrated as it should be. The *Megillah* was read, and when Haman's name was mentioned, we made noise with *groggers* and keys full of sulfur.

After Purim, the community began preparing for *Passover.* No small thing of a holiday! Immediately after Purim, we began to bake matzos. The hullabaloo would start at Feygl Bash'keh's. There was noise, a tumult, with shouting from all sides. The dough rollers, the cutters, the water handlers, and so forth – everyone contributed to the great tumult. The children would be let out of school and go over the fields searching for yellow flowers, the first that come out in the spring, and grow underneath the snow... others would go to the hullabaloo and stay close to their mothers or sisters. If one could snag a piece of matzoh, well that was a big victory. Then the Passover Eve 'emigration' would begin... one washed and cleaned. Dishes and utensils were made kosher, the double glazed windows were removed, and periodically, whitewashed the exterior of the house (inside – was axiomatic).

Passover was the most happy holiday celebrated by the Jews. We would get new things, with goblets and glasses with the inscription *Pesach* on them. Naturally, during the Passover season, the days were very full, and the moonlit nights were practically entrancing. The children went around with pockets full of nuts. The teacher would come to the house in order to sign up students for his *Heder* for the coming year, but the children would be playing the game of 'nuts' and not paying much heed to the eventuality of school.

Summer life would start after Passover, and you understand, in the Jewish way. One cannot go swimming because of the *sefira*[210] prohibition. One cannot go for a run out of the city, nor rowing on the river. One must sit at the *Gemara* from early in the day until late at night, even though the summer was tempting. The evil inclination was very strong, but Jewish children are even stronger. Despite this, we were able to take some pleasure from the summer. Friday, towards evening, we would go to bathe in the river near the priest by the swamp, or going as far as *Vatashchina* to the large Ros River. We would jump into the water, turned the world upside down, and returned home singing....

Shavuot was celebrated in a happy fashion. After all, it was the best time of the year. We would bake up a variety of dairy baked goods. We, the young folk, would go off into the swamps, and pull up the tall grasses to decorate the house in honor of the holiday.

Summer would pass quickly, as all good times naturally pass swiftly. The *Fast of the Ninth of Ab* was a signal that the summer was moving along,. And there was a need to pause and mourn. In the *Bet HaMedrash*, boards were laid out close to the ground. The curtain covering the Holy Ark was removed. The Jews would sit about in their stockinged feet, bemoaning the destruction of the Temple, and the entire sad history of our people.

It was in this fashion that months and years would pass by. Zamoscheh existed like all other little towns. Weddings were held, circumcisions were performed, Bar Mitzvahs, and then weddings once again... Life

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210 Reference to the counting of the 49 days of the *Omer*, from Passover to *Shavuot*. Excepting the 33rd day (*Lag B'Omer*), the days are viewed as a period of abstinence in memory of a great plague that struck and killed thousands of the students of Rabbi Akiva in Talmudic times.

went on in a well beaten path for hundreds of generations.

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After the First World War, an emigration began, some to North America, some to the Land of Israel, and others to faraway Argentina. Many nests were emptied out, and parents would await the letter carrier with great trepidation. People from Zamoscheh went to places very far from home. But no matter where one ended up, the image of the tranquil and peaceful home town always stood before one's eyes. Now this had all been eradicated. All that remains of the old home town is a mound of ash, and not even a trace of our dear ones remains behind. The mind rejects this with disbelief. Is it true that all the Jews of my Zamoscheh are no longer alive? Is it true that there no longer exists a Jew such as *Reb Yoss'l Leib Rabinovich,* a wise Jewish man, whose weekly conversation was like pearls? When he was once late to prayers (during the time of the First World War), and he was asked: "Is it possible, how does it come that you are late for services?" – to which he replied: "It is written, to listen to the refrain and the prayer. First one needs to relieve oneself, and then one goes to prayer...'[211] Is there no longer a Jew like *Velvel Kaplan,* who was such a heartfelt Jewish man, that when he would see me dragging bundles to the train station (on my way to the Yeshiva), would stop me, and give me yet another package full of goodies? Has *Nakheh's little house* really been destroyed, where we used to have such good times? And *Nakheh* herself – with her face that was the very image of goodness – is she also no longer here? And *Chaim Rabinovich* and his little wife, who played in the Bialystok theater, and afterwards at our location? And all the other dear beloved neighbors of our street? Have you all really been exterminated? One does not want to believe this. The mind rebels against it – how is this possible? But sadly, there is the bitter truth. And there is not even a shred of doubt about it: all were exterminated! All were killed in the most terrifying manner! **W H Y ?** For what transgressions? Where does one seek an answer to this tragic question?

Numismatists in Volkovysk

The youth in days gone by had their hobbies, just like the young people of today. People collected postcards, occupied themselves with photography, while others collected old coins. And even myself, who was always occupied with the *Gemara*, was also a very ardent numismatist. In order to obtain an ancient coin somewhere, it was acceptable to me to close up my *Gemara* and run even to Karczyzna...the kids in the street knew already, that if they ended up with a coin somewhere that the storekeeper wouldn't take, they would come to me, to request a good one so they could buy candy.

Every pauper, who came to us for a handout, would also exchange such coins with me. I would especially seek out visiting emissaries, who would come to remove the money from the coin boxes of *Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess*, and from other coin boxes. Such a [visiting] Jewish man would empty out his entire sack of coins on the table, from which I would glean many older coins that were no longer in circulation. It would appear that a charity coin box was a good source for such coins... and traveling on the wagon from Berestovitz to Krynki (to the Yeshiva) I would often see the green glint of something shiny on the sandy roads, and I would then jump down from the wagon and indeed pick up a coin from the 17th or 18th century that had turned green with time... there were gymnasium students among the numismatists of Volkovysk, and among them also was

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211 A play on the Hebrew work, '*rinah*' which is usually read as refrain, but here altered to the German '*rinn*' meaning a runoff (i.e. into a ditch).

Khmelnitsky's son. We also had a couple of very dedicated numismatists in Zamoscheh. One of them was *Aryeh Velvelevich* (or Velvelevsky), a very polished young man, well-schooled in Torah. He came from some town or another to become the son-in-law of Shimon Rutchik. The Zamoscheh residents always remembered the high-class wedding that took place at that time. The young man also occupied himself with collecting old coins. Also, *Leibeh Tchopper*, a rich man from our street, had a large coin collection. The above mentioned, who had sufficient means, were in a position to purchase rare coins, silver ones, and even gold ones. We would meet with each other frequently, and show each other the recently acquired pieces, and talk about old coins. In addition, I had a catalogue of old coins from St. Petersburg (Leningrad). Many people looked askance at such an activity as idle foolishness, but from time-to-time, they would have to come to us. At Purim time, for the '*Makhatzit HaShekel*'[212] they would have to come to us to borrow the half-ruble coin from the time of Czar Alexander II, or even earlier, because the half-ruble pieces struck by the last two Czars were not valid for ritual purposes, because they were stamped as 50 kopecks, and on the older coins the word Полтинник (half-ruble) was stamped. An old woman started coming to me for half groschen pieces (Полушкий). Naturally, I would give them to her, but when she started to come to request half-groschen pieces more frequently, I became curious to find out why she needed this. One time, I refused to provide them until she told me to what purpose she used them. She tried to squirm out of it, but having no choice, she told me, she used the coins as a good luck charm for a nursing mother who had malfunctioning breasts. Naturally, I didn't go to research whether this, from a medical point of view could really be of benefit, and I always provided her with these 'good luck charms...'

[212] The ritual half-shekel piece

Karczyzna

by Chaim Nakhumovsky, New York

Dedicated to the sacred memory of the children and grandchildren of my *Brother* and my *Sisters*, and of my Brother-in-law, *Reb Abraham Milkov*, ל"נ.

Here, I will portray Karczyzna as I remember it, and how I knew it, a scant fifty years ago.

Karczyzna, which lies at the east end of Volkovysk, began at the white jail and at the end was divided in two parts: on one side, to the right, [the road] led to Zapolye[213], Haminich and Zelva, and the other side – to Zahalik, Biskupče, and other villages.

Despite the fact that Karczyzna was the way into the city, and the non-Jews would travel through it on their way to take their products for sale, or to come to the city to make purchases, this area was counted as a poor area, and most of its residents, with few exceptions, were poor people.

Years later, after the First World War, Karczyzna was repaired a bit, both in terms of housing stock and appearance. A few [sic: large] buildings were erected there. The Hebrew Gymnasium *Tarbut* was in one of those buildings. The Russian parochial school[214] was also found in Karczyzna.

The richest of the Jews in Karczyzna was *Joel Amstibovsky* the grain merchant. He was a handsome Jew, a scholar, and had a Rabbi as a son-in-law, which in those days brought with it a great deal of status.

Moshe Yankel der Millner (Freidkin) was one of the very important *balebatim* of the area, who owned the mill in Karczyzna. At that time, the Karczyzna mill was very popular, because half of Volkovysk would come there before nightfall on Friday, during the summer months, to bathe for the Sabbath. This was before the bath house was built on the Millner Gasse. Moshe Yankel der Millner was a warm and approachable man. He was also the *Gabbai* of the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash*, and in general as a doer in the city. He and Joel would together study a daily page of the *Gemara*. He died a tragic death at the time of an attempted repair of the millstone apparatus.

Hoshea Nakdimon was another prominent one of the *balebatim* in Karczyzna. He dealt in forest products and had a large yard, where lumber boards were cut. One of his daughters was in business with him in the forest and she was one of the few women in Volkovysk that worked in the fields.

Among the other important residents of Karczyzna were the two brothers *Botvinsky* : *Ahareh der Polivnik*[215] and *Itchkeh the Teacher.* Ahareh was a gentle Jewish man, who had book-learning, and led prayers (*Baal Tefilah*). His son, *Aizik* was the Torah Reader at the Karczyzner *Bet HaMedrash* since the age of thirteen. After he married, Aizik became a ritual slaughterer in Volkovysk. Itcheh Botvinsky was occupied with

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213 In the Dubno District of the Grodno Province (rendered Zapole).

214 *Прйходскй Училища (Prikhodski Utchilitcheh)*

215 A Water-carrier

teaching, and was counted among the best teachers in Volkovysk, especially in Hebrew [language]. Apart from these previously mentioned people, there were several other water carriers, a couple of shoemakers, tailors, smiths, jobbers, and just plain indigent people.

Karczyzna had a tiny Bet HaMedrash, and apart from the residents of Karczyzna, Jews from surrounding neighborhoods prayed there as well, among them: *'Nioma ,der Haminicher*, who owned the mill in Haminich, and his son, *Gedalyahu*, who had a field there, and maintained gardens which he would plant with cucumbers, which he would then pickle and seal very well into jars. He would store the jars in the river during the entire winter, and every Thursday, he would bring some of the jars of pickled cucumbers into the city for sale. The Volkovysk homemakers would buy the pickles for the Sabbath, and would literally lick their fingers eating them. Regular worshipers at the Karczyzner Bet HaMedrash also included: *Avreml Biskupičer*, who had the yard in Biskupče, and his son-in-law, *Yisrael Novick* – both gentle sorts of Jewish men. Also, the few Jews who lived in Zapolye would come to pray in the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash, among them, *Blonde Itcheh*, who was always happy and made jokes – he dealt in *shurkehs* (wagons filled with wood); *Efroykeh Blume's* (Mania the Butcher's brother). He was a weaver by trade, and worked in Horodok. He would come home for the holidays, and also occasionally for the Sabbath. He was a soulful *Baal Tefilah*, and would lead the *Musaf* services on the High Holy Days. Also, my parents, who at that time were residents of Zapolye, would come to pray in the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash*.

The Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash* had its own Scholar (*Perush*) and *Shammes*. The *Perush*, *Reb Hersh*, would sit and study Torah purely for the sake of study, simply because it was a mitzvah to learn, and not with the objective of becoming a Rabbi. At one time he was a teacher, but at one time he was left without a position, so he became a *Perush*, and the worshipers at the *Bet HaMedrash* would somehow support him. He had two weaknesses – recitation of the *Kaddish*, and being called to the Torah for an *aliyah.* He would always say *Kaddish*, even if he was not a mourner. Jokers would say he is "reciting Kaddish for the entire world," because the world is dead, and all the businesses are also dead... he also wanted to be called to the Torah for an *aliyah* at all occasions. It didn't matter which *aliyah* – but at least any *aliyah* – and one could silently observe how much aggravation he had from this...

The *Shammes*, *Yosh'eh*, had a maimed hand, and also limped. Do understand, that he derived no great fortune from being the *Shammes*, and in order to make a living he had a side job – begging door-to-door.

Ending Prayers Late Because of an *Esrog*

In Volkovysk, the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash* was famous for the fact that they prayed very quickly there. A good *Baal Tefilah* was defined as someone who could get through the service quickly...

Early on the Sabbath, the second *minyan* would get finished by 10AM, and also not very much later on Holidays (excepting *Rosh Hashana*). One day, they finished prayers somewhat late, and all of Karczyzna went berserk. This happened on the first day of *Sukkot*, and the reason was because of an *Esrog*. The Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash* had a total of only three *Esrogim,* two which belonged to individuals, and one which was a community *Esrog*. The community *Esrog* was usually bought from my father, *Hertzl der Melamed*, who was a teacher of the older *Gemara* children.

I want, at this time, to dedicate a few words to my father, ע"ה. He received rabbinic ordination at the age of eighteen. Were it not for his bad luck, he would have been one of the great rabbis, because he possessed all of the characteristics demanded of such a great rabbi. However, a few year after he married, he fell sick and

was bedridden for a year. During that time, he was forced to expend his entire dowry, and beyond that, fell into debt. Also, my grandfather, my mother's father, *Berel Zapolyer*, who had been one of the richer *balebatim*, lost his fortune, and was no longer in a position to help him, so that he could continue his studies until such time that a pulpit position would come open. Having no choice, he became a *Melamed*. However, for many years, he strove to supplement his income, in order that he could more fully dedicate himself to scholarship, and to give a lesson in the Yeshiva without charge. In the end, his dream did not come to be. Apart from his teaching, he would undertake the sale of *Esrogim* at *Sukkot* season. Among his customers was the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash* which would annually purchase the community *Esrog* from him.

That year, the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash did not buy its *Esrog* from my father, and the reason was the following: Around that time, an organization called *Somekh Noflim*[216] had been established in Volkovysk, with the purpose of making interest-free loans that would be repaid weekly. The *vokher*, or weekly collector for the *Somekh Noflim* also dealt in *Esrogim.* Seeing that a large number of the worshipers at the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash* owed money to the *Somekh Noflim*, they thought that if they bought the community *Esrog* from the collector, he won't be as strict and insistent while making his weekly collections. This really irritated my father, but he didn't do anything about it. A couple of days before *Sukkot*, in the morning, after prayers, when the congregation had already dispersed, each member going to his own business, and the only people left in the *Bet HaMedrash* were the Scholar and the *Shammes,* my father (for whom this was between terms, and he had no reason to hurry home), and me as well, who was then a youngster of fifteen years, and had returned from the Yeshiva to be home for the Holidays. My father then approached the *Shammes*, and asked to please have a look at the *Esrog* that the *Bet HaMedrash* had purchased. He examined the *Esrog* with great care, and asked the *Shammes* what was the price of the *Esrog*, and when he told him that they had paid three rubles for the *Esrog,* my father remarked: *Dos iz nisht kayn metziyeh* (This is no bargain).

Very early on the first day of *Sukkot*, when it was still dark outside, my father woke me up. He apologized for being unable to attend services, and he asked me to proceed immediately to the *Bet HaMedrash*, and convey to the *Shammes* that the community *Esrog* they had purchased was ritually unfit, and it is forbidden to recite any blessing over it. He asked me to tell the *Shammes* that in a certain place in the *Shulkhan Arukh*[217] it is explicitly written that an *Esrog* with certain specific kinds of spots on it, exactly like those on the very same *Esrog* possessed by the Karczyzna *Bet HaMedrash*, is ritually unfit. He asked me to go swiftly to the *Bet HaMedrash*, and to warn the Scholar, in order that no one, God forbid, make a blessing in vain over the ritually unfit *Esrog.*

When I arrived at the *Bet HaMedrash*, they were preparing to commence with the first *minyan*. I went up to the top bookcase, took down the *Shulkhan Arukh* and handed it to the Scholar. I related the entire story, and the Scholar, along with a couple of other Jews who stood nearby, appeared to be thunderstruck by what I had said, as if a bomb had exploded in the middle of the *Bimah*....

The *Shammes* was dispatched to pose this question to Reb *Yaakov Abraham* the *Dayan*[218] who lived opposite the Bet HaMedrash of *Reb Meir'keh*. Reb Yaakov Abraham ruled that if there is no other *Esrog* in the Bet HaMedrash, then the existing *Esrog* in question may receive a blessing. However, if another *Esrog* is at hand,

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216 Hebrew, for 'support those who are falling.'

217 The Code of Jewish Law

218 Probably *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*

then this one should not be blessed. But before this all happened, before the Shammes, who still limped in one leg, could return to the Bet HaMedrash with this reply, a good amount of time elapsed, approximately a half hour or more. And when the second minyan finished praying, it was after twelve o'clock in the afternoon. What it means for the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash to end services after twelve o'clock – only someone from Karczyzna can understand...

Having Prayed Under the Free Sky

Together with Karczyzna and the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash, several incidents remain in my memory that took place at the time of the outbreak of cholera in Volkovysk:

It was the beginning of Elul, when every morning one would hear the sound of the shofar in the shuls, and late into the night – the sounds of the Torah (during the summer months it was customary not to study in the [early] evenings). We were approaching the High Holy Days, when "even a fish in water trembles." Each individual became a little more pious, prayers were recited with a bit more conviction, one studied or recited more of the Psalms, and one generally became more mystically attuned. – At this time, one year, alarms began to circulate that "something" was going through the city. People were suffering stomach cramps, and there was bleeding. Conditions worsened until it took on the proportions of an epidemic, and there even were a number of fatalities.

The fright became greater when it was learned that *Mot'cheh Ber* the butcher had died from the illness. Mot'cheh Ber was a strong man. Around the city, stories of his strength were legendary. Everyone thought that if a strong man like this couldn't resist this disease – may God have mercy on all Jews, the weak ones...

At the beginning, it was thought that the illness came from eating unripened fruit, so the police went to the market, and threw all the fruit they found in the marketplace into the sewer, and poured carbolic acid on it. The police also launched a sanitation sweep, that is, they conducted an inspection of all yards and commanded that carbolic acid be put down all over.

When these measures proved ineffective, an order was given not to drink 'raw' water. Water first had to be boiled. The city, meaning the community, opened up several free tea-houses, where free tea and sugar were served several times daily. True, the sugar, was only a 'hint' of sugar. A sugar cube was cut into eight pieces, and a one-eighth piece was given with each glass, but seeing that we were not generally 'over-indulged' and that it didn't cost any money, we were satisfied with this as well...

A great deal of help was rendered by the *Khevrat Lina* , whose members dedicated much time and energy to combat the cholera, and to provide relief to the families of those who were taken ill.

The entire month of Elul passed in this way, as did Rosh Hashana, and Yom Kippur drew nigh – and the situation did not improve.

On the day before Yom Kippur, we were very frightened, because the disease would affect a hungering and weakened person more strongly, and [consequently] special measures were invoked. The *Bet Din* [219] ordered that the floor of the prayer house should not be covered in straw. Every Yom Kippur, it was the practice to

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[219] The local Rabbinic Court of Law having religious authority in the area.

spread the straw, in order to make it soft underfoot, because one did not wear shoes, and one spent the bulk of the day standing. The straw would kick up dust, especially when one would perform the kneeling ceremony during the *Aleinu* prayer... and so the straw and the attending dust were canceled this year. The *Bet Din* also sent in a bottle of wine into each Bet HaMedrash, and sliced challah in pieces smaller than the traditional 'olive bite,' in case someone would, God forbid, begin to feel poorly, he would immediately be given something to ingest. Apart from this, a *feldscher* or a doctor was stationed in each Bet HaMedrash, which was far from the center of the city, in the event someone became sick, he could be attended to immediately.

Velvel the doctor, who lived on the Kholodoisker Gasse, was sent to the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash. He was considered to be an expert in – extraction of teeth... (there were no dentists yet in Volkovysk at that time).

The police were not satisfied with these measures, and at midday of the Eve of Yom Kippur, it sealed up all the women's galleries in the houses of prayer. You can imagine the diversity of imprecations hurled at the police by the womenfolk, but nothing could be done about it. The Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash, where we prayed, found an alternative; seeing as two sides of the Bet HaMedrash, the east side and north side, looked out over a yard full of lumber owned by Hoshea Nakdimon, tables and benches were nailed together against these walls, and since the weather was nice and mild, the womenfolk prayed there.

The women joked that their prayers would reach heaven sooner. They won't have to pass through the attic and the roof...

Prayer on the morning of Yom Kippur began later than usual. The *piyyut* was entirely omitted, only the essential prayers were recited, and even in those instances, they were not lingered over. Free time during the day was spent out of doors, in fresh air. It was in this fashion that Yom Kippur passed peaceably, with no added incidents of disease. We breathed a little more freely, and took our leave with lighter hearts.

An You Will Exact Vengeance From His Oppressors

The following episode occurs to me in connection with that Yom Kippur evening, after the fast:

As previously mentioned, the person who led the Musaf service in the Karczyzna Bet HaMedrash was *Efroykeh Blume's.* This Efroykeh was a lovely and soulful *Baal Tefilah*. He was in general a loving and approachable person. He lived in Zapolye, a gentile settlement near the city, where he had his own house and a piece of land. Apart from this, his wife, *Blume*, did a little business. Blume was a true 'woman of valor' and half a doctor – "a throat specialist." If a neighbor's child would complain about a sore throat, Blume would be called to take a look at the throat, and would immediately conclude that it was tonsils. She would squeeze them with her fingers, and would say that this would make it 'better.' Whether it made anything 'better' is another matter...

Efroykeh took no compensation for leading services, rather, the Bet HaMedrash would make him a gift of tea and sugar, in order that he drink sweet, pure tea and thereby have a clear sweet voice...

That Yom Kippur night, after *Maariv* ,[220] the bottle of wine was opened, that had been provided by the Bet

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[220] The daily and last public prayer service of the evening.

Din, the *Havdalah* service was performed, and everyone took a snort. Efroykeh had a vulnerability to drink, and as soon as he imbibed even a bit of alcohol, he would become somewhat befuddled. When he finally got home (it was a goodly distance from the Bet HaMedrash to his house), his wife asked him whether or not he had made *Havdalah.*-- he answered, no. So he made *Havdalah* again, and became quite merry, and instead of breaking his fast, he went off to his couple of Jewish neighbors to wish them a 'good year.' He also came to us, left his greetings, and went off.

A couple of minutes later, a gentile, a neighbor, came into our house and told us in his language: *Efroykeh spevaye y tantzuye*, which means, Efroykeh is singing and dancing. When we went outside, we could see Efroykeh standing on a little hill, with a circle of gentiles around him, and he danced and sang "And if I have not exacted vengeance for their blood, I have not exacted vengeance... and I will exact vengeance on his oppressors." All the while pointing his finger at the gentiles.

The gentiles stood around in wonderment. Among them, if somebody gets drunk, they start a fight, create a disturbance, and here stood Efroykeh singing 'prayers.' It was an extraordinary sight to see, and the setting half moon lent a yellowish mysterious light to the tableau.

It is fifty and some odd years since that happened, and yet Efroykeh's chant still echoes in my ears from that Yom Kippur night: And if I have not exacted vengeance for their blood, I have not exacted vengeance... and I will exact vengeance on his oppressors. May we live to see this sentiment come true, speedily in our day.

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This generation of Jews from Karczyzna, all these decent and beloved Jews, are long gone. Additionally, all their children and grandchildren – excepting those that emigrated before the Second World War to the Land of Israel, America and other countries – perished at the hands of the murderous Nazis together with the entire Volkovysk Jewish community. The Almighty will take vengeance for their blood.

Ostroger Gasse (Kosciuszko)

By Rabbi Yaakov Zakheim, New York

Dedicated to my parents, *Shlomo* and *Dvo'sha*, and my sister, *Taiba*.

The Ostroger Gasse occupied a very important place among the prominent streets of our home town of Volkovysk. Its name was derived from the two prisons that were found there: the so-called 'red jail,' for the military prisoners (occasionally Jews from the poorer sections were detained there, as a discipline that was imposed on them for not cleaning off the bridge or the thoroughfare – in accordance with the then strict, so-called sanitary regulations of that time), and a little further, on the way to Karczyzna, the 'white jail,' for civil violations, such as: stealing, murder, political activity, etc. And even though the name didn't sound as well in Russian, it was called Улица Турмная (the Prison Street), – but it didn't in fact, prevent many wealthy people from living on the Ostroger Gasse, as well as Dayans, God-fearing folks, community benefactors, and generally a better class of Jewish people who typically took places at the 'eastern wall' of community life.

The Ostroger *Bet HaMedrash*

Page 494: *Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse*

Page 495: *Aizik (Yitzhak) Neiman*

Before we will portray the colorful personalities and types of the *Ostroger Gasse*, it is appropriate to pause at the place that unified poor and rich, and between whose walls, the so called 'walls of the *Bet HaMedrash*,' the Jews of the eastern wall, and those who sat behind the Bimah, united into one congregation, and from there together offered their supplications to the Master of the Universe – and that was the *Bet HaMedrash of Rabbi Meir Rosenbloom*, or as it was called for short in Volkovysk, *Reb Meir'keh's Bet HaMedrash.* This *Bet HaMedrash* was a rather small building, low, and without any special carved artistic sayings from the Holy Writ, as was the custom in those times to use as decoration done by handiwork, for the Holy Ark, the Cantor's prayer stand, and the Bimah, Nevertheless, this diminutive Bet HaMedrash, incorporated a slice of the life of the *Ostroger Gasse,* because there, in the *Bet HaMedrash*, it was possible to find out about all newsworthy occurrences in the city and the Volkovysk vicinity: a funeral, a circumcision, a wedding, or an especially important gathering [called by] the Rabbi of the city with the seven benefactors of the city, or just an ordinary dispute between two *balebatim* who were neighbors, might be having with each other. – Everything, everything had an echo between the walls of the *Bet HaMedrash.*

The founder of the *Bet HaMedrash* was *Reb Meir Rosenbloom*, in whose name the this house of worship was called. He was a great Torah scholar, a man of means, and as it was told, he personally put up the building. Consequently, he would lead the *Musaf* services there on the High Holy Days, and also blew the shofar. On top of this he was a superbly expert *Mohel* on condition that he would not receive a fee for his services.

Accompanying Reb Meir , the *Dayan* of the city at that time, *Rabbi Yaakov Abraham Stein* came along, who literally exuded erudition and greatness. It was told of him by Jews, that on Yom Kippur, during the recess from prayer, he would go through the entire volume of the Talmud, *Yoma,* with all of the commentaries. Jews also told of him, that in 1886, at the time the great fire took place that destroyed a great part of the city, the *Ostroger Gasse* was spared – thanks to the *Dayan,* Rabbi Yaakov Abraham, who prayed at that time that the fire should be put out.

Yitzhak Neiman

Yitzhak Neiman of the *Ostroger Gasse* was known in the city as a benefactor of the community. Even as a young man, he was well acquainted with members of the city government apparatus, and through them he would work out a variety of concessions for the Jews. Thanks to his intervention, many conscripts were excused from military service.

In his later years, he was the *Gabbai* of Reb Meir's *Bet HaMedrash*, and also of the Volkovysk Burial Society. In the event of a death, one immediately went to Yitzhak Neiman, in order to arrange for all the necessary formalities, as for example, a burial plot, meaning what specific location and next to whom the deceased will be interred, and also what burial fee will be charged to the heirs. He was held to be a wise man in the city. He was often approached to be a mediator. After Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov left for the Land of Israel, Yitzhak Neiman was also elected to the search committee for a new Rabbi. And indeed, Yitzhak Neiman then traveled to Yagustov, where Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky שליט"א was the sitting Rabbi, and who is today the Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg in South Africa. And as everyone knew, it was Neiman's candidate, Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky, שליט"א, was later chosen to take the pulpit as Rabbi of Volkovysk. In the last years of life, he was already weakened and ill, and he spent his days and free time in the company of the well-known *feldscher*, Padarowski, who was a frequent visitor to his home. Yitzhak Neiman died on the Eve of *Sukkot* in 1929, at the age of 81.

One of his sons, *Abraham* was the first leader of the fire-fighting command, and contributed greatly to its development. A son of his, *Hanokh* was a well-known merchant and estate manager of a large number of parcels of land. He was a committed Zionist, and always gave donations to the Zionist funds.

Berel Itcheh Pinkhosovsky

Page 497: Berel (Dov) Pinkhosovsky

Berel Itcheh Pinkhosovsky, or as he was known for short in the city as 'Berel Itcheh,' was a familiar persona on the *Ostroger Gasse*. His father was called Shlomo Berel Ostroger's, because he lived next to the 'white jail,' on the *Poritzisher Gasse* near the bridge. From earliest youth, Berel Itcheh was a Yeshiva student at the prominent Yeshiva in Slonim, where he studied. He fulfilled the Tanaitic directive found in the Ethics of the Fathers – "You shall eat a slice of bread, and drink in [small] measure, and you shall sleep on the earth, and live in sorrow" – in the full sense of the word. He married early. Later on, he became a merchant, but was never successful at it. He had a youthful outlook, and a deep understanding of the younger generation. In addition, he had a great sense of humor. A fountain of sharp-witted words always flowed from his mouth. He would sit for long hours in Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash* and study. At that time, a new Rabbi came to Volkovysk in the person of Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, who was a wise man and a pleasant personality. Berel Itcheh Pinkhosovsky became a regular and frequent visitor to the Rabbi's home. And seeing as he was a smart man with a logical mind, the Rabbi proposed that he become a mediator. Thanks to his love of people, and his constant readiness to come to the aid of other people, he was very successful as a mediator, and earned a good reputation as a mediator, not only in Volkovysk, but also in the vicinity. For a number of years he was also the Gabbai of the Large Synagogue, and later – after the death of Yitzhak Neiman – he became the Gabbai of the Burial Society. At his own initiative, he founded a "Linat" society on a small scale, whose members would go to the homes of those who were taken ill, take care of him, during the night hours.

This society existed for a number of years and did good work. When the *Chafetz Chaim*[221] came to Volkovysk to establish a *Shas* Study Society, he also went to Berel Itcheh to ask for his help to implement this idea. This concept came to fruition in the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash*. Apart from this, Berel Itcheh would learn Mishna on a daily basis with the congregants of Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*, and under the oversight of Rabbi Moshe Nakhinson, he would also conduct a study of the *Daf Yomi* with the congregation in the *Gemara.* Berel Itcheh was in general an active person, and was beloved and respected by everyone. His opinion was valued on all matters of community interest, as in the case of hiring a new rabbi, a ritual slaughterer, or a cantor, and on general day-to-day issues of community life. He passed away at the age of 80 years.

Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel

Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva, also lived on the *Ostroger Gasse*. He was renown as a great scholar and thoroughly grounded in the *Shas* and commentaries. As a young man, he taught *Gemara* to the richest and most scholarly of the young men of the city. It was a privilege for a young boy to have him as an instructor. Rabbi Yerakhmiel was born in Izavelin, 14 *viorst*[222] from Volkovysk (where Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, the Rabbi of Kovno, had his first rabbinical pulpit position). Rabbi Yerakhmiel studied at Volozhin, and then as a Resident Scholar in Eishyshok. He later married Reb Chaim Lev's daughter in Volkovysk, and remained in Volkovysk for his entire life. In his time, he was considered to be one of the most influential Jews of the city. He would unofficially work as *Dayan* and Director to the community alongside Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, and later alongside Rabbi Gaon Yitzhak Kossowsky שליט"א. He would be approached with issues to be mediated and totally confused business matters and rulings concerning financial matters, and primarily in those instances where there was a desire to avoid having these disputes taken into the jurisdiction of the public [sic: gentile] courts. The Jews of the *Ostroger Gasse* would also come to him with ordinary day-to-day matters, such as ruling on whether a chicken was kosher, or whether a pot or spoon was to be treated as a dairy or meat implement, etc. Physically, he was handsomely built, and had a radiant face. He died in Volkovysk a short time before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Rabbi Moshe Nakhinson

Rabbi Moshe Nakhinson lived his entire life on the *Ostroger Gasse* – he was born there, he was raised there, and he was married there to Mir'el, the daughter of Reb Itcheh Moster.

Rabbi Moshe Nakhinson was a Torah scholar. Every day, he would present the daily page of the *Gemara* to the congregation between the afternoon and evening prayer services in Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*. He was an outstanding Torah reader, and led prayers on the High Holy Days with great taste and feeling. From time to time, he was invited to substitute for Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus, the well-known cantor of the *Old Mauer Bet HaMedrash.* In his younger years, he was a bookkeeper for Rakhmilevich. Immediately after the First World War, he organized a Guest House, on a standard befitting Volkovysk, where the local nobility

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221 *Rabbi Israel Meir HaKohen* of Radun, who was one of the great exponents of the Lithuanian Rabbinate. His grave site and mausoleum in Radun became a pilgrimage site, drawing even non-Jewish visitors, and survived the ravages of the Holocaust.

222 A linear measure used in Czarist Russia, rendered '*verst*' in English (1 verst = 1067 meters).

would travel to from their estates, and other gentile 'guests,' when they would come to Volkovysk. Later on, he was appointed as the bookkeeper at Ephraim Barash's factory, from which he made his living. His son, *Shlomo*, or as he was called in the city, *Shloim'keh Nakhinson*, lived in Argentina for a while. He later returned to Volkovysk, where he opened a pharmacy on the Wide Boulevard. His daughter *Rosa*, completed the studies at the government gymnasium and later studied medicine at Vilna University. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, she practiced medicine at the Sejmikov Hospital in Volkovysk.

Reb Moshe Joseph Ravitz

Reb Moshe Joseph Ravitz was also know in the city as Reb Moshe Yoss'l the grain merchant. He was the son of Taiba the mill store operator from Volkovysk. He was an observant man and a Torah scholar. He was a member of the *Shas* study group of the Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*. While he was still quite a young man, he married *Masha Shevakh*, the oldest daughter of Rabbi Yitzhak Benjamin (Itcheh 'Nioma) Shevakh, the Yeshiva headmaster of Ruzhany, Volkovysk and Brisk, all in Lithuania. He made his principal living from commerce in grain, and also had a store in his own building. He was counted among the most significant merchants in the city, and among the most important worshipers in the Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*. He died in Volkovysk in 1939. Moshe Joseph's daughter, *Ethel* married Joseph Alperstein and lived in Ruzhany. Her son, *Nakhum Alperstein*, is today in Israel. *Herschel Ravitz*, Moshe Joseph's son, who lives today in America, who was also one of the bigger merchants in Volkovysk. He was at one time a contractor, and dealt in grain. Reb Moshe Joseph's daughter, *Dvo'sha* married *Shloim'keh Zakheim*.

Reb Shlomo Eliezer Zakheim

Page 501: Bus Station Near the Church

Reb Shlomo Eliezer Zakheim, my father, or as they called him on the *Ostroger Gasse*, Shloim'keh Zakheim, was a very decent man, and erudite. He had great knowledge of the *Tanakh* and the Talmud. He was born in the Kosovo vicinity of the Grodno Province. His father, Dov Ber, lost his wife while a young man. As the oldest son, and while still at a young age, Reb Shloim'keh assumed the burden of earning a living, and as a young boy became a merchant in forest products around Ruzhany, where he eventually acquired his own home. He married *Dvo'sha*[223] *Ravitz*, the youngest daughter of *Moshe Joseph Ravitz*. After his marriage, he settled again, this time in Volkovysk, and began again to deal in forest products. But about that time, government decrees were issued forbidding the taking of lumber from the forests, and Reb Shloim'keh began to deal in grain in the building of his father-in-law, Reb Moshe Joseph Ravitz. He was involved with this until the outbreak of the Second World War, and as such, earned a good name as one of the most reliable and decent merchants in the city. He has a *son* in America (the author of these lines) and a daughter, *Zahava Zakheim-Lev* in Haifa. His daughter Taiba, remained in Volkovysk and shared the fate of the entire Jewish populace.

Reb Mordechai Gurevich was a Torah scholar. He had a general merchandise store on the *Ostroger Gasse*, from which he and his wife, *Bash'keh*, made their living. Their son, Yaakov was the secretary of the Hebrew School in Volkovysk. He lived in Volkovysk until the last day.

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223 Both *Dvosha* and *Dvo'shka* (little *Dvo'sha*) are Russianized diminutives for the Hebrew *Dvora*, or Deborah.

Reb Meir Weiner (Meir the Shoemaker) was a son-in-law of the well-known 'Shimon the Artist.' He could always be seen with a book in hand. He especially was fond of the book, *Chayei Adam*. If someone in the city died, he would run around with a sad face, and one could read the bad news from his looks. He had a good memory, and remembered all of the *yahrzeit* dates in Volkovysk. He was a pauper for his entire life, but content with his lot. His two sons, *Moshe'keh* and *Yankel* were active members of the fire-fighting command in Volkovysk. A daughter of his has survived.

Leib Halpern – or, as he was called, Leibeh Kolontayer – lived on the *Zeikess Gessel* near the *Ostroger Gasse.* He was the son-in-law of Chaim Moshe Botvinsky of the Kolontayer Mill. In his youth he worked at the mill, and later he opened a clothing business opposite Poliachek's building. His family was counted among the most intelligent of the families of the city. His daughter, *Gruna,* who was a midwife, would spend her time in the circle of doctors and dentists. A large part of Volkovysk youth that was born between the two world wars, came into this world with Gruna's help.

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Reb Shmuel Holland was also counted among the important *balebatim* of the city. In the community elections of Volkovysk, Reb Shmuel was always the candidate on the orthodox Jewish list. He was a forest product merchant and also a surveyor for the larger forest merchants. In his early fifties he pulled back from his businesses and devoted himself entirely to community work. He was the *Gabbai* and Treasurer of the Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash* for many years. He was a gentle man with a good heart. He was always ready to assist anyone with word and deed. He died at the onset of winter in 1929.

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Reb Issachar Lidsky came from a village near Ruzhany. His wife, *Tzirel* was from Volkovysk, and was seen to be an enlightened woman. He was very successful in all of his businesses, and in time, was counted along with his father-in-law, *Yitzhak Solomon*, to be among the richest of the forest merchants. They later moved to Volkovysk, where they built a very beautiful building. Issachar Lidsky had two daughters, *Shayn'dl* and *Henya,* and a youngest son, *Herschel*. The Lidsky-Solomon family occupied a prominent place on the *Ostroger Gasse*. Later, Issachar brought his father over from Ruzhany, and had him live in his home.

Dr, Hanokh Arianson came from Vilna to Volkovysk to practice as a doctor. He opened his office on the *Ostroger Gasse*, across the street from the Skrobover Bank. The first days in Volkovysk were difficult for him; however, he slowly worked up a good name for himself, not only in the city, but also in the entire area. He was frail in health, but he committed himself intensely to his profession. He had a cart prepared for himself that was closed on all four sides, and was always prepared to go. He was by nature a good man, and always received people in a friendly manner in his office. He supported all the Volkovysk institutions generously. In August 1930, while visiting a patient, he suddenly felt ill, and had to leave the patient.

On his way home, he suffered a hemorrhage. He was still able to open the door to his home, and completely covered in blood, fell down and died.

The sudden death of the popular and universally well-liked Dr. Arianson made a deep impression on everyone.

The Bereznitsky Brothers – Yaakov, Abraham Moshe and Fishl – lived near the Russian cemetery, with Yaakov Hanokh Yatvetsky as a neighbor. *Yaakov* had a general merchandise store on the *Grodno Gasse*.

Abraham Moshe was an erudite Jewish man who was enlightened. He was constantly researching either a line in the Pentateuch or the *Tanakh*, or a commentary of Our Sages. He had many sons and because of this he was a pauper. He would assist with the writing of letters to America and the Land of Israel to relatives and friends of Volkovysk Jewish residents. However, the principal source of income was his wife's sewing. *Fishl* had a general merchandise store near Yitzhak Neiman's house. He was employed by the Volkovysk Electricity Works, and later became a bookkeeper. He always took pride in the fact that when he was young, he was a pupil of Rabbi Yerakhmiel.

Herschel Ravitz (lives today in America), had two good-looking buildings and was a grain merchant. At one time he was also a contractor. His children received a very good education. *Yaakov*, his oldest son, was an educated young man, and married Feygl Peremolnik; the other son, *David*, was one of the best performers in the Volkovysk Maccabi soccer team, and the youngest son, *Itzel* played in the fire-fighters' orchestra. His two daughters were *Taiba* and *Rosa*. David and Itzel served in the Polish Army at the outbreak of the war in 1939, but their fate is unknown. Herschel's wife *Shifra*, died during the time of the German occupation.

Abraham Lifschitz of the hotel, who lived diagonally across from the post office, was one of the *balebatim.* He was called Avreml Sholom's. In addition to the hotel, he owned a number of houses. His son, *Katriel* was a son-in-law to Eliezer Shaliota, and was known in the city as a very capable and educated young man.

Herschel Mordetsky (Herschel the Artist) earned his living by the work of his hands; he loved to draw. He was in America a number of times. In his later years, he re-built his house and gave up his work. His youngest son, *Joseph* (Yoss'l), was a soccer player on the Maccabi team, and also played in the fire-fighters' orchestra. His other two sons are in America and his son, *Chaim*, lives in Israel. Herschel was the constant leader of the first *minyan* of prayer on the Sabbath in Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*. He died before the last war in Volkovysk.

Aaron Hirsch Greengass, (The Pensioner), lived together with his son-in-law, Eliyahu Zaklas, a hatmaker. He was a friendly, and very decent man. In his youth, he worked in Yanovsky's tobacco factory on the Wider Boulevard. In his older years, he already was not working, and he would receive support from his children in America. His son, and his daughter, *Sima*, who is married to Yaakov Podolinsky (a son of Abraham Yitzhak the carpenter) both live in America.

Abraham Aaron Manokh, the son of *Rabbi Zadok HaKohen Manokh*, lived in Piesk for a while after his marriage. But soon after his father left for America, where he was a Rabbi in Detroit, Abraham Aaron returned to Volkovysk where he became a jobber. He would buy fruit from the orchards of the nobility all summer, and sell it in the city. His brother *Shmuel David* lives in Detroit. When Reb Zadok still lived in Volkovysk he would give sermons on Friday night in the *Ein Yaakov Bet HaMedrash* on the Schulhof. He passed away in Detroit.

Reb Mordechai Moorstein was a tailor by trade, but additionally he did community work. He was a *Gabbai* of the Society of Pallbearers. The famous parties held by this society took place in his house. For a short while, he was also a *Gabbai* of the Reb Meir'keh's *Bet HaMedrash*. He had two daughters, *Rachel* who married in Vilna, and *Basheh* who married Yitzhak Tchopper. His son, *Yekhezkiel* lived on the *Grodno Gasse.* Another son of his lives in America.

His mother-in-law, *Chana Sarah*, also lived with the Moorsteins, who was a real throwback type, being a truly righteous woman. She herself was all alone and crippled (she would limp on one foot), but despite this, she undertook the mission of helping the poor of the city. Every Thursday and Friday, she would go through the streets with a large linen, going from house to house among the Volkovysk Jews, and from there, gather

donations from whoever would give, whether a *challah* or rolls, and later she would distribute this to the hungry. She was considered in the city as a provider of the poor class, and people related to her with real respect and consideration.

Berel Salaman (*Berel the Haminicher*), a son of Gedaliah Haminicher, was an older bachelor, intelligent and knowledgeable and also erudite. He was at one time a pupil of Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel. His brother *Yaakov,* a watchmaker, lived with him, as did his sister, *Sarah* and her husband, *Moshe Shipiatsky*.

Chana Yenta Rosenbloom lived near the post office. There, in the small building, she would sell ice cream and lemonade in the summertime. The young people from the *Ostroger Gasse* would always go there to cool off in the hot summer evenings. The floor wasn't more than four by four, and if four people entered, no more could be accommodated. Nevertheless, Chana Yenta was renown throughout Volkovysk for her unique and delicious ice cream. Her husband, *Nakhum* and her sons, had a small factory for the manufacture of soda water on the *Kholodoisker Gessel*, on the way to the *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash.*

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It is difficult to describe all of the characteristic personalities, that lived on the *Ostroger Gasse* in such rich measure, in the confines of an article. Our Volkovysk was a place where a deeply rooted Jewish life shone forth over the span of many hundreds of years. We have become symbolically orphaned by having lost the most beautiful and the best of what we had accomplished in such a terrifying and tragic manner. At this time, Volkovysk means to us – the entire span of our home town to Treblinka and Auschwitz, where the souls of our beloved and dear martyrs were united with those of millions of other Jewish martyrs, who fell at the enemy's hands, with the cry of 'Hear, O Israel' on their lips.

A Tear for the *Volkovysker Leben*

By Alexander Kalir, Petakh Tikva

Page 508: *Members of the Editorial Board of The Volkovysk Leben, photographed with the prominent writer Z. Segalovich in the year 1928.*

Right to Left Seated: Reuven Rutchik, Z. Segalovich, Mordechai Leib Kaplan;
Standing (presumably Right to Left): Eliezer Kalir, Mordechai Giller

Page 509: *Facsimile of a typical front page (Issue number 140)*

Page 510: *The Employees of the Volkovysker Leben*

Right to Left First Row, Seated: Lev, Mulya Kwiat, Lapin
Second Row(presumably RtoL): Karashinsky, Mazya
Third Row (presumably RtoL): Kagan, Unknown I, Unknown II

In the terrifying extermination process of the Volkovysk Jewish population by the filthy Nazis, may their names and memory be forever eradicated, my unforgettable partners and friends were killed: the gentle author, *Reuven Rutchik* and the refined writer and Esperantist, *M.L. Kaplan.* No matter how hard I tried to obtain details about their last days, about their ends – I did not succeed. Only from one refugee, a certain Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, who suffered through the period of the bunkers with the Volkovysk Jews – I found out only then that Motteh-Leib Kaplan kept a diary for this entire period, and hoped someday to publish it. Sadly, he did not live to do so – and was incinerated along with his writings. Reuven Rutchik, again, lived quietly, wrote quietly, and perished quietly, and no one took note of him, and no one knows where he may lie buried. To my questions of the surviving Volkovysk refugees in Poland – I was answered with these words only: there is no Rutchik, there is no Kaplan, there is no Shakhna Dworetsky, No one! And that is all!

In this case, I would like to recall these couple of dreamers with a few words – these creators of output, and editors of our own local newspaper, the *Volkovysker Leben*, which during a period of fifteen years illuminated the daily life of our city, stood watch over its interests, and tied all Volkovysk Jews around the world to their home town – Volkovysk, with an unbreakable thread.

Reuven Rutchik – a son of a simple laborer from Zamoscheh, was educated in Talmud Torah and Yeshivas, became acquainted with the Talmud and the peripherally related knowledge of the Hebrew language. In time, he became a teacher, first in Volkovysk, afterwards in Bialystok. He was the first Hebrew teacher of Tzemakh, the founder of the *HaBima* theater troupe. 'Rutchik planted a love of the Hebrew language in me, and thanks to Rutchik, the idea was born in me to establish a Hebrew theater troupe' – this was the way Tzemakh ז"ל told it, seeing him for the last time in the Land of Israel. Rutchik published hiss first poems in a children's journal, *Ben Shakhar,* afterwards Yiddish poems in *Jude* and other outlets. The ability to rhyme came to him by inheritance – his mother, Feygl Rutchik, a simple [sic: uneducated] Jewish lady, excelled in her ability to rhyme. Later, when the *Volkovysk Leben* appeared, Rutchik would often print the blessings that his mother bestowed on her children for various occasions – woven out of verses of meaningful folk themes. This reminds me of a story: when we put together the material for the very first edition – Rutchik went away to Bialystok to turn over the copy [for printing]. There, during the printing process, some sort of a board broke off the machine, and struck Rutchik in the head, wounding him – he was covered in blood. They

bandaged him up, and as it happened, Pesach Kaplan, the editor of the Bialystok *Dos Nyeh Leben* was in the print shop – he went over to Rutchik, and congratulated him: *BeDamayikh Chayii* – Through your blood, this publication will now live. And his prediction came true. It existed for fifteen years, and would have continued to live on and on, had only Volkovysk continued to live on!

Remarkably, even though he was morose and thoughtful in his nature – it was he who directed the humorous section of the *Volkovysker Leben*, which was called 'The Wise Peasant.' Also, from time-to-time, he would publish useful advice under the title of 'Domestic Issues,' where in a light humor and a unique cadence – he would describe the joys and sorrows of Jewish life in our Volkovysk. Reuven Rutchik was a rare poet. His gentle poems are full of heart, longing and sadness, and transport you other worlds. Another poet with his talent would have shouted out to the world, his popularity would have been great, but Rutchik was a modest person for his entire life, and shy, and did not try hard and push himself to the fore, and was himself a mournful and lonely person:

"My life's not going well, I don't know about others –
Everything is backwards for me, unattainably high.
I may try to build something – and it collapses,
When somebody yields already – a billow comes out.

I had a sister – my only one, shy,
One and only love, that fills the world,
This too, fate angrily tore away from me,
Leaving me alone on a desolate field."

You cannot recognize the same Rutchik, when in a light playful humor, he writes his 'Domestic Issues' – about the effervescent stream of life of his and our dear home city of Volkovysk:

"Did someone in the town dream,
That a newspaper could be published here,
And that very newspaper (or call it a 'sheet')
Wouldn't hear anyone, or be disturbed by anyone's complaint.
Its progress continues, reaching number one hundred already,
And will continue for a long time...

No matter what you say, it is a fact of life:
The city has a different face to it,
The paper instilled spirit and feeling,
All its current charitable patrons.
We should not miss anyone, and not think too long
Support is given, help is brought.
What a joy, but the heart is sour,
The relatives the big world over know immediately.
Congratulating on good news, and also feeling the sadness
And the friendship becomes even stronger and more ardent
And it this way united overall
The specific and general people of Volkovysk will become..."

Cry out woe! There remains from him no issue, no memory, not even the remnant of a book – from so many pearl-like poems, and only like poor little orphans, without a father or mother, the silenced scraps of his

Volkovysk Leben flutter about randomly containing his brilliant poems that plead and beg: 'have pity – I am one of Rutchik's poems; save us, we are Rutchik's, the poems of your own Reuven Rutchik...'

Let a tear fall from the eyes of Volkovysk Jews the world over, for our martyred poet, wh was so self-effacing, and sanctified in his own life, how gentle and heartfelt was his poetry...

Together with *Mordechai Leib Kaplan* and *Reuven Rutchik* the following employees of the *Volkovysker Leben* were also murdered: *Alter Giller*, a young man who was a storekeeper, who would stand in his store and weigh out a pound of salt, a bottle of pepper – and between the salt and pepper, weigh out and measure up a poem; *Shakhna Dworetsky* who was one of the founders of the *Volkovysker Leben*, and *A. Tz. Schwartz*, a teacher at the Hebrew gymnasium, who would often grace the columns of the paper with his wondrous poetry.

Three *Balebatim* of Volkovysk

By Eliezer Kalir (Petakh Tikva)

Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus

Page 515: Reb Abraham Eli Markus

There are people, whose way of life does not vanish from the memory of man. There personality lives on for generations. Their name tells of a page of history about an entire epoch. These are people blessed with a very special spark in their souls, that lights up not only themselves, but casts a radiance on those around them, and on the surroundings in which they lived and made an impact.

Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus זצ"ל, was this type of person.

Was there a Jew from Volkovysk anywhere in the world who did not respect and cherish this name!? He was wise, and a Torah scholar, managed large business enterprises, valuing and holding the title of 'merchant' highly. His word was sacred, when something was bought, it was bought, when sold, sold. Whether it involved the greatest of profit or the opposite – there was no reversal. He enjoyed it when people could make money off of him, and himself was a generous man. The name of Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus rang out as a symbol of decency and straightforwardness. His home was a typically fundamental merchant's abode, that constantly bubbled with people, with merchants. People came to him from the entire area, from all the small Jewish towns around. One would hear a good word from him, a suggestion. With his straight and deep common sense, he would help people through there difficult times and set them on a proper direction. But the enterprise that stood above all the others was his work with the *Bet HaMedrash*. He was unusually devoted to scholarship, in which he had no peer. Before dawn, in the greatest downpour, snow, frost and blizzard, he was already seated in the *Bet HaMedrash*, studying with devotion. He was always the first one to cross the threshold of the *Bet HaMedrash*. Being a very pious person, thanks to his great wisdom, he also was held in high regard by the younger generation, which was more liberally oriented, and he worked along sided them in community institutions, where his words found a responsive reception and made a great impact. From time to time, his house took on a different appearance. The merchant's house, which was full of goods, was also filled with Torah: the large rooms were furnished with long tables, covered with all manner of good things, and a mitzvah feast was celebrated – a completion of the *Shas*, the *Mishna,* or a Tractate, a feast of the Burial Society. At the table, the faces of the old patriarchal guard of Volkovysk would be seen: *Reb Itcheh Jonah's* with his white beard and ruddy cheeks, *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*, the Dayan, *Reb Herschel Einhorn, Reb Joseph Berestovitsky*, who stood head and shoulders above the rest, *Reb Yehuda Bereshkovsky, Reb Asher Yudzhik, Reb Akiva Yudzhik*, and other scholars, with Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus at their head. Entire well springs of Torah thought and wisdom would circulate around the table, of reasoning and analysis; the sweet notes of chanting would pour forth, and one thought that the holy spirit of God himself must hover over these Jews – because everything is vanity, and only the Holy Writ is of the essence.

Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus was a Torah scholar who always loved being in the close company of other Torah scholars. A Sabbath or Festival did not pass, that he would sit down to a meal without a Yeshiva student, a resident scholar, or a boy from Talmud Torah.

He was prominent and well-known in the rabbinical world. It was not for nothing that when the time came to appoint a rabbi to the city pulpit, which had been occupied by *Gaonim* such as Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg

זצ"ל, Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov זצ"ל, the expert was Abraham Eliyahu Markus.

But apart from this, Abraham Eliyahu Markus was an outstanding and unique cantor. He would enchant the congregation with his sweet voice, full of emotion. When he would lead services in the middle of the week, it seemed as if it was a holiday – *a Yom Tov*. His style, the way he poured out his soul, his articulation of Hebrew, his hearty melodies, all will echo for a long time in the souls of every Volkovysk Jew – even if fate had cast him out to another end of the world. Who can forget his rendition of "*mimekomkha malkeinu sofiya*" which he would sing to the tune of "*schlof mein kind, mein shayner Feygl, schlof-zhe lyu-lyu-lyu.*" He loved to weave folk song motifs into his prayer, and grab hold of and drag along all the worshipers into his prayer with song. He was known as a folk cantor, and his name will be recalled for many of generations yet, as one of the most beautiful inspirational people that ever came out of our now destroyed city.

Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus was privileged to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, where his children continue to spin out the thread and continue in the way that he had shown them.

Reb Shmuel Feinzilber

Volkovysk Jews of an older generation remember well the unique wise and lovely man, *Reb Shmuel Feinzilber*, who was called 'the wooden God,' because of the wooden leg that he had. He had lost a leg at the time of a fire, when he had ran to rescue, and had remained crippled for the rest of his life. He played a large role during the time of the Russians. He was a participant in the municipal council, and was highly regarded by the highest authorities. He would be consulted on all matters pertaining to military service, and he was the most familiar with all the municipal and community institutions. During the time of the Poles, he was already on the way down. He was already old, weak and impoverished, and he was rarely turned to. One time, on a Saturday morning, as the populace was returning form the Schulhof, from the various *Bet HaMedrash* prayer services – Reb Shmuel Feinzilber, as was his custom, was sitting at the window of his little house, and was looking out... and he saw Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky going from the *Schul* with his prayer shawl...

– Itcheh, come here – he called out – take a look, see – there are the Jews going home from *Schul* – that one there I saved from military conscription, that one I got out of jail, that one I freed from the fortress [jail] – and see – they all walk by – and nobody even so much as offers me a *Gut Shabbos*....

– Oh, Reb Shmuel, Reb Yitzhak answered him, how is it that you ask such questions? The world assumes that you are such a wise man, and you don't understand such a simple thing! If you hadn't released them from military draft, the fort or jail – they would have all fled to America – then they would have become vastly wealthy like everyone else – and now they have remained poor, paupers, impoverished – and for this you expect them to come over and wish you a *Gut Shabbos*?!....

Reb Yaakov Solomon

Page 517: *The Market on the Grodno Gasse*
Left: Papa's Ironmongery, Freidkeh's Flour store, Uryonsky's houses, Tamara's, Zaklas and Davidovsky.

One of the finest personalities that Volkovysk ever produced was without a doubt *Reb Yaakov Solomon*. He was one of the most dedicated of the Bet HaMedrash adherents, not an outstanding scholar – he was ordinary,

yet pious Jew, a merchant who spent his entire life managing large scale businesses and constantly pressed for time – but it was because of this that he jealously guarded the principles of correct conduct in personal affairs, and always sought justices, righteousness and the truth. He was outstanding in his profound and logical common sense, with is unique decency and straightness, giving the impression to both Christians and Jews alike of a very decent person. It is told of him that in negotiating over forest properties, he once purchased, with partners, a large forest in the neighborhood of the *Bielovezer Pushtsa*.[224] The boundaries of the forest were marked off with stamped stone markers, which bounded the parcel where it was permissible to take down trees. Once, when coming into the forest, he noticed that the markers did not seem to be in their proper place, but rather seemed to be displaced a little further to the right. Reb Yaakov asked his partners what this meant.

Well, Reb Yaakov – the partners answered – just don't pay attention to it, you're not going to add any value to the matter – and they made a calculation for him that showed this "action" would make them an additional ten thousand rubles...

– The markers must be returned to their original places – Reb Yaakov answered – Yankel Solomon will not sell his name for ten thousand rubles! – and no form of argument helped, and the "action" was abandoned. It was not for nothing that all the prominent nobility and estate managers in the area held him in such esteem, and when he would come to them, they would always be forthcoming with substantial contributions for philanthropic institutions of our city. On one winter's day, a Christian entered his home, wearing a peasant overcoat, and asked if the owner of the house was in. Reb Yaakov happened not to be home just then, but his wife, Batsheva, thought the gentile had come to ask for a donation. – What do you need from the head of the house? – she asked him – I wanted to let him know that tomorrow I am sending him 200 pounds of potatoes for the old age home, and 200 pounds for the orphanage...

This was the estate manager Sherayev, the well-know philo-Semite, who despite this, preferred to dress modestly in a peasant's overcoat.

Reb Yaakov Solomon was popular throughout the entire populace of our city, and also his name reverberated in the entire vicinity, and he was constantly overwhelmed by people who came to seek either advice or assistance – and they would find it. Reb Yaakov was also recognized and accepted in rabbinical circles and in all involved and complicated issues involving mediation, religious court cases, the opinion of Reb Yaakov Solomon was sought. He was the right had of the Gaonim, Rabbi Joseph[225] Eliasberg, Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, and also in the case of Rabbi Kossowsky, who today is in Johannesburg. For many years, he was the first *Gabbai* of the large *Mauer Bet HaMedrash*, supported Torah scholars, people who studied the Torah, both openly and secretly, and was active faithfully in all matters of public welfare.

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224 A Byelorussian Forest also referenced in both the Zelva and Dereczin Memorial Books.

225 Likely an error, since this seems to be Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg.

Characters & Personalities

By Yitzhak Bereshkovsky (Tel-Aviv)

Son of *Yud'l Bereshkovsky* – The Ironmonger

Reb Shlomo son of Reb Yitzhak Bereshkovsky

Reb Shlomo Bereshkovsky was the Headmaster of the Yeshiva in Volkovysk. The Volkovysk Yeshiva was regarded as one of the most important educational institutions not only in Volkovysk, but in its vicinity as well. Before the War, over 800 students attended there. The Yeshiva was also one of the oldest institutions in Volkovysk. In 1880, the Headmaster was Rabbi Yehoshua'leh Epstein, who later made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, where he settled in the old city of Jerusalem. His family is highly regarded to this day among the members of the older *Yishuv*. Rabbi Shlomo became the Headmaster after he made *aliyah*. Among his pupils were the well-known Volkovysk residents: *Fyv'eh & Nakheh Heller*, *Hirsch Einhorn* (the Pharmacist), *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* (the Lawyer). Among his students were also many Torah scholars who came from the surrounding towns, whose names are well-known far and wide as exceptional intellects from this corner of the world. Rabbi Shlomo himself exuded the characteristics of a *Gaon* in Torah scholarship and a keen analyst in giving direction. He passed away in Warsaw in a very characteristic way. A student of his, an exceptional scholar from a small town, posed a question to him that Rabbi Shlomo was unable to give the correct and appropriate answer on the spot. It was Hanukkah season, at the time of the bitter cold. He sat for long hours thinking about the answer, and in sitting this way for long hours, he became frozen from the cold. On the Sabbath, it became necessary to quickly transport him to the hospital in Warsaw. Before he died, he requested that his son, Yehuda (the father of this writer), spend the night with him at the hospital. He then conveyed the essence of the difficult question posed to him by his student, and also gave him the correct answer – and on the following morning, he gave up the ghost. This was in the year 1895.

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Before the Second World War, the Headmaster of the Volkovysk Talmud Torah, where there were already over 800 students, was *Rabbi Yerakhmiel [Daniel]*. The members of the school board were: *Reb Joseph Berestovitsky* (Yoss'l the Beer Maker), *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky* (Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's), *Reb Abraham Eliyahu Markus*, *Reb Yehuda Bereshkovsky* (Yud'l Reb Shlomo's), *Reb Akiva Yudzhik* (the father of Mr. Yehuda'i in Israel), and others. Hundreds of young boys from the surrounding little towns, received their elementary education in the Volkovysk Talmud Torah, and took their daily meals in the homes of the *balebatim* of Volkovysk.

When *Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov*, the elder of the *Gaonim*, as he was called in Israel, became the Rabbi of Volkovysk, the Talmud Torah took on a completely different complexion. Secular studies were immediately introduced. The Zionist ideal, in which Rabbi Borukhov himself was so deeply steeped, became the dominant spiritual force among the hundreds of students who derived their education there. This

nationalist ideal became even more deeply rooted under the influence of the later Dayan, Rabbi Joseph[226] Berestovitsky (the father of Azriel Broshi in Israel), who was a nationalistic and advanced [thinking] Jew.

Reb David Feinzilber

Reb David Feinzilber was a great Torah scholar, and a contractor in the Russian Army in Brisk. He was very popular in the fort at Brisk, and was well acquainted with everyone, from the lowliest scribe up to the most senior general. They all knew that they were not permitted to engage him in any business transactions on the Sabbath of [Jewish] Festivals, even if ordered by the Czar himself.

After the Russians destroyed Brisk in 1905, and expelled the resident populace, Reb David Feinzilber and his family came to live in Volkovysk, with his daughter Aydeleh and son-in-law, Yehuda Bereshkovsky. Just as he was a close confidant of the *Gaon* Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk, he immediately became a confidant
and household member of the *Gaon,* Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov in Volkovysk. Shortly after his arrival in Volkovysk, he took over the post of a *Dayan*, at the behest of Rabbi Borukhov, and discharged those duties with precision and understanding without any compensation.

By the end of the First World War, when the Germans were retreating from Volkovysk, and the Poles had not yet indicated that they would be taking over control, a self-defense committee was established in the city, that consisted of Jewish and Christian representatives from all strata of the population. Reb David Feinzilber was elected to serve as a member of this advisory body, where, among others, he worked together with Abraham Ain, a well-known communist in Volkovysk. Later on, when the Poles retreated, and the Russians occupied the city, this very Abraham Ain was appointed Chief Commissar of Volkovysk. Abraham Ain took the opportunity on many occasions to express how satisfying it was for him to work together with Reb David Feinzilber, when they were both members of the self-defense committee during the transition period, despite the fact that they were foresworn opponents on the political front.

Reb David Feinzilber died in Volkovysk in 1923.

Reb Yehuda son of Shlomo Bereshkovsky

Page 523: Yud'l Bereshkovsky

Reb Yehuda Bereshkovsky was known in Volkovysk as Yud'l Reb Shlomo's, or Yud'l the Ironmonger – a son of Rabbi Shlomo the Yeshiva Headmaster, and a son-in-law of Reb David Feinzilber. In his very early years, he studied under his father's tutelage at the Yeshiva, and later at the Yeshiva in Volozhin. As a young man, he worked very hard at his small iron business, and shortly before the First World War, he bought out the more substantial iron business of Sholom Barash. But commerce was not his only activity. He also took an active part in matters pertaining to the Jewish community. He would examine the students at the Talmud Torah every week, and made himself famous among the youngsters of Volkovysk that studied at the Talmud Torah, with his difficult questions that he would pose to them during the examination. When the *Gaon, Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov* made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, Rabbi Shlomo Bereshkovsky

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226 This appears to be an error. Prior text reports the father of Azriel Broshi, and the *Dayan* to be *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*.

participated in the nominating committee that was set up to designate a new Rabbi. Together with a delegation, he traveled to *Yagustov* to extend an offer to Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky to take over the pulpit in Volkovysk.

In 1929, paying no attention to the Arab riots in the Land of Israel, he settled in Jerusalem with his family, and became a frequenter of the home of the *Gaon Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov* זי"ל, and of the Chief Rabbi, the *Gaon Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook* זי"ל. He lived for fifteen years in Jerusalem, and devoted the entire time to the study of the Torah in Rabbi Kook's Yeshiva. He especially took an interest in the situation of scholars that were unable to reach out and ask for assistance – and he would help them with small loans. He died at the age of 73. Before he passed away, he asked his family to donate his personal Talmudic library to Rabbi Kook's Yeshiva, And also set aside a specific sum of money which provided a foundation for a charitable lending society named after him, that provided loans to needy scholars without interest or guarantees. His grave is found on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, near the graves of Rabbis Kook and Borukhov, זי"צל.

Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky

Page 525: Yitzhak Novogrudsky

Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky was known also as Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's, or Itcheh the wine storekeeper.

Who in Volkovysk didn't know Reb Itcheh and his wife Fradl? Every boy and girl, before the First World War, would buy wine at his house prior to the Sabbath or a Festival. Reb Itcheh, and his wife Fradl, their son Leibeh, and a number of daughters, would stand beside a long table, which was set with very large containers of various wines that could addle your senses because of their strength, and would measure out the portions of wine for *Kiddush* and *Havdalah* with a ladle. Itcheh's place of business was most full of boys and girls on the eve of Passover. In that time, most of the houses of the *balebatim* retained house servants, Christian girls, but to bring the wine, it was forbidden to send a gentile woman, because of the issue of wine used for idolatrous purposes, and Reb Itcheh was very stringent in assuring that the wine be handled only by Jewish children alone.

There was not a single charitable institution in Volkovysk in which Reb Itcheh did not take an active role, even though he officially did not want to lead. He was active on behalf of the old age home, the burial society, in the *Khoma*[227] *Bet HaMedrash,* and in the charitable lending institution. Together with his wife Fradl, he participated in the winter firewood society, food for Passover, and discreet giving to the needy – and both of them would contribute well beyond their ordinary capacities.

Reb Itcheh and his wife Fradl, for their entire lives, were accustomed to give generously, and tried to impress upon others to do the same. Their conveyance of assistance to the poorer segments of the Volkovysk Jewish populace knew no bounds. Many Volkovysk *landsleit* in various corners of the world, owe thanks to Reb Itcheh and his wife, for their Jewish upbringing and their way of life, who provided them with support in Volkovysk, and later assisted them in emigrating from their home town to the larger world beyond.

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227 This is the Hebrew word for a Wall, and hence Mauer in German or Yiddish. Thus, this may refer to the *Mauer Bet HaMedrash.*

In their day-to-day lives, Reb Itcheh and his wife Fradl also held themselves to the high principles of helping their own brethren. They would never by potatoes, eggs, chicken or fruit for their own use from gentiles, but rather seeing to it that this income would go to Jews. In order that the indigent Jewish men and women have enough to eat on the festivals, Reb Itcheh and his wife Fradl would provide many of the poor with *kapores*[228] on Yom Kippur Eve. The *Shokhet* was stationed in their yard, where he would slaughter hundreds of roosters on Yom Kippur Eve, which were then distributed to the various houses buy poor people who earned a little from this for the holidays. There was in Volkovysk an elderly, frail Jewish man who used to deliver cookies, bagels, and a variety of rolls, to the stores, from the Bialystoker baker. All the storekeepers used to buy something from him. He would come to Reb Itcheh last, who always out of pity, bought up his entire unsold stock of merchandise. Reb Itcheh would take part of it home for his family, and the rest he would divide up among poor people or the young, who because of this, had to recite the appropriate blessing out loud. This writer can recall that as a boy, there was not only one instance when he ate either cookies or bagels, received at Reb Itcheh's hand, only in return for reciting the proper blessing out loud. Reb Itcheh did this in order to be of assistance to the elderly Jew. Reb Itcheh and his wife Fradl also did much in connection with charitable lending. Hundreds of people would borrow money from him without a note, without a written commitment, without interest, and without a guarantee.

Reb Itcheh's house was also known in the city as the house in which one could find the greatest number of students taking their daily meals. And during the cold season, the young people would not leave the house without a warm garment. His wife, Fradl would often give away her children's warm clothing to the poor young students. On one cold day, Reb Itcheh himself returned home from the Maariv service without his warm overcoat, and when Fradl asked him for the reason, he told her that he gave the coat away to the Head of the Mirrer Yeshiva, who came to Volkovysk practically naked. Insofar as activity in the society for provisioning brides, Fradl already had a monopoly. The commitment with which she undertook this sacred work of providing for the poorer girls with everything, in order that they could get married, was exceptional. She simply did not take into account any difficulties that stood in her way, and with a smile on her face, she would do all that was necessary to overcome these difficulties in order to attain her objective.

When the time of Grabski's[229] rule came, and the wine trade was taken out of Jewish hands and turned over to gentiles only, Reb Itcheh went into decline. His substantial wine business was locked up. He confined himself to the production of mead, which the regime did not forbid to the Jews. He did this in a cellar. You can understand, that under these circumstances, Reb Itcheh was not able to contribute in the same manner that he had in prior years, but despite this, he held on to his novel means, and would help the poor to the extent that he was able. The Jewish men and women, from whom he would buy in the good times for the Sabbath and Festivals for use in his home, would continue to come to him every Thursday. He would calculate precisely what he used to buy from them during the good years, ask them what profit they would have made if he bought everything, and then he would pay them only the profit margin, because he could no longer allow himself to conduct his household at the level of generosity he had done previously. Also, the elderly Jew would come to him every evening with his sack of unsold baked goods. Reb Itcheh would count the unsold items, pay the Jew the profit that he would have made, had he sold them, and the Jew would take

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228 The formal process of absolution of sin prior to the Yom Kippur fast. Modeled on the sacrificial ritual of the scapegoat, a rooster was typically used even well into the 20th century in North America. It has become customary to substitute coins, or some sum of money, that is donated to charity in place of slaughtering a rooster.

229 Also referenced at the end of Yerakhmiel Moorstein's memoir on Zelva, in *Volkovysk*, the third part of this Trilogy, edited by Katriel Lashowitz.

the unsold baked goods back to the baker without sustaining any loss.
After his wife's death in Volkovysk, Reb Itcheh went to the Land of Israel to his son, Yud'l, where he later passed away.

Reb Joseph Berestovitsky

Page 527: Reb Joseph Berestovitsky

Reb Joseph Berestovitsky (Yoss'l der Birrer) was a unique Jewish man. He was built tall, broad-boned and had a wide beard, which was always well-kempt. He always carried a small comb which he always kept in the top pocket of his jacket along with his pince-nez which hung from a black ribbon, pinned to his lapel by a gold pin. Entering the house, he would, simultaneous with a hearty "Good Morning," take off his hat, and take out a black, folded yarmulke, in the style of the *Mitnagdim,* and put it on his beautifully combed head. He would then affably seat himself at the table, exuding much homely warmth and friendliness.

He was a great lover of humanity, and his life was filled out with the doing of good deeds. He was full of goodness and dedication. The day he arrived in Jerusalem, the few of us people from Volkovysk went with him to Rabbi Borukhov. After the warm reunion, Rabbi Borukhov approached him with a question, as to whether it was possible to reveal the secret that he had kept to himself all these years. With Reb Joseph's permission, Rabbi Borukhov told, that after the great fire in Volkovysk, when part of the synagogues and *Batei Medrashim* were destroyed, Reb Joseph Berestovitsky came and expressed his concern to the Rabbi, that when it comes to prayer, the Jews will pray in the surviving houses of worship, but what is to be the fate of the hundreds of young children, where will they be able to continue studying? He immediately took one thousand rubles out of his pocket and gave the money to the Rabbi, insisting that he take it, in order that construction of a new Talmud Torah begin immediately. He requested, in this connection, that under no circumstances should his name be revealed. Rabbi Borukhov observed this condition until that day when he met with him in Jerusalem. Reb Joseph and his wife donated two Torah scrolls, and when the new synagogue was finished being built, a great celebration was put on, with music and a fine repast (in which this writer also participated), and with a great parade ceremony, the two Torah scrolls donated by Reb Joseph were brought into the new synagogue. Reb Joseph was a prominent participant in many Volkovysk institutions, where he always gave donations in generous amounts for the benefits of the needy.

After settling in the Lands of Israel, where he arrived with very frightening sums of money, he continued to advance his good deeds. Many young Volkovysk girls owe him many thanks making their *aliyah* to the Land of Israel possible. They would personally approach him for his assistance, and he would run all over the banks, looking for guarantees in order to secure their certificates. Today, they are comfortably settled in the Land of Israel.

Sholom Barash

Sholom Barash was a great Torah scholar, merchant and manufacturer. Apart from a Jewish education, he obtained a secular education and could speak foreign languages well, especially Russian and German. He was an honest man, and a major warrior on behalf of constructive work and modernization. His large iron foundry and casting plant were the most modern in the city, also where the first telephone was installed. He detested falseness and lies, and hated idleness even more. His motto was 'Torah and Labor,' and with only these two key points, he would argue, would the Jews be able to construct a state in the Land of Israel; the Land of Israel would eject idlers, because they are an impediment to redemption. He had great respect for

those Jews who dedicated themselves to agriculture, or maintained land parcels under lease.

Sholom Barash visited the Land of Israel, and after his return, he held meetings regarding threats against land in the Land of Israel. He would strenuously protect and help out every worker that wanted to learn a trade, and he accepted many Jewish workers into his factory in order to train them. He was a strong-willed man with progressive ideas, and in all his undertakings he manifested a strong dynamic force. He always came out with ideas that were too far advanced in the eyes of the Jewish masses. It was only years later that his friends grasped how far ahead Sholom Barash was, a 'wise man who can anticipate what will be,' and how committed he was to the interests of the Jewish people.

In the First World War, during the time of the German occupation, Sholom Barash was the unofficial mayor of the city. Thanks to him, the Jewish populace received aid and foodstuffs from the city committee that Sholom Barash helped to found. During the difficult times of the German occupation in the First World War, when the Jewish schools were closed entirely, Sholom Barash personally dedicated himself to the upbringing of the Jewish children, and even taught a number of them in his own house.

Sholom Barash died of a heart attack in the year 1929 at the age of 73 years. Issue No. 134 of the *Volkovysker Leben* records the following concerning the funeral of Sholom Barash:

> "News of his death spread through the city with lightning speed, and elicited sorrowful reaction from all circles in the Jewish and even Christian populace, among whom the deceased was greatly beloved.
>
> The funeral took place at 2PM on *Simchat Torah*. First in front of the casket, the members of *Gordonia, HaShomer HaTza'ir, HeHalutz,* the children of the orphanage, and the students of the Hebrew school and *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium marched in aligned ranks. Behind the casket came delegates from the various organizations and societies, and also from the magistrate and municipal government. Bringing up the rear behind these delegates – an immense crowd, the likes of which has not been seen in Volkovysk in a long time. Many members of the Christian intelligentsia, who strongly befriended the deceased, were seen among the participants in the funeral."

In the same edition of the *Volkovysker Leben*, a report appeared about a meeting of the city council which was postponed after the death of Sholom Barash, because he was a council member:

> "At the beginning of the meeting of the city council, all those present observed the memory of the deceased Councilman Sh. Barash by standing, The speakers praised the deceased, and cited him as one of the best and most decent of the representatives. Those present then made a motion to eternally preserve the memory of Sholom Barash by installing a city clock on the magistrate's building, that should serve as a symbol and an indicator of direction for the remaining residents of the city. This motion was passed."

Of the large family of Sholom Barash, his two sons, *Ephraim* and *Menashe* were best known. Engineer Ephraim Barash was the leader of Bialystok *Judenrat* during the last World War. He organized the resistance against the enemy in the Bialystok ghetto, and fell a hero in battle. His brother, Menashe, remained in Russia.

David Hubar

Page 530: *David Hubar*

David Hubar was considered the second richest magnate in the city (first place was taken by Eliyahu Leib Rakhmilevich). It was said of David Hubar that he could count out and put one hundred thousand rubles on the table, ready at hand. Reb David ran a web of businesses. At his home in his large yard on the *Ostroger Gasse*, he had a warehouse of general merchandise, sugar, petrol, salt, and other articles. Apart from this, David Hubar also controlled forests and fields in the Volkovysk vicinity. The fields were always planted with wheat and potatoes.

David Hubar was an educated man, and he also exerted himself to provide his children with a good upbringing. He dedicated his entire life to the education of Jewish youth. Thanks to him, the first modern *Heder* was established in Volkovysk, and afterwards the first Russian *Real Schul. Hanokh Neiman* was active along with him at that time in the area of education for children. Both of these *balebatim* in Volkovysk were the first to send their children to the Land of Israel to study at the newly founded *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv. They were also the first in the city to by shares of the Jewish Colonial Bank, and bought land parcels in the Land of Israel – in *Rukhama.* In the year 1929, David Hubar relocated, along with the larger part of his family, to the Lands of Israel, and settled there. Under no circumstances did he want to get involved with business. He invested the large amount of capital that he brought with him into land, and planted a park of 200 dunams[230] in *Tziona*. He would complain: "I have given enough of my life to business. I want to be a colonist in the Land of Israel, to sow and plant."

Sorrowfully, his son, *Israel,* who had remained in the diaspora, fell as a martyr to the Nazi murderers, with his wife Fanya (Avigdor Bloch's grandchild) along with two children.

David Hubar and his wife *Pelteh,* not long ago passed away in Tel-Aviv at a very advanced old age.

Meir Shiff

Meir Shiff was a first-class watchmaker, he was one of the most popular of the *balebatim* in the city, and in addition to that an active and committed activist on behalf of the general welfare. He was a constant visitor at the Rabbi's home, Rabbi Borukhov ז"ל, to whom he was committed body and soul. He would never taste new fruit without first bringing it to the Rabbi for a *SheHekheyanu* blessing. He was especially active during the season for gathering firewood for the poor, and for providing food for Passover. At that time, he would never let any of the *balebatim* get by him without exacting from him what he wanted.

He was very active in the work of the old age home. He was the one who instituted the custom, that at every happy occasion, be it a circumcision, a wedding, or a Bar Mitzvah, that money should be collected for the benefit of the old age home. When a child recovered from an illness, the parents would send a contribution or a bottle of wine for the old folks. On the eve of a festival, Meir Shiff would personally go to the old age home, and bring his friends there all manner of good things that he gathered up in the city, and would spend some time with them. In private life, he was a good brother, and had an open hand for charity and was active

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[230] There are four dunams in an acre.

in the community affairs of the city.

Zvi Berg (Herschel the Contractor)

Page 533: The Barracks at Volkovysk

The yard of *Herschel the Contractor* was locates near the barracks, on *Kopustinsky Pereulok* as the Russians used to call the street. As far back as 1885, he was a contractor for the military. He was an observant Jew, and highly regarded in military circles.

Herschel Berg passed away in 1923. After his death, I (his son-in-law) was appointed to open his iron safe where his documents were found. In the safe, I found a wooden container that had a lock on it. There were many letters found in the box, visa cards, telegrams, and other significant papers, all of which reflected on his multi-faceted activities in providing assistance and concern for those near and far, for Jew and gentile, for the needy and suffering. There were thank you letters from parents, sisters and brothers, brides and rabbis, officers and generals. Mostly, there were letters of gratitude from mothers, who blessed him for the many favors he bestowed on their sons who served in the 16th Artillery Brigade which was billeted in the Volkovysk barracks. In one envelope with the double-headed eagle and the Czar's crown on it, there was a letter inside printed in gold letters, which had the signature of Nicholas II. This was a thank you for hiding and safekeeping the repository that contained all the funds for the brigade in the year 1905, at the time of the uprising of the soldiers, when the brigadier-general found it suitable to trust the safekeeping of this repository to Herschel, until such time as the unrest died down. Herschel kept the repository at his home for two months time and later returned it in the best of condition to the general.

Among the papers, an order by a Russian general was found, in which a Jewish soldier was sentenced to seven days arrest and to receive four lashes from Herschel the contractor in the presence of a Captain and an Adjutant. The soldier receiving the punishment was standing guard at the gunpowder magazine on the night of Hanukkah. He wanted to light the Hanukkah candles, and he had put them on one of the powder boxes. The soldiers on guard duty at other posts, seeing the light, began to shoot as a means of sounding a fire alarm in the camp. The Jewish soldier was arrested. His excuse for lighting the candles was not accepted, and the matter was turned over to the brigadier, who sent for the contractor. Herschel Berg, in his defense of the Jewish soldier attempted to introduce a humorous tone, in order to make the charge seem less severe. At the conclusion, the brigadier sentenced the soldier to seven days in jail, and he ordered Herschel to do the following: "Give him four good lashes, so that he will know and remember that one does not light Hanukkah candles on Russian powder boxes." It was precisely in this fashion that Herschel Berg was often able to stand up for Jewish soldiers, thanks to his good name and strong influence in the military circles, and thereby rescue them from harsh punishment, assisting them with loans, and in general assisting them in a variety of circumstances.

Herschel always had a *minyan* in his home at which the Jewish soldiers could participate in prayer. His home was always open to the soldiers who did not want to take their meals at the military mess. They would always get together at Herschel's, especially on the Sabbath and for Festival holidays, where they would enjoy the good Jewish delicacies that his wife, *Leah,* would prepare for them. She would also provide them with ritually-fringed undergarments for their use.

The large *cholent* pots that Leah Berg prepared for the soldiers every Sabbath, were specially stored with Jesierski the metalworker. And Leah Berg prepared good Jewish cooking not only for the soldiers. Every

Friday, Leah Berg would cook gefilte fish and distribute it to the army officers, in order to always be in an advantageous position to work out all manner of easements on behalf of Jewish soldiers.

What used to go on in Herschel Berg's house on the eve of Passover is literally hard to describe. In order to run a *Seder* for the Jewish soldiers, every year the walls needed to be taken down, in order to make room for that many more soldiers. Many Russian officers were invited to these *Seder* meals, whom Herschel would give matzoh to take home, and whiskey that was kosher for Passover.

In his own yard, Herschel Berg put up a private slaughterhouse under the supervision of *Reb Yaakov Weinstein,* husband of Esther the contractor, who ran businesses in partnership with Herschel. Every Thursday, and on the eve of all Festivals, Reb Yaakov Weinstein, together with Leah Berg, would distribute portions of meat for poor Jews, each according to the size of their family. Others would also receive an allotment of potatoes.

It was particularly a festive time, when an issue over *kashrut* would arise at the slaughterhouse. Then the *Dayan, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky* would be called down, along with the *Shokhet Reb Yoss'l Yerusalimsky,* who was held to be the leading expert in the area of ritual slaughter. Both of these Jewish men would then don large white aprons, and get to the task, which would often last late into the night. Only then, when their work was finished, was a festive meal served. At the head of the table sat *Rabbi Yaakov* and *Reb Yoss'l*, the entire *Berg* family, *Reb Yaakov Weinstein*, the *Menaker*[231] and the workers in the slaughterhouse. The principal speaker was Reb Yoss'l the *Shokhet*, who would amuse the people with his wonderful stories. And in this manner, they would celebrate late into the night, and afterwards the guests would be escorted back to the city.

Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky told me, that together with Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov, they would annually visit Herschel Berg for the purpose of soliciting a contribution for winter wood provisioning, and provisioning food for Passover. On this occasion, Reb Herschel would send his coach into town to bring the guests to his house, where a table had already been spread with the best of all manner of delicacies, as befitted the esteemed company who had earned it. After the sumptuous meal, and a discussion of a variety of issues, Herschel would put his hand into his pocket and take out a huge fistful of money – silver and gold coins – placed it into the Rabbi's hand, not bothering to count it, and not even asking him to retain the donation in his possession.

There was also an alcohol distillery in Herschel Berg's yard. In accordance with the decree of the Polish regime, seventy percent of the production had to be set aside in a separate building for military use only. Once, in 1920, about fifty thousand liters of spirit had accumulated in this magazine. At just that time, four transports arrived in Volkovysk with "Haller's" soldiers. The soldiers found out about this huge cache of

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231 Jews who observe the laws of *kashrut,* do not normally partake of the hindquarters of an animal, even if it has been slaughtered according to ritual. This restriction is traced to the biblical injunction that can be found in Genesis 32:25-32, stemming from the hip injury sustained by Jacob when he is alleged to have wrestled with an Angel of the Lord. However, by Talmudic Law, the hindquarters can be rendered ritually fit for consumption if the veins (presumed to be the part of Jacob's thigh that was injured) are carefully and completely removed. The process of removing those veins is called *trayboring* in Yiddish, and the specialist who does this is called a *Menaker.* Although this is a highly labor-intensive and painstaking work, it was – and still is – deemed cost effective, in order to 'rescue' some of the choice cuts of meat for the use of the ritually observant community.

spirits immediately. Armed, they came to the front gate of the magazine, and demanded that the spirits be turned over to them. Despite the fact that they took the matter to the police, the managers of the facility were forced to accept a compromise, and gave the soldiers five barrels of spirit. However, when the matter was taken to Herschel for his consent, he strongly opposed this arrangement with the Haller soldiers. He said that this should not be done, because the soldiers would get themselves drunk, and then launch a pogrom against the Jews of the city. He ordered the management of the facility to extend the negotiation regarding this matter, and at the same time went off to the chief of police, whom he bought off with a specific sum of money and a barrel of spirits, and worked on him to send the soldiers back to Zelva immediately, where the train station was at some distance from the town. He immediately then went to the military gendarmerie and for three barrels of spirit he worked on them to send an armed detail that very night to drive off the Haller soldiers in the troop train transport, and it was in this manner, thanks to Herschel, that we got rid of the *pogromshchiks* that night in Volkovysk.

Dr. David Tropp

Page 536: Dr. David Tropp

Dr. Tropp, the dentist, came from a very prominent family. His parents settled in the Land of Israel many years ago, and built up a distillery and yeast factory in Petakh Tikva. His sister, also a dentist, is married to Dr. Caspi, the first veterinarian appointed by the Tel-Aviv municipal authority. David's older brother was involved with a school for dentistry in Warsaw, and today is also in Tel-Aviv, where he is counted among the best of the dentists.

Dr. Tropp came to Volkovysk as an officer in the Polish army. There, he made the acquaintance of Fanya Kaplan, Zundel Kaplan's daughter, and a sister of Shmuel Kaplan, the former president of the Volkovysk Merchants Society who is today in America. At that time, Fanya Kaplan was considered to be among the most beautiful of the Volkovysk girls. Immediately after being discharged from military service, David Tropp married Fanya Kaplan, and opened an office, first in Yoss'l Yunovich's house on the *Kholodoisker Gessel,* and then later in the home of Avromsky the Pharmacist, near the Russian Orthodox church.

There home was immediately transformed into a rendezvous point for the Volkovysk Jewish intelligentsia. He, with his broad knowledge and intelligence, and Fanya, with her joie de vivre and good-hearted nature, drew the best and the most intelligent of the Jewish youth to them. Their house became the cultural center of Jewish life, where at every evening meal, one could observe any number of guests, who would remain on for hours at a time, to discuss political and community problems. Among the visitors to David Tropp's home, were the finest and most intelligent people of the city, such as: *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Dr. Sarah Peisik, Dr. P. Bebchuk, Y. Merkin, Joseph Dwortesky, Milia Goldenberg (Khirurg[232])* with her husband, *Yud'l Khvalovsky,* and many others.

Dr. David Tropp was a serious member of the firefighting leadership and active in *Maccabi.* He enchanted not only the Jewish populace with his refinement and intelligence, but also the Polish intelligentsia that held him in very high regard. He was also appointed as the official dentist of the railroad management, where he was accepted by the Polish regime. The Polish committee members of the railroad showed him great respect and loyalty. He always related to his professional colleagues in a fraternal manner, and was always prepared to help out with both word and deed.

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[232] *Khirurg* is Hebrew for a Surgeon, indicating that this was likely her profession.

Unfortunately, the Tropp family remained in Volkovysk for family reasons. Dr. Tropp was killed in the [Nazi] sweep against the Jewish doctors. His delicate and beautiful wife, *Fanya* committed suicide immediately after his death, and his *two young sons* perished in the gas ovens of Treblinka.

Itcheh Leibeh Golda's (Reb Yitzhak Goldin)

Itcheh Leibeh Golda's had a store for galoshes in the market square store complex, in Brom, diagonally opposite the brook. He was an accomplished scholar, and active on behalf of the burial society. He was considered to be one of the most prominent of the *balebatim* in the city. He was very tall with black bushy eyebrows, and as strong as an ox. In the summertime, when demand for galoshes was low – only the discharged Russian soldiers would come to buy half-galoshes, which they would wear on top of their glistening high boots – Itcheh Leibeh Golda's would spend most of his hours, sitting in the store with a book in hand, studying. He had two sons and a daughter. His daughter, *Chana,* was married to Moshe Leib Khmelnitsky, a lawyer and Torah scholar. She was a very friendly lady and would receive everyone with a smile on her face. Itcheh Leibeh's older son was *Moshe Noah*, who was also known in the city as "The Boy." He remained an old bachelor, and he would assist his father in the store. When one would come in to the store and ask for a pair of galoshes, and it was difficult for Itcheh Leibeh to go down into the cellar to bring them up, he would ask the customers: 'Please wait, my boy will be here shortly.' Suddenly, it would get dark in the store – and Moshe Noah would appear, a tall broad-shouldered Jewish man, with a beard and large boots – this was what Reb Itcheh referred to as 'The Boy.'

The second son, Yoss'l Itcheh, lived in Baku, and was married to one of Mikhal Mazya's sisters. He was also tall, handsome, with ruddy cheeks and beautiful mustaches, in the style of Czar Nicholas. Traveling on the way to Baku, not far from Petrovsk, a train accident occurred in which a senior official of the principal petroleum company in Baku was seriously injured. Yoss'l Itcheh Leibeh Golda's, who in Russian was called Osip Isakovich Goldin, pulled the broken manager of the oil company out onto his broad shoulders from a burning train car, and carried him for several kilometers until he brought him to a nearby military hospital. As a reward for saving his life, Yoss'l Itcheh received a very large monetary reward, with which his wife, a provisioner, opened a pharmacy there, and he personally was awarded permanent employment with the oil company.

Gedaliah Pereshetsky

Gedaliah Pereshetsky the tailor was a diminutive Jewish man with a little gray beard. He undertook the care of guests as the principal objective in his life, and he dedicated his entire life to this great objective. He was primarily active on Friday. At nightfall on Friday, he could be seen going around the *Bet HaMedrash*, going from one of the *balebatim* to the other, and haggling with them about having them take a guest home for the Sabbath. He would already see to matching up the guests and the *balebatim* with whom he had made arrangements, for which he had a good sense, sorting out the poor people into different categories. On the way home from services, one could see Gedaliah running from one *Bet HaMedrash* to the second, and even when the *balebatim* were on their way home, and if Gedaliah had additional guests to accommodate, he would go running to the houses with his guests, often in the rain and snow, and he would have no rest until he had provided for everyone for the Sabbath. And when all possibilities were exhausted, he would arrange places for the remaining guests at Hosea the Hassid on the account of the alms box used to take collections at services on Mondays and Thursdays, which was collected by Gedaliah specifically for this purpose.

Not only once, late on a Friday night, when the rest of the community was out taking a stroll after eating, one

could hear a delayed *Kiddush* melody coming out of Gedaliah's window, which he would chant only after he had finished his running around all over the city, in order to take care of his guests for the Sabbath. Over a period of time, Gedaliah arranged for those *balebatim,* who for a variety of reasons were unable to accommodate a guest for a Sabbath or Festival holiday, to reimburse Hosea the Hassid for providing for such a guest. Many young *balebatim* paid Hosea on a monthly basis to accommodate such guests on their account. This activity grew stronger at the time of the High Holy Days and Passover, when apart from guests, soldiers would arrive for the holidays. At that time, many houses took in tow and three guests for the holiday. The oversight and concern for soldiers during the holidays was very intense on the part of the common people – tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, and wagon drivers, who took the soldiers into their homes with the greatest respect and joy. The leader of this activity was always Gedaliah the Tailor.

His good-heartedness knew no bounds. When the Russian regime, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, began to drive the Jews out of Poland, they were forced to travel through Volkovysk on their way to Russia. The train, however, stopped at the city for only a few minutes. Gedaliah Pereshetsky would stand for hours at a time out in the cold and wait for the train with the Jews, in order to divide some foodstuffs among them for the journey. He considered himself fortunate when it would be his privilege to meet such a train and fulfil this mission.

Leibkeh Patsovsky, the Barber

Who in Volkovysk doesn't remember *Leibkeh Patsovsky, the Barber*, who was also called Leibkeh Chas'shkeh's? As a young man, he opened his barbershop near the Large Synagogue, opposite the marketplace storefronts, in the wooden building of Mordetsky the Artist.

His barbershop was the center of the *Bund* and of revolutionary-minded youth in Volkovysk. Revolutionary youth met there. The first Krynki group, with red shirts and Russian bandanas under their coats, would meet there. The first revolutionary proclamations were distributed out of Leibkeh's barbershop. He later relocated his barbershop to the Wide Boulevard, in the building of Sasson the Butcher near Zuckerman's pharmacy. He installed three glittering, comfortable American barber chairs, which always attracted a greater number of customers. But even greater popularity accrued to the barbershop because of his wife, *Chana*, who was the first and only lady barber in Volkovysk. Because of high expenses, and the chronic crisis with working people, Leibkeh taught his wife the business, and she later even overcame her rabbi – many customers would allow themselves to be shaved only by Chana.

Leibkeh was known for his good character, and his readiness to do a favor for a second person, not for monetary gain. He would always help people without means with charity, and would donate to a variety of community needs generously.

Towards Friday evening, especially in the wintertime, his barbershop would be packed with people, who would sit and wait for their turn to be shaved in honor of the Sabbath. And in so waiting, conversations would develop concerning a variety of problems. The barbershop would then be transformed into a sort of club, where the city leadership would be criticized, debate about world problems and ordinary day-to-day matters. The debates were always conducted in a friendly manner, and in a good mood, without any embitterment, rather the opposite, with a show of consideration and understanding. Among the leading debaters, one could always find: *Y. Merkin* the Teacher, *Tzaphnath, Solkovich* the Tailor, *Shimon Lev* (Yehuda Hirsch the Butcher's son), *Shimshon Lev, Yud'l Khvalovsky, Herschel Zuckerman, Joseph Dworetsky, Tevel Smazanovich* (the Photographer), *Benjamin Shevakhovich, Yaakov Goldberg* (Shosh'keh's

Husband), and others. The proprietors of the barbershop would never get involved in these debates, working quietly, they would listen attentively while observing the strictest neutrality.

When I visited Volkovysk in 1933, I also fit in a visit to Leibkeh's barbershop. By that time, it was a first class barbershop, but just as in days gone by, it retained its original character, and was able to project an intimate and homey corner for all those who used to come in. Sorrowfully, Leibkeh and his entire family were exterminated in the great Holocaust.

Yud'l Novogrudsky & Moshe Rubinovich

Yud'l Novogrudsky, Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's youngest son, and *Moshe Rubinovich*, the son of Zundel Rubinovich, were thought of in Volkovysk as the one's who established and built Zionism. They represented two contrasting personalities: *Yud'l* – diminutive and short, always looked like a young boy, and *Moshe* – a tall, broad-shouldered, strong young man. They were devoted to one another with love and soul, sharing one common ideal in their lives – spreading the Zionist concept among Volkovysk youth, and the reconstruction work of the Land of Israel. In the street, one always met them together, speaking in Hebrew. *Moshe Rubinovich* was a pure idealist, a quiet, committed Zionist. He came from a very intelligent family. His parents were the aristocrats of the city. He himself was well educated, and at every free moment he would be learning and reading. He was easy-going by nature, listening to everyone with a smile on his lips, and would dismiss everything that had nothing to do with the Land of Israel. There was nothing too difficult for him to do if it was for the good of the Land of Israel. He was joined to Yud'l in a deep friendship. One rarely saw him walking with a girl in the streets. In the evening, after meetings, one would see them both walking in the streets. Then they would begin the process of walking one another home, until they would see that the hour was already three in the morning. Then Yehuda would exclaim: "Moshe, will you come tomorrow?" And Moshe would answer in his deep voice, "I'll come, I'll come."

Yud'l Novogrudsky was the spokesman at every gathering, festivity, or even just at an ordinary meeting of several tens of people. His theme was always the Land of Israel, and his speeches – fiery. Both of them would fight like lions for every little detail if it had anything to do with the Land of Israel or Zionism. There was not a single institution in the city, where both, or one of them, was not a member of the leadership, and all for the purpose of injecting the Zionist ideal into the plan of activity of the institution. The friendship between these two comrades was so great, that when Yud'l received a certificate to emigrate to Israel, he refused the privilege, because he didn't want to leave Moshe behind in Volkovysk. Yud'l's position was that the masses needed to emigrate to the land of Israel to build the land. But the Zionist leaders and activists must remain behind in the diaspora, in order to look after the youth and prevent them from falling under the influence of the *Bund* or communism, and to work for the Jewish National Fund. The active Zionists, who stand at the head of the army, he would say, have to stand guard and present their efforts for the good of the Land of Israel.

Despite this, Yud'l was privileged to come to the Land of Israel, where he works in the administration of the daily newspaper, *HaBoker.* Moshe Rubinovich, the idealist and committed Zionist soldier, sadly fell on guard for the sacred ideal, and was killed by the Nazi murderers.

Moshe & Yankel Rutchik-Kavushatsky

Moshe & Yankel Rutchik-Kavushatsky were two brothers, both very popular. *Yankel Rutchik* was a short, frail little Jewish man, who additionally, coughed a great deal. He would sit on the bench near his store, and warm himself in the sun. Apart from the food store, which was actually run by his wife and children, principally by his daughter *Frum'keh*, he conducted significant business in grain and other produce.

Moshe Kavushatsky, by contrast, was a hale and hearty Jew, full of energy. He also carried on large scale business with the nobles, and was befriended by all the gentiles in the vicinity. He was a hard working man. He always had large silos, especially for wheat, corn and bran. He would buy the grain from the gentiles on market days. Running through the market, he would intercept the entire intake of grain for that day. He even know what the peasants had hidden underneath the straw in their wagons.

Frum'keh, Yankel Rutchik's daughter, was in my day, the prettiest of the gymnasium girl students, and one of the happiest girls in the entire city. Her resounding laughter on the porch of Shayn'keh-Bayl'keh's house (home of Reb Nathan the Teacher) would reverberate all over the city. On that porch, she would come together with the golden youth of that era.

Hona Kavushatsky, Moshe's son, was the strongest and fastest young man in the city. To go to Yatevich, Kolontai, or the new train station on foot – was child's play for Hona. With his hands between the suspenders on his trousers, Hona would run literally like a deer. Along with this, he had an unusually good heart, and he was an understanding and talented merchant. He was blindly loyal to people, but if anyone fooled him even once, there was no reason afterwards to envy them.

These two children of the two brothers, Frum'keh and Hona, married each other, and on the level of their parents, conducted substantial businesses in Volkovysk and developed Jewish commerce in the city, where they had business ties to merchants and contractors thanks to their extensively diverse interests.

Their house was a *Volksbank* for hundreds of small scale merchants and business people, who were drawn to Hona with great loyalty. Many substantial merchants and business people, who were on the brink of going under were saved through the efforts of Frum'keh and Hona, thanks to their readiness to help anyone in their time of distress.

Regrettably, only Frum'keh and Hona were saved from the terrible destruction out of all of the large and branched Rutchik-Kavushatsky family. All the other members of the family, along with their own children, were killed in the Holocaust. Today, Hona and Frum'keh are in Israel.

Meshel Lashowitz

Meshel Lashowitz was not known by his family name at all. Gentiles and Jews alike called him 'Meshel.' He was a tall, broad-shouldered Jewish man, with a patriarchal beard. Meshel did the postal delivery for all the surrounding little towns. He would distribute letters in the towns by horse. He had eight horses, in accordance with the requirements of the position, but his horses more closely resembled large country dogs. But the distribution of letters was not Meshel's principal livelihood.

Meshel was primarily a man of the soil, who listened to the call of the earth and devoted most of the days of his life to agriculture. He could not stand seeing a parcel of land lie fallow, when the owner was either

destitute or went around getting drunk. “Mother Earth,” – he would say – “Is available, and people go around unemployed, and the horses stand idle in their stalls, and this is why bread and potatoes are so expensive.” Wherever he would see an unused parcel, he would take it over, in accordance with a written contract, and immediately brought gentiles who were going around with nothing to do, hitching up his horses, and begin to work the land, sowing wheat and potatoes. Understand, that when the land began to bear fruit, the gentiles would regret having entered into the contracts and they would drag Meshel to court. This was repeated each and every year, and often the sentimental Russian judges would nod their heads in Meshel’s direction and state that they have great respect for this patriarchal Jew.

Meshel was a wise and jolly Jewish fellow, and the gentiles would say that there was not a wiser Jew in the entire world than Meshel. Meshel specifically exacted vengeance from thieves, who attempted to steal from his fields, or Jewish assets in general. Not only one gentile spent months in jail for stealing, because Meshel took him to court. Meshel had a whole operation near his house: roosters and chickens, that he raised himself, storage bins full of grain, , and pits full of a variety of potatoes – the fruit of his own agricultural labor.

Only one grandson remained alive out of all of Meshel’s large and variegated family – *Katriel Lashowitz*. He lived through the extermination of his entire family in the Nazi hell, but managed to save himself in the forest, where he joined up with partisans, and after the liberation from the enemy, he came to Israel.

Padrovsky the *Feldscher*

Padrovsky himself came from Amstibova, but as a *Feldscher*, he had served in the Russian Army, when the latter fought in the Caucasus Mountains to capture the oil wells of Baku. He was built tall, and looked like a Russian field officer. He later took up residence in Volkovysk, where he won for himself the title of: “Professor of the Children.” He emanated a good psychological approach to handling the children, who upon seeing his friendly smile, would immediately extend their trust, and let themselves be handled.

Padrovsky was a decent man who hated flattery, and always stood up for what is right and was never afraid to speak the truth while looking you in the eye. Even in anti-Semitic Christian circles, where he would often be a visitor – such as in Timinsky’s Club on the small bridge – he was shown great deference. He was dedicated to his profession with his whole heart, and he was always ready, day and night, to run and help the sick. He especially gave of himself to the poor children of the city, where he knew that his recompense would be a big ‘thank you’ washed with tears. Many times, he would write out the prescription, and indicate in Russian, На мой счёт (for my account), for which he would later pay himself. In such cases, where he knew that the indigent parents could not pay for his visit, he would come back a second time, without being called, and many times he would bring along a doctor – all for his own account.

He would always come to sick children with a black salve that had a bad odor, with the throat swab and small bottle of iodine. He would make the children laugh at their first encounter with him, and when their laughter, mixed with bitter tears would get intense, he would stick a spoon in their mouth and with the swab smear their throat with iodine. With his familiar Russian Да!, Padrovsky would explain philosophically: “All the holidays will be dispensed with, but Purim will remain: also all the discoveries of modern medicine will also be discarded, but the ‘little cone’ will remain the restorer of health. In his time, Padrovsky saved thousands of children form the ‘English Disease’ and from Diphtheria. Most of the children were from the poorer sections of the city, who could not permit themselves the luxury of calling a doctor.

The "Kolontai" Company

Velvel Epstein, Berel Kaplan & Yoss'l Ein – these were the three partners in the "Kolontai" Company. The partners got started with a small water-mill in Yatevich, near Volkovysk, and with time, they developed a large modern business organization with offices, bookkeepers, and telephone installations – from which tens of Jewish families made a living.

They were three simple and decent men when they decided to go into partnership, and the partnership in its early years, when the firm was still small, was still based on its original foundations. No books or accounts were kept. All three of them would stand in the mill, dressed simply, covered in dust and flour, each with a leather strap wound around their waist, from which hung a leather wallet, where the days receipts were gathered. Every evening, the partners would empty out their wallets, and put the entire income into a drawer. From there, each of them would take enough to cover their needs, without writing anything down or erasing anything. The trust that one partner had for the other was rare. Each of them knew, that the other partners would sooner let a finger be cut off rather than take so much as an extra kopeck beyond what he really needed for his sustenance. The three partners ran their business in this fashion for years, with a blind trust in each other, without books and accounts. This harmony was even a greater marvel for those who knew them more intimately, because these three partners represented three different types of personalities.

Velvel Epstein came from a rabbinical family and he was observant. He live a quiet, modest life. *Berel Kaplan*, the son of Reb Yaakov Kaplan, and brother of David Yoss'l Kaplan, was a handsome young man, and loved to dress well. He was from a prominent Volkovysk family, and was a committed Zionist. In general, he presented himself as a very modern European man. *Yoss'l Ein* was the real worker among the three partners. He was skilled in the flour trade, as well as in dealing in forest products. He was a through worker with a good head on his shoulders, who would travel around the yards, villages and forests, in connection with the partnership and for so much as a *groschen* of the partnership's money, he was prepared to let himself be killed.

After the First World War, they expanded their partnership, they bought Kolontai, which was a small yard with a water mill that had been seriously ruined in the waning days of the war. In the course of a couple of years, Kolontai grew into a four story large water mill, in which the largest machines of that period were installed. On the ruined property of Kolontai, the three partners planted thousands of fruit trees of all kinds, such as apples, pears, plums, cherries, and strawberries. This work, of planting and cultivating the land, was done by a specialized agronomist who was brought in for that purpose. A stable was installed, where hundreds of cows could be found, along with large half wild oxen. In connection with this, a first-class dairy was established there, where butter, and a variety of cheeses were produced. The entire enterprise was run by a number of Jewish families who lived in Kolontai, under the supervision of the chief overseer, *Khatzkel*, the quiet and gentle man, who was loved and respected by all. Kolontai which had been ruined and abandoned, quickly began to sparkle, thanks to the energy and the hard work of the three partners.

Apart from Kolontai, the partners also managed a number of other water mills in the vicinity, in order to maintain their level of skill in this area. They bought a water mill in Petroshovitsa, that had belonged to a prominent Polish estate manager, and another water mill in Zelva – and everywhere, they constructed four-story buildings, in which they installed large, modern machines.

Apart from the mills and the many-branched agricultural business of the Kolontai, the three partners invested large sums in the forests, where they developed a lumber industry by themselves. They would produce boards and staves for wine casks that they would export to France. It was in this fashion that the Kolontai Company,

in time, developed into a large industrial concern that was known internationally, even though it had a modest beginning in this simple three-way partnership.

As it concerns donations to the Volkovysk community institutions, the Kolontai Company always stood at the head of the list of donors and supporters of needy institutions. It would also greatly help out the community leadership with a variety of their institutions when there would be difficult periods in budget management.

Shaymeh Mordetsky & Yankel Palteh's

They belonged to the people, and stood ready always to defend the honor of the Jewish people. Tall, and with strong fists, developed from laying bricks in construction work, they were always the first at the scene – in case of fire, in a fight with the police, with gentiles that would fall upon and attack Jewish homes in order to rob their assets, with the new recruits who agitated on the Jewish street, with drunken soldiers, who would take out their anger against the Jews. They would respond to all of these attacks with the might of their fists, and use their strength to protect the honor of the Jewish people.

Principally, they excelled in putting out fires in their time. I can still recall as a young boy, during the great fire of 1908, these two were the most effective in saving lives and the contents of Jewish houses, while risking their own lives. This was their trademark at every fire, and quite often they would go around afterwards bandaged up and on crutches because of the wounds they sustained during their rescue work.

I remember once, when a large blaze broke out in a gentile stable in Karczyzna, but the fire threatened the neighboring Jewish homes. In putting out the fire, the burning beams were pulled with large iron pikes. Suddenly a clap of thunder[233] was heard, that hit a Jewish man who happened to be at the place of the fire. The Jewish man fell down immediately in a swoon. *Yankel Palteh's* took note of this, immediately running to the side of the Jewish man, and taking note of his bad condition, he dug out a trench with his bare hands, and threw the Jewish man that was struck by the thunder into it, covering him entirely with soil. In response to my query as to why he did this, Yankel replied: "Mother Earth is the best cure for someone who is thunderstruck." It didn't take long, and the Jewish man jumped up from the trench in good condition.

Shaymeh Mordetsky and *Yankel Palteh's* instilled fear in the swine of the city, who were constantly the initiators of attacks and pogroms against the Jews. However, they accorded Shaymeh and Yankel great respect, and when they themselves were at risk because they were far from their home turf, they would call Shaymeh and Yankel to help them. Even the police had considerable respect for them, and in any conflict where Shaymeh and Yankel showed up, the Jews emerged victorious.

Shmuel David Nionia's

Shmuel David lived on the Wide Boulevard neat the *Chayei Adam Bet HaMedrash*. He was built tall, and was as strong as a lion. He was missing two fingers of his right hand, which his father hacked off in order that he would not have to serve in the military. Shmuel David himself performed this procedure on his five sons, and as a result, not one of them had to serve in the gentile army. He performed the procedure on his

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233 It would seem that this 'clap of thunder' was something in the nature of a shock wave from a collapse in part of the burning stable.

five sons, by himself, without taking any excuses. He detested the gentiles for their hatred of the Jews, and every gentile who decided to pick on Shmuel David, got a beating from him to the point that he would be covered in blood. Thanks to Shmuel David and his five sons, the city was saved from a pogrom any number of times. The gentile swine who hated the Jews to the point of death, would provoke pogroms in the city, and call upon help from the gentiles in the surrounding villages. But then, Shmuel David and his five sons would throw themselves into the battle, along with their friend, *Shepsel Kvachuk,* and other Jewish strong arms, who with their outsized fists rain down murderous blows on the gentiles, instilling a fear not only in these gentiles, but also in the police, who would wait until things would calm down, and then emerge from the corners to re-instate order, so to speak.

In September of every year, at the time of military conscription, the newly recruited soldiers that were quartered in the city, had the custom of going through the streets with concertinas. Their objective, however, was to fall upon the Jewish stores and houses and rob them. The Jewish 'strongmen' were already waiting for them on the watch, with the necessary 'stuff' and would fall on the new recruits and beat them, whenever the opportunity presented itself. Quite often, they would beat them up so badly, that they were no longer wanted in the military. It was in this manner that our 'strongmen' taught them to have respect for Jews and they did this out of a pure desire to protect Jewish honor and property.

The Jewish Wagon Drivers and Peddlers

We must commemorate with great honor the memory of those Jewish folk people, who with exceptional heroism and energy, stood watch and defended the Jewish population against anti-Semitic attacks at various times, and first and foremost in the time of the Polish regime.

After the First World War, when the German occupation ended, and Volkovysk and its environs became a part of Poland, free trade began to develop again. However, the railroads were still being restricted to military use. A variety of merchandise began to arrive in the city for the starved populace. At that point, all the wagon drivers and peddlers united in one group, in order to organize the distribution of the various material – a part of which was brought by wagon even from Warsaw – and to control transportation costs, as well as that of loading and unloading. This writer was designated to regulate the prices of heavy materials, such as iron, blocks, glass, cement, flour, petrol, etc. At that time, a separate group was established of wood carriers, whose sole work consisted of loading and unloading wood. Every Thursday, we would get together at *Eliezer Kossowsky's* coffee house. All the wagon drivers and peddlers would come there, and over a glass of beer and a piece of fish, we would straighten out all the prices, sometimes based on the price of bread, and sometimes based on the price of gold. The leaders of this group were the familiar: *Herschel Munchik, Itcheh Munchik*, and *Leibeh Munchik*, and the large multi-branched family of *Bayer*, with the prominent *Abraham Bayer*, who guarded his black shining horse like the apple of his eye, and who was renown for his humorous stories.

These were all pious Jews, who would run, horsewhip in hand, to the *Ein-Yaakov Bet HaMedrash* in order to fit in the afternoon prayers, parking their large wagons in a side street, and leaving their horsewhips outside leaning against the handrail by the *Bet HaMedrash.* These were Jews, who would sacrifice themselves to hear a Cantor or an itinerant Preacher, and upon leaving the *Bet HaMedrash*, they would manage to scratch up a couple of kopecks and throw th3em into the collection plate, which was on a table near the exit.

These families that I have just mentioned, and many others, whose names I cannot recall, as well as a whole

group of peddlers, with whom I was a student together in Leib Ahareh's the Teacher's *Heder*, and who were my friends, on more than one occasion saved the Jewish population from a murder or robbery. When Haller's anti-Semitic *pogromshchiks* came to the city, and took to their "work," of cutting off the beards, or just plain beating Jews, they encountered the resistance of these heroic Jews in Volkovysk, and it instilled a fear in them. On one occasion, the Polish police called upon the Jewish wagon drivers and peddlers for help against these uncontrollable *pogromshchiks.*

The Jewish strong arms waged a separate struggle against the Polish 'squatters' that the Polish regime settled on land in the Volkovysk vicinity. The neighboring local gentile residents hated these new neighbors – and in order to quell this hatred towards themselves, these 'squatters' incited violence against the Jews and called [the locals] to pogroms.

Their anti-Semitic activities were always carried out at their most intense level on the market days, when thousands of gentiles would come into the city, and it was easy to incite the masses to fall upon and rob the Jews. Our Jewish heroes were ready for this, and were already on guard. On those days, they would leave the work from which they made a living, in order to stand ready to do battle with Jew-haters. With their substantial fists, and with sticks and iron rods, they would instill terror in the *pogromshchiks*, and before the police arrived, several tens of the *pogromshchiks* would already be wallowing in puddles of their own blood in the street runoffs. This was the 'people's' heroism, ever ready to defend Jewish Honor.

An Album of Volkovysk Groups

Ed note: Because of the right-to-left Hebrew script, all names are given from right to left. The writer of the captions seems to have restricted the 'right-to-left' designation to the first mention only. Consequently, a right-to-left enumeration is assumed for all rows in a picture, even if not stated explicitly.

Page 551: **A Group of Volkovyskers**

Right to Left, Sitting: Pesach, Sarah Giller, Sarah Slapak: *Standing*: Mulya Kwiat, Deborah Reznitsky, Elkeh Ogulnick, Avreml Wallach,

Page 552: **A Group of Young People on 1920**

Right to Left, first row, from the bottom: Itkeh Panter, William Yerusalimsky (son of the *Shokhet*)
Second Row: Shepsel Zelitsky, Gittl Bayer, Sonya Kastrinsky, Mottel Khmelnitsky, Moshe Yanovsky
Third Row: Chana Novick, Abraham Kalman Lev, Rachel Moorstein, Chana Bialsky, Avreml Sidransky, Israel Hubar, Fei'tcheh Gallin, Shmuel Rogov

Page 553 (Top): **A Group of Volkovyskers in 1921**

Right to Left First Row Seated: Sholom Tzerkavich, Lyuba Halpern, Tevel Smazanovich, Sonya Kastrinsky, Sioma Gallin, Anya Grodzinski, Rivka Lev, Shepsel Zelitsky
Second Row: Avreml Shapiro (from the factory), Miss Glembotsky, Fanya Kaplan, Yitzhak Kaplan, Yitzhak Merkin, David Solomon[234]

Page 553 (Bottom): **A Group of Friends, Photographed with Tzivia Kaminsky Prior to Her Departure for America in 1920**

Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Mereh Lev, Sarah Kaminsky, Rachel Kaminsky
Second Row: Mottel Adef, Shayna Bayer, Abraham Farber, Israel Aaron Bulgatch, Tzivia Kaminsky, Rachel Galiatsky, Israel Gurevich, Chava Rones Lev, Alter Weiner
Third Row: Pess'l Rozhansky, Babish Maranchik, Shayn'dl Lev, Abraham Kalman Lev (from *Kakhelnya*), Israel Weiner

Page 554: **Members of the Volkovysk Metal Society in 1937**

Right to Left First Row Seated: Bebel Kushnirovsky (the Tinsmith), Shimon the Blacksmith (from Zamoscheh), Dubitsky the Blacksmith (from beneath the *Barg*), Abraham Kaganovich, Ze'ev Glatzer (the Coppersmith), Yud'l Rubinstein (the Locksmith), Solomon (the Watchmaker)
Second Row: Unrecognized individual, Shifran, Epstein (of the wagons), Pisetsky (the Watchmaker), Leizer Shiff, Uryonovsky, Kravchik, Yunovich the Jeweler

Page 555 (Top): **The Leadership of the Manual Trades Society in the Year 1926**

Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Aaron Smazanovich (the Shoemaker), Shtupak (the Tailor), Shlomo'keh Frei (the Tailor), Ziskind (the Jeweler), 'Nioma Solkovich (the Tailor), Chana Kaganovich, Abraham Galiatsky (the Barber)
Second Row: The Shingle Maker, A Tailor, A Tailor, Herschel Ravitz, Yoss'l Dworetsky, Yankel Lipiak, Abraham Kaganovich

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[234] There is one more name than person, indicating some sort of error.

Page 555 (Bottom): **A Group of Volkovysk Survivors**
Photographed in Lodz in the Year 1947
Right to Left First Row Seated: Mrs. Shapiro (Bogomilsky), Mrs. Gurevich (Davidovich), Miss Perekhodnik
Second Row Standing: A man from Cracow, Bashitsky, Khiller, Jedediah Katz, Zohn-Mazya, Moshe Stolovitsky, Enosh

Page 556: **Farewell Banquet in Honor of Yoss'l (Pelteh's) Langbord**
Prior to His Return Trip from Argentina to Volkovysk in the Year 1934
Right to Left First Row Seated: Sh. Ripsky, Y. Alpert, Mottel Kaganovich, Zalman Lazarovsky
Second Row Seated: Lev, Shklavin, Chaim Lisitsky, Volla[235] Lazarovsky, Joseph Goshchinsky, Yoss'l Langbord, Danik Kaganovich, L. Epstein, Itcheh Yalovsky
Third Row Standing: Rakhmiel Lev, Moshe Khananovich, Shchigel, Sinai, Levin, An Unknown Man, An Unknown Man, Herschel Kaplan, Two not from Volkovysk
Last Row: Zaydl Shkolnik, Bayer, Enosh, R. Shalkovich (Rakhmiel Khien'keh's), Shklavin (from Lisokovo)

Page 557 (Top): **A Group of Friends in the Year 1935**
Right to Left First Row Seated: Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Mulya Schein, Felix Blumstein
Second Row: Yankel Zuckerman, Nionia Khvalovsky, Bom Bliakher, Itzel Tchopper, Moshe Yanovsky

Page 557 (Bottom): **A Group of Friends**
Right to Left First Row Seated: 'Nioma Rubinovich, Mendel Matskevich, Leizer Farber
Second Row: Mottel Alpert, Zalman Lazarovsky

Page 558: **A Group of Volkovyskers in the Year 1928**
Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Boruch Beckenstein, Etkeh[236] Rubinovich, Sala Mazya, Ritveh[237] Rubinovich
Second Row Seated: Klay'tcheh Lidsky, Sonya Dombrovsky, Elkeh Gam, Moses Mandelbaum
Third Row: Itzel Gam, Shlomo Shpak, Hanokh Winetsky, Lalleh Patsovsky, Shaul Markus

Page 559 (Top): **A Group of the Volkovysk Youth in the Year 1920**
Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Yud'l Shpak, Shlomo'keh Markus
Second Row: Itzel Tchopper, Volya Salman, Yankel Zuckerman, Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, Nionia Khvalovsky
Third Row: Volya Lazarovsky, Moshe'l Dombrovsky, Munya Schwartz, Noah Fuchs, Nota Salutsky, Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg, Avreml Zelitsky

Page 559 (Bottom): **A Group of Friends from Volkovysk**

Right to Left First Row Seated: Isaac Werner, Zalman Schein, Yud'l Rutchik
Second Row: Hona Shiff, Joseph Lapin and Lev

Page 560: **The Workers on '*Yingl*'**

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235 Nickname for *Wolf*, or *Volf.*

236 Nickname for *Esther* (also *Itkeh*)

237 Variant of *Riv'cheh*, nickname for *Rivka*

(The sign in the picture indicates this was taken on the first anniversary of the organization, 1919-1920)

Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Shlomo Leibowitz, Matus Ilyovich, Raphael Klatshkin (Publisher and Illustrator), Joseph Langbord, Saneh[238] Lifschitz
Second Row (not designated): Joseph Galai (Editor), Eliyahu Levin, Zaydl Friedman (Grandson of Rabbi Borukhov), Moshe Dunsky

Page 561(Top): **A Student Circle from the Hebrew and Polish Gymnasium in the Year 1936**
No Captions Given

Page 561 (Bottom): **A Group of Volkovyskers Shortly Before the Outbreak of the Last [sic: Second] World War**
Right to Left First Row from the Bottom: Lip'sheh Gurevich, Ed'zheh Sedletsky, Nieta Khvonyik, Tzivia Ravitzky, An Unknown Girl
Second Row Seated: Shayn'eh Lidsky, Nieta Kaplan, A Man from Sejmiaticz
Last Row Standing: Natan Schein, Kiva Ein, Miss Lidsky, Shepsel Ravitzky, Two people from Grodno, Shayn'dl Einhorn, Bobel (daughter of Yehuda Hirsch the Butcher), Mottel Ein

Page 562: **A Group of Girlfriends with Tzipa Katzin Before Her Voyage to the Land of Israel**
Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom, Sitting: Tzipa Katzin, Hinde Ditkovsky-Kossowsky
Second Row, Standing: Golda Yoshpeh-Broydeh, Sonya Averbukh (from Pruzhany), Rachel Rozakhovsky (from Pruzhany), Genya Yoshpeh
Third Row: Genya Raskin-Bereznitsky, Chan'tsheh Raskin-Cohn

Page 563 (Top): **An Evening at the Subitch Inn**

Right to Left, First Row, Sitting: Yud'l Khvalovsky, Zhenya Frenkel, Liotsha Glembotsky, Lyuba Halpern(?)
Second Row, Standing: Gruna Halpern, Yankel Neiman, Chaim Weinstein, Mulya Cantor, Rak, Liza Pinkhosovsky, Tevel Smazanovich

Page 563 (Bottom): **A Volkovysk Group in 1926**
Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: Liova Glickfeld, Yitzhak Alpert
Second Row, Sitting: Grisha Kaplan, Moshe Savuolsky, Berel Davidovsky, Yos'keh Galiatsky,
Third Row Standing: Mottel Ein, Chaim Khvonyik, Sham'eh Wilk, Joseph Beckenstein

Page 564 (Top): **A Group of Girl Gymnasium Students in 1930**
Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: Hinde Kravitsky, Nieta Kaplan, Tanya Shkolnik
Second Row: Kreineh Berg, Liza Kaplan, Sonya Lifschitz
Page 564 (Bottom): **A Group of Young Women from Volkovysk in the Year 1922**
Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: A girl from Bialystok, Sonya Kastrinsky

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[238] Nickname for *Nesan'el*

Second Row: Lyuba Halpern, Fanya Kaplan
Third Row: Sonya Papa, Anya Grodzinski, Tzil'eh Papa

Page 565 (Top): **A [First of] May Parade by the P.P.S. on the Wide Boulevard**
In the background one can see from the right, the houses of Hona Kavushatsky, Zuckerman the Pharmacist, Patsovsky the Barber, Lifschitz (of the Herring), and Shereshevsky (of the Bicycles)

Page 565 (Bottom): **A March of the *Brit HaKhayil* (Society of Jewish Soldiers) in Volkovysk**

Page 566 (Top): **The Catholic Church on the Millner Gasse**

Page 566 (Bottom): **Millner Gasse**
Right: The houses of Zilberman, Mordechai Giller, Khmelnitsky and Lev

Page 567 (Top): **The Millner Gasse Shown in the Winter**
From the Right: Min'tcheh's house, in the distance, Khirurg's Mill

Page 567 (Bottom): **Khirurg's Mill on the Millner Gasse**

Page 568 (Top): **The Familiar Zerakh**

Page 568 (Bottom): The Wide Boulevard in 1939
Right: The stores opposite the Shiff and Einhorn houses

Page 569: **A Collage of Volkovysk Portraits**

Page 570 (Top): **Avigdor Perlmutter on a visit to Volkovysk**

Page 570 (Bottom): **The Intermediate Station on the Poritzisher Gasse**

Scenes from Volkovysk

Painted by Shmuel Rothbart ("The Artist")

Shmuel Rothbart was born in Volkovysk. His father *Herschel*, a son of the baker of Svislucz, emigrated to America in 1884. His mother, *Chaya*, who had a flour store, was a daughter of Itcheh Kanoval from the Wide Boulevard.

Even as a small child, in the Rebbe's *Heder, Shmuel Rothbart* began to demonstrate a talent for drawing. The beautiful landscape in the Volkovysk surroundings inspired him in this undertaking. He would sit in the *Heder,* and under the bench – so the Rebbe wouldn't see – he would draw his Rebbe, Reb Yaakov Herschel the *Melamed*, the Rebbetzin, an a variety of types among the students. After school hours, he would go to Jedediah the wood turner, and help him in his work. When he got older, he became a tanner at Bloch's tannery. While still a young boy, he joined up with the Bund in Volkovysk and was active there – until the year 1904, when he went to America with the remaining members of his family. He was already recognized for his artistic talents in Volkovysk – and he was given the name Shmuel 'The Artist' there.

In America, he spent his first years in decorating synagogues, theater salons, and Barzansky's art gallery in New York. After that, he had many art exhibits, and to date, many of his works can be found in most museums all over the American continent.

Also, his niece, *Vivian Losh* (his sister's daughter) is also well known in America as a sculptor. His son, *Lawrence*, is following in his father's footsteps, and has already had many art exhibits in many galleries all over the country.

Shmuel Rothbart drew hundred of pictures of his home town from memory. We present here, a number of reproductions of his Volkovysk works.

Apart from the four pictures that are on pages 572 and 573, there are two other pictures by Shmuel Rothbart printed in the Yizkor Book – *The Dog Catcher*, on Page 55, and *The Heder* on Page 56.

Page 572 (Top): **Play in Zametet**

Page 572 (Bottom): A **Saturday Afternoon Stroll Near Nasip and Schlossbarg**

Page 573 (Top): **Rabbi Jonathan and the Dayan, Rabbi Mendele Examine the Yeshiva Students**

Page 573 (Bottom): **The Deaf Water Carrier**

Volkovysk Relief Organizations

P. 574 **The Executive Committee of the Society of Volkovysk *Landsleit* in Argentina in the Year 1946**

Right to Left, First Row from the Bottom: Kiva Ein (Treasurer), Leizer Epstein, Yankel Zapoliansky (Vice-President), Abraham Kaganovich (President), Moshe'l Savuolsky (Secretary), Leibeh Shpak (Vocal)

Second Row: David Shishatsky, Izzy Igal, Sholom Igal, Taib'l Kaplan, Mendel Kaplan, Rosa Shpak, Avreml Wallach, Isak Davidovich

Page 575: **The Executive Committee of the Volkovysk "Social Center" in New York in the Year 1949**

Right to Left, First Row Sitting: Max Kaplan, Julius Solomon (Finance Secretary), Leon Moorstein (Second Vice-President), Hyman Cohen (President), Chaim Nakhumovsky (First Vice-President), Morris Nakhumov (Treasurer), Eliyahu Levitt;

Second Row: Sarah Elisofon, Mamie Rosenthal, Golda Levitt, Masha Moorstein, Rash'eh Vishenefsky (Protocol-Secretary), Bodaneh Kinzer, Pes'sha Grossman, Hinde Levitan, Lina Epstein.

Third Row Sanding: Morris Tchopper, Herschel Bergen, Albert Barish, Kayla Shiner, Morris Zeitz, Saul Barish, Harry Nakhumov

Page 576: **The First Shipment of Goods Sent By the Volkovysk Society in Argentina to Lodz**

In this picture are seen, from *Right to Left:* Yitzhak Alpert (leaning on the crate), Y. Zapoliansky, Abraham Kaganovich, together with the representatives of the central committee.

Page 577: **Officials and Members of the Volkovysk Society in Philadelphia in the Year 1949**

Right to Left, First Row, Sitting: Sam Sulkes, Noah Pines, William Uris (Yerusalimsky), Baylah Loev, Leizer Silverstein, Abba Loev

Second Row: Miriam Sulkes, Rivka Pines, Anna Uris, Bertha Loev, Esther Loev, Esther Silverstein, Anna Loev

Third Row: Liebeh Wallof, Archeh (Abe) Loev, Aaron Loev, Yud'l Loev, Joe Loev, Eliyahu Ostrovsky, Ita Ostrovsky

Lisokovo

By Azriel Broshi (Berestovitsky), Tel-Aviv

Son of the Dayan, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky

In memory of my sister *Shayna*, brother-in-law, *Chaim Ze'ev*, and children *Miriam* and *Aryeh*, who were murdered by the Nazis

The little town of Lisokovo could be found thirty-five versts from Volkovysk, thirty versts from Pruzhany, and eighteen versts from Ruzhany. In the distance, along a straight line, one could see a forest, which led to the road to Pruzhany, and the Polieser swamps, which were only ten versts from the town.

The usual evening and Sabbath stroll used to be to the pine trees, which was a new small stand of trees on the way to Ruzhany. The Jewish community of Lisokovo was quite old, counting a history of about six hundred years, which was testified to by the gravestones in the old cemetery in the center of the town. Later, a new cemetery was constructed on the way to Boriva[239] and Novy-Dvor. Primarily, Lisokovo was surrounded on all sides by forest – the well-know Bielovezer Forest was only a few tens of versts from the town. During the time of the First World War, in the wintertime, the Germans secretly brought into town a zebra they had trapped and shot in the forest.

Because of this, the principal means of livelihood of the Jews of Lisokovo was – the forest trade. Several Jews would get together in a partnership, and buy sections of the forest from the nobles. They would cut down the trees, and during the wintertime they would transport the wood on sleds to the surrounding towns. These forest merchants would spend the long winter evening playing cards. Other Jews would buy grain, the hides of cattle, sheep, foxes, hares, and similar articles and trade in them. They would buy fish from the peasants in the area, who would catch them in the small streams not far from the town.

The Jews would also wash their laundry in those streams, bathe in the summertime, and draw good water for tea, which they would carry into town on their backs. They would also go there on Rosh Hashanah for the *Tashlikh* service. They would also bring drinking water from those streams, because until after the First World War, Lisokovo had no water system. Water was drawn from these streams in a very primitive fashion, as well as from the wells in town. The scraping of the pails could always be heard for long distances.

Since Lisokovo had a large percentage of Jews engaged in forest trade, most of the Jews there made a living from small business. They had small establishments for general merchandise, manufacture, finished clothing. They also maintained fruit orchards, and leased land. There were also a number of tradespeople, such as shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, beer bottlers, shingle-makers, etc.

The houses in which the Jews lived were small wooden structures, covered with straw, and only partly with shingles. There were a few houses built of stone and brick.

The Jews always awaited Sunday, the market day, impatiently. The market days were very active. The gentiles would come to buy and sell. They would get good and drunk with the money that they received, and

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239 Possibly the town of *Boiary,* which was near Novy-Dvor.

the fights in the restaurants and streets were a common occurrence. Quietly, the Jews would thank God if a market day went by peaceably without a pogrom.

Jewish Community Life

Page 580: The Town of Lisokovo

Jewish community life in Lisokovo concentrated itself around the congregation. When a wedding took place, musicians were brought from Ruzhany. The bride and groom were escorted to the Schulhof, where the wedding canopy was erected. Afterwards, everyone would gather at the home of the bride, and there dance, sing and eat good food. If, God forbid, there was a tragedy in town, and someone passed away, it was the custom to escort the deceased to the place where the body was prepared for burial and then to the cemetery.

Before the First World War, there was a large stone-constructed synagogue on the Schulhof. It was a very tall and beautiful building. Pigeons were in the habit of building their nests there, and during prayers, one could hear them chirping as they flew from one place to another. It was very cold there in the wintertime as a place to pray, but for the same reason, it was a cool place during the summer, literally a place that could revive you! The *Bet HaMedrash* on the Schulhof was a building of wooden construction. There a *shtibl* for prayer was also to be found. For this reason, it was well-heated during the wintertime. Life in the Bet HaMedrash would first start to pick up after midnight, when old *Chaim Novick* and *Nehemiah Kaplan* would go for midnight prayer. Shortly afterwards, the first minyan would begin its prayers, and then the second minyan would arrive.

On the Sabbath, all the Jews without exception, would gather either in the Synagogue or in the *Bet HaMedrash.* On Friday night, everyone wanted the privilege of fulfilling the mitzvah of entertaining guests, and right after services, they would seek to invite a guest home – an itinerant preacher, a pauper, etc. When a Lisokovo native would return from a visit to Volkovysk, Bialystok, or even as far as Warsaw, all the Jews would gather at his house, in order to hear the latest news from the larger world.

Sabbath in the morning, at the timed of prayer, one could see all the Jews, from the surrounding nearby villages and estates, on the roads hurrying to the *Bet HaMedrash* in Lisokovo. They would gather together from the smallest of the Jewish settlements, such as Masziewicz, Adamkova and come on the Sabbath to pray.

Frequent worshipers who would come to Lisokovo from the environs were: *Reb Menachem Bayzer*, tall and lean with a combed beard; *Reb Shmuel Leib Kravchik*, with his prayer shawl on his shoulders under his coat; whose worship was suffused with faith and great devotion; he was also a good Torah reader. This Reb Shmuel Leib was a formidable grammarian, and an outstanding scholar of the *Tanakh* and the Talmud. At a later time, he moved into Lisokovo and opened a modern *Heder*, which became very popular in the town, and earned a good reputation.

At the eastern wall of the *Bet HaMedrash*, one regularly found the following worshipers: *Reb Abraham Yaakov Shiff*, his *mekhutan*[240], *Reb Mordechai Resnick, Reb Alter Rappaport*, and *Joseph Goldman*, the *Feldscher.*

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[240] Father-in-law to the child of the subject. Curiously, there is no good English equivalent for this.

The Jews who attended the first minyan studied the *Mishna* with *Reb Joseph Khaiman*. On the Sabbath, before evening, between the afternoon and evening prayers, a goodly number of the Jews went out for a stroll, but most studied the *Gemara.* As soon as it became dark, they made a transition to reciting the Psalms. The Jews knew the Psalms by heart.[241] The young boys would then make sport with one another in the *Bet HaMedrash*. They would throw around wet towels; their principal target was the elderly *Shammes*, *Reb Gershon*.

Personalities

The Cantor of the town was *Reb Reuven Gotthielf*, he was an inspiring man, a good natured Jew with a good voice. Right after the Ninth of Ab, he would get his choir together, and conduct rehearsals for the High Holy Day prayers. This would take place every evening at his house. Both the old and the young would then gather under the windows of his house, and enjoy the choir immensely. On the High Holy Days, everyone made a strenuous effort to get to the synagogue to hear the Cantor. The following would lead the services at the *Bet HaMedrash: Reb Yosh'eh Yatskevitzer, Reb Tuvia Rabinovich, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*[242]*, Reb Yaakov Kontsepolsky*, and others. They would lead the *Kol Nidre* service and the *Musaf* services. The morning (*Shakharit*) services were led by: *Reb Tuvia Resnick, Reb Katriel Lieberman, Reb Shimshon Novick*, and others. Residents of the towns of *Kuklitz, Krupa, Zelenevitz, Mogilovtzeh,* and other surrounding towns, would come for the High Holy Days, and in general, community live concentrated around the *Bet HaMedrash*. It was there that an understanding was arrived at with regard to complaints relating to the question of reporting for military conscription. The poor people would always complain, that the sons of the rich would buy their way out of military service with money. The young men of Lisokovo were required to present themselves to the military authority in Volkovysk right after the *Sukkot* holiday. The Jewish community leader of Lisokovo was *Reb Shlomo Mezheritzky*, a wise man, who by occupation was a forest products merchant. He was always approached with complaints about military service. The Torah reading would then be halted on the Sabbath, and the complaints were then all straightened out. As was usually the case, this ended with giving some money to the aggrieved poorer young men, and in this fashion the matter was set aside for a full year.

Shlomo Mezheritzky was a good-hearted Jew, who always strove on behalf of his community. At the time of the German occupation during the First World War, many Jewish and Christian boys were released from hard labor thanks to his efforts, for which they were being sent to Lamsdorf (Upper Silesia). Of his family, the following survived the last war: his son, *Joseph Mezheritzky* the Lawyer, his sister *Pes'sha*, and her little *daughter*. They were partisans in the Ruzhany forests.

There were a number of prominent scholars in Lisokovo, about several of which it is appropriate to pause and take note: *Reb Yaakov Zalman Finkelstein*, tall and with a blond beard, a butcher by trade, who dedicated every free hour to Torah study and to discussions about the Talmud, *Yoreh Deyah*, or *Hoshen Mishpat* with the town Rabbi or *Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky*, a local manufacturer and merchant; *Reb Yitzhak Klietsky*, a

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241 The significance of this lies in the fact that no illumination was available. This still being the Sabbath, it was forbidden to kindle a light, and it had become too dark to continue reading the *Gemara*. Hence the reversion to a different form of study and worship, where the participants didn't have to rely on sight, but rather on their memory.

242 Later the last *Dayan* of Volkovysk.

tailor of ladies clothing, and a unique Torah reader and *Tanakh* scholar, and a clever Jew in general; Manes Kontsepolsky a Jew who was suffused with Torah and fear of God, and in addition was a steady reader of *Hatzefira.*[243] Reb Yaakov Kontsepolsky – the town magnate – who was a great forest products merchant and iron goods handler, who studied at the Yeshiva during his youth. He was an able scholar, and in addition was familiar with worldly issues and also published a book titled, "The Book of My Life," which appeared in 1935.

We also need to recollect *Leibeh Beckenstein*, the postman, who would provide wagons to deliver the mail from Volkovysk to Ruzhany, and was a good-hearted Jew. He considered it an obligation to give charity, and during Yom Kippur, he had a claim on the chanting of the *haftorah* of the Book of Jonah, because he believed this to be a reward for good works. *The families of the Resnick brothers*, especially *Reb Mordechai Resnick*, who was always at the ready to go into fire and across water in order to do a favor for a fellow Jew, and also was prominent in taking in of guests; *Reb Yitzhak Bliakher* – who was also known by the name *Itcheh Benjamin Bezalel's* – who was a quiet and modest person, always with a smile on his lips and ready and willing to do a favor for someone, and would be of great help to the sick and suffering; *Reb Shimshon Novick,* a blacksmith by trade, was an intelligent Jewish man, well read, and always ready to tell a joke.

Lisokovo also had good Rabbis. After the death of *Rabbi Lipa Meyerson*, who was mourned by the entire town, it was decided to turn over the town pulpit to his son, *Rabbi Aryeh Leib*. A delegation of the most important Jews went out with musicians and dance to greet him, and the joy in the town was unusually high. Apart from wages, the Rabbi in Lisokovo had a monopoly on the sale of yeast. Despite all this, he barely made a living from all sources of income. *Rabbi Aryeh Leib Meyerson* was a great sage, and in addition, he was well acquainted with the Hebrew literature and was an ardent Zionist. His son-in-law became the Rabbi of Lisokovo after his death.

In those years, about forty years ago, on a midday Friday in the winter, a wagon arrived from Volkovysk carrying a Jewish political prisoner. The wagon drove up to the jail in Lisokovo, where the prisoner was interred. His guards, two Russian policemen, immediately left to grab a drink of whiskey in town. The prisoner remained under the guard of the permanent Lisokovo jailer, a tall old gentile, with wild unkempt mustaches. Two young Jewish boys approached this gentile: *Shmuel Kontsepolsky* and *Moshe Rappaport* (both today in America). They talked the gentile into taking a shot of whiskey, and then another, and another, until he became totally inebriated. The boys then released the imprisoned Jew, the political miscreant, and they hid him in the attic of the *Bet HaMedrash*. He was supplied with warm things, and with good food, and Sunday in the morning, *Reb Issachar Yellin* earned the mitzvah of taking him away to Ruzhany, and in this manner, rescued this young Jewish fellow from terrible suffering.

Lisokovo Before the First World War

A stream of emigration of the young people out of Lisokovo to America began in the year 1905. A specific number of young people left their home town and settled in that new land.

It used to be a great holiday in town at the time of the elections to the Duma.[244] For example, at that time, the

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[243] A prominent Hebrew newspaper of the Enlightenment era, from Warsaw

[244] The name of the Russian Parliament under the Czars.

great magnate from Volkovysk Heller, desired to see his son become a Deputy of the Duma. He ordered wagons, and had many Jews from Lisokovo driven to the polls. As an aside, he also provided them with all manner of good refreshments. These 'perks' were made available over a period of seven days.

Life during the winter months always was more subdued than usual. The Jews would slaughter sheep, and prepare full barrels of mutton which they would keep frozen in cellars. Also, geese and ducks were slaughtered and the meat was kept frozen. Entire pits were filled full of potatoes and bread was baked for personal consumption. Jews would study the *Gemara* and *Mishna,* and when the time of completion of a tractate would arrive, it was customary to have a small celebration with good things to eat, such as marinated herring, cooked veal covered in rice, washed down with beer.

A dark pall fell over the town with the outbreak of the First World War. Jews went off to military service, and many of them never returned. Commerce was disrupted. The connection to America, from which regular support would come, was severed. The rule of the Cossacks began at that point, under which the Jews suffered mightily. Before the Cossacks retreated from the town, they plundered the Jewish stores and homes. The daughter of Ginter the Thief showed the Cossacks which of the Jewish houses to approach, and carry out their robbery. Joseph Goldman the Feldscher, on that day when the Cossacks left town, literally put his life on the line by virtue of hiding those who fled the home of Chaya-Taiba Salutsky, out of fear of being murdered by the Cossacks.

Also, the plight of the Jews did not improve very much under the German occupation during the First World War. A shortage of all necessities reigned throughout the town. The Germans impressed the Jews into forced labor, and they promoted the plunder of Jewish homes. But at that time, they did not kill any Jews. They even established a Jewish school in town at their own expense, and the children received a Jewish national education. During the time of the German occupation, a serious fire broke out in town. There was a fire-fighting command at that time in Lisokovo, but despite this, the fire could not be controlled in time, and many houses went up in smoke. Immediately after the fire, those Jews whose houses were spared, took in those who were burned out, and helped them with every possible means down to the last slice of bread. The German authorities then permitted the Jews to bring lumber from the forests to construct their houses anew. Thanks to the vital energy of the Jews, the burned down Jewish property was re-built in a fairly short time The *Bet HaMedrash* and the Synagogue were re-built by the Jews after the war, with the help of Lisokovo *landsleit* in America.

The bath-house was an important institution in town. From the very early morning hours on Friday, visitors would start heading there already. The bath-house manager was a Jew who had a fondness for the gargle. He would take the people according to how well they were connected, or in accordance with the amount of money he would collect from them, but in general, it wasn't possible to get around him. The bath-house was really a sort-of community club, where one would meet people one knew, and even guests from Volkovysk, Pruzhany, Ruzhany, and other towns. One would learn the latest news from them, one would get into discussions, mostly about politics, and also carry out commercial transactions. Among the visitors to the bath-house, one could find a type of strong and healthy Jew, who in the wintertime, would run out of the heat, and cool themselves off in the corridor, or altogether in the street. They would then drink down a lot of cold water,, and immediately re-enter the bath-house on the run, yelling: "Steam! Ye-gods Jews, provide some steam!" On the way home from the bathhouse, the Jews would drink boiling hot tea from the samovar, eat some *taygakhtz* from flour made of cereal grain or potato, and get themselves ready to go to the *Bet HaMedrash.*

Connection to the outside world was maintained by various means. First there were the wagon drivers: *Yekhiel Edelstein* and *Yaakov Friedberg,* who traveled to Volkovysk twice a week. They were waited on as if they were the Messiah. They would bring people, merchandise and mail from the big city. Apart from this, *Herschel Yellin* would travel to Pruzhany once a week. Then, the postmaster would also arrive with the mail he got in Ruzhany. In distributing the mail, the postmaster would call out the name of a family member to whom the letter was addressed, and hand it over with a flourish. For this, he received a gift from his clients – matzos and wine for Passover.

The first record player came to the Graf[245] of Lisokovo, and in order to give the Jews some satisfaction, on Friday evening he would play Yiddish records, such as '*Oy gevalt, a ganef* ' and others like it. The Jews would gather under the Graf's window, and enjoy the music – and also to marvel at Edison's invention.

News of the Balfour Declaration reached Lisokovo by newspaper. A youth then ran through the mud in town, late at night, to communicate the good news to the Jews.

At about that time, new sanctions began being applied by the Polish regime to the Jews, in connection with the professions and commerce, etc., and the young people of Lisokovo used all their might to find ways to emigrate to America, Argentina, or the Land of Israel.

There was no highway or railroad line then in the Lisokovo surroundings. A few years later, an autobus began to run between Lisokovo and Volkovysk. Yaakov Friedberg's son was one of the partners in that bus company. Sorrowfully, he was one of the first martyrs of the town, and he was shot by the Nazis in the middle of the street.

I visited Lisokovo for the last time in July 1938. The danger of war was already in the air. The Jews were concerned and disturbed. When I would come to the *Bet HaMedrash* for afternoon and evening services, I would barely find a *minyan* of Jews. *Yekhezkiel the Dyer*, pointed with satisfaction to his son, the Rabbi, who was getting ready to emigrate to Australia. *Eliezer Kravchik* drew my attention to the young boys who were gathered at the time of *Mincha* at a spot near the Schulhof where they were playing soccer.

During this time of my last visit to Lisokovo, I met with many people, *balebatim* of Lisokovo, who in the hot evenings would sit in the gazebos of their houses taking respite form the heat of the day. I would stroll to the brook on the way to Ruzhany in the company of friends, and I would visit various families in the evening.

Early in the morning, at about 4AM, I went out into the street. *Notteh*[246] *Eliyahu's* was leading his horse to the well and set out on the way to the villages. Heschel, the old gravedigger, with his heavy step, was on his way to pray. *Joseph Yellin* the blacksmith was astonished to meet me on the street in Lisokovo. We were once neighbors. He poured out his bitter heart to me, and told me of the death of his daughter *Chana*, who suddenly died and left five orphans behind.

I then went to the *Juridzhiker Gasse*, where as children, we would go out to the Boriver Forests, and gather wild berries and mushrooms there. The Mendelevich family, that was known to me, lived on that little street, out of which only one son, who was my pupil survived the Holocaust. Today he is in Italy. The *Kvassnitseh*

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245 A nobleman. The title is German in origin.

246 Nickname for Noss'n or Natan in Hebrew. Variants include Nott'l, Notkeh

family (Beckenstein's aunt) also lived on that same street. The son-in-law in that family survived in Russia, and came to Israel in 1947. *Abraham Bakonovitsky* lived right at the head of the street at one time with his family, Novick's family and their son-in-law, *Eliezer Kravchik.* The latter was an intelligent Jewish man, and an ardent Zionist. Sadly, he died on his way to Israel, and was not privileged to join his brothers and daughter.

From there, I went to the marketplace, where *Moshe Kontsepolsky*, a Torah scholar, used to live. His family emigrated to America. At the market, I met *Zaydl Salutsky* and his younger sister. The older sister and mother were no longer alive. Zaydl was a student of [Chaim Nachman] Bialik at the Yeshiva in Odessa. He had mastered much Torah scholarship and the discipline of the Enlightenment. He dreamt of many things, but unfortunately never developed any of these dreams into a reality in his lifetime. I also met *Yeshayahu Mikholeh's* there, who was a member of the fire-fighting brigade and a well-known benefactor of the public interest in Lisokovo. He took me to his father, who was already gravely ill at that time.

A large number of Jews were standing in a group in the middle of the marketplace, engaged in animated conversation. *Tonya Resnick*, the 84 year-old senior, stood to the side, listening to the conversation.

I left my home town with a heavy heart. The autobus conveyed me speedily, riding by *Podoroisk* and *Izavelin*, in the *Volkovysk* district. I felt the strong connection between me and my dear and beloved brothers in the beautiful little town. However, I did not know that this would be the last time I would ever see them.

What Happened in Lisokovo

What happened to the Jews of Lisokovo, as described in this article, is based on the testimony of *Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg* and the Partisan, *Jonah Borukhansky*.

Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg himself is from Volkovysk. After the Germans entered Volkovysk, he went to Ruzhany and then later to Lisokovo, where he settled along with his family at the beginning of the summer of 1942. He lived there in Resnick's house until November 2, 1942, at which time all the Jews of Lisokovo were driven to the bunkers in Volkovysk.

Jonah Borukhansky is from Lisokovo. He was in Lisokovo up to November 2, 1942, the day the Jews were taken out of Lisokovo. He then fled to the forest, from where he fought as a partisan. Now he is in Israel. His
testimony was sent through *Azriel Broshi* (Berestovitsky) – *Dr. M. Einhorn.*

The Outbreak of the German-Russian War

The news of the German-Russian War that broke out on *Sunday, June 21, 1941*, became known among the Jews of Lisokovo on that same day. The entire Jewish population of Lisokovo was gripped by a panic on that morning. Those who had radio equipment at home did not leave their sets and received each new bulletin about the war with anxiety. Most of the Jews were gathered at the marketplace where they received all manner of notification about the war.

A member of the magistrate's office came outside and declared that at 3AM that day, the Germans had declared war on Russia and a number of cities, such as Kiev and Minsk had already been bombed by the enemy. He appealed to the Russian citizenry to join the army in the defense of their fatherland. On Sunday evening, German airplanes were heard in the skies above Lisokovo, giving late notification of the outbreak of the war.

On the following day, *Monday morning*, placards were posted in the streets concerning the mobilization of all men aged 19 to 29 years of age, demanding that they gather on that very same day at the magistrate's building, where they will be transported by wagon to the designated military registration points. A shudder immediately coursed through the town. Wives came to bid their husbands farewell, and mothers their sons. Most of the men were placed aboard wagons, and part of them were taken away on foot. A silence fell on the town. On the same day, after the noon hour, single detachments of the Russian military began to appear in town. The soldiers appeared to be in disarray. There were many wounded among them. They merely drove through the city streets, retreating in the eastward direction. Many civilians in automobiles were also traveling in that same direction, apparently in an attempt to save themselves by going deeper into Russia. According to the news that was reaching Lisokovo, the Germans had already taken Brisk while continuing to proceed further.

Tuesday morning the men who had left the prior day to be taken into the Russian military began to return. According to what they told, they were released by the Russian commanders because all the roads in the area were already cut off by the enemy, and contact with the higher echelons no longer existed. The men had spent the entire day of Monday in the Janiner Forest, and the following day had returned home on foot. One could see a satisfied smile on the face of the Christians, as opposed to the Jews, who were greatly concerned about the fact that the Germans were drawing near. A short while later, the first two German motorcycles appeared in the town. A Russian soldier, who was stationed in the marketplace with a machine gun, raised

his hands in fright. The Germans took him away from his post, put him on one of the motorcycles and took him away. A couple of hours later, gentiles began to come in from the villages, carrying sacks in order to plunder the Russian magazines. The Jews stood at a distance and watched on. In between, two Russian officers appeared on horseback. They approached the gathered crowd, and proclaimed a warning in a loud voice, that anyone who would attempt to rob Russian assets would be shot on the spot. It appears that they were not aware of the fact that the Germans had already entered the town. The gentiles however, were not intimidated and they began to attack the Russian officers with staves and iron rods. The officers fired on their attackers, but the gentiles were in the majority, and they tied up the officers and threw them in the magistrate's building. Then the gentiles began to plunder the magazines, taking whatever came into their hands.

On the same day, *Tuesday morning*, individual Jews of Lisokovo, who were known to be communists, fled the city. Among them were: *Zechariah Khvonyik* (Shmuel's son), *Abraham Lev's son, Avreml Pintelelvich* (Israel Rakhmiel's son), *David* (Ovadiah the Shingle maker's son), *Hinde Kravchik, Joseph Trumper's son*, and others. Regrettably, nothing has ever been heard from them to this day. There were notifications given that they were all killed near Zelva.

Tuesday before nightfall many German tanks and artillery had already appeared. The principal battle that took place between the Germans and Russians in that area was not in Lisokovo, but rather around Ruzhany. The battle there lasted several days. The Russians mounted a strong defense, and fought practically to the last soldier. Were it not for the German aerial bombardment, it is possible that the Russians might have been able to break through the German front line.

Immediately on the first day, after capturing Lisokovo, the Germans had already shot several Jews who had been fingered as being communists. Among these first martyrs was *Ovadiah*, whom *Yosh'keh Zhinovich* found in an attic and turned over to the Germans.

Lisokovo Under the Nazis

After they took control of Lisokovo, the Germans left behind a military command and a small number of soldiers, and took off in further pursuit of the Russians. In this manner, Lisokovo ceased to play the role of a battlefront. A couple of weeks went by where it was quiet and peaceful in the town. Were it not for the report of gunfire in the distance, it would be hard to sense the conduct of war. In the town proper, indeed, single members of the German military command would be seen, and this alone would cast a fear upon the Jewish populace.

Then the Germans ordered Jews of age 14 and over, to affix yellow badges [on their clothing], and wearing this symbol, assemble in the marketplace. When the Jews arrived their, they found soldiers in ranks with machine guns. A terror gripped everyone, because they thought that from there, the Jews would be taken to their slaughter, and it was demanded of the Jews that they line up in rows – men women and children separately. Then, a number of armed soldiers went by the formed ranks of Jews, and investigated if everyone was wearing a yellow badge. The neighboring Poles stood around and around, looking upon this scene with pleasure. The chief of the military command strode out into the center, in order to read aloud the main points of the famous anti-Semitic decrees of the Nazi regime. Among the decrees were the well-known restrictions, such as, that a Jew was not permitted to appear in the city without a yellow badge, etc. Jews were not permitted to walk on the sidewalks, and were forbidden to address a German soldier in the street. The Jews were required to form a *Judenrat,* which would be directly responsible to the Nazi military command in the

city, for the entire Jewish population. The following were selected to be in the *Judenra*t, among others: *Abraham Kuzhevsky, Moshe Resnick, Yitzhak Mendelevich, Yeshayahu Schwartz* (a son-in-law of Tonya Resnick the Tailor), *Zaydl Salutsky* and *Joseph Mezheritzky*.

The Germans immediately began to squeeze everything out of the Jews that they could. They imposed demands for heavy financial contributions on the Jewish populace, which the *Judenrat* was compelled to meet, and turn over to the military command by a specified time, often within the span of two or three days. In this manner, for example, they demanded a specific amount of soap and toothpaste and other articles. As quickly as they received this, they demanded of the *Judenrat* that they produce a specific amount of gold and silver in the course of three days, threatening, that if they didn't receive this in the specified time, that they would burn down the *Bet HaMedrash* and kill 150 Jews. You can appreciate that this instilled an enormous fear in everyone. The Jews began to assemble money and gold, whatever anyone had. But when this was not enough in order to meet the demands of the German command, the Rabbi levied a demand on everyone, rich and poor to give their share. Those who had no money, sold their belongings and bedding to the gentiles in order to generate their share of the contribution.

Then the Germans began to demand that the *Judenrat* provide a daily quota of workers for forced labor, most of whom were sent out of the town to build roads.

In between, the Germans carried out mass arrests of communists, Jews and Christians. In one week they shot about 200 people, a number of them from Mogeluvtsa. They then demanded that the Jewish workers dig pits near the Polish cemeteries, and after they threw the murdered people into the pits, they used tanks to tamp down and smooth out the recently turned earth.

The plight of the Jews in Lisokovo worsened. A little at a time, the Nazis extorted all their possessions. Even furniture, beds and bedding was taken out of the Jewish homes. Whatever they demanded of the *Judenrat* was provided to them in the specified time. Their demands were met with the greatest speed, hoping that by doing so, we would be able to buy our way out with our lives in a given time. Fortunately, Lisokovo and its environs were counted in the East-Prussian zone, where the Nazi regime had delayed the implementation of its extermination program to a later date. By contrast, the farther towns, such as Slonim, Kosovo and others, were incorporated into the Byelorussian ambit, and from there, even at that time already, news began to reach us about pogroms and the slaughter of Jews. The Jews from that area, who were saved from the enemy's sword, fled to the forests. There, they found out that the Jews in Lisokovo and in its nearby surroundings, Jews were on average, still living peacefully, and so by the hundreds, they began to arrive in Lisokovo, Ruzhany, and the other surrounding towns. The *Judenrat* settled all the fleeing refugees in the town.

This is how the Jewish populace in Lisokovo lived for another half year, until November 1942, under the German occupation, in poverty, weakened and in constant fear, that in the end, the noose would be tightened around their necks as well, as it had already happened to all the Jews of Byelorussia.

The Nights of November 1 & 2, 1942

The dark day finally came to the town with the arrival of a complete SS Division. *On the night of the 1st and 2nd of November*, the Jews of Lisokovo were ordered to assemble at 7AM in the marketplace near the magistrate's building. Prior to this, the Germans had issued an order to the peasants to provide a number of wagons on that morning. The peasants immediately understood what was going on, and many of them ran off to Jewish craftsmen and reclaimed even their unfinished work and belongings. This threw the Jews into

a panic. The president of the *Judenrat, Abraham Kuzhevitsky*, even went to the commandant to see if he could find out something about the new decree. However, the commandant received him in the usual fashion, and Kuzhevitsky was unable to find out anything about the new situation. The order, that the Jews assemble in a specific place and at a specific time, accompanied by the warning, that if even a single person from a family was missing, that the entire family would be shot – something whose meaning could even at that time not be mistaken. The men understood very well that this was the last mile before the slaughter. For this reason, a number of Jewish men committed suicide on the nights of November 1st and 2nd, and others, the younger and more daring, fled the town to the surrounding forests. Among the suicides were: the pharmacist of Lisokovo, *Kagan* (son-in-law of Goldman the Feldscher), his wife *Babel*, and her son *Fredek, the lady doctor and her mother* (both had been in Lisokovo only a short while), *a lady dentist* who lived at the home of the Jewish pharmacist, and others. Among those who fled to the forests were: *Jonah Borukhansky, Pesach Benditovich, Joseph Mezheritzky,* the *Kravchik Family, Boruch Volpovich, Shlomo'keh Kravchik* with his family, *Gershon Mezheritzky* and *his wife and two daughters, Joel Pomeranietz*[247], *Berel & Yankel Kuzhevitsky, Tzivia Kobrinsky* and others.

In the marketplace, the old and the children were put into the wagons, and the remainder of the Jewish inhabitants of Lisokovo as also those of the surrounding towns, were set out in rows of ten, and everyone was ordered to head in the direction of Volkovysk. The convoy of people numbered between 700 and 800 souls – men, women and children.

The entire town was in the meantime surrounded by German soldiers and Polish police, in order to prevent the Jews from fleeing. A number of Jews who had decided to flee, but out of fear of being captured by the enemy, returned the next morning to the town, and joined the convoy of their brothers and sisters in their last journey away from their home town. The Christians of the town immediately fell upon Jewish assets and belongings and robbed everything that came to their hands.

The March to Volkovysk

At about 9 o'clock in the morning, the march began, surrounded by the military. In the evening, after a long day of trekking, the Jews of Lisokovo arrived at Podoroisk. There, on the marketplace, where they stopped, they met up with the Jews from Ruzhany, who on the same day were driven out of their town in a similar fashion. The Jews of Ruzhany, among whom were a number of Jews from Volkovysk who had married spouses from Ruzhany and lived there, related instances of the brutality with which they were handled on their way to Podoroisk. The Ruzhany residents were forced to march for two days, a distance of 50 kilometers. The children were separated from their parents, and they were not permitted to be with one another for the entire time. About a hundred of the weaker and older people were shot along the way, because they could not keep up with the pace.

The night of the 2nd and 3rd the Jews spent out of doors in the cold on the marketplace of Podoroisk. A number of the Jews committed suicide.

Very early on the *3rd of November*, the people were again ordered to form ranks of ten and they began again to drive them along the way – in the direction of Volkovysk. This part of the trip was much worse for the Jews from Lisokovo. The soldiers drove the Jews mercilessly, and whoever couldn't keep up with the pace was shot. Many fell.

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247 See prior note regarding *Pomerantz* family in *Krzemienica*

We finally reached Volkovysk at three o'clock in the afternoon. The line of Jews was taken on the Slonim Highway, led past the old railroad station and barracks, in the direction of the bunkers.

On arrival at the bunkers, the Jews of Lisokovo and Ruzhany were driven into one bunker, where the overcrowding was indescribable. There they were subjected to the same fate as befell the Jews of Volkovysk, until in the end, the order came to liquidate the entire Volkovysk camp. The Jews of Lisokovo and Ruzhany were among the first on the transports that left the Volkovysk bunkers on the way to the gas chambers of Treblinka.

What the Lisokovo Partisans Survived

According to the report of the former young partisan, *Jonah Borukhovsky*, one of the few surviving partisans from Lisokovo, many of the Lisokovo Jews who fled into the forests died from hunger and cold, or from being turned in by Christians, before they were able to establish any sort of contact with the partisans in that area.

Jonah Borukhovsky tells of the difficulties he lived through in the forest. *He, Pesach Benditovich, Joseph Mezheritzky* and a number of others of those who fled from Lisokovo, decided when they had heard of the forced expulsion of the Lisokovo Jews, that they would go through anything not to fall into the hands of the Nazis, and finally, attempt to make contact with the partisans in the forests. The *Kravchik* family, which found itself in the forest, knew a forester in Kupičy that helped them construct an earthen bunker[248] in the ground where they hid themselves. They dug a pit which they covered with branches. Inside, they spread sand, and put up a small fireplace. The pit had two holes. One was an entrance, and the second was a flue to allow the smoke to go out. The pit was small, and the people slept there severely stifled and crowded together. Their friend the forester helped them out the first time with potatoes, four potatoes a day for each person. They had no bread at all, and they found water not too far from their bunker in the swamp.

After their fifth day spent in the forest, they were surrounded on all sides. Armed men ordered them to remain in their places. Fear fell upon the people, and only when the armed men addressed them in Russian, did the Lisokovo people calm down a bit. The armed men demanded wither money or gold. They ordered the people to produce all their valuables by nightfall, at which point they would return with wagons and take everything away. As the Lisokovo Jews found out later from Joseph Mezheritzky's brother, who with his family had hidden out with a friendly Pole in Janina, this same group of armed bandits had been at their place that morning and took everything of any worth that they found. Out of fear of these bandits, who threatened to molest the women, a number of Lisokovo Jews had to leave their hideouts in Janina. *Gershon Mezheritzky*, *his wife* and *two daughters*, as also *Joseph Mezheritzky* and *his sister*, and *Joel Pomeranietz's* brother-in-law decided to go from Lisokovo to Janapolia to a gentile that they knew. On the way, however, Joseph and his sister altered their plan and they decided to remain in the Bazalianer Forest. With Joseph was also his niece, *Enya*, and a friend of Gershon's, a girl from Kosovo. As was later discovered, the gentile whom they knew in Janapolia informed on the Jews from Lisokovo that came to him looking for protection. It was in this fashion that *Gershon Mezheritzky*, his wife *Bobeh*, and his little girl *Fanya* were killed by the Germans, as also was *David* (Joel Pomeranietz's brother-in-law). The band of outlaws kept their word, and late in the night they came to the earthen bunker. They ordered the people out of the pit, they went inside, and took whatever they found, and then they tore the clothes off the people, and took the shoes off their feet – and

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248 Called a *zemlyanka* in Russian.

vanished with their booty. *Berel Kuzhevitsky* (Mikhlah's son) and *Yankel Leib Kuzhevitsky* killed the bandits and retrieved the things they took.

They remained barefoot and hungry in the forest. The forester from Kopichka that was known to them stopped bringing them potatoes. They were left with only one alternative – to steal into the storage bins of the gentiles in Lisokovo at night, or into the abandoned Jewish homes, in order to find food. A group of them took off for Lisokovo one night. Among these were *Joel Pomeranietz, Pesach Benditovich, Boruch Volpovich*, and *Shlomo Kravchik's two daughters*. Not far from the potato storage pits, Jonah Borukhansky proposed that he and Pesach Benditovich should go first, in order to be safer. Boruch Volpovich did not agree, and he went first with Shlomo Kravchik's daughters. It was a bright night, and on top of this, the snow glistened strongly. They reached the potato storage pits near the *Bazalianer Gasse,* and as quickly as they started to throw potatoes into their sack, they suddenly heard whistling coming from the bridge, and at the same moment, bullets started to fly over their heads. Jonah and Pesach, who were together, left the potatoes and began to crawl on all fours back in the direction of the earthen bunker. The night passed, but the rest of the people did not return. In the morning, they learned that *Boruch Volpovich* had been killed in the volley of bullets 50 meters from the potato storage pits, and *both of Shlomo Kravchik's daughters* were captured alive by the Germans. A few days later, the Germans shot both of the girls at the Jewish cemetery. Two days later, *Gershon Mezheritzky* also fell as a martyr at the hands of the German murderers.

It was in this fashion that the group of Jews from Lisokovo grew smaller. Those that remained alive, went around in the cold winter days, barefoot and hungry looking here and there for a potato with which to sustain life. The gentiles of Janina related sympathetically to the hungry, and one or another of them would give them something to eat. By contrast, the gentiles of Kopichka continuously warned them that they would reveal their whereabouts to the Germans. One of the Kopichka peasants took them into his barn where he had his stable. He and another gentile grabbed the hungry young people by the throat making to choke them, and they wanted to turn them over to the police. And when it became possible for the Jews – miraculously – to get out of the talons of these gentiles, they sicced their dogs on them, who bit them to the point of drawing blood. When the gentiles of the nearby black forest found out about the earthen bunker, they would come to the Jews and demand money, threatening them that if they didn't receive money, they would inform on the Jews. Among this group of gentiles were several that were known to Joel Pomeranietz, and he warned them, that if the gentiles won't leave the Jews alone, they would surrender themselves to the Germans, so that everyone would know that it was because of them that the Jews martyred themselves. This made an impression on the Christians that Joel knew, and it influenced them to leave the Jews in their earthen bunker alone.

The hungry Jews had to forage farther and farther away to seek nourishment for their emaciated bodies. They would range as far as Rozalin, a trek of about 15 kilometers. There in Rozalin, they met up with *Tzivia Kobrinsky* from Lisokovo, who had hidden out with a Christian woman that was known to her. They took Tzivia back with them, and with the potatoes slung over their backs, they returned to the earthen bunker.

Periodically, the Jews in the earthen bunker were visited by the bandits in the area, who warned them not to come into the villages for foodstuffs. Also, the Germans threatened the peasants with execution if they help out Jews in the forest. The plight of the hungry Jews became much more serious as a result of this.

They survived under these conditions until the new year, when finally, at the beginning of January 1943, a miracle happened. Two men came into the earthen bunker, dressed in fur coats and felt hats, with machine guns in hand. It was dark in the bunker, and Joel Pomeranietz was sitting and reciting the Psalms. The two

men interrogated the residents of the bunker discovered the entire story of their struggle to survive. They explained in Russian that they were partisans. The fear immediately vanished from the pale Jewish faces, when the men ordered a guard be posted near the earthen bunker, and they then left the place. Immediately in the morning, the partisans returned with a doctor. The doctor tended to their frozen wounds, and bandaged them. They were brought together with a group of about twenty Jews from Pruzhany, and all of them together were taken by the partisans from the black forest to their command headquarters, where they joined the organized partisan movement. They survived difficult conditions of hunger and cold, and most eventually fell into the hands of the enemy or fell in battle with the enemy. Only a single few remained alive, and among them was *Jonah Borukhansky*, our witness, and *Joseph Mezheritzky*. Both today are in Israel.

Lisokovo After the War

David Kahana (Yakhvidovich), the Slonim teacher and partisan, whose articles about his experiences living with the partisans in the forests were printed in the New York *Der Tag*, was one of the first of the living Jews who survived that visited the areas around Bialystok and Volkovysk after the liberation. What he gleaned from his stop in Lisokovo during his visit is described by him in the following words:

> "After the area was liberated by the Red Army, only 12 people returned to Lisokovo from the forests; among them, seven men, four women, and one child, a six year-old girl. They took up residence in Mezheritzky's house. There, they established a collective on a cooperative basis, headed by *Reb Joel the Tailor*. Reb Joel sat a whole day, and tailored for the peasants, for which he received food as remuneration, as well as dairy products. The women were occupied with the washing and cooking of the food. Reb Joel, a man in his sixties, being in the forest with other partisans, was unable to observe the Jewish laws of Kashrut, but now he abides by the old tradition fastidiously, he is observant, and prays three times daily. When he found out that a gentile in a nearby village had a Torah scroll, he investigated how to rescue the Torah scroll from gentile hands. His disappointment was monumental when he discovered that the Torah scroll had been torn into shreds."

Svislucz

By Abraham Ain, New York
Secretary of the Svisluczer Relief of New York

[Note: The author supplies his own footnotes in this memoir. To distinguish them from my own, I have printed the author's footnotes in an Arial font, but retained the numbering scheme of the main body of this text. – JSB]

The town of *Svislucz*, which the Jews called *Sislevich* or *Shislevich* was already in existence in the 15th century. At that time, it was the property of the noble family of Fokush. In the 17th century, it was transferred to the Krishpionov nobles. In the 18th century, Svislucz became the property of the Grafs Tyszkiewicz.[249] Graf Winzenty (Vincent) Tyszkiewicz contributed a great deal of energy to enlarge and beautify the town. He created a market square which was built up on all sides with houses. He erected a *four story stone building* in the middle of the marketplace, which was about twelve feet square at its base, and about fifty feet high. On the top of the building a formidable metal ball was placed, from which a metallic rod protruded for about three feet. In town, it was said that the building with the metal rod served as a lightning rod, in order to prevent fires started by lightning strikes.

Five principal streets emanated from the marketplace. Two to the east, one to the west, and one to the north and one to the south. Upon entering the town, every principal street had a stone arch on which heavy gates were hung. At night, the gates were locked. Entry to the town was only by way of the principal streets, through the arches. And at night, when the gates of the archways were locked, it was not possible to ride into or out of town.[250]

On the east side of the market, on a stretch of land two blocks long between the Amstibover and Rudavker Gasse, Graf Tishkevich had storefronts constructed, built out of large stones. He instituted market fairs, that took place several times a year. Each of the fairs lasted about four weeks. People would come to these fairs from all over Lithuania, and also from the Polish kingdom. The merchants would store their goods in the stone-walled stores.

Tishkevich planted a town park on the west side of the town, in which there were paths cut out for taking a promenade. On the southwest side of the town, he built a gymnasium that later also became a Teachers' Seminary. Elementary school teachers for the entire Grodno province would come out of there. The Jewish Schulhof was gradually built up over time on the northwest side of town. On the southeast side of town, a number of smaller streets were constructed which were called 'the entrenchments.'

Svislucz burned down several times. A large part of the town was consumed by fire on three separate occasions. *One time* – In the 1830's; *A second time* – in the 1880's; in the summer of 1910, a large part of Svislucz was consumed by fire. Specifically because of the frequent fires, Svislucz kept on re-building itself, and as a result, its exterior appearance was quite nice. It had many new houses and buildings, among which were two-story structures.

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249 I have taken the historical facts from a dissertation that was written at the Svisluczer Teachers' Seminary by a student named Vaclav Kozlowski.

250 In my time, there were only three archways remaining; the other two, belonging to the *Kerisker Gasse* and *Grodno Gasse* no longer existed.

The Jewish Community in Svislucz

Page 602: *The Marketplace in Svislucz*

The exact time when Jews first settled in Svislucz is not known. However, one can be certain that the Jewish community in Svislucz existed there for centuries. It was possible to deduce this from the old Jewish cemetery in the town. The oldest gravestones in the old cemetery, on which the writing was still legible, show dates from the 18th century, but there were older gravestones, whose inscriptions were no longer legible because of their age. In addition to this, there was part of a cemetery where the gravestones and the graves themselves were sunken, and it was barely recognizable that a cemetery had existed on that spot.

By the signs found in the Jewish cemetery, the Jewish settlement in Svislucz was originally a very small one. The settlement began to grow during the 18th century, when Svislucz passed into the hands of the Tishkevich Grafs, and when Graf Vincent Tishkevich built up the storefronts, and instituted the market fairs. The commerce generated by those fairs attracted merchants, who indeed, in that time settled in Svislucz. This marks the arrival of my family, the *Eins,* who came from Grodno, but settled in Svislucz in the 18th century. They were given the additional name, *novikehs*, from the Russian word, *novy*, meaning 'new,' because they were seen as newcomers.

The Jewish settlement in Svislucz grew over a long period of time. According to the census of 1847, there were 997 Jewish souls in Svislucz, and in the following fifty years, the Jewish population there doubled. According to the Russian census of 1897, the Jewish population consisted of 2,086 souls.[251] The population of Svislucz continued to grow. This is notwithstanding the fact, that at that time emigration to England, America and Argentina had already begun.[252] The economic development of the Jewish population was caused by this growth in the Jewish population, and the growth of the Christian population in Svislucz as well.

The Economic Life of the Jews in Svislucz

Page 604: *Svislucz Fire-fighters in the year 1917*

Right to Left, Bottom Row (The first four people): Shmuel Maisel, Berel Leib Kapitan, Berel David Ein, Isaac Mottel Uryonovsky; (the first two on the left): Menachem Finkelstein and Alter Burdeh

During the initial years of the Jewish settlement in Svislucz, the Jews occupied themselves in dealing with forest products, commerce in grain, running stores and labor. When Graf Tishkevich built the stores and instituted the large fairs, the incomes from commerce grew. Clubs, inns and taverns were added. In the 1830's, when the stores burned down, there was nobody who would reconstruct them. The Grafs Tishkevich were involved in the Polish uprising and later had to flee the country. Because the stores burned down, the great fairs were stopped, and many Jews lost their livelihood. They began to look for other ways to make a living. A number of them took to trades, especially to tanning leather. Prior to this, a crude form of leather tanning was used to create what was called '*yokhet*' from animal hides. Later on, they began to work with

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251 The figures for the number of Jews in 1847 and 1897 are taken from the Jewish Encyclopedia.

252 A number of Jewish families in the last decade of the 19th century, emigrated to Argentina, where they settled as colonists in Baron DeHirsch colonies.

horse hides and finer leather, such as Spiegel (Hamburger), Shagrin and Flat. German master craftsmen were brought in who taught the trade of how to produce a finer grade of leather. The pioneers in the production of finer grades of leather were *Pinchas Bereznitsky, Sender Mintz, Elyeh Rubin* and *his children*, and *Itcheh Pinchas Levinchik.* Leather production grew gradually. Towards the end of the 19th century, the leather industry in Svislucz consisted of tens of factories and tanneries, that employed several hundred workers. The income of these workers was a great deal more, in many instances two or three times the wages or ordinary workers. Because of the increase in leather production, Svislucz had need for more workers, and many young people from the surrounding towns and villages were brought in there to work in the leather factories. This also expanded the Jewish population of Svislucz. Because of the higher wages of the tanners, their standard of living was higher as well. They ate well and clothed themselves well. This, in turn, provided a good living to storekeepers and other workers. Among the larger storekeepers of that day were numbered: *Zdanovich, Iliensky, Khaliuta* and *Liss*, whose stores were on the same level as an American Department Store, in miniature. In these stores, one could purchase everything from a needle on up to a nickel samovar, a herring, and a good portion of sardines or sprats, a pair of galoshes and a good hat, sweaters, and warm underwear.

In the year 1906, when the new Siedlce-Balagoya railroad was completed, with a station in Svislucz, a mere 3 versts from the town, communication with the larger cities, such as Volkovysk, Bialystok and even Warsaw, was significantly improved. This attracted new people to the town, and the Jewish population continued to rise. Before the First World War, there were approximately 3,500 Jews in Svislucz. During the First World War, when the Germans occupied Svislucz, the Jewish population increased even more, with a number of families that the Germans brought there from the town of Luftch in the Minsk Province, who at that time had remained homeless. The larger number of these subsequently remained in Svislucz permanently.

Economic Conditions After the First World War

After the First World War, the leather factories in Svislucz operated at a low level. The market for finished leather in Russia from Svislucz was completely cut off, and because of this, a large portion of the Jewish population of Svislucz remained without a source of income. Because of the economic decline and the intensification of Polish anti-Semitism, emigration from Svislucz increased. People emigrated anywhere it was possible to go, to Argentina, North America, and after America instituted quotas on new immigrants, a strong emigration began to go to the Holy Land. Despite this, due to natural growth, the Jewish population in Svislucz did not diminish. And when the Nazis occupied Svislucz in 1941, there was a population there of about 3,500 Jewish souls.

In the past several decades, large centers were formed out of the Jews of Svislucz who emigrated from their home town, in the United States, England, Canada, Argentina, and Israel. The largest centers of Jews from Svislucz are found in Liverpool (England), New York, and Montreal. The large majority of the Jews from Svislucz are well established in their new homes, where they are involved in industry, a variety of professions, as well as in community work. It is appropriate to mention two people from Svislucz here, whose names are recognized on a national level. They are *Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin* and *David Lewis.* Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin is a son of Shlomo Belkin, who was a Hebrew teacher in Svislucz. *Shlomo Belkin* was an enlightened Jew, a good Hebraist, and a contributor to Hebrew newspapers and journals. He was also active in the Zionist movement in Svislucz. Rabbi Dr. Belkin was educated in the Yeshiva in the old country. He received his doctorate in America. He is today the President of Yeshiva College, named for Rabbi Isaac Elchanan, in New York. *David Lewis* is the son of Moshe Lewis,(known in the old country as Moshe Losh, or Moshe'keh Khatzkel's). Moshe Lewis was a member of the leadership of the Bundist movement in

Svislucz. He was active in the community and cultural life of the town. Today, he lives in Montreal, where he is very active in community life, and occupies the position of Secretary-General of the Jewish Labor Committee in Montreal, Canada. David Lewis came to Montreal as a young boy. He is a graduate of two colleges, McGill University in Montreal and Oxford University in England. David Lewis could have made a great career for himself as a lawyer. Rather, he chose to follow in his father's footsteps. As a socialist, he gives his time and energy to the SSP – the Labor Party of Canada, where he occupies the position of Secretary-General. His name is well-known among socialist circles in the United States, and among the leaders of the English Labor Party.

The Destruction of Svislucz

By Abraham Ain, New York

Compiled from letters and recollections that I received from *Simcha Kaplan, Emanuel Goldberg, Meir Galperin, Abraham Stupachevsky, Berel Orlovsky*, and from two Svislucz Christians who were witnesses to the tragedy, as well as *Yerakhmiel Lifschitz* – a partisan who was in Svislucz for several weeks in the year 1946, and spoke with many Christian residents of Svislucz – and from *'Nioma Levin*.

In *September 1939*, when the Nazis attacked Poland, the Jews of Svislucz had their first taste of war. German planed bombed a military transport at the Svislucz railroad station. A large number of Polish soldiers were killed there. It didn't take long before Svislucz was occupied by the Russian army. When the Russian army occupied Svislucz, the Polish police commandant and two Polish policemen were shot.

A town committee was established. The local leather factories went over to the Russian regime. A manager was sent that directed the work of these factories. The regime requisitioned the better houses, in which its relocated appointees took up residence. The houses of the *Rabbi, Leizer Khaliuta* and *Meinkus* were requisitioned along with others. Religious education of the children was immediately forbidden, and all the *Heders* were closed. However, slowly, circumstances began to settle down and the populace began to accustom itself to the new Soviet order.

In June 1941, when the Germans attacked Russia, they showered the entire area with leaflets from airplanes, that said they were coming to liberate the entire world from the Jews, and that Jewish assets would be turned over to Christians. Many people elected to flee into Russia, but the way to the east was at that point already cut off.

Svislucz Under the Nazis

Svislucz was captured by the Nazis on *June 26, 1941.* On the first day of the occupation, the German commander issued an order that al the Jews of Svislucz and surroundings should register themselves immediately, and that each Jew should put a white armband on their left arm. A few days later, a new order was issued, which ordered each Jew to put on a yellow patch , ten centimeters wide – one on the front left side of the breast, and one on the rear, right side of the back.

Many young Jewish people were shot on that day, based on informers telling that they were communists. Jews were forced to walk in the streets in order that they not come in contact with the murderers. The Nazis levied burdensome demands for money, gold and also furs. These 'contributions' had to be satisfied in a matter of several hours time. For not complying with these orders on time, many times people were shot on the spot.

The Christian population cooperated with the Nazis to a considerable extent. Many of them took over Jewish houses and stores. Many Christians became converted into ardent followers of Hitler, who bathed themselves in Jewish tears and Jewish blood.

The German commander ordered that a *Judenrat* be established in Svislucz, that should consist of seven people. The spokesman for the *Judenrat* was *Schlachter*, the director of the Hebrew school (he was someone

who had moved to Svislucz). His assistant and deputy was *Ephraim Zdanovich*. The other members were: *Mendel Vigonsky, Alter Brudeh,* and *Motkeh Kalmanovich*. The secretaries were: *Dr. B. Meisel*, and *Pin'iyeh Kleinerman*. All the orders from the German authority were conveyed to the *Judenrat*, which was held responsible for carrying them out.

In *July 1941* a *ghetto* was established in Svislucz at the order of the German command, and all Jews were ordered to move into the quarters of their overcrowded ghetto, which consisted of the area from the Schulhof and the *Grodno Gasse*. On the same day that the Jews were supposed to move into the ghetto, it was demanded of them that they bring all their horses and cattle to the marketplace, and turn them over to the Christians.

Life in the ghetto was a real Hell. The enraged German murderers would fall upon the small Jewish ghetto, raining murderous blows on the Jews, robbing them of anything that they pleased. During the time that the Jews lived in the ghetto, they were forced to perform the hardest and dirtiest labor, under the constant eye of the Nazi gendarmes. The Nazis even posted proclamations that Christians were forbidden, under penalty of death, to sell anything to the Jews, especially bread and foodstuffs. Despite this, an illegal trade developed between the Jews and the Christian populace.

In the *Spring of 1942,* the commandant, *Odenbach* called the head of the Judenrat to him, and ordered the assembly of all Jews between the ages of fifteen and sixty, men and women, for work on the road that the Nazis were then building between Bialystok and Baranovich. The order had to be carried out immediately. The populace began to pack up, and they went off to do the work. The Jews of Svislucz worked on the road near the village of *Kvatereh.* They did hard labor for twelve hours a day, and did not receive adequate food. Nevertheless, the Jews worked speedily, believing that in this way they would buy themselves out of being killed. But this did not satisfy the Germans. An hour did not go by that the Nazis didn't beat the workers about the head with rubber truncheons. When the Jews could no longer withstand the frightful beatings, they would send messengers to the *Judenrat* in Svislucz to go an plead on their behalf. The secretaries of the *Judenrat* would then come to the workplace, and appeal to the overseer on behalf of the welfare of the Jews. The *Judenrat* also would invite the commandant and other high officials to their homes, and attempt to buy them off with the best articles, the best boots, coats and gold. Each and every one turned over their last possessions in order to ease the plight of the Jews at their hard labor. The Nazis would take everything. A few days would then go by quietly, and they no longer beat the Jews. However, a short time after that, circumstances reverted to the prior situation – in order to extract more money and possessions from the unfortunate Jews. In order to extract even more from the Jews, they took to the Jews with even more brutality. It was in this fashion that the Jews of Svislucz endured through the summer of 1942. At the end of *October 1942* the work on the road came to an end, and the Jews were sent back to Svislucz.

All these tribulations and exertions made life miserable. Many Jews wished for death.

On *Saturday, October 30, 1942* the Christians of Svislucz received an order to provide five hundred wagons for November 1. It became immediately known that these wagons would be used to take away the Jewish population of Svislucz.

The Last Night in Svislucz

On the nights of the *1st and 2nd of November 1942,* Svislucz was surrounded by the German military and local gendarmes – Ukrainians, Poles, and White Russians. On *Monday, November 2, 1942* (22 Heshvan 5702),

at 5AM, they began to drive the Jews out of their homes. The old, the young, the sick – everyone was compelled to go to the marketplace. Each person was permitted to take along a small pack of personal belongings. These packs were carried on the back, leaving home and gathering at the horse market, in the former stores between the Amstibover and Rudavker Gasse. The marketplace was bounded by a stone wall. At the order of the Nazis, the Christians of Svislucz and surrounding villages gathered there at 7AM, to watch the scene of what was becoming of the Jews. The commandant *Odenbach* arrived at 8AM along with other German officers, and they began to sort the Jews. The young and middle-aged separately, the old and sick separately, and women and children separately. The young and the middle-aged were formed into rows of four abreast, and through the Brisker Gasse, were led off to the railroad station of Svislucz. A large number of the Jews were exhausted, and could not carry their packs, so they took them off their backs and discarded them, freeing themselves from that burden. The Christians, standing by and watching, snatched up these packs. A train transport stood at the ready at the Svislucz train station. The Jews were packed into the train cars, eighty people to a car. The train pulled away in the direction of Volkovysk. Many, because of a lack of space in the train cars, remained outside. The Nazis rounded them up together, and took them to the nearby *Vishnick Forest*, and they were all shot.

The *older men* and the *women* with *small children* were also taken to the Vishnick Forest through the Rudavker and Hofisher Gasse. Those who could not walk, were loaded onto wagons. Among the Jews taken to the Vishnick Forest were the Rabbi of Svislucz, *Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Mushinsky*, his *wife*, and many of the finest *balebatim* of the town.

In the forest, large pits had been dug out and made ready. The Jews were ordered to take off their clothes to their underwear. They were lined up in rows of ten, led to the pits, and shot there. According to the telling of *Simcha Kaplan*, the Rabbi gave a sermon in order to soothe the people in their last moments, before they were shot.[253]

The small children were not shot. They were thrown into the pit alive, or their skulls were smashed with wooden clubs before they were thrown in. A Christian writes about this in Russian: "Dyeti Uvyali Derevianemi Kalatushkami." A group of young Jews pulled the convulsed and trembling bodies of the Jews to the pits. These young people were promised that their lives would be spared for doing this work. Nevertheless, they were shot on the following morning. The forest was surrounded by German soldiers, armed with machine guns, in order to prevent anyone from escaping. A few young people though, managed to escape.

The executions continued for an entire day. Towards nightfall, when the murderers saw that they were not yet done with all the Jews, they stood all the people in rows and shot them. It was in this fashion that many who were only lightly wounded came to be thrown alive into the pits that were the graves of their brethren. When the murderers were finished with their handiwork, they went off to the palace in the forest, and indulged themselves in a celebration that lasted the entire night. The group of young people that had assisted in burying their home town brethren were locked up in the cellar of the palace. They were all shot on the morrow. According to the account of *Abraham Stupachevsky,* a number of Jews had the good fortune to escape from the palace. But instead of fleeing to the forests of *Bielovez*, they fled in the direction of the Berestovitz railroad station. There, they were caught and shot.

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253 Simcha Kaplan was not in the Vishnik Forest. What the Rabbi had spoken about, he heard from Christians when he came to Svislucz in 1946. Simcha Kaplan served as an officer (captain) in the Russian-Polish Army.

The possessions of the Jewish populace was gathered up by the Germans and taken to a large grain silo. The better things and furniture were sent back to Germany, the lesser things were sold off or given away by the Nazis, a little at a time, to their local allies and believers in Hitler.

The transport with the Jews of Svislucz arrived in Volkovysk, and there they were driven in to block of six bunkers that had been made ready for them.

The fate of the Jews of Svislucz who were taken to Volkovysk, was no better than that of the Jews of Volkovysk and its environs. They remained in the Volkovysk camp for only a matter of several weeks, where they suffered from hunger, cold, surviving dysentery and outbreaks of typhus, and all the other tribulations that were the hallmark of the day-to-day life in a German concentration camp. Together with the other Jews, they were then sent in transports to Treblinka and Auschwitz, where they were gassed and cremated.

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Only four people survived out of the approximately three thousand Jews that lived in Svislucz when the Nazis occupied the town: *Meir Galperin* fled to Bialystok and was sent to a slave labor camp from there; *Berel Orlovsky* escaped from the bunkers in Volkovysk and joined the partisans; *'Nioma Levin* lived through the camps at Auschwitz and Dachau and was liberated by the American Army; and *Yerakhmiel Lifschitz,* who went off to Bialystok, and from there joined the partisans. One young girl, *Alteh Shevelevich*, the daughter of Yoss'l Shevelevich (nickname is Yoss'l Brushkeh), also survived Auschwitz. Shortly after being liberated, she was strongly moved to return to her home in Svislucz, where she hoped to find some remnant of her family. En route, she was killed by Polish brigands. They killed her solely because they saw that she was a Jewish girl.

In addition to the four surviving Jews from Svislucz previously mentioned,, there are, to date, 38 additional Jews from Svislucz. A number of them had lived in other towns, others fled the camps, and hid themselves in the forests and fought the enemy as partisans, and most of these are among those who served in the Red Army or were sent to Siberia.

No Jews live today in Svislucz anymore. The few who turned to go back there after the liberation of the town, took one look at the desecrated [Jewish] cemetery in which the town takes pride, left immediately to find a new home.

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I have written this article in memory of the Jewish martyrs of Svislucz, among whom were *my two sisters and their families*, who were shot in the Vishnick Forest, gassed and incinerated in the crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz.

Let the lines of my article serve as memorial markers that cover the scattered and dispersed graves of our brethren and the ashes of the Svislucz Jewish martyrs, who were taken from us in so tragic a manner.

Let us honor their memory!

Volp

By Zvi (Herschel) Kaplan, New York

(Son of Israel & Bayl'keh Chava Dinah'keh's)

In memory of my murdered brothers and sisters,
Yaakov, Leibeh, Eybush, Riv'cheh & Dob'keh

The Development of Volp

The *shtetl* of Volp lies on the road between Volkovysk and Grodno, at the mouth of the Volpianka River. Its population was comprised of 1,100 Jews and approximately the same number of non-Jews, or citizens.[254] The designation 'citizen' was a legacy of the time when Volp was founded. The shtetl was privileged to experience growth and popularity thanks to its *Synagogue:* a masterpiece of art and architecture, which over the course of ten generations, anchored the *shtetl* and attracted the attention of many exponents and critics of the art academies of Europe. A rich body of writing was generated about the Volp Synagogue in Polish, Russian and German. As a consequence, Volp is prominent for a segment of Jewish history in the 17th Century, when Jewish settlements were established and spread out in the time of the Lithuanian rulers, the Holshanskys, who ruled in Vilna. During their time, they attracted many Jews: craftsmen, small shopkeepers, and merchants, as well as other citizens, to whom they granted special status, freeing them from taxes for a set period of time, and giving them special privileges. The *shtetl* grew quickly, with its commerce and small industry, and became a place where the rich nobility from the surrounding area would come. The nobles because a source of income for the Jewish shopkeepers.

Volp attained the high point of its development under the aegis of the Graf, *Lev Sapieha*[255], when the town became the seat of his summer residence. In the year 1643, King Wladyslaw IV and his Queen, Cecilia Renata came to Volp in great pomp and ceremony.

The Synagogue

Page 615: *The Synagogue in Volp*
Reproduced from Nota Kozlowski's Oil Painting

Page 616: *The Holy Ark in the famous Volp Synagogue*

Page 617: *The Volp Synagogue*

Page 618: *The Bimah*

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254 Called Мещяний in Russian.

255 Readers of the *Dereczin Memorial Book* will recognize the *Sapieha* Family as one of the most influential of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility of this area.

The economic upsurge permitted the wealthy Jewish community to erect the magnificent synagogue in the eastern part of town, right by the road to Volkovysk. The synagogue exuded its influence far beyond the borders of Poland and Lithuania. Even miles away, there were road markers pointing to the gigantic wooden structure, which was highly original in both style and concept. Apart from this, the building had a massive main section of several stories high, with large and small roofs, some higher, some lower, and two symmetric wings, right and left which were harmoniously proportioned. Who constructed this synagogue? According to tradition, it was the same architect who constructed the synagogue in the capital city of Grodno, because that synagogue makes use of a number of design elements that are identical to the synagogue in Volp. The exact details are not known with certainty, because at the time of the war with Sweden, when the Swedes torched Volp on all four sides, the entire community building was burned down, along with the archive that was located there. Also, the Swedes plundered all the valuable implements of the synagogue, such as the awesome silver menorah that used to stand in the synagogue, and which three people could barely lift. The synagogue, however, remained intact, and was not maintained in the three hundred years of its existence. Only the roof was at one time covered with new shingles, and on the Ark, the inscription remained from 1781, which recalls the improvements to the synagogue. The art commission of the Polish legislature (i.e. the Sejm), recognized the synagogue of Volp as one of the most noteworthy old-time architectural landmarks in all of Poland, and forbade even the most minor alterations to be made, or any repairs or renovations without a special permit.

The center of the synagogue was crowned with an octagonal cupola, which was supported by four massive columns which were covered with a variety of carvings. From the inside, the cupola covered five galleries, either higher or lower, symmetrically divided, and carved from wood. The cupola had painting on it of shining stars against a background of a dark sky color. The interior height of the synagogue up to the soffit was 120 feet. The previously mentioned four columns formed the four corners of the *Bimah*.

According to the opinion of Matyas Berson, a member of the Posen Art Academy, in his Polish brochure of 1904 –

"*Kilka slów o Drewnianych Bóznicach w. Polsce*"

the *Bimah* can be thought of as an architectural masterpiece in the art of carpentry. The most original and most magnificent part of the synagogue was without a doubt the Holy Ark – 36 feet high and 15 feet wide in several stages. The Holy Ark was thought to be the handiwork of the greatest wood workers of the 17th century. The carvings of the Holy Ark were composed of arabesques, motifs of a variety of allegorical representations of animals and plants. Berson expresses himself in his brochure as follows:

> "Looking at the Holy Ark, which has remained in its original condition, the eye is lost among the many impressions, and the aesthetic sense is filled from its breadth. It is one of the most beautiful compositions of its kind."

Economic & Community Life

Page 619: *A Corner of the Volp Marketplace*

Page 620: *The Volp Hebrew School*

Right to Left, Seated: *Zalman Kaplan, Meir Gershon (Hona's son-in-law), The Volp Rabbi, Rabbi Mordechai Segal, a lady teacher, Yaakov Pet, a lady teacher.*

The town of Volp was proud of its synagogue, and lived in the shadow of its one-time grandeur. Because the Polieser Railroad passed Volp by, the economic circumstance of the *shtetl* was bad for the last forty years. Many Volp Jews were occupied in gardening. The Jews of the area had a special reputation as tobacco planters. There were times – during the First World War, and immediately afterwards – when the entire town was occupied in it. They worked hard, but earned their living honestly. During the campaigns for the *Keren HaYesod* or *Keren Kayemet*, the activists would go from house to house and the Volp citizens would give them sheaves of dried tobacco, as their contributions to the campaign. Volp was cited many times in the records of the national fund organizations as a model of initiative and willingness to be forthcoming.

The new influences on Jewish streets that came after the First World War also did not bypass Volp. The youth was swept up in the *Zeitgeist.* Many left among the first pioneers to the Holy Land, a portion of them on foot, where they established a meaningful Volp group. A majority of the young people left Volp to study in the in the middle schools and higher institutions of learning in Poland and beyond. It was in this fashion that this small town produced a 'minyan' of licensed Hebrew and Yiddish teachers, three doctors (among them Dr. Shevakhovsky, who was killed in Israel), three graduates of the Warsaw *Takhkemoni* Teacher's Seminary, a chemist, a lawyer – apart from many graduates of the Hebrew and Polish gymnasiums.

Giving no heed to their dire economic circumstances – the Polish government tobacco monopoly always ruined the Jewish tobacco plantations, and the town became impoverished as a result – the Volp Jewish community nevertheless maintained a four-grade Hebrew school.

To accomplished this, they skimped on food, in order to be able to send their children to the Polish *Volksschule,* which happened to be tuition-free. A large Hebrew library of over three thousand volumes existed next to the Hebrew school, with a rich repertoire of books – ranging from the works of Rabbi Yehuda Halevy to the newest books from publishing houses in the Land of Israel. Also, a significant number of books could be found in the Yiddish library.

The Jews of Volp were exceedingly proud of the Yiddish author *Ben-Eliezer* (he passed away a few years ago), who was a son-in-law to a Jewish Volp family. His wife, *Manya Ben-Eliezer*, is to this day the secretary of the *Organization of Olim from Volp* in Israel.

The well-known Polish author *Liza Ozheshkova,* who came from Milkovchizna near Volp, portrayed Jewish characters in her work from the small Jewish shtetl, and generally memorialized a number of familiar Jews from Volp, such as *Gedalyahu* and others. Volp served as a source for her portraits.

The talented Yiddish author, *David Leizer Yelinovich* was born in Volp. He died in 1922 (at the age of 23) from tuberculosis, leaving behind a cornucopia of prose, poetry, a longer epic, "The Neman," and many stories about the lives of settlers (in the Holy Land), and others. Among the coterie of Jewish writers in Vilna, he was thought to be a great rising star.

Today, every trace of the *shtetl* has vanished. On June 25, 1941, the attacking Germans bombarded the town heavily with cannon fire, and created great destruction in Volp. Also, the famous Volp Synagogue, that had withstood all conflagrations for over 300 years, was reduced to rubble.

Incidents in Volp

By Zvi (Herschel) Kaplan, New York

Volp found itself in the part of Poland that was occupied by the Russians in October 1939. Life proceeded normally under the Soviet regime, without any incidents, until the tragic day of June 22, 1941. A mere four days after this date, on *June 26*, the entire Jewish infrastructure in Volp went up in flames. Almost all the houses were burned down at that time, from the *Catholic Church to the home of Velvel the blacksmith* – the last one on the road to Volkovysk.

The Germans appeared in Volp on July 1. Their first troops entered the town on motorcycles. For the entire week, prior to the arrival of the German troops, all the Jews of Volp hid out in the cellar of *Shlomo Chaim Heschel's.* The Jews were seized with a panic, out of a great fear of the new rulers. By contrast, the Christians welcomed the Germans with flowers. As quickly as the initial front line moved past, a new order was established, in which the Jews were declared to be outside the settlement. A *Judenrat* was established in which *Fei'sheh Rubinson* (Gruna's) was placed at the head. The Jews were compelled to arrange themselves in earthen bunkers, because their homes had been burned down. A regimen of hard forced labor began for the Jews. The *Judenrat* was compelled to provide a specific number of people every day for forced labor. The Jews had to built the new chancellor's building from scratch, that the Nazis demanded on behalf of their commander. They had to carry the bricks from their own houses, that had burned down, on their backs, for a distance of kilometers.

A part of the Christian populace, indeed, did exhibit a certain measure of friendliness towards their Jewish neighbors. The majority, however, related to them with cruelty. The Jewish were informed upon to the Nazis, and they were robbed of their last possessions. Jews were attacked in the middle of the street and forcibly beaten or whipped altogether.

This lasted for 15 months until the fall of 1942. Suddenly, the German command ordered the Christian populace to provide the Jews with potatoes at reduced prices, several measures for each family. The Jews became encouraged by this last decree. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a bad sign. The tragic *Monday* of *November 2, 1942* arrived. At a time before dawn, an order was disclosed that all the Jews were to assemble at the church square and bring their possessions with them.

This order hit the Jewish population of Volp like a thunderclap. They immediately assembled in the earthen bunkers, where considerable discussion took place. The younger among the Jews argued that the order of the Germans, which can bode no good, should not be obeyed. They argued that the Jews had nothing to lose, that they were better off trying to flee where possible, and not to surrender into the hands of the enemy. Their voices were shouted down by the older ones, who warned that if the order were not obeyed, the Germans would shoot the entire community. Finally, the older element won the argument, and the Jews gathered at the church square at the designated hour.

On arrival at the place, the Jews were ordered to throw all of the belongings they had brought along, together in the courtyard. They were permitted to take only two pair of undergarments, and food for three days. They were compelled to leave the rest in the town. When a Christian, who could no longer wait to plunder the Jews, approached the Jewish possessions, the Germans shot him on the spot.

Meanwhile, SS troops surrounded the *shtetl* on all sides, in order to prevent anyone from fleeing. My youngest brother, *Eybush* and my cousin *Leibl Zaretsky*, who worked at the German gendarmerie, did not show up at the appointed place. The gendarmes for whom they worked had simply told them that they were not obliged to appear, if they did not want to, and that they can go wherever they pleased. The German command, however, got wind of this, and threatened to shoot 15 Jews if the two boys did not show them selves. In the end, the *Judenrat*, of which my older brother *Leibeh* was a member, was able to get the order called off. Under the stringent watch of SS Troops, the Jews of Volp left their home town forever, in the direction of Volkovysk.

Sixty six people, the fathers and mothers of those who were driven out, who because of their age could not present themselves in accordance with the German decree, were then gathered together into the brick Volp bathhouse building. Wladek Petrovich's son and his companions dug a common grave in the new cemetery for the entire day. That evening, they were shot in groups of ten at the mouth of the common grave. *Gershon Srebrenik*, who jumped into the grave, was buried alive. Only *Pearl, Motteh Yosh'keh's* had the good fortune to sneak out of a window in the bathhouse, and flee in the direction of the Volkovysk bunkers, where, however, she died two weeks later from exhaustion. *Galinshchiza* died there as well. The murder of the 66 people took place on the day of *Zadushek*, which the Belorussians celebrate as their Memorial Day. The Germans ordered the Christian grave diggers to strip the clothing off the corpses, but no one moved from their places to do this.

Only one Volp Jew managed to survive the Volkovysk bunkers, and that was *Yitzhak Vodovoz* (a son of Golda Leah Atzkes). The Volkovysk Jew, *Epstein*, helped him, a member of the burial society of those bunkers. He sequestered him into a sack on a small wagon, under eight corpses, and in this manner, took him out of the bunkers to the cemetery, from where *Vodovoz* followed the rail line until he reached the Klibanitzer Forest (7 kilometers from Volp). He joined up with the partisans in the forest, in whose movement he was active in the Volp district, until the liberation by the Russians. This very same *Yitzhak Vodovoz* took revenge on the Germans and also on the Christians who helped to exterminate the Jews of Volp.

My sister *Riv'cheh* and her son, *Leizer* hid themselves with a Christian in the village of Palicki. The Christian however, at a later date, turned them over to the Germans, and the Volp policeman Litvinovich shot her along with her son Leizer. When Yitzhak Vodovoz joined the partisans in the Volp district, he decided to revenge this betrayal and murder. He organized an attack in Klibanitsa. The attackers killed Litvinovich and two Germans, who had previously beaten and tortured the Volp Rabbi, *Rabbi Mordechai Segal*, whose beard they tore out as part of their bestial acts. The gentiles then acquired great respect for Yitzhak Vodovoz, and the Germans put a price of fifty thousand marks on his head.

Another incident took place with *David Zaretsky* (son of Sima) and *Joseph Motes* and his *daughter*. They hid out in Gliendievich (two kilometers from Volp) in a mill. The head of the village found out about this, and sent them back to Volp under guard. The same night, they were imprisoned in the cellar of the Volp anti-Semite, Vishnievsky. The following morning, they were shot at the new cemetery. The Soviet regime later sentenced the head of the village to ten years in prison. A similar situation occurred with *Sholom Rizikov.* He hid himself for over three months with a peasant in the village of Lazi (three kilometers from Volp). For this, the peasant confiscated everything that he had, and then informed on him to the Germans. The Germans shot him the same day at the new cemetery. All these betrayals reached Yitzhak Vodovoz, who by that time was already active in the partisan movement. He then organized an expedition to the village where the peasant lived, and took revenge for the death of Sholom Rizikov.

Yitzhak Vodovoz would come to Volp frequently, despite the fact that he knew the Germans were looking

for him. The town Christians – as he himself would say – held him in respect like "steel and iron", after he had several times attacked and carried out expeditions against the perpetrators. *Yitzhak Vodovoz* and also *Shmuel Sidransky*, who survived the entire war in Russia, from Stalingrad to Prague, survived. They returned to Volkovysk after the liberation, but in August 1947 they left Volkovysk, and are today found in Poland.

The plight of the Volp Jews in the Volkovysk bunkers, in the initial period after their arrival on November 2, 1942, was so oppressive, that the feelings of loyalty among them to share the fate of their families was so intense, that many who could have saved themselves chose not to. This was the case with my youngest brother *Eybush* and *Label Zaretsky,* who did not present themselves along with the other Volp Jews on November 2, 1942, in accordance with the German decree. After five days of wandering over fields and forests, they voluntarily presented themselves at the Volkovysk bunkers, and together with their larger family, were eventually exterminated in Treblinka.

What happened to the Volp Jews during their three weeks in the Volkovysk bunkers is adequately communicated by Dr. Einhorn. Their fate was the same as that of [the Jews of] Volkovysk and of [the Jews of] a number of other small towns that had been driven together into the bunkers.

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The *shtetl* of *Volp* is completely destroyed. The streets are overgrown and covered in rubble – writes Yitzhak Vodovoz. The gravestones are knocked over. Every week, Yitzhak Vodovoz and Shmuel Sidransky would come to Volp to repair the grave sites, and cry out their hearts. Two witnesses for a vanished Jewish community. We are aware, in total of eleven Volp Jews who survived the Holocaust.

The Incidents in Porozovo

Based on the Information of Dr. Marek Kaplan

Dr. Marek Kaplan, the son of Shmuel Kaplan, came to Porozovo under the Russians, in the year 1939, and became the chief physician of the hospital in Bogudenka, about a half mile from Porozovo. The hospital was put in place in an old palace of the nobility. There were seventy beds installed there. – *Dr. M. Einhorn*.

Porozovo had within it a small Jewish community of approximately *six hundred people*. There were four large streets there, and a couple of smaller streets. Most of the Jews were workers, and small businessmen, and there was also a small number of farmers.

The condition of the Jews was not particularly good under the Russian regime. All the workers joined collectives, and this is how they made a living. The small business people were, however, severely impacted by these events. Their stores were shut down, and they didn't know what form of livelihood to pursue. By contrast, the circumstances of the few farmers was not altered at all. They continued to work as they had in the past.

These circumstances persisted in Porozovo from the *end of 1939* to approximately *June 22, 1941,* until the outbreak of the war between Germany and Russia.

The Jews of Porozovo found out about the German attack against the Russians at 12 o'clock, noon on June 22, 1941. That day though, passed by peacefully.

On *Monday, June 23*, one could then already sense a heavy movement of Russian military around Porozovo. The people were very upset by that day. One did not know where one stood in the world.

On the morrow, *Tuesday June 24* the first German transports appeared in the area. From the outskirts of the town one could hear the exchange of fire between the German and Russian armies.

On Wednesday morning, heavy fire started outside and around the town, as well as inside the town itself. A large fire broke out, and a large part of the town, from the *Volkovysk Gasse* to the river, was burned down, including the *Schulhof*, the *old and new Bet HaMedrash*, the *Community House*, and many other houses. Approximately one-fifth of the town burned down on that day, even though on average, there were not many Jewish dwellings in that area. Out of fear, the Jewish population hid themselves, and the fire was not even fought. This was the first taste of German brutality tasted by the Jews of Porozovo.

The German soldiers ran amok all over the town. In their desire to take revenge for the strong resistance put up by the Russians, they fell upon the Jewish neighborhood and made a wreckage of it. Many Jews were shot on that day without any reason given. Among them were the *Khananovich* family, including their *grandson* (two years old), *Isaac Novick, Kulakowski* and others.

It continued this way for the entire day of Wednesday, during which time the Germans wrecked the Jewish neighborhood of Porozovo. During the night from Wednesday to Thursday, however, the Russians again regained the upper hand, and after a longer battle, they re-entered the town from the Novy-Dvor side.

On the evening of the following day, *Thursday*, a new German command arrived with a military detachment,

and once again drove the Russians out of Porozovo.

The Life of the Porozovo Jews Under the Nazis

The town now really passed into German hands. A young German *leutenant,* the senior officer of the local German army detachment, set up his residence in the home of the priest, and issued his demands from there. The Jews of the town were immediately ordered to wear white armbands and a yellow Star of David.

He set up a local Christian administration, with *Radivinsky* in charge. *Myedver* was installed as the secretary.

The Jews were ordered to set up a *Judenrat.* Unfortunately, no one wanted to participate in it, because everyone knew the dismal consequences tied up in this involvement. Finally, *Lev the Baker* was designated as the head, and *[A]vigdor Trop* – his deputy. One week later, the German commander left Porozovo, and the real authority for a period of several months was the Polish Burgomaster *Radivinsky*. The relationship of the Polish administrative leadership to the *Judenrat* was more or less satisfactory. During the course of the three months from September to November 1941, the Jews of Porozovo, on average, lived peacefully, despite the fact that their economic circumstances were straitened, and the news that they received from the outside was disquieting. During the first week of their occupation of Novy Dvor, near Porozovo, where approximately fifty Jews lived, the Germans drove out all the Jews to Pruzhany.

A German ploce station was created in Porozovo in *October 1941*, in which there were from 4 to 6 policemen. They occupied themselves principally with sending packages back to their families in Germany.

The *Judenrat,* in the meantime, was able to buy its way out of many decrees by bribing the town administration. In *November 1941* the first government commissar arrived in Porozovo, who distinguished himself even more than the others in his ability to accept bribery at every turn and opportunity.

This was the way it stayed for about six months. Decrees were issued against the Jews, but the *Judenrat* would buy off the command, and one would resume daily life. The news coming from other towns in the area, such as Slonim, and the towns further to the east, like Zelevianka, that were on the border of the Third Reich, were however, very disquieting. During this time, more and more refugees came from the vicinity. It fell to the *Judenrat* to buy off the command, and obtain permission for them to remain in Porozovo.

Circumstances, however, changed at the end of the *summer of 1942,* when the first commissar left Porozovo, and a second commissar took his place, who also took bribes, but despite this caused the Jews a great deal of trouble.

Two weeks after his arrival, he forcibly drove all the Jews out of their houses one night to the marketplace, and during that time, conducted a search of the Jewish houses with the objectives of trying to find partisans. By this means, he emptied the houses of all their valuables.

Two Jews were also shot that night – *the Dyer* and a second person, *from Slonim*. After this search, which was conducted by the Germans with the cooperation of the Polish police, the Jews were permitted to return to their homes.

A week later, all the young people in the town were arrested. The young people were kept in jail for a week, and a number of them were severely beaten. Thanks to the intervention of the *Judenrat* with bribes, they were ultimately released.

At that time there was no ghetto in Porozovo, but all the Jewish craftsmen were compelled to perform forced labor for the Germans, ten hours a day. They worked on the new road that the Germans were building between Porozovo and Volkovysk. The *Judenrat* was compelled to provide 25 young workers to work on the road between Volkovysk and Zelva..

Already at that time, the *end of the summer of 1942,* rumors were heard about a Jewish ghetto for the Jewish population of Porozovo, and despite the fact that this decree was dependent on the commissar, this time it could not be averted. The ghetto was created along the full length of two small streets, between the *Kosciolna Gasse* and Zapolye, and then by the Novy Dvor Gasse. All the Jews of Porozovo were then ordered to concentrate themselves there. Despite the fact that the population was not very large, the area was entirely too small for everyone. The overcrowding in the ghetto was entirely too great. There was not enough for everyone to eat, and the sanitary conditions were very bad.

It only took a month, and symptoms of disease due to hunger and bad hygienic conditions began to manifest themselves. Almost all the capable workers were working on the roads, and it was nearly impossible to bring in any additional food into the ghetto.

The Expulsion of the Porozovo Jews

On *October 30*, a notice spread throughout the town that the Germans had hired five hundred wagons from the Christians for the coming Sunday night. The wagons were readied in the nearby villages of Podoroisk and Lisokovo. This notice did not in fact upset the Jewish populace of Porozovo, because they could not imagine that in driving them out of the town, that the Germans would resort to using wagons.

At three o'clock in the morning the head of the *Judenrat* was summoned to the commander of the local police, along with the *Rabbi* and *Dr. Marek Kaplan*. An order was read to them according to which all the Jews in the Volkovysk area were to be brought to one camp for work purposes. Everyone is permitted to take along food for two days, work clothes, two sets of underwear, two covers and all valuables, such as gold and jewelry. The order was for the Jews of Porozovo to gather in the space of a couple of hours, that is to say, by six o'clock in the morning, on the marketplace.

And that, indeed, is how it happened. At the appointed hour, the entire Jewish population of Porozovo was gathered with their packs on the marketplace. After the people had stood for three hours in great cold, they were taken in rows of five, at ten o'clock in the morning, and driven in the direction of Volkovysk. The old and the sick, who could not go, remained behind in the town. Mothers and small children were permitted to ride in the wagons.

Approximately 50 people remained behind in the Porozovo ghetto (the old and the sick). Of these, approximately 30 were brought to Volkovysk a couple of days later, and the rest were taken by the Germans to the Novy Dvor Forest and shot.

The March to Volkovysk

The march to Volkovysk – almost half of the way, no one was permitted to stop and sit for even a minute. The men were driven brutally with staves, and under a hail of gunfire. The train extended for a length of between two and three miles.

When the womenfolk could no longer continue under their own power, the Germans beat them mercilessly. However, when a majority of the people began to stop, the commander ordered that the weaker be permitted to ride on the wagons, because he could see that he could not get them to move any faster by beating them, and his order was to get the Jews to Volkovysk by a designated hour.

In the end, the marching Jews arrived in Volkovysk at *ten o'clock in the evening*.

There, they were driven into the barracks. The overseer of the barracks was the 'Baker with the Adam's Apple.'

Dr. M[arek] Kaplan remained with the Porozovo Jews for a period of two weeks. He then fell ill, and he was taken to the hospital in the Volkovysk bunkers. This was November 16.

A short few days later, at the end of November, the Jews of Porozovo were sent out from the Volkovysk bunkers on the second transport, and all were exterminated. It was in this way that nearly the entire Jewish population of Porozovo was wiped out, except for those few who managed to save themselves by joining the partisans.

It was possible for *Zaydl Trop* and *Fishl Khananovich* to remain behind with the seventeen hundred others in the Volkovysk bunkers. They were later sent from there with the final transport to Auschwitz. *Khananovich* and *Zaydl Trop* remained in the Auschwitz labor camp together with 280 people from Volkovysk, but both perished in the camp.

Krzemienica

Based on the description of *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*, a scion of Volkovysk who came to Krzemienica in June 1941, as a doctor during the period of the Russian occupation, and remained there until November 2, 1942 when the local Jews were driven out to the bunkers in Volkovysk. – *Dr. M. Einhorn*

In the town of *Krzemienica*, or as it is known by the name of Kushemienitsa Kosciolna, two Jewish families had lived for countless generations: the family of *Chaim Pomerantz* and the family of *Malka Rogov*. Pomerantz was a scholarly Jew, a righteous man, and very highly regarded by the Christians of the area. A sister of his married the Koshchilker's son, from Volkovysk and was known as in the city as *Rachel Lev*, the community worker. She was also active in the Volkovysk municipal government, and in general was an unusual, talented, and wise woman. She lived for a long time with her three daughters at her bother Chaim Pomerantz's in Krzemienica.

The other Jewish family consisted of *Malka Rogov*, the proprietor of a mill with her two sons, her brother Mulya, a laborer, who was a strong believer and a pious Jew.

Apart from these two very well-respected Jewish families, many Jews lived in the various villages of the Krzemienica vicinity (Krzemienica was the principal center of the entire area). The majority of these Jews were tenant farmers, who did hard manual farm labor for their entire lives, and had a good name with their Christian neighbors, as exceptionally skilled workers of land.

The three *Papiernitsky brothers* and their families lived in the village of *Podbalatsya;* three brothers and their families lived in the village of *Derkatchy*, (they were known in Volkovysk as '*Die Derkatcher*'); *Abraham Polski* lived in the village of *Avdievicha* with his family. Altogether, there were approximately 70 Jewish souls in the Krzemienica vicinity. The German authority there consisted of an area commissar, a production manager, and six gendarmes. Even for this meager Jewish population, the Germans organized a *Judenrat*, in which three members were installed.

Immediately after they entered the Krzemienica area, the Germans robbed the Jews of all their possessions. They took away their land, the horses, cattle, and agricultural machinery. In addition to this, this small handful of disenfranchised Jews constantly had to buy off the local commissar with all sorts of gifts such as: several pairs of boots, a fur coat for him and his wife, several services for coffee and tea, and other valuables. They were compelled to do this to buy their way out of a variety of decrees. Despite all this, the Jews continued to live in their own homes, and the way they lived, the terror for the morrow continued to envelope them more tightly.

Dr. Resnick tells that on average, the Jews of that area continued to live peacefully. There were few Germans there. Dr. Resnick was the doctor of the German commissar, his family, and the remaining German soldiers found in that village, even though this was not official, because it was prohibited for a Jewish doctor to attend German [patients]. Dr. Resnick had a good relationship with the German commissar, and on different occasions, was able to extract concessions from him for the Jews, and permits for them to travel from one village to another in the vicinity of his authority. He would also obtain permits for the Jews to travel to Volkovysk, to go into the forest for wood, etc. At that time, this was a big thing, because it was strenuously forbidden to Jews to leave their dwellings. It was even worked out for the Jews in the Krzemienica vicinity to get together with Jews from surrounding villages to conduct services for Passover and the High Holy Days of 1942. The Jews made their living from a variety of endeavors, mostly in construction work. They also worked for the German gendarmes, built stables, a post office, as well as other structures. The Germans did

a lot of construction at that time, because they were convinced, that the area from Volkovysk to the Zelvianka River, the border between the Third Reich and the lands to the east, would remain permanently as a part of East Prussia. They also built new roads there, and the Jews were involved in all of this work.

This is the way conditions remained until *November 2, 1942.* No general order was given as was the case in the larger cities and towns. Polish police, accompanied by Nazi gendarmes simply went around knocking on the doors of the few Jewish households, at about 4 to 5 AM in the morning, and ordered the Jews to get dressed in ten minutes time, and to go with them. The Jews were permitted to take food for three days, and a little bit of clothing, and warm underwear. In this connection, the Polish police treated the Jews much worse than the Nazis themselves.

Dr. Resnick, who found himself in Krzemienica then, tells us also about that night of the *1st to the 2nd of November*. At 5AM, pounding on the door by two Polish policemen and one Nazi gendarme awoke them. They ordered his entire family to get dressed in ten minutes and to leave the house. They had barely time to dress themselves and the 8-month old baby daughter of Dr. Resnick's brother, when the Polish police literally drove them out of their house, not wanting to wait for them to pack up the most necessary of their belongings, and a little foodstuff for the journey.

In the course of an hour, all the Jews of Krzemienica were gathered together on the police station courtyard. The women and children were put up into wagons, and the remaining Jews were ordered to begin to walk on foot in the direction of *Zelva*.

When the Jews from Krzemienica came to the *Zelva railroad station*, they met up with te *Jews of Zelva* there, all gathered together in one place, and ready for the journey.

The Polish police along with the Nazi gendarmes immediately turned their small contingent of Jews from Krzemienica over into the hands of a large contingent of SS troops that were found there. Immediately, the Krzemienica Jews were fallen upon and beaten about the head for no rhyme or reason. (They broke Dr. Resnick's glasses at that time, and he was without glasses until May 1945). Finally, after the Jews had stood there for several hours, enduring a hail of beatings, they were driven into a transport car. There were approximately 70 Jews from Krzemienica and over 40 Jews from Zelva. At the time the Jews were driven into the transport, even their small packages that they had taken when they left their homes, were taken away from them. The Germans tosses all of these packages into one pile not far from the transport.

Dr. Resnick tells, that when he made his way to a window in the car, and asked of a passing German if he would give him back his package that had food in it for the child, the German, to everyone's astonishment, complied with his request. Dr. Resnick was the only one in the car who was able to retrieve the package of his things.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, the train that had a complement of about 2,400 Jews, from *Zelva, and the entire vicinity*, arrived in Volkovysk. The train stopped in the middle of the field, precisely opposite the barracks. All the Jews were swiftly driven off the train transport, and they were once again driven under a hail of beatings, in the direction of the bunkers. Passing by, the Jews of Zelva and Krzemienica were able to see the community of Volkovysk [Jews] that had been driven together and concentrated in the bunkers.

The Jews of *Zelva* and *Krzemienica* were immediately driven into a stable, which had already been equipped with three-level bunks for sleeping. About 2,800 Jews were crammed into this stable from *Krzemienica, Zelva, Berestovitz* and the vicinity.

The Extermination of the Volkovysk Community and Surrounding Towns

By Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York

Moshe'keh – Son of Herschel the Pharmacist, brother of Rosa the Dentist

My Flight to the Land of Israel

During the years of the Second World War, no contact existed between the countries under German occupation and the outside world. Only in the final months of 1944, when Hitler's victories in Russia were transformed into an even greater defeat, and the Red Army reclaimed and liberated Jewish cities and towns day-by-day, did the first reports begin to appear in the Jewish press about the extent of the destruction of the Jewish communities in Poland.

In time, Volkovysk was also liberated, but nobody knew what had happened to the ten thousand Jews of this city.

Not a single Jew was found in Volkovysk proper, that had survived the terrifying tragedy, and who could bear witness to the destruction of this large and vibrant Jewish community of Volkovysk, because all of the Jews, down to the last one, had been transported away from the city by the Germans.

My closest family had been in Volkovysk before the War, but I did not know what had happened to my two sisters: *Rosa*, the dentist, and her family, and *Paulia (Pes'shka)* and her children. I then commenced to search in every corner of the world, from wherever any news emanated concerning the "vale of tears." I established connections with every committee and body in America, that searched for relatives. I sent telegrams to all countries, where there existed even the tiniest of hopes, that there might exist knowledge of the fate of the Volkovysk Jews. I established a connection to the Moscow community, with the American ambassador in Moscow, and all the other local relief agencies. However, all my research and effort was for naught.

As quickly as the European war came to an end, that is how quickly I made the decision to fly to the Land of Israel, in order to visit with my sister, *Liza Kharakh,* who lived in Tel-Aviv with her husband, and to meet with my *landsleit* at the same time, who had there organized a Society called "Emigrants from Volkovysk." I hoped that there, I would succeed in determining the fate of my family and that of the Volkovysk Jews. Thanks to my connections, I obtained permission to fly there in a military aircraft. The trip took only a matter of days, and I arrived in the Land of Israel. To my great disappointment, my *landsleit* there also did not know the fate of Volkovysk.

Meeting with the First Witnesses in Israel: Joseph Kotliarsky, Zvi Roitman & Shayna Lifschitz

Page 639: *Shayna Lifschitz*

Two weeks after I arrived in the Land of Israel, two survivors of the Volkovysk Hell arrived: *Joseph Kotliarsky* and *Zvi Roitman*. Both had survived the crematoria at Auschwitz. Kotliarsky conveyed the first authentic reports about the killings in *Slonim,* where he had lived, and also about the *Dereczin* massacre[256], a town that is found in the Volkovysk vicinity, where on the night of *Tisha B'Ab 1942 three thousand Jews were killed.* Kotliarsky, his wife and child, along with fifteen other Jews, managed to escape to Zelva.

The town of Zelva had already been incinerated from before, and the few remaining Jews lived in cellars. He, along with other refugees, were forced to hide out in the local cemetery for lack of space. He could not remain in the cemetery for long, and fled Zelva to Volkovysk, to his great-aunt, *Fruma Movshovsky*. The town of Zelva was the border between White Russia and the "Greater German Reich." The river, with the same name Zelva,[257] was indeed the strategic borderline. Kotliarsky and his child needed to ford the Zelva river in the dark of night. The danger of being apprehended was great, because the Germans swept the river with a searchlight. He went under the bridge, and when the searchlight would sweep by, he would go underwater with the child. Miraculously, the group got across intact, and in the end did reach Volkovysk from the Karczyzna side on Friday morning. They waited in Karczyzna until nightfall, at which time they mingled among the other workers from Volkovysk, and entered the center of Volkovysk together. Kotliarsky was astonished at the great silence and stillness that reigned on that Friday in the city. He discovered that Volkovysk knew nothing of the great Dereczin Massacre that had taken place on Tisha B'Ab, nor about the slaughter in Slonim.

Kotliarsky communicated terrifying details concerning the *nine thousand Jews of Slonim* who were butchered on the Tchoplova fields. Machine guns were set up in front of them. Graves that had been previously dug, stood before them. The leader of the Nazi murderers then approached the Jews, who stood in an arranged pattern – some of them wept, others murmured their final prayers over and over again – and says: "Who among you wishes to lead a prayer?" From among the ranks, *Reb Abraham Moshe, the Shammes* of the city stepped forward, and recited the prayer, '*El Moleh Rakhamim*' in front of the huge mass grave! He exhorted the holy community to die in purity, and ended with a recitation of the *Kaddish*, and *Zadok HaDin* for himself and the entire congregation. After these moving prayers, the machine gun fire killed all of the gathered Jews.

Kotliarsky himself is not originally from Volkovysk. He came there, as previously described, in the middle of the *Summer of 1942.* Because of this, he was not familiar with the events in Volkovysk from the outset of the War. Also, as a stranger to the city, and under the prevailing circumstances, he didn't have the proper opportunity to make the acquaintance of the local Jewish people.

The second witness, who communicated terrifying details about the destruction of Volkovysk, was *Zvi*

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256 Thoroughly documented and confirmed several times over in the *Dereczin Memorial Book.*

257 Referring to the Zelvianka River.

Roitman.

Although *Zvi Roitman* was also not a native of Volkovysk, went through the destruction of Volkovysk from the beginning to the end. At the outbreak of the war in 1939, he fled Warsaw to Bialystok, and from there, at the end of 1939, he arrived in Volkovysk.

He is an electrician by trade. Thanks to his craft, the Germans considered him to be essential, and they always gave him jobs to do, which without a doubt saved him from otherwise certain death. On arriving in Volkovysk, he lived with *Leibl Draznin* the gardener, at Number 12 *Tatarski Gasse*. The parents of Draznin's wife, *Reb Naphtali & Sarah-Baylah* lived in the same house. They all came from the *shtetl* of *Amstibova*. Roitman, who was a quiet sort of man, and didn't involve himself in the affairs of the city, naturally was removed from the pulsating Jewish life in Volkovysk, because he was not native born to Volkovysk. But he nevertheless apprehended well the principal aspects of all events which he suffered through along with the natives of Volkovysk, from beginning to end. His eye witness account is therefore of great significance.

A third witness, whom I personally interviewed during my trip to the Land of Israel, is *Shayna Lifschitz*. She also went through all that happened from beginning to end, and because she was native to Volkovysk, she was well acquainted with the city and its residents. For this reason, her eye-witness account and written testimony are very important. Shayna Lifschitz is a grandchild of *Shmuel Chaim Bayl'keh's*, who dealt in yeast. They lived diagonally opposite the Einhorn pharmacy.

These three previously mentioned witnesses, *Joseph Kotliarsky, Zvi Roitman* and *Shayna Lifschitz,* personally conveyed their writings to me.

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There are a large number of people from Volkovysk today in Lodz and other cities of Poland. But the majority of them did not go through the process of the destruction of the city. At the beginning of the war, they fled into Russia, from where, shortly after the end of the war, they returned. But because of this, they have nothing to contribute to the record.

Our Witness Ida Mazover

Among the very, very few who lived through the *entire tragedy of Volkovysk*, as well as the Hell of *Maidanek* and live today in Poland, is *Ida Mazover-Rak*. I corresponded with her, and obtained very important details from her about the destruction. Today, she lives in Poland. Ida Mazover is the daughter of *Herschel Mazover* of the paper business on the *Kosciuszko (Tzerkovna) Gasse*[258], near Abraham Galiatsky the Barber. She, and her friend, *Olleh*[259] *Glickfeld* were the only Jewish souls that remained in Volkovysk after the last transport departed on *January 26, 1943.* After *January 14, 1943*, together with her friend, she fled from the bunkers and hid out with a Christian woman, Maria Rodnitsky. They later got sick with typhus, and their protectress, the Christian woman, drove them out while they were still sick. Her heroism and terrifying experiences are documented later on.

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258 The Church Street

259 Nickname for *Eydl* (German-Christian), meaning fine, or delicate.

In the course of time, I had the opportunity to get in contact with a cohort of Volkovysk survivors that are today found in Italy. Among them are: *Yitzhak Tchopper, Dr. Yitzhak Resnick, Chaim Zapoliansky, Dr. Y. Epstein,* and *Chaim Volsky*. I received many letters from them.

However, from Tchopper, I received a very detailed accounting, to which I am certain that the other Volkovysk survivors in Italy contributed.

Our Witness Yitzhak Tchopper

Page 643: *Three Surviving Witnesses from Volkovysk*
(Right to Left): Yitzhak Tchopper, Shmuel Zapoliansky and Yoss'l Kossowsky
(Photographed in Italy in 1946)

Yitzhak Tchopper is a son of Leib Tchopper, who lived in Zamoscheh. From his youngest years on, when he was still attending *Heder*, he was already beloved by everyone, having not only friends from Zamoscheh, but from all over Volkovysk. By the time his parents bough the ironmonger's store from Bereshkovsky, and put down roots in the center of the city, Yitzhak Tchopper was already at home in town. From then on, he expanded his circle of friends and acquaintances even more. He personally did not do significant public service, but as a merchant, he donated generously to all the local funds. He knew almost all the Jewish residents of the city, in all walks of life, rich and poor alike. He related to them, and was deeply enmeshed in their lives.

Yitzhak Tchopper was one of the very few survivors from among the Volkovysk Jews who went through all that happened from beginning to end. Therefore, his record about everything that happened to the Volkovysk Jews – *an accounting from street to street and house to house* – is of great historical significance. His accounting is authentic and very detailed, because he recollects everyone from the city there.

At this opportunity, I wish to express my gratitude to Yitzhak Tchopper for his cooperation and for compiling his testimony, to which he dedicated many days and nights. At this opportunity, I also wish to thank his comrades: *Chaim Zapoliansky* and *Moshe Volsky* who cooperated with him.

Our Witness Dr. Yitzhak Resnick

Page 644: *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*

The testimony of *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*, who lives in Rome today, is also important, and with whom I corresponded upon my return from the Land of Israel.

Dr. Yitzhak Resnick is the son of *Pes'shka* (a daughter of Velvel Lifschitz), who lived on the *Mitzrayim Gessel*, and a cousin of *Yankel Lifschitz* from the Wide Boulevard. He was born in Volkovysk and is descended from a number of Volkovysk families. He personally was one of the dreamers and builders of the city. He received his education in the Volkovysk schools, attended the Hebrew Gymnasium, and later studied medicine in Italy. Despite this, he would return and work summers in the Volkovysk hospital, and maintain friendly relations with his old school friends.

Dr. Resnick was in Volkovysk during the time of the Russian occupation, the bombings, and during the

German occupation. At that time, he worked as a doctor in *Krzemienica.* He arrived in Volkovysk on *November 2, 1942*, when the Jews from the surrounding villages were brought to Zelva, and from there, to Volkovysk. Also, at that time, he was very active in the hospital in the bunkers, and did a great deal during the typhus epidemic.

He escaped from the bunkers on *January 26 [1943]* together with *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky*, and hid out with his Christian friends in Krzemienica, who sheltered them for the entire time until the Bolsheviks arrived. He traveled back to Volkovysk after the Russian entered the city, and once again assumed his position at the government hospital. A short time afterwards, he left Volkovysk and went to Italy, where he is today.

Therefore, Dr. Resnick can only provide a partial account of what took place in Volkovysk. By contrast, however, he was one of the very few who *returned to Volkovysk* immediately after the Russians re-occupied it. His testimony is therefore of special interest as a portrait of the destroyed city immediately after its liberation by the Russian armies.

In between, a number of Volkovysk natives traveled to America, from whom I had the opportunity to receive specific eye-witness testimony personally. Among these was Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg.

Our Witness Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg

Page 645: *Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg*

Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg himself was born in Ruzhany. His parents settled in Volkovysk in the year 1918, where they opened a manufacturing concern in Bartnovsky's house, and in time, integrated themselves very well into the city. His father, *Yaakov Goldberg* and his mother, *Chana*, were also active in Volkovysk community life. The younger Goldberg received his primary education in the Volkovysk *Tarbut* School, and attended the Polish Middle School. He was very well integrated with his schoolmates, and nurtured these friendships even in later years, when he would come home for summer vacation to Volkovysk. After completing the Polish Gymnasium, he studied medicine in Vilna, but because of the *numerus clausus*[260] there, he was forced to continue his studies in Prague. He later completed his medical training in Italy. In the final years before the war, he worked in the city hospital of Volkovysk. He also had his own private practice. He remained in Volkovysk during the time of the Soviet occupation, and survived the bombardment and annihilation of the city, where his mother was killed by the bombs. A few short days after the Germans entered the city, Dr. Goldberg left the city with his remaining family. He came to Ruzhany, from where he was later sent to *Lisokovo*, where he worked as the town doctor. When the Jews of Lisokovo were driven out of their homes on *November 2, 1942*, and brought to Volkovysk, Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg and his family were also taken with them to the Volkovysk bunkers, where he worked in the hospital. Along with the other Volkovysk doctors, he lived through the hell of the bunkers, as he also later did in the camp at Auschwitz. Therefore, Dr. Golberg can only provide a part of the Volkovysk story during the time of the destruction, because he was absent from the city for the entire time of the German occupation.

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260 An infamous quota system to limit the number of Jewish students given permission to study medicine.

Our Witness Dr. Marek Kaplan and His Sister, Nunya[261]

Page 647: *Dr. Marek Kaplan*

Dr. Marek Kaplan is a second Volkovysk eye witness who came to America. He is a son of Shmuel Kaplan and a grandson of Zundel Kaplan of the New Street. He was born in Volkovysk and received his education there. He graduated from the Volkovysk Gymnasium and later studied medicine in Vilna. He is a very intelligent and talented young man.

However, Dr. Kaplan also is only a partial witness to what took place in Volkovysk. because he worked as a doctor in *Porozovo.* He arrived in Volkovysk on *November 2, 1942,* along with the Jews of Porozovo, went over to the Volkovysk camp and was active during the time of the typhus epidemic in the Volkovysk bunkers. He survived the hell of Auschwitz, and is one of the few Volkovysk natives to have remained alive.

Dr. Kaplan lives in New York today. I had the opportunity in my frequent meetings with him, to obtain many facts about the destruction of Volkovysk. He and his sister Nunya remained alive.

Dr. Kaplan came to America along with his sister *Nunya Kaplan*. She was a part of only part of the events in Volkovysk, because she lived with her family in Porozovo. She is one of the few women to have survived the Auschwitz camp. In my meeting with her, she communicated unique important facts.

Other Witnesses: Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, Katriel Lashowitz, & Eliyahu Kovensky

Among the other witnesses, whom I do not know personally, but whose writings about the events in Volkovysk I read in *The Destruction of Volkovysk* which was published by the Volkovysk Olim in the Land of Israel[262], are *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, Katriel Lashowitz* and his wife, *Kalman Kushnir*, the cook's son, and *Eliyahu Kovensky*, a famous partisan, who lost a hand fighting in the vicinity of Lida, Zhetl and Vilna. Eliyahu Kovensky received the Order of Lenin for his great heroism, a medal which entitles him to be called, Hero of the Soviet Union.

Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, as is known, is not native to Volkovysk, and he did not experience the entire destruction. He came to Volkovysk in the summer of 1942, and remained there for merely six weeks, and was delegated by the Volkovysk *Judenrat* to serve as the doctor in Mosty'. He was later brought back to Volkovysk along with the Jews of Mosty' on November 2, 1942. He worked in the hospital of the Volkovysk bunkers up till January 26, 1943, when he escaped along with Dr. Resnick to Krzemienica. Even though Dr. Kaplinsky was in Volkovysk for only a short time, managed to integrate himself very well with the native Volkovysk residents, and apprehended the situation very well. His writings about the destruction of Volkovysk provide a fundamental and correct analysis of the conditions and the events that the Jews of Volkovysk endured in the most sorrowful months of their lives.

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261 Nickname for either Hannah or Penina

262 The English Translation of this work forms part of this Trilogy.

Our Witness Moshe'l Shereshevsky

Page 649: Moshe'l Shereshevsky

One of the last of the witnesses is Moshe'l Shereshevsky, who is found today in New York.

Moshe'l Shereshevsky from the bicycles on the Wide Boulevard, came to Volkovysk at the age of five years. He is a grandson of Israel Leib Biskupitsky. He received his education in the Volkovysk schools. He was very active in the "*Maccabi*" sports club from his early youth on, and also in *HaShomer HaTza'ir*.

Moshe'l Shereshevsky was in Volkovysk for the entire time during the last war, before the Russian occupation, and during the time of the Russian occupation. He lived through the extermination of the local Jewish community, endured the bunkers from where he escaped, with a few other Volkovysk residents, to Bialystok, in the beginning of December 1942 before the first Volkovysk transport [to the death camps].He was in the Bialystok ghetto, and was sent from there to Maidanek and to other camps, until he came to Auschwitz. From there, he also had the opportunity to escape into the forest, along with Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg, a short time prior to the forthcoming liquidation of the entire Auschwitz camp, when the Russians were already close, and he was saved in this way. He was also among the first to return to Volkovysk, immediately after the war, and saw the complete destruction of the city that the Germans left behind, with his own eyes.

In the Year 1939

Page 651: The New Market on the swamp near the river

Page 652: The Slaughterhouse and Meat-Packing Plant

Page 655: The Forests Where the Summer Cottages Were Located

In the year 1939, after Hitler had annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia, and was preparing to take Danzig, a movement arose in Poland to take away part of Czech territory in the vicinity of Zaaultsa, which Czechoslovakia had obtained at the end of the First World War. A partial mobilization was decreed, into which a large number of young people from Volkovysk were drawn. Among them was the son of Aharon Hirsch Botvinsky of the cinema, *Yaakov Botvinsky*, who was killed in Czechoslovakia.

In that year, Poland stepped up its pace of re-armament, feeling that she would not be able to avert the approaching storm. A large government budget was needed for this, and for this reason, the regime proclaimed a loan. Quotas were set for every town and district. Volkovysk also received a quota for each resident separately – a merchant, the *balebatim*, a laborer, not taking the circumstances of the individual into account.

"Bonds" were distributed, and people were literally forced to buy them on a monthly instalment plan. Those

who resisted buying them were severely punished, and in many instances sent to Kartuz Bereza[263], a concentration camp. A short time after the first loan, a second loan was proclaimed for air defense. And once again, quotas were imposed on the populace, and the local government of each city forced the Jewish residents, through the Jewish community, to buy the bonds.

In that same year, anti-Semitism intensified considerably throughout all of Poland, both on the economic front and the political front. This was also felt strongly in Volkovysk. The Christians would come through the Jewish business quarters, and not permit non-Jews to buy goods from Jewish stores. The tobacco concessions were taken away from Jewish storekeepers. Also, many Christian stores were opened, of all types. It was also possible to begin feeling the influence of a German "fifth column."

In addition to the bonds, high taxes were imposed on all residents and except for a small number of rich families, they could not be met without difficulty. Notwithstanding all of these difficulties, everyone carried on an independent existence, not requiring support from America or other foreign countries, and there was no want in the city. It was even possible, in the usual Volkovysk fashion, possible to generously support all the local institutions. And despite the fact that the air seemed to be laden with gunpowder, there was not a belief that the war would break out so swiftly.

It is worth mentioning here, that the city itself was significantly beautified in the few years before the war. The market, which always stood in the middle of the stores, and also on all the surrounding streets, such as the Wide Boulevard, Grodno and others, was totally moved over to the swamps, on the other side of the river near Chafetz's. The streets were completely re-bricked anew, the twists and turns were straightened out, and rows of trees were planted on both sides of the streets. The entirety of the New Street was re-built. Old houses were torn down, and many new houses were built. Karczyzna, which for years had been nothing more than an empty field, was built up with modern houses. All the empty lots on the Millner Gasse, on the Wide Boulevard and other streets were built up with two and three-story buildings. Opposite the Jewish hospital, a very practical building was erected for the municipal government and the police. A large meat processing plant was constructed, which employed between five and six hundred workers, and was considered one of the largest meat packing operations in all of Poland. Several lumber manufacturing plants were put up in the neighborhood of Bloch's tannery. The entire area from Zamoscheh to the new train station was built up. Many summer homes were put up in the outskirts. Many such dwellings, belonged to Christians up to several years before the war started. Jews bought them up, and transformed them into practical summer homes. Even the older houses on the Wide Boulevard, *Mitzrayim* and *Lazaretner Gasse* were equipped with all the newest appointments. The police oversight of the city regarding sanitation became extremely strict in the years before the war, and because of this all the streets and yards became spotless, and the entire appearance of the city became significantly better.

During these years, a Polish government public school was also established in Volkovysk in Karczyzna, and the old ladies Gymnasium on the hill, near the *Lazaretner Gessel* was transformed into a government Gymnasium for boys and girls.

In the meantime, life during the summer of 1939 in Volkovysk proceeded normally. The weekly newspaper, *Volkovysker Leben,* edited by *Motya Leib Kaplan* and *Reuven Rutchik,* would appear on schedule. The announcements and obituaries, as usual, would take up the front and back pages of this small newspaper, and were the principal source of income for the periodical. Rutchik's poems that mirrored the life in Volkovysk

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263 Called *Bjaroza-Kartuzskaja* on modern maps of Belarus, about 20 km east of *Pruzhany.*

appeared in his column, "Local Issues." "Folk Wisdom," the section of humor and satire, would also appear each week.

The community activists carried on with their work for the public welfare, as usual. The community servants of that day were: *Moshe Rubinovich*, of the general store, who was the head of the community and very active in the Zionist movement and in Hebrew education; the young *L. Schlossberg* of the brick factory, together with *Markus* from the Millner Gasse, were the leaders of the *Bund*. *Sioma Gallin* was active in the hospital, and *Melekh Khantov* – in the fire-fighters organization.

The Jewish residents of Volkovysk were preparing to move out to their summer cottages in the forest at the end of the spring of 1939. The various pensions announced their opening for the new summer season. *Slava*[264] *Rozhansky's* pension announced the opening of its well-appointed villa of Topelnitsky, indicating in that connection that near the pension, a special pavilion would be opened especially for children, under the oversight of the well-known governess, *Hadassah Yunovich. Mrs. Graetz* also announced the opening of her pension, *'Zdarovyeh,'* [265] that also had a special division for children, under the supervision of *Miss Krosnovsky*.

The *Tarbut* Hebrew Gymnasium, and the *Gymnasium Ivrit* announced the schedule for their entrance examinations in the *Volkovysker Leben*, for the year 1939-1940. And, as is well known, each Gymnasium had its followers and supporters. At the head of the group was *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg,* and of the other group, *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky*. Both represented two different camps not only in education, but also in their general community endeavors, where their competitiveness was very evident.

The annual conference of the *Organization for Charity* was held as usual. The following people were selected as representatives: B. *Shalakhovich, Y. Merkin* and *Kaplinsky.* The lawyer, *Turiansky* gave a comprehensive report at this first meeting, of all of the activities of the prior year. According to his report, the organization had extended credit to about a thousand separate individuals during the year. The conference approved a budget for the year 1939-1940, and a program of continuing activity.

The *Zionists* also held a number of various meetings, and worked hard to get prepared for the coming Zionist World Congress, which had been set for August 1939 in Switzerland.

The *TOZ*-Organization had opened its summer colony for the underprivileged children of Volkovysk in the forests, and was occupied with putting together a work program for the coming year. It also announced a new registration for nurses in the [nursing] school under its supervision.

In the middle of July 1939, the *TOZ* children's colony was visited by *Dr. Esther Rakhmilevich*, who represented the central *TOZ* organization. Dr. Rakhmilevich was native born in Volkovysk. She practiced as a pediatrician in Danzig for many years, but because of the widespread Nazi influence in that city, she was compelled to return to her home location. She was appointed as an inspector of the children's colonies by the *TOZ* organization. During her visit, she was constantly accompanied by the president, *Sioma Gallin*. She reviewed the menu, the play program, measured the weight of each child, and gave the requisite direction regarding ongoing management. Her inspection of the colony was not straightforward, because being from

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264 Russian name meaning 'Glory.'

265 Russian for 'health.'

Volkovysk herself, she related to the children with special love and commitment. In taking leave of the colony, Dr. Rakhmilevich expressed her satisfaction and thanked the leadership and the personnel for their commitment and substantive effort on behalf of the welfare of the needy child.

The *Keren HaYesod* held a community meeting. The room was packed with people. That entire summer, meetings were being held for the benefit of the *Keren HaYesod* program. The leader of the Keren HaYesod at that time was *Zvi Inker*. The following members participated in the initiative: *Moshe Rubinovich, Anshel Bliakher, Dr. Shlomo Mandelbaum, Dov Salistovsky, Joseph Vinogradsky,* and *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg.*

The *Gordonia* sports organization of the young revisionists also carried out its activities. The following were in its executive committee: *Mrs. Rachel Levin, Dr. M. Niemchik, Mezheritzky, Prof. Birnbaum, Avra'sheh Offenberg, K. Pines, Tzirulnitsky, Daniel* and *Sukenik*. The club instructor was *Shifran*. The *Brit-HaKhayil Society* was led by *Engineer Shipiatsky* and *Applicant Mezheritzky*.

For the new town council, six Jews were selected, three from the general Jewish bloc, and three from the *Bund*: The general Jewish bloc – *M. Khantov, Dr. David Tropp*, and *Sh. Gallin*. From the *Bund* – Y. *Merkin, Sh. Ravitzky,* and *L. Schlossberg.*

In June 1939, Volkovysk celebrated *Mother's Day* in a very nice manner. The celebration was held in the large auditorium of the *Tarbut* Hebrew Gymnasium. The gathering was welcomed by *Hadassah Yunovich*, as the chairperson, and *Bertha Rothwald*. The children came up and gave Hebrew addresses. Among those who took part were: Shvetz, Rabinowitz, Meshengisser, Bitensky, and Adelsky.

The sports activity of *Maccabi* also was felt in the city. A trip was organized to Svislucz and other towns. The leader of the sports activity was *Turiansky.*

Volkovysk also carried out a huge protest demonstration against the British "White Paper," in connection with the Land of Israel. The entire Jewish population of Volkovysk took part in this demonstration.

The following Jewish students were among the graduates of the government Gymnasium in June 1939: *Rivka Kaplan, Naomi Kaplan, Leah Levin, Nechama Rubinstein, Leizer Bialostotsky, Johan Bebchuk, Boruch Schwartzbukh, Eliyahu Renzler*; among the graduates of the trade school were: *Renya*[266] *Goldrei, Mira Scharf, Liba Falkovich, Sonya Epstein, Abraham Lapaz, Polya Kimmelman, Chana Berman, Rachel Movshovsky,* and *Chaya Nishvitsky.*

On the Threshold of the Second World War

On August 24, 1939, a week before the attack on Poland by the murderous Germans, mobilization began rapidly. Among the Jewish doctors, Dr. M. Niemchik was then mobilized, and was immediately appointed as the head doctor for the Polya Division in Lida.. The real pressure of war was being felt in the city at that point. A going-away party was arranged in honor of Dr. Niemchik at the house of *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky*. Participants in that evening also included: *Mulya Pshenitsky, Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Sioma Gallin, Meir Seletsky, Sh. Kaplan, Dr. David Tropp*, and others.

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266 From the Old French for 'Queen.'

The atmosphere was already depressed. Everyone's eyes were filled with anxiety and fear. The Jews were primarily concerned with taking a complete accounting of what likely awaited them in the event that war should break out. For whom and for what reason would they fight, and lay down their lives. What to expect from the Germans was already well understood from their behavior, since the accession of Hitler to power; also, the Jews anticipated nothing good from the Poles as well, because long before the outbreak of the war, the Poles were following the German line towards the Jews, sending innocent Jews to jail and concentration camps and robbing them of their valuables.

At the outbreak of the war, the anti-Semitic group in Volkovysk, at whose head stood the pharmacist Timinsky, became more active than before. The Polish population, believing that the Germans would be quickly defeated, became even more emboldened. A special committee of anti-Semites was established, that prepared a list of Jewish names that they wanted to butcher at the first opportunity possible. No one, therefore, felt that their life was safe, and the mood among the Jews was very depressed.

The Outbreak of the German-Polish War

A week later, on *September 1, 1939*, the war broke out. The Poles still went around with their heads in the clouds and a foolish pride, making the case that it won't be long before the Nazis will be defeated. In this connection, they utilized the opportunity of the unstable situation to carry out patriotic demonstrations and anti-Semitic attacks.

A couple of days after the outbreak of the war, a few solitary German aircraft appeared over Volkovysk, dropping a couple of bombs aimed at hitting the train bridge near the *Poritzisher Gasse*, in order to cripple that line of communication. The elderly *Mrs. Schlossberg*, who had run to seek shelter under the bridge was killed on the spot. She was the first victim of war in Volkovysk.

Two days later, the Germans had penetrated deeply into Poland, and a great tumult arose in the city. Many refugees, Jews and Christians alike, streamed into Volkovysk from those areas where the Nazis had already placed under occupation, hoping thereby to find greater security. The Jews of Volkovysk took them in with generous hearts, gave them food, and arranged lodging for them all around – in private homes and in the houses of worship.

Dr. M. Niemchik, who was by that time already in the service of the Polya Division, provides a description of the appearance of Volkovysk after the first of the bombardments. On September 13, he received an order to stand ready to leave Poland and go out of the country. Before this, he was given permission to visit Volkovysk for a few hours. On his way to Volkovysk he saw a picture of disintegration: burned houses and wrecked streets, and refugees from many villages. The roads were overflowing with Polish military personnel, who were singly running away, under the ceaseless bombardment of German aircraft, and without any order. Dr. Niemchik came into Volkovysk on Friday night. Sabbath candles had already been lit in the Jewish homes. He did not find his wife at home, because she was already at that point in the municipal health division, together with Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky, where they were working as nurses. He found his young daughter together with her friend Dora Pshenitsky (Rosa's daughter), frightened and with pale faces. They bemoaned the ceaseless aerial bombardment and reverberations of the cannon fire, that continued day and night. The image of these innocent victims of "German Justice" made a terrifying impression on him.

The news of his arrival spread immediately, and people began to arrive to get news. In the meantime, his wife also arrived. Dr. Niemchik arrived, in a large military auto, and wanted to convince his wife and children to

leave the city with him, but they argued that the war would only continue for a few more months, and why then break up the family, house and possessions? Dr. Niemchik, not being particularly certain what would happen to him in the war, lacked the conviction and the will to persuade them otherwise. Nobody could foresee the outlines of the forthcoming disaster. Before his departure, a tense meeting of the city leadership and Zionists took place in his home, in which they dealt with the issues of providing food and heat, in the event that circumstances were to deteriorate. As an officer in the army, Dr. Niemchik was selected to work out with the military commander of the city, specific permissions and easements with regard to procuring foodstuffs, medical help, and other necessities for the Jewish population.

In the second week of the war, rumors spread through Volkovysk that the Germans were getting close to Warsaw, and also Bialystok, moving in the direction of Volkovysk and Berestovitz. The Jewish populace became extremely upset, and the agitation became intense because of the rapid advance of the Germans. Rail service had come to a complete halt with the outbreak of the war, and Volkovysk was as if it were cut off from the surrounding towns, such as Slonim and Bialystok, and other towns in the vicinity.

On *September 16* it was heard that the Russians and begun to march from the direction of Baranovich and Slonim, approaching the east side of Volkovysk. Many Poles began to flee the city, taking along their valuables. On September 17, the Russians had already attacked the eastern border of Poland vigorously. The Polish army, together with the local police, were forced to pull back from Volkovysk, leaving the city defenseless. The anti-Semites took advantage of this opportunity and fell upon the Jews. In these attacks, under the tall postman Sotchevkoi, they murdered the elderly *Alexander Makov* in cold blood on the Grodno Gasse. His cries could be heard from a distance, but none of the neighbors could come to his rescue because they had no arms. Then, they also shot the young *Joseph Galiatsky*, and *Itcheh the Dancer*[267], of the *Ostroger Gasse*, and a shoemaker from the Grodno Gasse and other victims. Two Jewish soldiers who were stationed in the city, were found murdered in the streets.

The few Jews who could put up any sort of resistance, were the fire fighters, with Khantov at their head. The last of the Polish army to pull back were the cavalry, and at the last moment, they raided the Jewish quarter. Being heavily armed, they, together with the Volkovysk anti-Semites under the leadership of Timinsky the pharmacist, and the postman, robbed Jewish houses the entire night. Who knows how far the aroused Poles would have gone with their wickedness, were it not for the fortunate circumstance that the Russians drew close to Volkovysk, and it was in this fashion that an auspicious end was brought to the anti-Semitic predations in the city. Early the next morning, there was not a trace of them in the city. The Red Army tanks began to stream into the city. The Jews, in general, breathed a little more freely. Many even received the Russians with great happiness, such as *Menaker*, the old shoemaker, who jumped up on a Red Army tank, and singing like a victor, rode through the streets of the city. That very day, the same seventy year-old man, with a rifle on his back, came to the well-known Jew-hater, the organizer of the pogroms against the Jews – Timinsky – detained him, and turned him over to the hands of the Russians, who later shot him. The Polish postman, the anti-Semite, who fled the city with the arrival of the Russians, also had a gruesome end. Chasia Kaplan, Shmuel Kaplan's wife, once on a visit, walking in the streets of Lida, immediately recognized the postman, who had murdered the elderly Makov. She called the police, and he was immediately arrested. He was later sentenced to ten years in prison.

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267 It doesn't seem likely that this was an occupation. Rather, this man may have been noted for his dancing ability, and may have performed at various festivities.

Volkovysk Under the Russians

At the beginning of the Russian regime in Volkovysk, the Russian-German borders resulting from the partition of Poland were only lightly patrolled, and movement from one occupied part of the territory to another was still unencumbered. And indeed, at that time, tens of thousands of Jews crossed the border from the German zone to the Russian side. Volkovysk became a transit point for passage from Poland to the Russian side. It was in this manner that over thirty thousand refugees came through Volkovysk on their way into Russian territory. The residents of the city, paying no heed to their own poor economic circumstances, rendered whatever assistance they possibly could to these refugees. They opened every *Bet HaMedrash* and synagogue, and every community building for this stream of refugees, and provided them with food and shelter. Every one of the residents of Volkovysk literally divided up their last bite of food for this purpose. These refugees did not remain in the city, but every day new refugees would come to the city. The city hospital took in those among them who were ill, and the overcrowding became very severe in the city. The temporary accommodation for the sick at the hospital overflowed with the sick. All of the city institutions were fully occupied with rendering assistance to these transient refugees. Volkovysk became divided by region. All residences were registered, and where possible, refugees were accommodated there, because there was no more place in the community institutions.

The Jewish population slowly acclimatized itself to the Soviet regime, and to its economic structure, and life normalized itself rather quickly in the city.

Several weeks after the Red Army entered Volkovysk, an order was issued requiring those who chose not to become Soviet citizens, to register for travel back to their former domicile. Many residents of Volkovysk registered themselves at that time. A short time afterwards, a second decree was issued, indicating that those who had registered to decline Soviet citizenship will be sent to Siberia, because the Soviet regime views them as "aliens," and not loyal to the Soviet government. Among those registered at that time were *Yoss'l Ein, Bogomilsky, Meir Slutsky*, and others. As it happens, this decree proved to be a boon to thousands of Jews from Poland and Lithuania – it ultimately saved them from certain death.

At the outset, the Russians did not interfere with commerce. Business went on in its usual fashion. Stores remained open, it was only not possible to replenish merchandise with new purchases, but it was permissible do business based on prior existing inventories. In this fashion, the government took over the larger stores a little at a time, under the theme of nationalization. Merchandise was transferred to a central location. Private commerce, under this gradual pressure eventually disappeared almost entirely, and the cooperative form of enterprise took its place.

However, it was not only in the are of commerce that the Soviet influence was felt. Cooperatives were established for almost every walk of life. The doctors were organized into one cooperative. Pharmacies were closed, their medicaments were gathered together in a central government location, where the various pharmacists rotated the work between themselves. A cooperative was formed of all the dentists, a huge dental clinic was established, where the dentists worked for a salary from the government. Residents of the city received free treatment there. It was in this fashion that nearly all professions were nationalized, and Jews got jobs from the government in this way. No anti-Semitism was practiced.

Also, craftsmen were organized in the same way by their trades – such as a tailors' cooperative, one for shoemakers, carpenters, and all other crafts.

Jewish community life also underwent Sovietization. The movie houses played only Russian movies, and courses were introduced [taught] in the Russian language. The Hebrew Gymnasium and the *Tarbut* school

were turned over to the hands of the government. Instead of Polish, Russian became the language of instruction, and the entire system of education became Russified. The *Talmud Torahs* and Yeshivas were entirely closed down.

It was in this fashion that the lives of the Jewish populace in Volkovysk quieted down, and the people slowly accustomed themselves to the new set of relationships. Because there no longer was any anti-Semitism in the city, the Jews breathed more freely, and didn't pay attention to their standard of living, to which one slowly, if willingly or not, it was necessary to adapt. The Jews felt more secure about their lives. One did not fear to show oneself in the streets as a Jew, and the fear of Polish anti-Semitism no longer swept over the Jews.

Outbreak of the German-Soviet War

The German Invasion

As many of the witnesses relate, the Jewish population of Volkovysk was severely disturbed by the sudden appearance over the city skies of German aircraft, in the middle of June 1941.

Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg tells, that on Thursday and Friday of *June 19 and 20, 1941*, he noted that aircraft reconnoitered the entire area around the city, and flying quickly, vanished. This was an alarm to the entire population, but very quickly, an argument ensued over what the meaning of this new incident was all about. The reason was that as recently as the prior week, many Russian troops and tanks had passed through the *Ostroger (Kosciuszko)Gasse* in the direction of the German border. It appeared that at that time, the Russians were already preparing themselves for war with the Germans, but in no way did they anticipate that it would come with such lightning speed. Meanwhile, in their haste, the Russians feverishly built a new airstrip.

On *Saturday, June 21, 1941* all was calm, and life proceeded normally. On that Sabbath day, Dr. Goldberg was occupied with his patients in his office on the Wide Boulevard, and worked hard the entire day. No special occurrences took place on that day. The Jewish populace, which at that time had become acclimated to the Russian regime, was concerned about the Jews who struggled and suffered on the other side of the border under the Germans, and about other relatives and friends, whom the Russians had exiled to Siberia. Mostly, it was the influx of refugees that were sent to Siberia, but there were many Volkovysk natives among them, such as *Dr. Matskevich, Shmuel Kaplan, Dr. P. Bebchuk, Yoss'l Ein*, and many others.

The last night before the outbreak of the undeclared war between Russia and Germany happened to fall, indeed, on the end of the Sabbath of the 21st of June. As was the usual custom, many people were attending various gatherings and other activities. The movie theater operated by *Sioma Botvinsky* was packed with denizens of Volkovysk who were enjoying the latest Russian films. *Roitman*, one of our witnesses, was also at the theater that night with some of his friends. Another witness, *Shayna Lifschitz*, spent the evening with her friends at her home on the Wide Boulevard.

At *5AM on Sunday Morning*, Dr. Goldberg tells that he suddenly awoke, because he heard the sound of running down from the second floor of Botvinsky's building where he lived. The principal headquarters of the Russian General were located there, and when Dr. Golberg alighted from bed and went over to look out the window, he saw how Russian officers were running up and running down. Dr. Goldberg turned on his radio, and only then did the situation become clear to him, namely, that the Germans had attacked the

Russian Army. The city of Volkovysk still slept quietly at that point. Dr. Goldberg was among the first people in Volkovysk to obtain the news regarding the new war.

At 7AM on *Sunday, June 22*, strong explosions were heard from the direction of the *shtetl* of *Rosh*. The residents ran out of their houses. The streets became dark with people, who stood about frightened, not knowing what had happened.

In a short while, a convoy of automobiles came from the direction of *Rosh*, filled with Russian officers, who related that a sudden attack had been made by German aircraft, who destroyed the large aerodrome at *Rosh*, along with the airplanes that were there on the ground. The disoriented residents still did not believe what the Russian officers told them, that this air attack was the harbinger of a Russian-German war. Finally, at 11AM, the voice of the Russian Foreign Minister [Vyacheslav] Molotov came over the radio, communicating to the Russian people that on Sunday, Russia was attacked by the Nazi armies, and called upon the citizenry to defend the fatherland. For the first time, the residents of Volkovysk believed that a state of war existed between Russia and its enemy – Germany. The doctors and nurses were organized with lightning speed, along with technicians, fire-fighters, and others.

The Soviet military contingents, however, began to abandon Volkovysk and retreat in the general direction of Minsk. This further increased the sense of unrest among the residents of the city.

The Bombardment and Destruction of the Jewish Quarter of the City

Roitman tell, that early on the *morning of Monday, June 23*, he was quietly going to work, because the early morning looked to be peaceful. This, however, didn't last long. Suddenly, well-armed German aircraft appeared over the center of the city, over the Wide Boulevard, that began to drop bombs. The siren at the fire station began to wail, and people quickly began to hide themselves in the cellars of their homes, and those that didn't have cellars, ran to their neighbors.

One of the first bombs fell on the *Schulhof*, where the synagogues, the *Talmud Torah* and the *Batei-Medrashim* were found, a number of which had been taken over by Russian soldiers. Most of the synagogues were destroyed, but no fires broke out.

Another bomb fell on the *Bet HaMedrash* of *Tiferet Bakhurim*, on the New Street, and on the house of *Nakheh Yud'eh's* (he dealt in cheese and butter). His house was completely demolished. His *wife* and *daughter-in-law,* as well as *A. Montiak* of the *Kholodoisker Gasse*, lost their lives there.

Another bomb fell on *Rakhmilevich's* house on the *Millner Gasse*, which during the time of the Russians, had been transformed into an emergency ward. The building was completely destroyed.

At approximately 3PM, the bombardment was resumed, this time with incendiary bombs, which fell on may neighborhoods of the city. An incendiary bomb fell on Zamoscheh, at *Leibeh Vinnik* the shoemaker. Eleven people were incinerated by that bomb, among them the following: *Rokheh the Baker*, and *her daughter, Leah Segal; Berg* (A resident of *Rosh*, and a son-in-law of Dr. Velvelsky), and *his son*; *Kreineh Gurevich* from the *Brzezker Gasse* (Gottleib's daughter); *Golda Vinnik*, Leib Vinnik's daughter. *Leib Vinnik* himself later fell as a victim while walking on the same street. Also, *Joseph Beckenstein*, from the shoe business, fell that day as a victim, near Jesierski's factory.

On *Monday* evening, an incendiary bomb fell on the house of *Khemeh the Hatmaker's* house, near Shaliota's. The entire structure caught fire with lightning speed. At first, and attempt was made to put the fire out, but

additional bombs fell, and the fire spread swiftly with vigor. People gave up hope and fled to the fields. Whatever could be saved was taken, and they ran in the direction of Karczyzna and Zamoscheh.

Dr. Goldberg tells that he also, along with the members of his family, fled to Karczyzna. There, he met up with both of my sisters, *Rosa the Dentist*, and *Pes'shka*, along with their families. They had brought along everything that they were able to bring, among which was certain dental equipment. Also, *Berman* from the laboratory had fled there.

The fire burned all night in various neighborhoods of the city from Monday night until Tuesday morning. On *Tuesday morning, June 23,* the Schulhof was still burning, along with houses on the *Ostroger and Millner Gasse* and on the Wide Boulevard. Also, the gymnasium up on the hill was completely enveloped in flames. During the entire day of Tuesday, bombs continued to fall on the city, and people hid out in the cellars. However, the bombs reached them there as well. A bomb hit *Nakdimon's* house in Karczyzna killing: *Yaakov Goldberg* (Shosh'keh Kvachuk's husband), the bomb decapitated him; *Fanya Matskevich* of the drugstore; *Itcheh Falkovich* the Tailor; *Sholom Lifschitz* (Falkovich's son-in-law); *Berman* from the analysis [laboratory] with his *child*, and others.

On the same day, *Katriel Lashowitz* tells that he found himself in a large cellar in Feinstein's house along with many other Jews from Volkovysk. The people sat pressed up one against the other, and frightened. Suddenly, *Shykeh Levin* knocked on the cellar door calling out: "Jews, come out of there, or you will be burned up!..."
The people didn't even feel or hear that an incendiary bomb had been dropped directly on the house. Exiting [from the cellar], they saw how the entire house was enveloped in flames. A large number of the people fled, and went to hide themselves in the Jewish cemetery. It was only on the following morning that they found on another.

There were no longer any attempts to put out the fire, rather one simply fled for life. The fire spread even further. It divided the city into three parts, and the people who lived on the Wide Boulevard were forced to run through side streets to reach the fields, and there find some safety from the fire that had ignited the entire city. Meanwhile, other neighborhoods of the city started to burn, and many people became entrapped, and only after great effort fraught with much danger, was it possible for them to find an escape route to Karczyzna or the fields. But many people did not have come to rescue themselves, and remaining behind in the cellars, they were buried under falling bricks and stones.

It was in this fashion that many people were killed in the cellars of *Margolis*, and *Epstein* the Agent. Among them: *Mrs. Schein* (Zhameh Schein's mother); *Mrs. Blinderman* (from the artists), with her son, *Volpeh*; *Alteh Yunovich,* the lady butcher with her son, *Chaim*; *Levitt* and his *wife & children*; *Epstein's* son; *Miriam Press* the dentist (wife of Shimon Press) with her *two children*. Also other families who had hidden themselves there from the bombardment, were buried alive.

Tchopper related the following episode concerning the dentist, *Miriam Press*: Her husband, *Shimon Press*, had left for Minsk a short while before the outbreak of the German-Russian war. When he returned several days after the outbreak of the war, he no longer found his family alive. Only his father-in-law survived the bombardment. Then, along with his father-in-law, he dug out the corpses of his wife and two children from Margolis's buried cellar, and gave them a proper burial. He was himself later killed in the roundup of the Jewish doctors of Volkovysk.

About fifteen people were at that time also killed at the house of *Mordechai Moorstein*. Among them: *Abraham Aharon Manokh* (Zadok's son); *David Goshchinsky's wife & three children; Ziss'l Tchopper* (the

wife of Leib Tchopper and mother of our witness, Yitzhak Tchopper); *Itkeh Zoyman*, a widow; *Two children* of the *Shammes* from Piesk, who also lived in that house; and a few others.

Yitzhak Tchopper tells of the following episode concerning the Piesker *Shammes* and his mother: after the bombing of his father-in-law's house, he ran to see what had happened to his parents. On the way, he met his father, and not far from Moorstein's house, the Piesker *Shammes* approached them from the opposite direction, who with entreaties, begged for assistance to help extract his wife and two children from the rubble. When they came upon the destroyed house, they heard the cries of people buried: "Take off the door from over us." They immediately threw themselves into rescue with all their might, but the door was covered by the wood from the house that had fallen down. Tchopper then ran out to the second side of the house to see if anything could be done from there for the unfortunate victims. Suddenly, he saw another buried body, and from the dress he recognized his mother. She was lightly covered, and seemingly not badly injured, but she was no longer alive. In the midst of this, the entire house was engulfed in flames, and the people were forced to back away from the place. Bombardment of the neighborhood resumed yet again, and Tchopper and his wife and child fled to the Russian cemetery (Mogilkeh's). The entire city, at that point, was already in flames. It was not until later that Tchopper found out that the Shammes had been able to get his wife out, but both of his children were burned alive. He and his wife were later killed in Treblinka.

When the airplanes detected the people hiding in the fields, they flew lower and began to shot at them with machine guns, and a large number of people were killed in this manner: *Goshchinsky* the Ironmonger, and his *wife* were shot near the priest by the swamp, near the mill. *Yud'l Rubinstein* the Locksmith, was wounded and died shortly thereafter. *David Goshchinsky* the Turner fell as a victim of a bomb that blew up the hospital building. Among the other victims were: *Chaim Khvalitsky*, the Tailor's son; The *wife* and *child* of *Eliyahu Lifschitz*; the horse-hitcher *Tatkeh* – were killed by a bomb that fell on their house; *Ahareh Yos'keh Yudzhik* of the gardens; *Khasman's child*, (a grandchild of Shykevich's); *Hertz Mostkov* – was wounded coming from the Sejmikov Hospital and died shortly thereafter; also his *daughter* was wounded and died; *Yaakov Lytus's wife; Nakhum Shalovich* (a member of *Betar*); *A son-in-law of Berel Epstein* from the beer brewery, who was a teacher at the trade school, and an officer in the Polish Army; *The Yunovich Family* that had the general store, and others.

A bomb fell in *Berel Klatchkeh's* yard, and *two children* were killed there. The shrapnel from the explosion, which reached *Sakhar*'s house, the director of the Tarbut School, instantly killed *Sakhar's wife,* and severed one of his hands.

Meanwhile, Volkovysk continued to burn, and the fire from the falling bombs continued to spread relentlessly. The nights were lit up by the fires, the days were darkened by the thick clouds of smoke that rose from the burning Jewish homes and places of business. The Germans paid special attention to assuring that most of the damage would be inflicted on the Jewish center and the heart of the city. P:eople, exhausted from the sleepless nights, ran from one street to another with their small children in their arms, in order to distance themselves from the flames and the suffocating smoke. The square with the Jewish stores burned, the *Schulhof* burned, all the *Batei Medrashim* were consumed, beginning at Kaufman's. All the streets from the river onwards were aflame. The entire Wide Boulevard was in flames. Flames shot out of Botvinsky's house reaching the heavens. The fire reached all the way to the *Grodzhensker Gasse*, encompassing part of the *Tatarski and Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse,* leaping from one street to the next, and there was no place anywhere in the city where one could hide from the flames.

Entire streets were ringed with fire, like a burning torches. But the sadistic Germans did not satisfy themselves with this, and they kept flying through the skies, dropping new bombs on each house separately. People fled into the cellars of the burning houses in order to try and hide. People hid themselves in the potato

storage pits. But the hand of the enemy reached even into there. Bombs fell even on the wrecked structures and buried people alive.

And the bombardment continued for the entire week, with bombs falling day and night.

The bombing reached its peak intensity on *Friday, June 26.* Near *Shifmanovich's* house on the *Tatarski Gasse*, which was encircled in flames, a new incendiary bomb fell on the cellar of the burned out house, and over thirty people were trapped there, men, women and children. Among those victims were: *Leibeh & Tzipeh Schorr and their children*; the entire *Tuval Family,* a family consisting of ten souls – they were *Hassidim* and lived on the Wide Boulevard near the movie theater; The entire *Duner* Family, that dealt in foodstuffs in the market square stores; *Gittl Ein*, and others.

Roitman tells about the incident, because he was also hidden in a nearby cellar. When he emerged after the bombardment of his hiding place, he saw a deep crater in front of him, which had just been formed by the most recent bomb, and a cellar near the crater, where there were concealed people, had vanished entirely. He heard the wailing of people: "Jews, save us!" Taking no heed of the danger from aircraft flying overhead, Jews young and old alike ran from their places of concealment with iron rods and poles, with crowbars, and even bare hands, digging with their fingers, in order to rescue the trapped persons from under the wreckage. [Dismembered] hands, feet, corpses, mothers with children in their arms – were all mixed up together with the earth. And those who were entirely covered by the earth suffocated, and their cries were heard no more. The feeling of commitment, the feeling of love for one another, was in conflict with the instinct for survival. The danger was great, the pilots kept up their machine gun fire, but paying no attention to this, the Jews who remained alive did not give ground – old Jews with gray beards, and the wounded, all dug in the earth and pulled out one body after another.

One of our witnesses, *Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg,* also tells the following about that Friday: At about ten o'clock in the morning, he left his mother in Levitt's shack, at the *shtibl* of the *Hassidim* near the river, where his family was found since the time his house burned down, and went off to his father, who at that time had hidden himself in cellar of *Pelteh* the *Moditskeh*[268]. He brought his father some tea and returned immediately to his mother. Along the way, a bomb suddenly fell on *Levitt's shack*. He ran with his brothers in the direction of the shack, but sadly, *their mother* already was lying among the victims of that very bomb. A child of *Breineh Minkovich* (the daughter of the *zhemshnik*) was killed in the same bombardment. The child was killed by a shrapnel fragment in the arms of its mother. Only she remained alive. Goldberg's mother fell dead with a Siddur in her hand.

The death toll at that point reached one hundred fifty people. A large number of them were Jews who had taken up residence in Volkovysk at the time of the outbreak of the German-Polish War, and since then were living there.

Also, the bodies of Russian victims were found during those days in the fields around the Volkovysk vicinity. These were Russian officials, engineers, and other military staff, who during the first days of the German attack, seized all the wagons, horses, and automobiles in the city, and fled in the direction of Minsk and Baranovich. However, the Germans shot them along the way.

The full accounting of the *streets* and *houses* that were burned down is approximately as follows:

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[268] Called this for her fashion shop in which she designed, made and sold dresses.

The entire *Wide Boulevard* was burned down, beginning in Zamoscheh and from the Gymnasium on the hill: the houses of Abraham Bayer, Issachar Lev, Leibeh Khananovich, Feitelevich, Kaplinsky the Baker, the white church, the houses of Kanoval, Smazanovich the Photographer, Sukenik the Teacher, Pelteh the [lady] Butcher, Rutchik from Zhelenevich, Bubliatsky the Locksmith, Travinsky the Bookbinder, Bialosotsky the Baker, Schein of the corn, Zuckerman from the paper business, Solkovich the Tailor, Gandz the Ironmonger, Shereshevsky from the bicycle store, Lifschitz who sold herring, Patsovsky the Hairdresser[269], Zuckerman the Pharmacist, Kavushatsky, Shipiatsky the Garment Seamer, Motya Ginsberg the *Hassid*, etc.

In addition, all the *side streets* that went from the Wide Boulevard to the river were incinerated. Also the *streets from the electric generating plant*; and from the other side – *all the streets* leading to the *Grodno Gasse,* including in this the *Mitzrayim Gessel*. The *entire Schulhof* was burned down along with its *Batei Medrashim*, the Great Synagogue, the Wooden *Bet HaMedrash*, the *Ein Yaakov*, the *Mauer*, the Tailor's Synagogues, the old age home, the bathhouse and all the other houses up to the river.

The extension to the *Wide Boulevard* was also burned down: beginning with the houses of Alter Rossiansky of the hotel, Mordetsky the Artist, and going on through the houses of Lapin, Einhorn, Shiff, and Slutsky. Further, *all the other side streets* from the *Wide Boulevard to the river*: also the side street where Manya the Baker's house was located, and in this manner for the entire length of the Wide Boulevard, the houses of Pelteh the Moditskeh, which had once belonged to Tzipeh Katzin, Zelig Bartnovsky, Shykevich, Yanovsky, Finkelstein, the Tailor from *Rosh*, Press, Leib Weiss, Pin'iyeh Khomsky, Rakhmilevich – and continuing in this fashion up to the *Millner Gasse*.

The houses on the *side streets* leading to the *shtibl* of the Hassidim were also burned down, and also the *Fabritchneh Gasse*, which led to the cemetery, as well as the *side street* that led to Margolis's house.

Then the *center of the city* was burned down, where the marketplace stores were found along with the storage units; and from the other side of the stores – the houses of Shaliota, Novogrudsky, Klempner and the beginning of the *Neuer Gessel*, near Feinzilberg's house.

The *Grodno Gasse* burned down, from the *Neuer Gessel* to Volsky's pharmacy (Itcheh Botvinsky's house). The side where the houses of Kavushatsky, Rubinovich who sold herring, Rivka Einhorn's general store, Shustak and Yunovich (Tamara's) were located – was partly spared. Across the street, the other side went completely up in smoke, where the houses of Barash (formerly Tchopper), Yud'l the Locksmith, and Nachman Papa were found. Most of the houses at the foot of the hill were also burned down, among them the houses of Tchopkin (Palteh's), Leibeh Schein of the Hotel, and others.

Part of the *Tatarski Gasse* was burned, where the houses of Shifmanovich, the Linat-Tzedek, Shchupak from Hnezna, Davidovsky, Shifran the Shoemaker, Khatzkel Berel the Dancer, Yazhernitsky the Porter, Wiener the Butcher, Lev the Koshchilker, Milvansky the Horse-hitcher, Polonsky the Tailor, And so on, up to the Gymnasium.

Then, beginning from *the Market to the Firehouse*, including the houses of: Matskevich the Pharmacist, Koroshel (where the whiskey business of Rothford was located), Efrat the Lawyer, Mazover of the Wurst business, Galiatsky the Barber, Mazover from the Paper Business, Galai the Butcher, Kroll the Pharmacist (formerly Avromsky), the wooden church, and all of the large houses opposite to it – among them the houses of Poliachek, Marantz, Kobrinsky, and Galai of the Hotel.

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[269] To be understood as also including those who were barbers.

All of the houses on the *Ostroger Gasse* also burned down (which was at the end of the Kosciuszko Street), beginning with the firehouse, the large magistrate's building, up to the white jailhouse, going through the houses of Gubar, Moorstein the Tailor, Neiman, Manokh, Podolinsky the Carpenter, Amstibovsky, Jesierski the lumber merchant, Herschel Ravitz, Berestovitsky, etc. From the *Poritzisher Gasse* The entire corner from the *Ostroger Gasse* to the river burned down completely.

Then all the houses that were in front of the stored burned down, among them the houses of Stolovitsky the flour storekeeper, Boyarsky the hatmaker, and Yitzhak Bliakher. Also the street leading from the *Market to the Millner Gasse* burned down completely, where were found the houses of Epstein of the Beer Brewery, Galiatsky the Shoemaker, Benush the Carpenter, Stein the lady Butcher, Lev the Bialystoker Baker, Shakhnovich from the Wine Business, Epstein the Agent, and the houses that had at one time belonged to Matskevich and Aaron Lifschitz.

The *Millner Gasse* was burned down, starting from the houses of Milia Khirurg, and Berel Kaplan (Moteleh's), then the houses of Sholom Lev, Mintz, Schwartz, Solomiansky, Moshe & Ephraim Zilberman, Khmelnitsky (his former house), Dr. P. Bebchuk, Lev and Timinsky.

A large part of the *Kholodoisker Gasse* went up in smoke as well, where the houses of Khien'keh the Dyer, Farber, Lashowitz, the orphanage, the *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash*, Yaakov Solomon, and others were located. The houses of Levitt the Military Tailor, Khvonyik and many others on the *Wilensky Gasse* were also burned down.

Remaining *intact* after the bombing were: the *Karczyzna* neighborhood, where the Hebrew Gymnasium was located,; the *Poritzisheh Gasse* from the river to the railroad tracks, and also other streets that led to the Izaveliner Road. The *white jail* remained standing on the *Ostroger Gasse*, and the *post office building*. A part of the *Kholodoisker Gasse* remained standing, *Itcheh Jonah's street*, and the entire *Neuer Gessel,* except for a few houses at its entrance. A few isolated houses remained standing on the *Grodno Gasse* on the side of Kavushatsky and Yudzhik, among them the houses of Moshe Rubinovich, Movshovsky, Kavushatsky, and Wolsky's Pharmacy. On the *Tatarsk*i (Lazaretneh) *Gasse* and in the area at the *foot of the hill*, on the way to Rosh, a few houses survived. The Jewish hospital was partly destroyed.

Zamoscheh almost entirely survived, except for the corner where the Zamoscher *Bet HaMedrash* was located. Barash's metal factory and Bloch's leather works also remained intact after the fire, as did the houses near the cemetery, among them the houses of Zalman Chafetz, and Pines.

It was in this fashion that the entire Jewish section of Volkovysk was destroyed by the German bombardment. The destruction was so great, that if one stood on that day in Zamoscheh , near the house of Moshe Koss – one could see the while jail!... The entire area that had once been built up with the houses of Jews, factories, synagogues, *Batei Medrashim*, Jewish institutions – where Jewish commerce and manufacture were carried on, and where Jewish life thrived – was transformed into a huge wreckage.

Because of this, the Jewish community was forced, after the bombing, to concentrate itself in and around the *Neuer Gessel*. In every tiny room – a Jewish family. And it was no longer necessary to drive the Jewish community into a ghetto – the "ghetto" sprung up "naturally" of its own accord.

The German Occupation

As is well known, the Nazi strategy and tactic was to cut off entire cities and capture entire military divisions in one blow. They used this same tactic, that was then known as the "pincer tactic," in the Volkovysk area,

as they drew nearer. The Nazi armies had entered Slonim and Baranovich several days earlier, before they took Volkovysk. This cut off the entire area, and there was no possibility of escape.

The first detachments of German troops marched into Volkovysk on *Saturday, June 28, 1941.* Their arrival instilled great fear into the Jewish community of the city. The SS Division immediately distinguished itself for its barbarism, and shot at any Jew that they saw along the way. By June 29, *Israel Tzemakh* (Alibuder's son-in-law) had already been shot in the streets, whom it would seem was the first victim of Nazi bestiality in Volkovysk. The following were then shot: *Yoss'l Feinzilberg* (from [the] Boineh[270]), *Yoss'l Beletz*, *Berel the Shammes* from the *Ein Yaakov* [Synagogue]. On that day, *Nachman Papa* the Ironmonger, *Basheh Gurevich, Yaakov Jesierski* the Lumber Merchant, and *Yanovsky's wife* (from the Tobacco Business) died. *Herschel Uryonovsky*, the son of the Rein Maker hung himself on that day. The Jews remained crammed into their partly burned out wrecked homes and in barns, three and four families crowded in at a time, waiting for further developments with fluttering hearts. Many families sent their children off to nearby towns – Svislucz, Izavelin, Lisokovo, Mosty', and other neighboring areas.

The largest percentage of the Volkovysk Jews, together with those who had saved themselves by going into the fields, and then returned later to the city, accommodated themselves anew on the *Neuer Gessel*, in Karczyzna, and in Zamoscheh, and in the few remaining houses on the other streets. Because of the shortage of housing stock, overcrowding became severe. Shortly after the arrival of the Germans, a severe famine began in the city. There was simply nothing to eat. The Christians had pillaged all the warehouses that remained after the Russians left, and they lacked for nothing. However, the burned out Jews suffered severely from a hunger that intensified day by day.

The Germans were unable to construct a ghetto as they had done in almost all other Jewish cities and towns. This was not because the Jews of Volkovysk were in any way 'better' than the Jews elsewhere, but rather because of the awesome and thorough destruction wreaked by the bombing of the city, there simply was no place where such a ghetto could be constructed. All of Volkovysk, and in particular, the Jewish quarter, looked like one big devastation. In order to set up a ghetto, the Germans would have had to drive the Poles out of that section of the city that had remained intact, from Zamoscheh, Volya, or Karczyzna – which they did not want to do.

Six German leaders were appointed to direct the security work of the city, and it was on them that the role fell of carrying out the systematic administration of the local Jewish population.

Anti-Jewish Decrees

The first decree was that all Jewish residents were required to immediately affix a yellow badge to their right arms, and a Star of David on their front and back. A second decree was – *forbidding the use of the sidewalks* – the Jews were permitted to walk only in the middle of the road together with horses, cattle and wagons. The Jews were ordered *to take off their hats in the presence of every German, an officer or soldier alike.* Apart from this, Jews were *forbidden to engage in any commerce*. Jews were *forbidden to own any property, no land, no cattle.* Jews were even forbidden to purchase specific necessities, such as meat. Jews *were not allowed to live under the same roof* with Christians. At the entrance of every Jewish domicile, it was required to affix a large round yellow badge. All Jews were immediately require *to register for forced labor*. Jews were forced to work in clearing the brickwork from the destroyed buildings of their own homes. The bricks, after they had been collected by hard labor, were sold off to their non-Jewish neighbors...those Jews who

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[270] The place where cattle were slaughtered.

were able to pay the German city account an amount of five marks daily, did not have to do this work. This, actually, was a probe by the Nazis to try and discover which of the Jews had money, and wanted to buy themselves out of performing the hard labor, in order to extort more money from them, before they would be sent to the gas chambers. The Jewish women had to act as servants for the Germans.

Jews were severely punished for even the smallest infractions. For example, when a Jew who had for his entire life been used to walk on the sidewalk, forgot himself, and walked there like everyone else, during the day, was beaten murderously. Jews were punished for the minutest infractions with monetary fines, beatings, incarceration, concentration camps, and death.

The *Judenrat*

A *Judenrat* was established in Volkovysk a short time after the arrival of the Germans, but in reality this was merely a front in the hands of the Nazis. On one side, the *Judenrat* directed the internal and external lives of the Jewish community; and from the other side, it was tasked by the Germans to provide Jews for forced labor and carry out all of the cruel decrees of the Nazis.

The entirety of Jewish life became concentrated on the *Neuer Gessel* in those times. The seat of the *Judenrat* was found there, in a small building, on the left side of the street, which the Jews referred to as "The White House." All the departments conducted their activities from a larger building to the right. At the entrance to the yard, was the Secretariat, and the management center of the "*Ordnungs-dienst,*" from where the Jewish Support Police were called. Not far from there, in a large room, people waited to be called. In the center of the yard was a temporary dwelling, where the former owner of the coffee house, *Spiegelglass* would sell lemonade with saccharine, fruit juice that had a peculiar taste, cookies, that nobody could tell what they were baked from, and black plums. This temporary structure was the one and only official Jewish "hall," the one an only open Jewish place of business...

The labor council was located in the Secretariat, which would receive the orders from the German command, which ordered the Jews to present themselves for forced labor. There, Jewish would wait daily for new orders.

The head of the *Judenrat* was *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg*. He served in this position from the day the *Judenrat* was established up until the time that the Germans arrested him, and later killed him. After that, Noah Fuchs, who had previously been the Deputy Head, took over the position.

Dr. Weinberg's closest co-worker was *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky.* Both of these doctors, who were so different in their character, nevertheless, joined together in a really harmonious fashion. Dr. Weinberg, previously an assimilated Jew, looked like a gentile, an aristocrat; Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky – a man of the people, was beloved by everyone, and was very popular. Both, however were distinguished in their decent character, commitment to the community, diligence and unusual energy. Both worked ceaselessly, abandoning their personal interests, and because of this, both became very revered by the Jewish populace.

The director of the Secretariat in Dr. Weinberg's time was *Noah Fuchs*. He concentrated all the work of the *Judenrat* in his own hands. The head of the labor council was *Sham'keh Daniel*; The manufacturing representative – *Mulya Kantor*; the liaison to the city government – *Berel Amstibovsky*; the Treasurer – *Moshe Krapivnik*. The other members of the *Judenrat* were: *Sonia Botvinsky, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky, Meir Pisetsky, Meir Farber, Nakh'keh Schein, Rachel Yaffa* (a daughter of Sholom Lev). *Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg* and *Clara Niemchik* would deal with the Gestapo. *Israel Pidtow* would represent the refugees. Apart from these, *Sioma Gallin, Pin'iyeh Khomsky* and *Israel Gurevich* were also very active.

Because of the shortage of housing stock, the *Judenrat* also directed effort in this area. It allocated housing on the basis of family size, distributed food, organized free medical help, and had oversight regarding the hygienic and sanitary conditions. For a long time, it also concerned itself with the refugees from White Russia, providing them with the necessary papers and transportation to a variety of more distant cities and towns, primarily to Bialystok.

The *Judenrat* also had a *Jewish Support Police*, headed at the beginning by *M. Khantov*, and was later led by a Galician Jew by the name of *Glatt*.

The Jewish Support Police stood at the behest of the *Judenrat* and serve the interests of the Jews of Volkovysk. But in reality, it served an entirely different purpose. The reason for this, is that the police body was composed mostly of individuals from the underworld. They made use of the privileges given to them for their own benefit. In particular, one of them named *Khiller*, "distinguished himself" in this regard, and caused the Jews a lot of trouble. He could not even shame the worst of the Nazis in the way he related to and dealt with the Jews.

The Mass-Murders

The arrests began immediately after the arrival of the Germans in Volkovysk. The following were the first to be arrested: *Velvel Tzirulnitsky, Isser Grunem* (Hoshea's son) and his *brother-in-law* (a stocking-maker), *David Sarakshabel, Mendel Rutchik* (a son-in-law of Moshe Bayer), *Jonah Irmess* (a shoemaker), *Eliyahu Kvachuk* and *Munya Solkovich* ('Niomka the Tailor's son) whom the Germans apprehended when he tried to run. The arrests were in reality carried out with the use of lists, which had been prepared in advance by the anti-Semites in the city. And this type of "good friends," the Germans did not have a very difficult time finding among the Christians of the city. It was enough when a non-Jew would represent to the police that so-and-so, a Jew, was a communist during the Russian occupation, such a person was immediately arrested and shot the next morning. The arrests were carried on without stop.

Those arrested were brought to the "white jail," which had remained intact after the bombing of the city, and from there, they would be conveyed by buses to the Mayak forest, where they were shot on the spot. In that small forest, ready graves had already been dug for them, prepared by Jewish slave laborers. When it happened that one of these unfortunate young people managed to get out of the clutches of German hands and try to escape, the Poles would catch them and again turn them over to the Nazis.

The arrest of the innocents cast a great terror on the Jewish populace of Volkovysk, because one simply was totally uncertain about one's own life. Before it was even possible to calm down from this most recent misfortune, the Nazis quite suddenly carried out a new aktion[271] among the Volkovysk Jews. At that time they took over *two hundred* men to the Mayak forest and immediately, like their first victims, shot everyone.

The following names are known to us from among those victims: *Kalman Bartnovsky, Leizer Bliakher* (a lawyer) and his brother *Anshel Bliakher, Yaakov Beletz* (a son-in-law of Nishvitsky the Carpenter), *Simcha Berg* (from Zamoscheh), *Itzel Berman* (Kolontai's Bookkeeper), *Elkeh Gass, Herschel Ditkovsky, Mikhal Zohn-Mazya* (from the Magistrate's office), *Zernitsky* (of the dock), *Koppel Khananovich, Itcheh Tkatch, Berel Tchistorozum-Narozimsky, Chaim Khvonyik* and his wife, *Mal'yeh* (a daughter of Pelteh the Moditskeh), *Liss* (son-in-law of Kalir), A *son-in-law* of Hinde Lev, *Daniel Leshchinsky, Mottel Lev* (a son

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271 The German spelling, *aktion*, will be used to describe the specific attacks and roundups carried out by the Nazis against Jews.

of Shlomo Lev from Kuzhnya), *Shaul Markus* (a son of Abraham Elie's), *Abraham Markus* (the leader of the *Bund*) and *his wife*, and daughter *Manya*,(a daughter of Fruma Movshovsky), with *her husband* the lawyer. *Moskowitz* the lawyer and *his wife*, *Khatzkel Moorstein, Velvel Novick* (the lumber merchant's son), *Khatzkel Sidransky* (from Zamoscheh), *Khatzkel Savuolsky's son, Itzel Smeizik* (from the Kvachuk family), *Israel Panter, Dr. Feinberg, Yoss'l Frack's son, Herschel Zuckerman* and his wife, *Yehudit* and son *Misha, Kraselnik*, and his son (a stone road paver), *Berel Kaplan* (Moteleh's), *Shavson* (the Gendarme) and his *wife* and *daughter*, *'Nioma Shevakhovich* (the smith's son), *Sidransky*, son-in-law of *Wilk*, and others.

Shayna Lifschitz, one of our eye-witnesses, tells us the following: she happened to be at the house of Velvel Novick, when he was presented with an order to appear at the police station. As his first name was not indicated in the order, *Shayna Lifschitz* advised him to send his aged father, whom the Germans would likely send back home again. Also, the aged father was intent on going in the place of his son. But the younger Novick did not want to do this, and forcibly tore himself away from [the members] of the household, and went off to the police, from where he never returned again. A few days later, his old father died from great sorrow. Other witnesses tell that it happens that later it turned out that they were seeking a different Novick and not Velvel Novick.

Shayna Lifschitz tells another episode concerning *Pes'sha Gass* (a daughter of [Kalman] Galiatsky the Shoemaker), who was married to *Izzy Gass* from the Pharmacy. After Gass ran off with the Soviet Army, his wife Pes'sha remained behind at home with her small son and mother-in-law, Elkeh Gass. When the police came at one time to inquire after Elkeh Gass, Pes'sha argued that she knew nothing about her. She did not tell the truth, even when the police threatened her life and that of her child. However, Elkeh, who had hidden herself in a second room and heard the threats of the police, understood the seriousness of the words of the Nazis, and came out of her hiding place, and voluntarily surrendered herself to the police, who took her away and murdered her along with the other arrested victims of those days.

The observations given to us by Yitzhak Tchopper are also interesting, that when they came to arrest *Chaim Khvonyik*, his wife *Mal'yeh* (daughter of Pelteh the Moditskeh) did not want to be parted from her husband, and of her own free will, she surrendered to the hands of the Nazis and they both went to their deaths.

When they came to arrest *Shliv'keh* (son-in-law of Avigdor Taran), he had a heart attack and died on the spot.

The news of the fate of the innocent two hundred Jewish victims disassembled the entire Volkovysk Jewish community like a clap of thunder. Everyone felt totally worthless in the hands of the enemy.

Shortly thereafter, Volkovysk was incorporated into East Prussia, and in this manner became part of the Third Reich. *Zelva* was the boundary city and beyond that were the 'Eastern Lands,' meaning the land of the enemy. The fact that Volkovysk was counted by the Germans as part of the Third Reich, served as a positive influence on the circumstances of the local Jews. Because, it just happens that in those days, terrifying tales began to reach Volkovysk about mass-pogroms against the Jews in surrounding towns and villages, which were a part of the Eastern Lands, such as Dereczin, Slonim, the towns in White Russia, Lithuania and the Ukraine. In Volkovysk, the situation of the Jews was on average quiet at that time. One can say, effectively, that for that entire year – after the tragedy of the initial arrests and the slaughter of the two hundred victims, apart from those victims that were lost to hunger and a variety of other reasons – there were no unusual occurrences. The yellow badges were worn, one walked on the edged of the bridge, and in the middle of the road, and not on the sidewalks, one performed hard, forced labor, one complied with all the insane decrees of the Nazis, and took comfort in the hope for redemption and liberation.

Daily Life Under the Germans

In that time, there were still a number of Jews who engaged in small business, and principally in barter, being fearful more than most of the Polish police. A coin was exchanged for bread. The very last that had been rescued from the destruction was given away for a crust of bread. The last valuable, the last garment, a pair of socks, a shirt – for a bite of bread. And in this fashion, a little at a time, the last traces of any Jewish assets passed over into the hands of the Christian neighbors, for food only. Every couple of weeks, the entire city would be shaken up by a Gestapo search. News of their arrival would spread with the greatest speed in the Jewish neighborhood, and then no Jew would dare to stick his head out onto the street. At that point, the Jews were no longer able to comply with the fantastic demands of the Gestapo, because all of their assets went up in smoke during the bombing, and the Gestapo continued to threaten them with death. When the Gestapo left the city, the Jews would recite the blessing of redemption from danger, and breathe a little more freely.

One still had freedom of movement, and it was possible to travel as far as Bialystok, understand however, only under very specific authorizations, which the leader of the city would sell for money, and in special wagons, which were marked: "For Poles Only."

Specifically, these regulations were vulnerable to being overlooked for monetary bribes, which the Germans and the Polish police would demand from the Jews. These latter, would tear into the Jewish center, and take bribes for the smallest consideration. The Jews would fulfill their demands with the assistance of the finance committee that existed as part of the *Judenrat*, doing this with the single thought that they will thereby prolong the status quo for as long as possible, until the storm passes over.

And this is the way we lived – some better off, some worse. We lived, and we continued to want to live. We lived in fear and in anxiety, but always with the certainty and the hope for a better tomorrow.

There was also no lack of many incidents in which Nazi sadism found its fullest expression. In this connection, Dr. Resnick, one of our witnesses, tells of the following incidents, which at that time, took place in Volkovysk under the German occupation. On the corner between the East Street and the Grodno Gasse, opposite Lisitsky's house, there was a destroyed Russian tank. One time, two German gendarmes walked by, and coincidentally so did Reb Leizer Shaliota (a familiar and important one of the *balebatim* of the city, who was also an erudite man). The Germans forced this old and weak man to climb up on the wrecked tank, and dance there for them. In addition, they then beat him vigorously and wounded him.

For a while, Dr. Resnick tells, the Germans would pass through the Jewish houses looking for books – Pentateuchs, *Gemaras, Mishnayot* and Prayer books – and finding them, they would burn them, and would then beat the Jews who owned these books mercilessly. Such incidents occurred to *Lipiak* the Tailor, *Leibkeh Patsovsky* the Barber, and his son, *Yisroel'ik* (the books were not even his, but rather belonged to the houses where they lived), along with many other *balebatim*.

The huge levies and payoffs that the Germans forced upon the Jews, on the one side, and the hard slave-labor without cease, from the second side, literally dried out the blood and marrow of the Jewish victims that remained alive. Want and poverty grew from day to day. The Polish auxiliary police prosecuted the German decrees upon the Jews with the utmost severity. Every day, searches were conducted in the Jewish houses, and what ever was found was confiscated.

We were compelled to work by day. Every day, the *Judenrat* received a list of workplaces where the Jews were compelled to present themselves for work. Hundreds of Jews were compelled to present themselves for the hardest labor: to clean off grass from the wrecked houses, to dig foxholes and other military work. The

girls had to clean off the wrecked houses. Groups of hundreds of Jews would present themselves for work each day in Petroshovitsa, not far from the Volkovysk center. This was the location of the rest and bivouac camp of the German soldiers, who would return from the front.

The Germans paid no salary for this work. It was exactly the opposite, we thanked God that they gave us the work. This was the sole comfort, that so long as they had a need for Jewish labor, they will continue to let the Jews live. The *Judenrat* was responsible to the Germans for providing workers.

In that time, the Germans began to build the railroad line to the rear of Volkovysk. The Jewish workers of Volkovysk were at that time mostly occupied in doing primarily military work, and the Jewish girls – with cleaning. At that time, the Nazis demanded about one hundred thirty Jewish girls be sent from the Bialystoker Ghetto. When the Judenrat in Bialystok received the order to provide a specific number of Jewish girls for forced labor near Volkovysk, it had to resort to a dramatic tactic. The Jewish police of the Bialystoker Ghetto suddenly surrounded the local where crafts courses were taught, and assembled the required number of girls from the students and workers of the school. They sent the girls to Volkovysk. In Volkovysk, their circumstances actually were not bad at the beginning. Those of the girls who had either relatives or friends in the city itself, stayed with them. The rest lived in barracks.

When the conditions of the Jews of Volkovysk deteriorated and became increasingly worse, and the risk of death greater, the Bialystoker *Judenrat* wanted to bring the Bialystok girls back to their homes, but this was no simple thing to do, and the Bialystoker *Judenrat* was able to bring back only a small number. Later, most of them on the Second of November, were driven into the bunkers along with all the Jews of Volkovysk.

Summer 1942 – Under the Germans

The Partisan Movement

In the summer of 1942, when the situation was already very serious, when a firestorm of pogroms and mass-murders had broken out all around, and the Germans would spill Jewish blood like water – in Slonim, Baranovich, Lida and in many other surrounding cities and towns (in Dereczin alone, three thousand people were burned on that *Tisha B'Av*)[272] – on average, in Volkovysk the conditions were quiet. Despite this, a portion of the young people in Volkovysk grasped very well how serious the circumstances were, and independently took stock of the approaching danger.

It was decided to mount a strong resistance to any attack, whenever it comes. Work was done in secret, and the young people were organized and made ready for the approaching danger, which could already be felt blowing in the wind. There was success in establishing contact with a larger Russian partisan group, which was found in the Zamkov Forest, not far from Volkovysk. These partisans were all former soldiers from the Russian Army, who had concealed themselves in the forests in order not to fall into the hands of the enemy.

There were even a number of Jews among them. The partisans were very active in the Volkovysk area, and despite the fact that they consisted only of a small group, they shook up the entire vicinity with their terrorist attacks. They had a variety of weaponry in their possession, and a large store of food. From their standpoint, they conducted sabotage throughout the entire area. However, in order not to be captured by the enemy, they could not stay in one place for an extended period of time. They would carry out one of their tasks, and then flee to a different area, and from there, start anew with their work of disruption. Their objective was, wherever possible, to disrupt the communications of the Nazi Army.

The *Partisan-Group* was divided into two parts: *One part* was concerned with carrying out acts of terror. Not a day went by without some kind of an incident: here, they would blow up a rail line, here they would blow up a bridge, fall upon German aircraft, and carried out all manner of sabotage. By the amount of trouble that they caused in the area, the Germans thought that and entire army was active in the area, and not a small group of partisans. It came to the point, where the Germans needed to deploy peasants with sticks along the entire length of the rail line. However, even this didn't help. In the morning, the Germans would find the dead bodies of the peasants, strewn across the entire area, and the rail line blown up.

The *Second Part* of the partisans was dedicated to looking after food procurement, and consisted of a smaller group of people. They would come to the peasants in the night, and force them to turn over food.

The Contact of Volkovysk Youth with the Partisans

Because the youth of Volkovysk succeeded in establishing contact with the neighboring partisan group, they also became very active, and played no small role in the above-mentioned activities of the partisans. The first ones to join up with the partisans were *Sarah Rubin* and her brother-in-law, who were active for the entire period. Many young Jewish people from Volkovysk actively joined the partisans in the forests, and the entire

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[272] See *The Dereczin Memorial Book,* where this atrocity is documented in detail.

group grew significantly. Those who were not active in the terror-acts, cooperated very diligently in providing the partisans with all the necessary materials from the city, beginning with medical supplies, and ending with all manner of explosives. Among the most active and most committed in this undertaking were *Bom Zuckerman* and a *Son of Lemkin* the Smith, and others.

Once, on a dark and rainy night, an unfamiliar man came to *Zvi Roitman*, one of our witnesses, who was an electrical technician in the meat processing plant, and said to him, that he is an emissary from the partisans, who have a camp in the Zamkov Forest, not far from the city. The man requested that he come to the partisan camp, in order to repair his radio equipment, through which they were receiving their secret orders from the higher command in the Russian Army.

Roitman, who had for a long time wished to come into direct contact with the partisans, took up the request with elation in his heart, because of the opportunity to take a part in a campaign by an authentic partisan-group. He went into the forest with this unfamiliar man, not paying attention to the great risk that this undertaking entailed, in the event that the Nazis were to pick up even the slightest trace of this activity. The unfamiliar man conducted him from one secret post to the next, until the last secret watch post brought him to the Zamkov Forest, where he found himself in the camp of the partisans.

In that alone, he was already at risk of being put to death, because according to law, the Germans demanded that all Jews be shot on the spot if they were found outside of the boundaries of the city, and it goes without saying, for being in the forest. There, even non-Jews were forbidden to enter. The reason was, that the Germans believed that anyone that they found in the forest or its environs was a partisan, and they would shoot him on the spot. He arrived safely at the appointed place, where a watch detail of partisans waited for him. Roitman met a sympathetic young Russian there, with a light machine gun in his hands. He identified himself, and the latter escorted him deep into the forest, to the [partisan] group.

It took about an hour to get there, and went through many paths and by-ways. Coming upon many watch posts, he finally arrived at a well-appointed place, between heavy, low trees. There were a number of tents pitched on the spot, and in the middle, a fire flickered, and a happy group of Russian soldiers were carrying on a warm and lively conversation.

Roitman tells that he suddenly felt as if he were in a completely different world. The impression that unfolded before him, exceeded his wildest imagination and ideas that he had at one time conceptualized about the partisans. He was thoroughly taken by the sense of security, energy, and suffusing silence.

Shortly after he arrived, he made the acquaintance of the commander, a handsome young man with the rank of Lieutenant. His name was Grisha. He showed Roitman the radio equipment and asked him to repair it, because it had already been several days since they had any news from Moscow, and this cut them off completely from the outside world.

It took Roitman several hours, but the radio was restored to function. Everyone was very happy about this. The day was still long, and Roitman had finished his work, and because of this, he also had an opportunity to have a thorough discussion and to become more closely acquainted with the partisans and their work.

He became so inspired by the life of the partisans, that he no longer wished to return to the city. But this was not a question of personal preference. The partisans advised him to return to the city and to work wit the Volkovysk group, whose mission was to organize the Jewish youth, to muster them to the extent possible,

and to transfer the more capable ones among them to the forest. Apart from this, it was necessary to organize all of the young people in the city, in the event of a German aktion against the Jews, that they be able to put up a credible resistance. At the same time, the partisan group assumed the obligation to help the Jews of the city.

He left the partisans escorted by a sentry, and now, first late at night, re-entered the city. It was specifically deep in the forest, in the territory of the partisans, that he first felt a little bit of security, because in there, even a German soldier would fear to tread.

After his first visit to the partisans, Roitman became very active in the city. Thanks to his work in the machine division of the slaughterhouse, where he worked for the Nazis, he was able to provide the partisans with a variety of things that they needed. Roitman was the overseer of the electrical generating machinery in the factory. All the tools and keys to the entire technical equipment were under his control. At the command of his director, he would have to travel to the warehouse, and pick out all the required instruments and parts from there for the factory. You can understand, that at every such opportunity, together with the parts for the factory, he would provision himself with all those parts that the partisans required as well, for example, radio parts, pliers, electrical parts, oil, Vaseline, and many other necessities. He would bring all of these materials to the factory, and later, have them sent further on. He would often turn this over into the hands of Sarah Rubin, and she would take them to the right address.

In the meantime, the situation in the city grew continually worse. The slaughter in the surrounding towns continued without abatement. However, the Nazis in Volkovysk were seemingly not in any hurry to undertake the complete extermination of that local Jewish community. It was exactly the opposite: in their sadistic manner, they waged a war of nerves with the hapless Jews, in order to squeeze out their last bit of life, and keep them in a state of perpetual fear and anxiety.

The Aktion Against The Handicapped Children

Yet even in those days, there were many human victims in Volkovysk. The Germans took themselves to the handicapped children, the abnormal, the blind, the deaf and the crippled. At that time, approximately forty handicapped children were taken away from their parents. It was in this manner, tells Ida Mazover one of our witnesses, that the only crippled child of *Mazkovsky* the Photographer was taken away, paying no heed to the screams and weeping of the hapless mother, to whom the handicapped child represented everything that she ever had.

It is fitting to document here, the repulsive role and cooperation, that the Jewish Auxiliary Police of the *Judenrat* gave to the Germans in the execution of each new decree. They knew where the handicapped children were to be found, and they would enter the Jewish homes and forcibly tear the handicapped children away from their hapless parents. Among the others who were taken away at that time from their parents were: the blind *daughter* of *Kleinbaum,* a *grandson* of *Duner* (they lived at Galiatsky's), a *child* of *Isaac Walitsky* (the Shoemaker), *Leibeh Yudzhik* (Velvel the Gardener's son), and others.

German Espionage in the Battle with the Partisans

At that time, Yitzhak Tchopper tells us, once twenty arrested Jews were brought from Berestovitz to Volkovysk, among them also being *Shlomo Mandelbaum* (the bank director). The charge against them was

that they had cooperated with the Partisan-Groups in the Volkovysk vicinity. A Jew informed against them, and was brought together with them to jail. Dr. Weinberg, in the name of the Judenrat stood to defend the arrested Jews, and they were all released under the caveat that if their presence was required, the *Judenrat* would be responsible to produce them.

All twenty Jews were immediately sent back to Berestovitz. By contrast, the *Judenrat* kept custody of the Jewish informer in the jail, which was located in the yard of the *Judenrat* on the *Neuer Gessel*. At night, Dr. Weinberg came to the jail with a Jewish policeman. The informer was killed for giving out this information about the twenty Jews. Yitzhak Tchopper's father was immediately summoned, who was then the administrator for the cemetery and the *Khevra Kadisha*, in order that the body be interred. The body was taken that night in a wagon provided by the Judenrat and nobody knew about the incident.

In the meantime, the acts of sabotage by the partisans made themselves increasingly felt in the Volkovysk vicinity, and in order to locate their base of operation, the Germans strengthened their spy net.

In the middle of this, Roitman was again called yet another time to repair the radio equipment of the partisans as quickly as possible. He was once again taken into the depths of the forest, where the partisans had their headquarters. He did his work, and was immediately taken back by an escort to the edge of the forest, from where he went back to the city by himself. When he reached the city, it was already 5PM. One of his co-workers at the slaughterhouse told him that the police had inquired about him.

At that time, the Germans already had a number of spies among the partisans. It was in this way that a gentile from Rosh, had told the German command about the technician who repaired the radio equipment of the partisans. That same gentile was once designated by the partisans to be the scout for three Russian officers. He later turned over these officers into the hands of the Gestapo, who shot them immediately.

In that time, *Katriel Lashowitz*, another witness, tells of one of the acts of sabotage by the partisan group near Volkovysk when they blew up a taxi that carried a number of Germans, and a young partisan was wounded. The partisans had no first aid, and because of this, Lashowitz went into the city and described the situation to *Dr. Berel Velvelsky* (a former doctor of the Maccabi), asking him to treat the wounded partisan. Dr. Velvelsky, though, sent him to Dr. Weinberg, the chairman of the *Judenrat* who refused to send another doctor, and went himself to treat the wounded partisan.

The Nazis, however, later found the bandaged partisan in the forest. They saw that this was a doctor's handiwork, and they tortured the partisan in a frightening manner, in order to force him to reveal which doctor bandaged his wounds. But the young hero died from the torture and did not betray the doctor who treated him. Seeing that this incident occurred not far from Volkovysk, the Nazis, understandably, suspected the Jewish doctors of Volkovysk.

Since the Germans were unable to find the principal hideaway of the partisans, they sent out spies, and detained all former Russian soldiers who were very likely inclined to find an opportunity to join up with the partisans. After these detained Russian soldiers became cognizant of the exact place where the partisans were, they went and described this to the German command. This also happened with a group near Volkovysk. Two bribed Ukrainians went into the Zamkov Forest and there they ran into a sentry watch of two partisans. They befriended them, and expressed their wish, as former Russian soldiers, to join the partisan group. At this occasion, they also drank with the two partisan sentries, got them drunk, and extracted from them all of the particulars and details in which they were interested. The partisans also told the

Ukrainians about the fact that a Jewish doctor that had given help to a wounded partisan, and that a Jewish technician had a number of times repaired the radio equipment that belonged to them. The Ukrainians immediately returned to the city, and told everything that they had found out. Also the gentile provocateur from Rosh had already described the above-mentioned incidents about the doctor and the technician to the Gestapo.

An complete detachment of SS troops, led by the Ukrainians, and with the help of tracking dogs, made a concerted effort to find the hideout of the partisan group. To the good fortune of the latter, who sensed the danger in time, the SS troops were greeted with heavy fire from the partisans. But the Germans had superior forces, and at the last moment, the partisans had to break through the ranks of the SS troops and flee into the depths of the forest. You can appreciate that they had to abandon a significant amount of goods and instruments, which the Germans examined during the following investigation.

The Arrest of the Jewish Doctors and Technicians

On the basis of this information, the Germans immediately arrested all the Jewish doctors, dentists, engineers, and technicians.

Among those arrested *doctors* and *dentists* were the following: *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg*, President of the *Judenrat, Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, Dr. D. Cantor, Dr. Berel Velvelsky, Dr. David Kaufman, Dr. Yitzhak Honigstein, the wife of Dr. Golond* (who came to Volkovysk to visit her aged mother from far-away Georgia); the dentists: *Dr. Shimon Press* (dental technician), *Dr. David Tropp, Dr. A. Mant* (a son-in-law of Motya Marantz), *Dr. Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitska, and Dr. Novogrudska-Piesikova*.

Among the *radio technicians* and *engineers* that were arrested then were: *Zvi Roitman, Galiatsky, Palik*, and others.

The entire Jewish population of Volkovysk and its vicinity was badly shaken up by the news of the arrest of the Jewish doctors, dentists and technicians.

The arrest were accused of conspiring against the Reich, on the basis that they had a relationship with the partisans. Thanks to strong intervention, the arrested women were immediately released. Among them were *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitska* and *Novogrudska-Piesikova. Noah Fuchs* was installed as the President of the *Judenrat* in the place of the arrested Dr. Weinberg. The former Secretary of that body. And immediately, the lapse of Dr. Weinberg's authority was felt, which was distinguished by its diligence, and who didn't show any fear for the Germans.

The arrested people were conveyed from the Police station to two bunkers near the barracks.

The Interrogation of the Doctors and Technicians

Zvi Roitman, the radio technician, tells that the morning following the arrest of the technicians, he saw through a narrow window over the entrance to the bunker how the doctors were being led out that morning from the bunker that was opposite theirs. They were being led to wash up under heavy guard. The water happened to be located near the bunker containing the arrested technicians, which created a possibility to exchange a few words wit the doctors through the iron bars of the small window. In short words, Dr. Weinberg told the technicians that the doctors were being accused of helping the partisans. He also conveyed

that a number of the doctors had already been interrogated. In general, the doctors gave the impression that they were not crestfallen, they looked tired, short on sleep, but they held themselves up well. Most important, Dr. Weinberg held himself in a good mood and fresh in spirit. Roitman goes on to say that among the doctors he saw: Dr. Weinberg, as previously mentioned, Dr. Velvelsky, Dr. Cantor, Dr. Tropp, Dr. Press, Dr. Sedletsky, and others. After the men washed themselves, the women were led out to wash themselves. Among the many Russian and Jewish women, Roitman saw Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitska and Sarah Novogrudska-Piesikova.

The men were separated from the women in separate bunkers, but despite this, they did have occasions where husbands had a chance to talk to their wives at the entrance to the bunkers. Food was allowed to be brought into the bunkers only twice a week. The arrested inmates would then lie on their awful bunks, starving, and cut through with cold for whole days and nights, suffused with fear that any minute they would be taken out of the bunkers to an interrogation, or perhaps straight to their death. And this was the way the days stretched on endlessly, in the dark, damp crowded bunkers.

The technicians spent several days in the bunkers – and nobody asked about them, no one came to call them out for interrogation. The Gestapo was in no rush, it felt very secure with the arrested people that were in its hands.

The interrogation of the technicians and engineers began on the third day. The command was seated in a clean, well decorated bunker nearby, where a member of the Gestapo carried out the interrogation. The doctors were taken in there one at a time, each one for several hours, and for several times. The Gestapo exerted itself in several ways to discover which of the doctors had taken care of the wounded partisan. The interrogation was carried out in a sever manner, and also very brutally. The doctors Cantor and Kaufman were the ones who were tortured the most during the interrogation – the first for his firm responses and hard answers; the second because of his athletic appearance (it was a general rule that the Gestapo was especially severe with such Jews).

As the interrogation progressed, the spirits of the doctors fell. They were called for interrogation daily, in order to force a confession out of them. The SS staff had specific evidence that one of the doctors had tended the wounded partisan, but did not know which doctor had done this. For a time, the interrogation didn't make any progress. Each of the doctors said that they knew nothing, and that he had never had any contact with the partisans. The situation became hopeless.

Dr. Weinberg let this be known in the city, and through the *Judenrat* asked for external intervention on behalf of the arrested doctors. Regrettably, the *Judenrat* was powerless. The only one who had any access to the three Gestapo men who controlled the city, was Dr. Weinberg himself. They treated him with a certain amount of respect, not only because of him personally, but also because of the money that would be turned over to their hands through Dr. Weinberg. These were the levies of blood and sweat from the Jewish population, that had the purpose of repealing one or another evil decree. And the only liaison between the Jews and the Gestapo was Dr. Weinberg. However, tragically, he himself was on the bench of the accused, under suspicion of having cooperated with the partisans. On average, the doctors kept themselves strong, even though they were physically drained – looking bad, and having aged in appearance – from hunger and sleepless nights.

The Interrogation of the Technicians

The interrogation of the technicians and the engineers commenced on the fourth day after their arrest. The first one called was *Galiatsky*, who after several hours of interrogation and torture, returned to the bunker broken and disassembled. The remainder of the occupants in the bunker fell upon him with questions about the interrogation. It became evident that one of the technicians was being accused by the Germans of repairing a piece of radio equipment that belonged to the partisans. The technicians held to the argument that they were occupied for a full day by the Germans and actually had no time to meet with partisans. Galiatsky was able to concretely demonstrate that he hadn't missed even a single day at work.

A couple of days later, the technicians received the good news that Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova had been released. This was the first out of the ordinary release made by the Gestapo. This gave some encouragement to the other arrested people, especially raising the spirits among the doctors. They began to believe that maybe in the end, they will all be exonerated from the charge against them. But, in reality, the circumstances of the doctors became worse, because the medical profession was a free one, and it was not confined to one place, and because of this they were unable to demonstrate that they could not have had contact with the partisans, at the time that the technicians made their case that their work caused them to be confined to one location.

Roitman was the first of the technicians to be released. He was interrogated several times, but being unable to derive any concrete evidence against him, he was set free and even allowed to return to work. Galiatsky was also set free two days after his interrogation, and three days later – all the remaining electrical technicians. It later became clear, that the release of the technicians took place because their employers had mounted a protest because they were needed at their work.

The elation in the city was great, and the mood turned to a glad one. The release of the technicians filled Jewish hearts with a strengthened hope that in the end the doctors would be released – and the Jews breathed a little easier.

However, several days went by, and none of the doctors were released. And when the Gestapo brought in several Jewish doctors from Bialystok to take the place of those who were arrested, the Jews saw a bad omen in this. Everyone awaited further developments with trembling hearts.

The Efforts to Free the Doctors

A process began to find ways and means to liberate the arrested doctors. Special delegates were sent twice to Bialystok – *Sonya Botvinsky* and *Dr. Kaplinsky's sister* – in order to obtain help from the chairman of their *Judenrat*, the engineer, *Ephraim Barash*. But the latter let it be known, that unfortunately, he had found that the fate of the arrested people were entirely in the hands of the local command in Volkovysk.

After the first set of interrogations, the arrested people were told that they would be given a week to reconsider their testimony, and if by that time the guilty party would not confess, they would all be found guilty.

It turned out to be possible in that time to obtain contact with a high-ranking Gestapo officer (*Clara Niemchik* did a great deal to make this possible, thanks to her unsurpassed connections), ;who promised to help in obtaining the release of the doctors. In the meantime, the period of the ultimatum ran out, and each of the doctors, one after another, denied having anything to do with the accusation.

It is hard to understand the reason why Dr. Weinberg did not admit his culpability. Perhaps he thought that the only way left for the Jews was to cooperate with the partisans; or perhaps he was convinced that regardless of which way it went, there would be no end to the issue; and the most important motive probably was that he did not want to place the entire *Judenrat* in danger. He had the clear and correct assessment, that if he personally assumed the guilt, he would put all of the members of the *Judenrat* in danger, and in the end, also the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk. Regrettably, this also didn't help – and the Germans later exterminated all the Jews.

Dr. D. Cantor (from Lodz) and *Dr. Honigstein* (from Voltzlavek) were the most pessimistic of the doctors, and also the engineer, *Hirsch Putchkernik* (from Vilna) – a refugee from the Slonim ghetto, whom the Germans captured while he was fleeing from the Slonim massacre.

Dr. Cantor, broken both physically and in spirit from the torture during the interrogation, had decided to accept responsibility for the guilt, but his comrades, foremost Dr. Weinberg, exerted great energy to force him give up this idea. Dr. Sedletsky was also very badly upset. In this regard, Dr. Tropp stood out as a result of his stoic bearing. In the final days, he was a wellspring of comfort and encouragement to everyone.

On October 11, the bribed high official in the Gestapo was still telling the families of the arrested people that they would be released no later than October 13. On the morning of October 12, the wives was their [arrested] husbands and conveyed these good tidings to them.

The Murder of the Doctors

At ten o'clock that same night, *Noah Schein*, a member of the *Judenrat* came to the house of Joseph Kotliarsky, on the *Grodno Gasse*, where *Moshe Movshovsky* and his brother-in-law *Moshe Ivensky* lived, and ordered all of them to appear very early the next morning at the *Judenrat*, and to bring along digging equipment. When they arrived in the yard of the *Judenrat* at the appointed time, on the *Neuer Gessel*, they ran into other people who were there with digging tools, and other such equipment. All the assembled workers were led off to the *Burkehs.* There, they were taken to a place, where the head of the military marked off a plot of land on the ground of about ten meters in length and two meters wide. They were immediately ordered to begin digging.

"The pit must be completed by ten o'clock this morning. If not, you will yourselves be shot like dogs," – the police order reverberated.

Covered in sweat, the young people finished up their work significantly earlier than ten o'clock in the morning. An order was immediately given to quickly run to the *Barg,* and to lie face down and remain in that position, not moving, until a following order was given.

At the same time, an automobile arrived in front of the bunker containing the arrested doctors, filled with armed Gestapo troops. They led the doctors out and ordered them to remove their jackets, and leave them in the place where they stood. Then the doctors were ordered to get into the automobile.

Volkovysk workers were occupied at that time near the bunkers, and among them *Adya*[273], the daughter of

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[273] Called by the diminutive affectionate nickname *Ed'zheh* in other parts of the book.

Dr. *Yaakov Sedletsky.* Seeing her father getting into the automobile, she threw herself on him and in a heartbreaking voice, cried. But the Gestapo people forcibly separated them, forever. The doctors were immediately taken to the hillock outside of the city.

The workers, who in the meantime were lying on the ground in the distance, in compliance with the order of the Gestapo people, heard the arrival of the automobile which passed by near them, heading in the direction of the pit. They lay there for a few minutes, totally lost. Suddenly, the sound of gunfire was heard, accompanied by stifled screams of people.

This lasted for a minute, and it became silent again all around. The workers barely had time to recover from their fright, when they heard an order to return to the place where the pit was located. A bit of fresh earth had been shoveled into the pit...and from the clothing they recognized that these were the doctors...

They were given an order to layer more earth onto the pit and to cover the location with grass, in order that it not could not be recognized that a pit had once been there. They finished their work, and were getting ready to leave this mass grave, when the ground began to heave... immediately the workers were called back and ordered to tamp down the grave with their feet, however stronger and more firmly...until such time that the earth stopped its heaving...

When the wives of the arrested people came to attend the release of their husbands, none of them were alive any longer...

Depressed Morale in the City

The day that the doctors were massacred was a bitter day for the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk. The Jews of Volkovysk sustained a severe blow from this. They felt abandoned and alone, and they could not find any solace.

With the murder of the doctors, all the Jews understood that they hovered between life and death, and the minutes of their lives were numbered. It could be clearly seen what awaited them in the near future. Fear seized everyone, and each and every person began to think of plans to rescue themselves from a certain death that could arrive at any minute. During the nights, when it was cold and dark outside, this opportunity was used to build hiding places in the dwellings, pits, where it would be possible to hide out in the event of any trouble, each in accordance with the means at their disposal. Others built false compartments between the walls of their houses so skillfully, that they could not be detected from the outside.

Morale could not settle down for the longest time in the city. First and foremost, the remaining relatives of the murdered doctors were completely distraught. A number of them, out of pain and anger, committed suicide.

Shayna Lifschitz, one of our witnesses tells how *Fanya Tropp*, the wife of Dr. Tropp was left with her two boys, who were seven year-old twins. Under no circumstances could she come to grips wit the tragic murder of her husband, and her single objective was to arrange for the care of her young children, and afterwards to commit suicide.

Dr. Tropp, who had been shot, was in his time, friendly with one of the elected city officials, a gentile named Palko. This gentile was also killed by the Germans, even before the death of the doctors, when he was

informed on that he had been a high official in the Soviet regime. After Fanya Tropp was left in the same circumstances as Palko's wife, she approached Palko's wife in the end, and asked her to take custody of her two children. Palko's wife was amenable to taking the two children, but her Christian neighbors gave her no rest, and threatened to go tell the Germans, and she was compelled to return the children to their mother. However, the mother did not want to continue with her life, and had decided to commit suicide.

One day, she approached a German policeman and asked him to shoot her along with her two children. But the German answered her sharply, that without an order he was not permitted to do anything... being however dominated through-and-through with her strong desire to end her life, Fanya Tropp ran home and took three doses of poison (Luminal) from the store of medication that remained from her husband, and went with her two children to the desolated Schulhof, where she first herself took a dose, and quickly went to give a dose to each of her children. But the two children felt something bad in their mother's behavior. They thought that their mother had lost her mind, and they tore themselves out of her half-dead hands and ran to the neighbors to whom they told that their mother had poisoned herself, and that she wanted to poison them. The neighbors found her half dead on the Schulhof in an unconscious condition. The Germans carried her into the burned out Talmud Torah and shot her there. *Milia Shalakhovich,* the aunt of the two boys, took them in. Later on, she and the two orphan boys went along with the other Jews of Volkovysk into the bunkers.

The economic conditions in the city became unbearable. Hunger and want grew more and more severe. The Jews were robbed of practically everything they had. In the district, a conflagration of pogroms and slaughter blazed through the Jews. It was felt that the end was nigh.

Liaison with the partisans was also cut, after the Germans discovered their headquarters, and drove them deep into the forest.

The Feverish Preparation of Hiding Places

The noose around the neck of the hapless Jews began to feel tighter and tighter. One simply did not know when the last yank would come. One had no sense of certainty regarding the following morning, the coming night, and not even with the next hour. One went about in perpetual fear, being too afraid to even lie down and sleep. And when night fell, everyone would go away into all manner of pits and hideouts, taking along only the barest necessities, and spend the long night hours there. People would hide themselves in potato storage pits, or simply in cellars, or in labyrinthine hiding places with secret entrances and exits for this purpose. The most clever and ingenious methods were employed for this purpose. The art of building secure hideouts in bunkers developed quite rapidly under the pressure of need, and became a matter of life and death. For example, in the house of Draznin the Gardener, on the small hill on the *Tatarski Gasse*, where Roitman lived, a bunker was built underground, where about ten people could fit in. The excavation was about a meter under the surface of the earth, in the form of a longer tunnel. The tunnel was a meter and a half high, the width – two meters. The walls and soffit were covered with wooden planks, and were supported by wooden beams. There were two entries to the hole, one was from a room in their house, there was a small door cut into the floor, which was not noticeable at first glance, and which opened from the inside. A clothes dresser stood on that spot, and the bottom part of the dresser opened in such a fashion that if one went into the dresser, one could go down into the bunker. It was possible to enter the bunker from the yard as well, through a compost heap, and it was possible to exit from there as well. This was one of the various ways in which bunkers and hideouts were built at that time. Remember, that these bunkers and hideouts needed to be built secretly, keeping them secret not only from the Poles and the Germans, but from Jewish neighbors as well. Whatever people had, was stored in these bunkers, in the event of need, to enable them to remain

hidden for a longer period of time, if necessary.

The Expulsion of The Jews of Volkovysk Into the Bunkers

Late in October 1942, when the cold winds began to blow and penetrate to the bone, when ceaseless rains soaked bodies through and through, and black clouds hung over darkened skies, was also the time of the onset of the new misfortune to befall the Volkovysk Jews. It was not a coincidence that the Germans picked this time of year to carry out their murderous depredations. In hindsight, we see that the Germans were depraved murder psychologists, and in all such instances, they would pick the worst weather – such as a great frost or a snow storm, and then carry out their expulsions and slaughters against the Jews, because this would drive the morale of the Jews even lower.

A new order was issued on *October 27, 1942* that all Jews must assemble at the *Neuer Gessel* where passes were to be reviewed. The purpose of the inspection was to discover if there were Jews in the city who were not registered. The elder *Shpak* did not comply with the order and the Germans shot him for this.

On the *last Sabbath in October*, the Jews did not yet know what awaited them. The Germans, who had their clothes sewn by Jewish tailors, rushed to retrieve their half-sewn garments from the tailors, and even cut goods that were not sewn. Germans who had left their shoes with Jewish shoemakers came to retrieve them, even if they were only half-ready. However, the Jews did not know the reason for this urgency, and as usual, in their tendency to reach for an optimistic conclusion that everything was going to work out all right, they began to believe the rumor that had quickly spread, that the Germans were packing their things in preparation for a pullback, and it was really because of this that they came to collect their belongings from the Jewish tradesmen.

On Sunday, November 1, when it was routine to have new work allocated for the week, everyone was given the news that there would be no work in the coming week. The Jewish population of Volkovysk did not understand the meaning of this new development and became greatly disturbed.

Black Monday

On *Monday November 2, Noah Fuchs,* the head of the *Judenrat* went into the street and informed everyone about the new order in the name of the Gestapo. The order said:

> *"All the Jews of Volkovysk, rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick, must gather on this same day, no later than noon, outside the city, near the barracks. It is permitted to take food for two days only. Stores and houses are to be locked up and the keys turned over to the Gestapo."*

As the order did not forbid taking along clothing, everyone, indeed, took along clothing and other valuables, such as jewelry, to the extent that they could carry it with themselves. Whatever else they had was hidden in the houses. The order went on to say:

> *"Whoever will be found in the city after the appointed hour, will be shot on the spot."*

A rumor immediately spread that the Jews were being assembled at the barracks in order to conduct searches in their houses. Another rumor suggested that from now on, the Jews would live in the barracks, where a

ghetto will be created, and they will go to their work from there. These rumors, which spread with lightning speed in those terrible days, acted like an anaesthetic on the Jews, and lightened the burden of even the most terrible misfortunes that befell them.

Our witness Roitman tells us that at the same time that Noah Fuchs had revealed the final order of the Gestapo, he [sic: Roitman] was, as usual, at his daily place of work. He was in the habit of going to work early, and because of this, along with several other workers, he was ignorant of the new decree.

At ten in the morning, his overseer came into the plant, and told the Jewish workers that they have to go home immediately, because a general search of the Jews was to take place in the city. He and his remaining comrades immediately returned home. On their way home, they already saw how large masses of military were beginning to encircle the streets of the city. They apprehended that something had happened there. They learned about the "good" news, as quickly as they reached the center of the city.

The panic became great. The period of time was terribly short, and people didn't even have the time to think about their plight.

Many Jews had previously prepared a variety of hiding places in their homes and cellars, but the German order was so severe, that people were afraid to risk their lives. Further, it was not evident for how long one would have to remain hidden. Therefore, nearly all, with few exceptions, decided to comply with the German order.

It was not even possible to take all that much food along, first, because there was simply not enough time to buy it as the great panic ensued. People simply did not know what to take first; and secondly, the Christian bakeries, on that morning, no longer wanted to sell to the Jews; and also, there was great fear of simply showing oneself in the streets too much, for fear of being shot.

People ran into their houses and began to pack their valuables, and what could not be taken along was hidden in the various hideaways in the houses. Everyone was harried and worried, being certain that nothing of any good could be expected to come from this last decree, but there was no time to devote to taking a clear measure of the situation.

The Tragic Procession

It didn't take long, and the people began to go out into the streets, heading in the direction of the barracks. They streamed fro all streets in an endless chain – young, old and children. Loaded down with packs on their backs, and children in their arms, they all went in one direction, to Zamoscheh, to the barracks. Even the children carried packs with them.

The long procession of the Volkovysk Jews stretched along the middle of the streets, over the Wide Boulevard, *Zamoscheh, Kolyova* – to the barracks. Hysterical women screamed, frightened children cried, and others proceeded in mortified silence.

The great stream kept on growing with an increase in people, who joined the procession along its route. The *Tatarski Gasse* was passed, the side street where the gymnasium was, the Wide Boulevard – everyone, everyone was heading in one direction. The streaming mass was like a single body, dominated by a great feeling of confused dismay and fear, as if their hearts were telling them, this is the last journey.

In this fashion they went, *the native-born Jews of Volkovysk, whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers where among the founders of the city, and her best sons*. Like sheep being led to the slaughter the Jews went, in the middle of the street, surrounded by military and police standing along the length of the sidewalks.

Along the entire way, the Christians stood on the sidewalks, near their houses, or looking out of their windows, and smiled cynically. On their faces was an expression of satisfaction. They comforted themselves with the prospect that very shortly they would be able to rob Jewish assets.

At noon, the procession reached its high point. The streets were literally black with the throng of people.

Panic On Being Driven Into The Bunkers

As quickly as the first rows of the procession went through *Zamoscheh,* near the barracks, and came to the gate that led into the camp, they were suddenly beset with SS troops who began to count them one at a time and drove them into the camp with sticks. The panic became great, but the way back was cut off by the police, which had cordoned off all the sides around the streaming Jews.

At the entrance, the women and children were counted off to the left, and the men to the right. The entire aktion came off quickly, so that there was no time to get oriented, and realize that one was being separated from one's family. Right after taking the count, people were driven into the bunkers, and the gates closed, stifling the painful cries of the children and distraught women.

Shortly afterwards, the workers who had only later learned of the order while at their work, were also transferred to the bunkers, and also the other Jews who had been arrested for a variety of petty infractions of the local German ordinances and were located in the concentration camp at the slaughterhouse. Among them was also our witness, *Moshe Shereshevsky.*

It was in this fashion that the entire city was emptied of Jews in a matter of a few hours. All the Jewish houses were closed, and the keys were hung on the doors.

Only a few Jews were hidden in their hideouts, but showing themselves in the city would have meant death on the spot.

The First Night in the Bunkers

A terrible sight was to be seen in the darkened bunkers where the Jews of Volkovysk were stuffed and crowded in. People fell down on upon the other. Mothers searched for their children, and children searched for their parents. People looked for a spot where they could sit down, or to lay down one's broken body. Many hours went by before people were able to arrange themselves somehow. From time to time, one would hear the cries of a child in the tumult, or the groans of a woman who had been separated from her husband. Older Jews prayed out loud together.

That is the way the entire day passed. The fear at night was impossible to bear. The wild cries and weeping of the people literally melted the soul. Each and every person wept and wailed about their family. No person was able to sleep. It was frightening. It was impossible to wait until the morning came. Finally, when dawn arrived, an interest was taken in the fate of those members of the family from whom they had been separated. It was in this fashion that it was learned that it was permissible to be re-united with the families. The panic

became great. People began to run all over the bunkers, calling out the names of relatives, who had been spread all over different bunkers in great over-crowding. In the end, family members were located, and the task of sorting out the families into the same bunkers was undertaken. It was only then that they began to think about their circumstances and to take stock of these most recent events.

Hearts were sad, just as the dreary bunkers into which they had been crammed were sad. People went about with their heads down and in silence. Outside one could only see the three-tiered barb wire fence that surrounded the camp.

The Arrival of the Jews from Surrounding Towns

After all the Jews of Volkovysk were already in the bunkers, the Jews from the surrounding towns began to arrive. For the entire night and the next day, they streamed in, escorted by SS troops. They came from all sides, with packs on their backs, and with more luggage than the Jews of the city. However, their families were not broken up upon entering the camp.

The Jews from the towns were taken into a separate block. An entire block of six bunkers was designated for the use of the Jews of *Svislucz*. A separate block of eight bunkers was designated for the use of the Jews of *Ruzhany*. The rest of the bunkers was divided up among the Jews of *Amstibova* and *Yalovka*. But all these bunkers could not hold all the Jews from the towns. So, the remaining Jews from the towns *of Porozovo, Zelva, Mosty', Piesk, Volp, Lisokovo, Izavelin*, and other small towns, were put into stables, in which three-tiered bunks had been installed for sleeping.

The Bunker *Lager*

The camp with the bunkers was found in the place near the barracks in the camp, which had been constructed back in 1941, with the help of Russian prisoners of war. There, were found several tens of underground bunkers deep in the earth. In the year 1941, in the time of the Germans, about thirty thousand Russian prisoners of war lived in the bunkers. Almost all of them died out in the course of a few months from hunger and a variety of diseases. The bodies of these Russian victims were buried in mass graves, with several thousand to each pit.

There were five fields to the *Volkovysk Lager*, as that camp was called, each separated from the other by barbed wire. Each group of bunkers was a camp unto itself, and part of the larger camp. The entire *lager* was ringed with a double fence that was three meters high. There was a two meter space between each of these fences, and in between there was nearly a meter of barbed wire that had been laid down on the ground. Watch towers were erected at every intervals of several hundred meters, with large searchlights, and these watch towers were manned day and night.

The large *lage*r was divided into separate blocks. There were from six to eight bunkers in each block.

The Nazis crammed about twenty thousand people into this *lager*. There were thirteen thousand Jews from the towns surrounding Volkovysk, and seven thousand Jews from Volkovysk itself.

The bunkers were deep cellars, three meters into the earth, which had to be entered using steps. They were about fifty meters long, and ten meters wide. There were two doors in each bunker. A long table and bench stretched from one door to the other. It was dank and dark in the bunkers. Only a small amount of light filtered through the small windows that were in the ceiling.

Along the sides of the bunkers were three-tiered bunks, one on top of the other like floors, which served as sleeping places. One could enter them only in a stooped position.

Living Conditions in the Bunkers

The Nazis crammed about five hundred people into each of this type of bunker. Sleeping conditions were so crowded that it was not possible to turn over on the other side. There was no place to wash, and no place to take care of one's bodily needs. The out house was in the field, and was not arranged to be separate for men and women. In the first days, the women would wait while the men went out first. However, this was not sustainable. In the end, the thousands of people abandoned their modesty. They became used to this as well.

There also was no water with which to wash oneself. There were only a few creeks with stained water, but as soon as this water was drawn, even this water also was insufficient. People would stand by the creeks waiting for water, just to be able to at least get a drink. There was no point to even discussing getting washed. This water was literally a luxury.

Because of these terrible sanitary conditions, a plague of lice immediately developed in the *lager.* In the first days, people gave no heed to the fact that it was cold outside, and because it was dark in the bunkers, they would go outside and take their clothes off to rid themselves of the lice. After this, epidemics of a variety of illnesses began to break out. Masses of people died each day. When an inquiry was made about how someone was, the answer would be "Thank God, he's passed away already."

The question of food was the principal pressure point on the people. No food at all was given during the first few days in the *lager*, and each family had to make do with whatever they had brought along. Nobody had taken more than three loaves of bread, at three kilos a loaf. You can understand that families with grown children had brought along more food with them into the *lager,* but those with small children, or older people who couldn't carry any packages, had rather little food with them.

Only after several days in the *lager*, was a small amount of food distributed among the people. Everyone received 170 grams of bread and a bowl of soup daily. You can understand that this was far from sufficient for a single human being. Because of this, hunger became more and more intense, the physical condition of the people deteriorated, and the number of those falling sick rose daily.

The Robbery of Jewish Possessions and the Murder of the Concealed Jews

Meanwhile in the city proper, the Nazis opened up the Jewish homes and stores, and emptied them completely. The Poles gave them a great deal of help in carrying out this act of pillage, and the Germans gave them much of the booty, after they had taken the better goods to be sent back to Germany to the German war fund.

Shortly after transferring the Jews of Volkovysk to the *lager*, the Germans became aware that a number of the Jews had not presented themselves. They therefore ordered Noah Fuchs, the head of the *Judenrat* to produce the Jews who were missing. In fact, a number of Jews had managed to secrete themselves in a variety of hideouts, which they had previously prepared in their homes.

Following the German order, Noah Fuchs went from house to house, where people were hidden, and called for them to come out from their hiding places, telling them that they would not be able to hide themselves for very long, because the Jewish houses were surrounded by military forces.

At that time, *Kotliarsky*, his family, and the family of his aunt, *Fruma Movshovsky* were all concealed in a bunker he had built between the two walls in his stable. Right after the Germans had ordered all the Jews to go into the bunkers, he immediately decided not to present himself, and hide out until the storm blew over. As it happens, his cousin, *Miss Ivensky*, who left hiding for a while, was apprehended by a Polish watch guard, and never returned. When Noah Fuchs came around and demanded that people come out, Kotliarsky did not want to comply. His aunt Movshovsky and cousin Ivensky, however, prevailed upon him to do so. They later found Miss Ivensky in the bunkers.

Other Jews, however, did not want to come out of hiding, and remained there, until the Nazis found them and shot them. Among them were a number of families: *Mayer Kruss* the Smith, with *his wife* and *two children*; *Mottel Smazanovich* (a son of Dodzhkeh the Carpenter); *Feygl Beletz* (a sister of Yoss'l Beletz), and others.

The bunker of the three brothers, *Alter, Yisrael and Ephraim Tchopkin* in their brick factory was revealed by informants, and the Germans shot them immediately. Not far from them, the Germans found *Shimon Liss* (of the bicycles) hidden, along with his *son* and *father-in-law*, and shot them as well.

Others, who had been going with the Jews in line, hearing the news that the Jews were accosted at the entrance gate to the lager, and forcibly driven into the bunkers, decided to make a last attempt to escape from the marching rows. However, the Germans chased them down, and shot them on the spot. Among the victims who fell in this manner were: *Chaim Ozer Einhorn* (Rivka Einhorn's son); *Yaakov Weinstein's son (Gisha's); Alteh Weissenberg* the Secretary. The Germans shot several at the railroad station, who appeared there in an attempt to escape. Among these were: the brothers, *Feivel* and *Yitzhak Zlotnitsky* (grandchildren of Metchik from Zamoscheh); *Meir Marotchnik* (Son of Jedediah the Leather Merchant) also fled on the way to the bunkers, but his fate is unknown.

When everyone was driven to the bunkers, many elderly and infirm people remained in their homes, because they could not go along. The Germans gathered them all together in the Talmud Torah, and shot them all. Many elderly Jews residing in the old age home were shot then. Among the victims, the following familiar *balebatim* fell: the elderly *Zundel Kaplan* (the father of Fanya Tropp and grandfather of one of our witnesses, Dr. Marek Kaplan), *Abraham Galiatsky* the Barber; *Abraham Yitzhak Podolinsky* the Carpenter, and many others.

Life in the Bunkers

The Difficult Conditions There

Immediately after the Jews of Volkovysk had more or less settled into the dark bunkers, a number of the members of the *Judenrat* were summoned to the chief commandant *Tsirka*. Among them were Noah Fuchs and Shammai Daniel. The commandant told them that the *Volkovysk Lager* was temporary, and from there the Jews will be sent to a large Jewish work camp in transport groups of three thousand people each. The transfer will last six weeks. However in the meantime, order needs to be introduced to the *lager.*

Noah Fuchs was designated to be the head leader of the *lager*, and *Shammai Daniel* his deputy. A Jewish

auxiliary police was organized with Khantov at its head.

Each bunker was required to designate its own leader, who had to be concerned with the order in his bunker and the allocation of food. He also had to provide current lists of the people in his bunker.

After the installation of this organization, a commission of high Gestapo officers came to review the *lager.* Among them were also the district doctor and the mayor of Volkovysk, Winter. Seeing the frightful sanitary conditions in the *lager*, and the lack of water, the mayor promised to provide water to the Jews in the *lager* with the help of the fire-fighters. He also told the Jews that he would arrange to send in a transport full of potatoes, taken from their own storage cellars, in order to alleviate their hunger.

From all of these promises, all that materialized were several jars of paint to cover the outhouses, and a number of small boxes that contained insecticides in bottles to kill the lice. The water problem was also eased somewhat. But the hunger was not stilled. Bread, in those days, was allocated in the amount of one kilo (a pound) per person for three days. Later on, even this was not given. Sometimes several days would go by, and no bread was given at all. Bringing bread in from the outside was practically impossible. And the little bread that was brought in with the wagons of the *Judenrat*, was sold for 120 marks a loaf, which most of the people could not pay.

A kitchen was organized. At the order of the Germans, the peasants brought potatoes into the *lager,* and the kitchen began to function. *Sonya Botvinsky* was appointed head of the kitchen, assisted by *Sioma Gallin* and a number of other people. This kitchen was supposed to prepare food for the entire *lager*, that is to say, for approximately twenty thousand people. Only one portion a day was distributed to people – a liter of soup. Many did not even receive this portion. For this reason, even the kitchen did not help alleviate the hunger very much, which grew more painful each day. Hunger reached the stage where people would fall upon the wagon loads of potatoes that would be brought into the *lager*, and grab them raw. In such instances, the German guards would attack the starving people who befell the wagons, and shoot them on the spot. Every such transport left behind a field strewn with the bodies of the dead and wounded. And yet, despite the fact that the people knew what threat awaited them for falling upon these wagons loaded with potatoes, their fear of death was not as strong as their hunger. The act of falling upon these transports of potatoes was repeated a number of times a day, and at the same time, there would be a repetition of the tragic scenes of fallen victims. Among the many who were killed in such incidents were: *Notteh Pereminsky, Meir Mitch* (Gruna's son-in-law) and others. *Chas'sheh Rutchik*, the daughter-in-law of Shmuel Chaim the Butcher, fell into the boiling pot and died of her injuries.

The people in the bunkers went around scrawny and faint, with nothing to do for days at a time. The old, the pregnant women and the nursing mothers lay about, starved, on their bunk beds. The appearance of the people became so changed that they could no longer recognize each other.

The Health Situation in the Bunkers

Disease began to spread with relentless speed, and there were not enough doctors, and even more important, no medication to use. The Volkovysk doctors at that time were no longer alive. The doctors who were active in the bunkers were from the towns: *Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg, Dr. Schulman, Dr. Yitzhak Resnick, Dr. Leizer Epstein, Dr. Wallach, Dr. N. Kaplinsky* and *Dr. Horn*. All these divided the work up among themselves. A clinic and small hospital was organized for the seriously ill in one of the bunkers. Dr, Horn was the head of the clinic. However, the efforts of the doctors were practically fruitless, because of the lack of medicine and

even bandages.

The *lager* was still sealed, and no Jews were given permission to leave it and go out to work. The requests by the gentile factory owners did not help, who had a need for the workers, and had asked that they be permitted to return to their former jobs. The Germans officially proclaimed that the *lager* is sealed because of the prevailing diseases, and that nobody may leave the *lager*, in order to prevent the diseases from spreading .

The Work of the *Khevra Kadisha*

The death toll among the Jews in the lager rose with every passing day. Daily, from twenty to thirty people would die from hunger and disease. The old and the weak were the principal victims.

A *Khevra Kadisha* was established in the *lager,* for which *Yankel Tchopkin* ("Palteh's") was the facilitator. The *Khevra Kadisha* consisted of the members: *Epstein* the Ironmonger, who was the president of the organization, *Rappaport's son* from the Cutter's Store, and others. The *Khevra Kadisha* worked without a stop. The dead were buried in the fields of Vatashchin, about two hundred meters behind the barracks, where a cemetery was arranged. Tens of people were buried at a time in a common grave, without any record, without a headstone.

Among the deceased were: *Pesach of the Byers*, *Reizl* (Metchik's daughter) from Zamoscheh; *Joseph Meir Levin*, from Zamoscheh; *Dr. Feinberg's father-in-law* and *Tzipa Rutchik* (the wife of Moshe Rutchik from Zhelenevich). At that time, *Yerakhmiel the Tailor* was shot in Karczyzna going to work. A son of *Leibl Smazanovich-Kvachuk*, whom the Germans shot at work, died in a similar fashion.

That is how the situation dragged on, and the fall season did its own part. The rains and snow effectively blocked the way to the bunkers, and in the bunkers themselves the muck would reach up to the knees.

The First Work Group

After several weeks of being in the bunkers, the situation began to improve due to a sudden shift in German tactics. The Germans began to compose lists of specific work groups, mostly of those whose work skills they needed for the war effort, and they sent them out into the city to various factories. Initially sixty Jews were selected from the bunkers to be sent out – technicians, locksmiths, bakers and shoemakers, As well as other tradesmen that the Germans needed.

Our witness Roitman tells that he was among the first to be sent out to work in the city. *Dodzhkeh Botvinsky* was sent out along with him.

The dentist, *Rosa Einhorn* also was released from the bunker at that time by the Germans, along with her daughter *Dora*, and they permitted her to practice in her office at Kilikovsky's in Zamoscheh.

All these workers would work a full day at their place of employment, and at night they were taken to a separate *lager* where they would sleep. They would no longer be taken back to the bunkers at night. They would sleep in the special *lager* for slave laborers, where there were also Poles to be found. This *lager* was located in the former municipal slaughterhouse.

The Germans increased the number of Jewish workers whom they let out of the bunkers, a little at a time. The Jews immediately saw a good sign in this for an extension of their lives in the bunkers. Understand that with this change, came an improvement in the conditions of all Jews in the bunkers. The reason was because each of the Jews who worked in the city, did everything they could to obtain additional food for their relatives and friends in the bunkers.

The Christians, in the meantime, used this opportunity to extort every last cent from the Jewish workers by charging exorbitant prices which they demanded for bread. Paying no heed to all difficulty, the Jews were able to bring additional food into the bunkers for this little bit of money that they were able to earn. Nevertheless, hunger continued to persist, and additionally the cold struck the people as well. There was no firewood for heat, and people would literally expire from hunger and cold. When Jews were caught cutting some of the wood from the perimeter fence, in order to heat a bunker, they were immediately shot by the sadistic Germans.

A Typical Twenty-four Hour Day in the Bunkers

Daily life in the *lager* presented a frightening picture. Stirring there began when it was still quite dark outside. The workers had to get up quite early in their ranks in the yard of the bunkers. The women would look for ways to warm up a little bit of water for their young children. A lot of activity would go on at the bathrooms found in each bunker, that simply needed to be used by the elderly and the children. Everybody else needed to go outside and use the public latrine where people would form up in two rows. A group of women would follow every group of men. Occasionally a voice would be heard saying: "Ladies, go along in with the men, why be ashamed, one way or another, they are going to drive us all into the same grave!..."

Each person bedded himself down for the night's sleep as well as possible in the bunkers. Afterwards, some would go for water, while others would go wait in the bread line. In one of the bunkers, Jews in groups of ten would come together for communal prayer. The Rabbis would proclaim a communal fast. *Selikhot* were recited, prayers were recited fervently, and *Avinu Malkeinu* was recited, one verse after another, "Our Father Our King, Bring Us Our Salvation Soon." The Cantor would intone out loud in a weeping voice, and all would respond, weepingly. When the verse, "Our Father Our King, Do It for the Sake of the Infants of the House of Your Rabbis," was reached, the outcries reached the heavens. And it was in this ways that the Jews stood, oppressed together in the mud, in the half-darkness, someone in a prayer shawl, someone wearing phylacteries, and others without either, and their outcries came from the depths of their oppressed souls.

Towards evening, the workers would return to the bunkers. One might bring along a piece of wood, and another might have had the good fortune to bring along a few onions or a beet, and there were others who were lucky enough to procure bread from the peasants.

As soon as it got dark, the men would come together in the bunkers. Each would light up his corner of the bunker with whatever means were at his disposal. One might have lit a candle, a second a lamp – he had to make use of the insecticide that was in the bunker to kill the lice, and to do this he had to illuminate his corner of the bunker. Then everyone crawled up onto their bunk beds, and it took quite a bit of time until everyone had ordered themselves for the night. There was only enough room to lie on one side, that's how pressed people were from the crowding. A Jew in a corner recited a chapter from the Psalms, another recited the *Shema* prayer out loud. A woman talked to herself, another kept on shouting: "I want to go home!" A sick man's breathing is labored and he groans, because he has no place where he can rest his ailing bones and no air to breathe. And that is the way we lived from day to day, with the frightening fear of the coming morning.

Rarely did a day go by without a tragic incident.

On *November 11, 1942,* the Jews were thrown into a new panic. The *lager* was suddenly sealed and no one was permitted to go to work. After several hours, a command of high Gestapo officers, dressed in splendid uniforms, came into the rotten filthy bunkers, in order to investigate the sanitary conditions there. The took one look at the bunkers and declared that "The *lager* is infested with vermin and therefore must be closed down."

It later became clear that this entire incident took place because a soldier had fallen ill, and they thought that it was typhus. Fortunately, he got well several days later, and the suspicion that the Jewish *lager* was a breeding ground for typhus, was discredited.

The Murder of Sioma Gallin

Sioma Gallin, the director of the kitchen in the *lager,* was a popular figure among the Volkovysk Jews, and an energetic public servant. He was a cheerful individual, and a sense of confidence and optimism emanated from him at all times. His favorite expression was, "We will annihilate them yet." The following incident occurred to him: Once, when he had obtained water from a water tank belonging to the fire-fighters, he got into a conversation with the automobile driver who was a Christian, an acquaintance of his, and obtained a small amount of benzene from him for his lighting machine that he used to light the fire in the kitchen, but the Gestapo guards immediately spotted this. SS troops approached him, threw him around, and beat him so severely with their rubber truncheons, that he was left without the strength to scream any longer. When he was entirely swollen up and blood poured from him, he was taken to a bunker. Towards evening, the commandant *Tsirka* came to the bunker, and inquired about Gallin's health in a warm and concerned fashion. He even took the doctor to task, that he should, God forbid, not ignore him. At about nine that evening, *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky* visited Gallin, and found him in serious condition. Gallin's breathing was labored, and could barely speak. At eleven o'clock that night, the entire bunker became disassembled from the wild shouting of the Germans, which emanated from the entrance to the bunker: " Gallin, out! Gallin, out!" The Jewish police from the internal watch ran to Gallin, and informed him that the Germans are demanding that he come outside immediately to them. Everyone raised themselves up from their bunks. A deathly silence enveloped the entire bunker. One could hear how Gallin struggled to get his broken body up from the bunk. Five hundred pairs of eyes were riveted on him. When he finally reached the exit, he turned around to the people and called out in a hoarse voice with the last of his strength: "*Jews, All of you be well!*" And he vanished into the darkness. A tumult was heard immediately mixed in with the last cries of the victim. Suddenly, the report of three shots cut through the air, and everything then became still. Only the heart-rending screams from his wife marked the fact that Gallin was no longer alive.

Early the following morning, Gallin's body was found at the entrance to the bunker – the tired body of the innocent optimist.

Through a fortuitous circumstance, that night, his own son *Izzy,* was able to escape from the *lager* and went to the forest where he joined up with the partisans, and in this manner remained alive.

Sioma Gallin was not the only one who paid with his life this way, having broken no laws. The Germans inflicted this deadly punishment on everyone and anyone whose word, or even glance displeased them.

People Seek Means to Escape from the Bunkers and Many Victims Fall

Because of this, people looked for ways to save themselves from the *lager,* and to escape into the forest, even under the most difficult of circumstances. Escape, however, was not a simple matter, because even if after one had managed to break through the German lines after a great deal of effort, the Poles and the White Russians would then do their bloody work of betrayal – they would inform and turn over every Jew they found outside of the *lager,* to the police.

Once, the Polish peasants noticed human tracks in the deep snow, and immediately reported this to the Gestapo. A strong patrol was immediately sent out in all directions with tracking dogs, and a large group of young Jewish people were discovered. Seven of them were shot in the forest, and three were brought to the Volkovysk bunker *lager,* where in the presence of the head of the *Judenrat*, Noah Fuchs, and many other Jews, they were shot on the spot. The Gestapo ordered that this event be publicized in every bunker as a warning to anyone, that if they are caught trying to escape, they will be shot.

Liova Shkolnik (a son of Shlomo the Restauranteur), together with *nine friends*, worked out a plan for how to escape from the bunkers. To begin with, they had the opportunity to hide themselves in a secret place on the *Neuer Gessel*. They waited for some time there, awaiting the right opportunity in order to execute their plan for escape into the forest. The Germans, however, captured them at their hideout, and brought them to the barracks. The leadership of the *Judenrat* were then summoned from the bunkers, and shot these ten young people in front of their eyes. Among those ten was *Nakhum Gershuni*.

Among those who were apprehended by the Nazis in those days, mostly because of being informed upon by the Poles, and whom the Nazis shot on the spot were: *Abraham Bontshevsky* (from Baranovich); *Shai'keh Shafran* (the Locksmith's son-in-law); *Moshe Press* (from the pharmacy warehouse) and his *wife; Tvarkovsky*, the wife of the Hairdresser, *Genya* (a daughter of Yud'l Beckenstein the Carpenter), with their daughter; *Yud'l Levin* (who was shot in Zelva), and many others.

A number of Jews, like *Yaakov Frei* (the Porter) and *Shlomo Bayer* (a son of Shimon the Horse Trader), fled to the forest and were never heard of again. Others, tragically being unable join up with the partisans, because they could not locate them in the forest, and being afraid to appeal to the Poles for either Aryan papers or food, literally starved to death, after wandering for weeks at a time in the forest. Hunger and cold were so intense, that against their own will they returned to the bunkers. They would usually do this in the evening hours, when they could intermingle with the returning workers. They knew that there were large and well-armed partisan groups in the forests, but unfortunately, when they fled, quite often they were unable to reach the place where the partisans were located. And when hunger literally threatened them with death, when their limbs were frozen through and through, and their bodies exhausted and starved – only then, would they seek the way back to the bunkers. Even after they returned, they would not give up the thought of finding yet a new way to escape. One of our witnesses, *Katriel Lashowitz*, tells us the following:

He had returned to the bunkers, but the thought of escaping ,yet again at any price, did not stop to eat away at his mind. And one day, when a larger than usual detail of workers was being led out in the direction of the city center of Volkovysk, he decided to use this opportunity to escape yet again. About half way, in the direction of the railroad station, at that moment, a train happened to be passing through. He jumped out of the line. The passing train blocked him, and by the time the train passed by, he was on the other side of the

tracks. By the time the Germans realized what had happened, he was deep into the forest. He hid all by himself. Some time later, he met up with several other people in the forest, among them *Leonovich, Mushatsky*, and others.

A New Volkovysk Partisan Group

Those who escaped from the bunkers organized themselves into a Volkovysk group. The put up tents in the thickest part of the forest, and dug underground holes for themselves. One night, they had the opportunity to steal guns from a German arsenal. At that time, *Lazarovsky* was still baking bread for the *lager.* They would steal into his bakery at night and get a little bit of bread from him to still their hunger. Also, they would occasionally let themselves into the city, gather up remnants of food from the abandoned Jewish houses that they would find there, and then flee back to the forest.

From their position in the forest, they would organize daring attacks against the Germans who would be riding by on the roads. They would also fire on the Christian provocateurs for their cooperation with the Nazis. They paid no attention to the great danger that lurked about them. They also didn't take account of the cold, which caused many to lose extremities to frostbite, rather they went on with their work of sabotage, principally at night, in order to exact vengeance to the extent possible, for the spilled blood of their brothers and sisters.

This continued for a rather long time, until once a forest sentry followed them and betrayed them to the Gestapo. The police immediately fell on them in a surprise attack, a number of them were shot on the spot, others, among them *Benjamin Lemkin*, were brought to the bunkers, and were shot in front of the Volkovysk Jews, which they had accustomed themselves to do in similar situations in the past. This never deterred the partisan movement. People who had the opportunity to escape top the forest, would start from fresh to organize and engage in acts of sabotage.

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In the *lager* itself, conditions were not the same in each bunker. For example, the Volkovysk bunkers had a better reputation than those of the surrounding towns. The Germans did this primarily to engender envy among the Jews, and in this manner stimulate them to pay the Germans bribes to give them permission to be moved to the better bunkers. For this reason, the uncertain Jews, with the blade already at their throats, gave away the last of their jewelry ands money to the Nazis, that they had so artfully concealed, in order to be transferred to the better bunkers.

A Group of Girls from Bialystok Is Permitted to Leave the Bunkers

A group of girls from Bialystok was also found in the Volkovysk bunkers, that had been brought to Volkovysk for forced labor by order of the Nazis. After they had been driven into the lager along with all of the Volkovysk Jews, the head of the Bialystok *Judenrat, Engineer Barash*, worked it out for them to be able to return to their home city. Since a number of them had already had the opportunity to go home, the Volkovysk *Judenrat* used the opportunity to fill out the allowed quota with girls from Volkovysk, because being able to save oneself by getting out of the Volkovysk bunkers and going to Bialystok had always been

thought of by the Volkovysk people as a solution, even though the final fate, unfortunately turned out to be one and the same.

In connection with the repatriation of the Bialystoker girls and the filling of the quota with a number of Volkovysk girls, our witness *Ida Mazover* tells us the following incident:

Two sisters, girls from Volkovysk, were listed in the quota to be sent to Bialystok. The night before their departure, their mother had paid two thousand marks, the last of her means, to save her two daughters. Out of great joy, they could not sleep the entire night, and simultaneously out of great fear that they would not be dropped from the list, which would change every five minutes. At the very end, early in the morning, the governess of the Bialystoker girls, *Rita Kinishevska*, who was known for her cooperation with the Nazis, told them that because there were too many candidates only one per family would be permitted to travel. Both sisters came to their mother, and asked her which of them would then go to Bialystok. The mother was subjected to a severe trial. She had to decide which of her daughters she would send to life, and which to condemn to death. However, she did not want to have any hand in this, and left it in the hands of the two sisters, for them to decide among themselves. Ida Mazover tells, that at the same instant, they both cried out: "I want to live!" The younger sister relented, and the older sister went away. But later, regardless, they were re-united, because in the course of a month's time, the younger sister came to the older one on foot.

The above overseer, *Rita Kinishevska*, later received an award from the Germans for her cooperation. She would betray the Jews to the Germans and turn them over into German hands. The Jews took vengeance on her, and at one time, they stoned her. The Gestapo protected her, and later promoted her to a higher post in Warsaw.

The Transports

The well-know depredations began. Around *November 20, 1942*, the overseer of the *lager, Tsirka,* arrived accompanied by storm troopers, and informed the gathered assembly of thousands of people that a portion of them would shortly have to leave the *lager*. They are to be sent, together with their wives and children, deep into Germany. There they are to work and live normal lives together with their families. You can understand that most of the people didn't have much faith in this supposedly good news. Nevertheless, this news calmed some of the more optimistic people in the *lager*. They didn't have to wait very long for the realization of this promise.

The First Transport

Two days later, the *Jews of Ruzhany* received an order to be prepared the next day at 2AM to be transported. They were also ordered to prepare an exact list of all the people in their bunker, giving precisely each person's name, age and occupation.

The Ruzhany Jews occupied the bunkers opposite the ones for Volkovysk. They occupied a block of eight small bunkers. Their accommodations were much worse than that of the Volkovysk Jews. The two thousand Ruzhany Jews could not all fit into their bunker at night, because there was not enough room for everyone on the bunks, and many of them had to remain outside. If the hardship in the general lager was great, it was even greater among the Jews of Ruzhany, and especially among the elderly. There were days when the death toll among them reached twenty, and often higher. Now at the transports, they were the first to have to go into the fire.

At the appointed time, *two o'clock in the morning*, the Gestapo people appeared in the *lager* and began to drive the Ruzhany Jews out of their bunkers. They were driven out of their bunkers under a hail of blows and shooting in the air, carrying only their barest necessities in accordance with the German order. They were driven together in a spot not far from their *lager.* There, they were arranged in rows under heavy guard. When the designated number had been arrived at, they were led to the transport wagons, which were standing in the open field. They were driven into the wagons, and the train began to move in the direction of central Volkovysk. The cold on that day reached twenty degrees, and the snowstorm was furious. The outcry and screams of the people literally rent the heavens. This was the *first transport* form the Volkovysk bunkers.

By the following morning, the entire Ruzhany block was empty, and the entrance to that *lager* was locked. It was only three days later that about a hundred young people were requisitioned to "clean out" the block. Among the packages, rags, and various other articles, one could see several tens of scrawny corpses of the sick and weak Jews who were unable to make the journey that night with the transport. The Germans permitted them to have a lingering death, and only when they had all died, did the Germans order the block to be cleaned out.

The dead, just as was done with the hundreds of others who had died before them, were taken outside of the perimeter of the *lager*, and interred in a common grave.

Three days after the Jews had taken their leave of the first transport, the *second transport* took place. This second transport consisted mostly of the Jews from *Zelva, Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Yalovka* and *Amstibova*. This transport was the only one to leave the *lager* during the daytime. The Jews were ordered to assemble in the place between the *lagers* for Zelva and Volkovysk, which were separated from each other by barbed wire. They were formed into rows of four, and permitted to stand in snow and mud for a number of hours, exhausted and drained, until they were finally ordered to move from that spot. Almost all of the Volkovysk Jews gathered, not far from their exhausted brethren, and witnessed this frighteningly tragic scene through the lines of barbed wire. It is possible that the unfortunate actually envied the Volkovysk Jews because they had yet remained behind in the *lager*, even though it was only for a short time. But the will to live was strong among everyone, and every day was considered a great achievement.

While all this was happening, it came to pass that one of the "fortunate" Volkovysk Jews was able to pass something through the barbed wire to a Jew from Zelva. This immediately served as an example to everyone. It didn't take long, and everyone made an effort to give something to the Jews from the province, who were being driven away, and who by the hundreds, threw themselves against the perimeter in order to get a parting gift. Tortured and tired hands by the hundreds tore through the barbed wire and grabbed at anything that they could; for one a dried out crust of bread, for another a potato, yet another, an onion. Being hungry, and fearing the hunger of yet another coming day, they cut their hands on the barbed wire until blood ran, and the gifts given in affection were mixed with blood...

Suddenly a shout was heard from the Germans to put an end to this "farewell blessing," and the Jews immediately turned to go on their way. This was the same way that, only a few days earlier, the Jews of Ruzhany had gone.

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After these initial two large transports, a whole *series of new transports* began. From day to day, the *lager*

became ever smaller. By the end of November, only six or seven thousand remained out of the twenty thousand Jews, and among them about one thousand Jews from Svislucz.

A little at a time, the bunkers and the stables were emptied of the Jews from *Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Berestovitz, Lisokovo, Zelva, Rosh, Amstibova, Volp* and *Yalovka.*

A number of days after the Jews departed, those that remained behind would "clean up" the empty bunkers, from which they cleaned away the abandoned rags, broken vessels, and the frozen bodies of people, whom the Germans had granted the "privilege" of wasting away until they died.

When Noah Fuchs fell sick with a severe lung inflammation at the end of November, *Tsirka* the *lager* overseer visited him a number of times, in the wooden building that the members of the *Judenrat* lived. After one such visit, *Tsirka* told the doctors, in a cold and serious way well-known to the doctors, that "Fuchs must get well." An important position awaits him. He has in his mind to appoint him as the leader of a new large *lager* of seventy thousand Jews...

Where did all the transports go? This question did not cease to natter away at everyone's mind. The *Judenrat* also made a variety of attempts to establish a relationship with the Polish railroad employees, who transported the unfortunate Jews. It became clear at that time, that the trains were going in the direction of the west. Afterwards, it was learned that they headed north, to Bialystok, Malkin, and finally to Treblinka. At that time, the knowledge regarding that extermination camp was not yet clear. But one thing was already clearly understood – that all those who were going there would never again return.

The Order to Liquidate the *Lager*

Like a storm, a new decision by the Nazis suddenly disassembled all the remaining Jews – *to eliminate the lager in its entirety.*

Noah Fuchs and *Shammai Daniel* had visited the German labor commissioners several times in Petroshovitsa. They were bribed, and in this manner they influenced the German commander to delay the liquidation of the *lager* at least until August 1943. They obtained an agreement to leave approximately *seventeen hundred people* in the *lager,* all men up to the age of fifty, and are occupied in a variety of the city businesses that are related to the war effort. What was promised in these terms, regrettably they could not expect from the Nazis, who did not keep their word.

Negotiations between the members of the *Judenrat* and the *lager* commandant continued for the while. It was able to be worked out that among the seventeen hundred men, it would be permitted to have *one hundred women*, and nothing was achieved in making arrangements to retain children. Afterwards, it fell to the Jews of Svislucz to receive an order for a quota of *several hundred* to be counted among the general number of the seventeen hundred men. They were able to effect this, thanks to the fact that Svislucz was one of the richest towns in the area, and would provide a lot of leather to the German command. This concession undoubtedly cost the Jews of Svislucz plenty of money.

The *Judenrat* is Ordered to Prepare a List

The situation became serious. Fate lay in the hands of the members of the *Judenrat.*, as to which people

would end up on the list of the seventeen hundred which the *Judenrat* had to present to the Nazi commander. This means, that the selection had to be carried out by the Jews themselves. You can easily imagine the tumult of those days. A war broke out for life or death, in which every extreme form of human emotion from the human character was exhibited in his struggle for life. On the one side was Treblinka, and on the other side – remaining alive for a period of another six months. The bunkers were seen as a sort of Garden of Eden, and the six months – like an eternity...

The Confused Struggle Between Life and Death

During those few days, some of the most uncivilized emotions and worst aspects of egotism surfaced and the lowest forms of the human character; yet among others – the noblest human feelings of unbounded sacrifice, from a sense of sacrificing oneself for kin, to feelings of the most committed friendship and deepest love for humanity.

In the course of several days, the Jews besieged the bunker of the *Judenrat*. Everyone asked for a favor for themselves alone, and afterwards – for his wife, child, brother sister, and so forth. Fuchs and Daniel wrote and erased, and wrote again, and erased again. And when the list was completed, a change came the next morning. And this is the way it went on, endlessly. Today a person was fortunate enough to be included in the list, on the morrow, he would give up the 'chance,' because he didn't want to be parted from his wife. Another would go to bed, satisfied that he would remain [on the list], and on the morrow he would be told that he was taken off the list because there was someone more needy. Blood relationship, friendship, begging, threats, screaming, weeping – all these were part of the struggle to try and remain in the bunkers. During this time of the struggle between fear and hope, Tsirka would walk around and cold-bloodedly inquire if the list was complete yet.

It was especially difficult to put together the list of the women. First, because their total number was set at a much lower proportion of the overall total, and second, very few of the women were employed by the Germans in war-related work. When Ida Mazover's mother presented herself to Shammai Daniel, who worked on putting the list together, asking that he only let her daughter remain, the sole member of her family, he refused.

The *Judenrat* also took a negative view of the privileges granted to Rosa Einhorn, the dentist, by the Germans, through their permission to let her live in the city along with her daughter Dora, and to practice there, and in compiling the list of the seventeen hundred, the *Judenrat* complied with *Rosa Einhorn* in her request to put her sister *Pes'shka* on the list, but at the last minute, Shammai Daniel changed the list, and left off the names of her sister *Pes'shka* along with her husband, *Joseph Yanovsky* and their *two children*. They did, indeed, depart with the second Volkovysk transport.

Those who worked in the slaughterhouse, in connection with export to Germany, were put onto the list of the seventeen hundred. Among them were: *Dodzhkeh Botvinsky, Katz, Mordetsky, Galai, Zvi Roitman* and *Leibl Draznin*, the gardener (Roitman's friend, whom he got into the slaughterhouse on the last day, and in this way enabled him to remain in the *lager*).

On the other side, there were certain strong young men, such as the *Gandz* brothers, *Avreml Yunovich*, and many others, that had value to the Germans, and were therefore also included on the list of the seventeen hundred. However, at the last minute, they declined to remain behind in the *lager* without their wives, children and parents. Also, the few who did remain behind, did so only because of the pressure and demands made of them by their own families.

Regrettably, these very bloody and heated days of conflict and heroism are somewhat stained with egotism, and other bad character traits, exhibited on the part of certain specific people. There was no other possibility to save oneself from death other than through bribery, or a price in gold and silver. And there were people, who during these very tragic moments of struggle for life, of deep confusion, of spiritual embitterment and physical impoverishment – continuously used every opportunity to fill their pockets with money. At a time

when hundreds of people could be found in the *lager,* swollen from hunger, there were others who were in the habit of selling bread for the fantastic prices that only very few could permit themselves to pay. These same repulsive people, used their positions in the [Jewish] auxiliary police, to carry out the basest actions against their poor brethren. During the time of the transports, when everyone offered all their belongings to avoid being sent away on a transport, these self-same people extorted money from the unfortunates, promising them that they would get them taken off the list of those being taken away from the *lager,* but then did nothing. In gathering the throng for a transport, these people were the ones who assisted the Nazis in finding those that were missing from the list, in order to complete the rolls. They thought that by doing this they would obtain approval from the Germans, and in this manner, save themselves and their families from death. Fortunately they constituted a small minority, who did not have the strength to blemish the holy martyrdom of our dearest.

Everyone exerted themselves to try and save their own kin, but not everyone succeeded. Those who did not succeed did one of the following two things: either he decided to go along with his relatives on the transport, or he let them go, and remained behind alone. For example, it was in this fashion that the engineer of the electrical station *Rak*, whose work the Germans needed, and therefore permitted him to stay behind in the *lager*, seeing that he was unable to effect the retention of his wife and children, decided to go with his family on the transport. There were many instances like this, and it was there that the noblest sentiments of dedication, and self-sacrifice in the eye of death, were expressed. The phrase –"If we must die – then together" – found resonance among many families.

There were other cases, such as the *Meshengisser* family, which consisted of a father, mother and four children. The father and the two older sons were given permission to remain in the *lager* because they had work skills. The mother and the two younger children had to go with the transport. At the last moment, it became possible for the younger son to hide himself and remain behind with his father, but the mother and the youngest son had to go to their deaths. Instances such as these, of dividing and breaking up families numbered in the hundreds. There were also instances where mothers abandoned tiny children and saved themselves. And their were opposite instances, where grown children abandoned their parents and saved themselves.

These individual family tragedies were unimaginably complex. It is no light task to attempt to criticize or justify one or another occurrence of a family forced to break up. Whether it was a mother who abandoned a child and saved herself, or if a husband handled his relationship with his wife in a certain way, not meaning that he did not try with all his might to save her, doesn't mean that the husband abandoned his wife, or that the mother abandoned a child – and does not imply that they should be criticized, or considered as having transgressed against their relatives. In order to arrive at such a conclusion, such as assessing how the situation was handled, one would have to have been a witness to that situation under those circumstances.

Renewed Pressure to Flee to Bialystok

At that time, just as before, many people wanted to save themselves by fleeing to Bialystok, where, one heard, that Jews lived more peacefully in that ghetto. A number of people achieved this through a variety of ways, using unusual means. In hindsight, the head of the Bialystok *Judenrat,* engineer *Ephraim Barash* was very influential in this connection, thanks to whom a larger number of people were able to get through to Bialystok. Apart from this, one tried to smuggle oneself out of the *lager* in the wagons filled with excrement that had to be removed from there. In particular, the method of smuggling oneself out in the hearses of the *Khevra Kadisha,* with the corpses, became particularly favored, for which the smugglers were paid four

thousand zlotys (about eight hundred dollars) per person. The hearse from the *Khevra Kadisha* would arrive at the *lager* in the middle of the night, covered with bedding, on which the dead bodies were lain, which had been laying in a stable. A few living people were mixed in wit the dead bodies. The vehicle would drive to within fifteen kilometers of Bialystok, which was about a two hour ride. There, all the living people were let off the vehicle. For the rest of the night, they would conceal themselves in the forest, and on the next morning, one way or another, they would worm their way into the Bialystok ghetto. When the Germans would catch them, they would buy themselves out of it. The Germans would often shoot the apprehended people.

Our witness, *Moshe Shereshevsky* who saved himself by getting to Bialystok this way tells, that two Germans followed him into the stable, where they hid themselves among the corpses. The Germans wanted to shoot him, but he was able to buy them off.

Among those who *Ephraim Barash* helped to escape from the bunkers, and those who succeeded in fleeing to Bialystok on their own, were: *the brothers and relatives of Engineer Barash*; *Yenta Patsovsky* (the Barber's daughter), whom the Nazis later shot in Katzovshchina; *Sonya Botvinsky* and his *wife* and *child* (they were later killed in Bialystok), *Dr. Meisel* from Svislucz; the *Smazanovich* family; *Nieta Bliakher* (the widow of the lawyer, Leizer Bliakher) with her *child*; *Yitzhak Bliakher* (Leizer's father); *Avreml Farber; Moshe Rubinovich* (the last President of the Jewish community of Volkovysk, who later was killed at Auschwitz); *Sarah Peisik* the dentist; *Engineer Yaakov Shipiatsky* with *wife* and *child*; *Yankel Tchopkin* 'Palteh's' and *family*, whom the Nazis later shot in Bialystok; *Nieta Gandz* (Milia Khvonyik's daughter), and many others. Whomever the Poles recognized along the roads, they immediately turned over into Nazi hands. *Khvonyik* was among those victims of Polish betrayal.

The Terrifying Night of Departure

On the seventh day, the notorious list of the seventeen hundred was finished, and the Nazis ordered the Jews on that very same evening, *December 5, 1942*, to transfer to bunkers vacated by the Ruzhany Jews, whose fate was no longer known to anyone.

There was a great frost outside. People pressed against the gate to the *lager*, where SS troops stood with a representative of the *Judenrat,* and every name on the list was controlled. People pushed, and the sentry watch fired and wounded and dead fell. However, this did not intimidate the gathering, who knew that if one could just get over to the other *lager*, one would stay there. The intent was to remove everyone left over that very same evening in a transport.

Our witness, *Yitzhak Tchopper,* tells of the following episode in connection with the transfer of the Volkovysk Jews to the new *lager*: he happened on that day to be in the city with the potato wagons, and had made the extra effort to bring back some foodstuffs to his family in the *lager*. On entering the lager, his wife suddenly told him that she was registered to remain behind in the *lager.* Shammai Daniel had told her that if a number of children will be permitted to remain behind in the *lager,* he will permit Tchopper's son to remain behind. Tchopper himself was among those registered to remain behind in the work camp. In the crowding at the gate of the new lager, his first effort was to assure that his wife and child would be admitted to the new bunkers,

They stood for three hours in rows, out in the cold, until in the end, his wife and child were admitted to the *lager.* At 11 o'clock at night, when Tchopper himself was getting ready to present himself for admission into

the new bunkers, se suddenly saw his wife and child coming back. She related to him that an SS trooper had prevented her from entering the bunker with a child. For this reason, she was required to go back. They went to the *Judenrat*, but they could accomplish nothing there. He then got an ingenious idea. He took a sack, and wrapped his son in it. The package looked exactly like a package of merchandise, and it was in this fashion that they got past the Nazi control point at the gate to the new *lager.*

One of our other witnesses, *Moshe Volsky*, who rescued himself from that Nazi Hell and remained alive, writes about the heart-rending scenes of those last minutes before the work camp was sealed off, and the separation of thousands of Jews, who that very night were sent away with transports. Men took their leave of their wives, and children of their parents. Everyone knew that these were the last moments they would ever spend together, and in several hours they would be separated from one another forever.

Volsky was at that time in a bunker with his mother and four sisters. He and one of his sisters were granted permission to remain in the *lager.* His mother, and the other three sisters were listed to be evacuated with the transport. Only one hour remained for them to be together. The entire bunker wept and wailed. His little sister begged him mercifully to take her along with him. "I would like to live a little longer" – she said. His mother embraced him, and in a crying voice, said to him: "Moshe'leh, my only son, at least you, please remain alive and avenge our blood." The outcry reached the entire length of the bunker to the gate of the new work camp. Where did the refrain not echo: "They are going to life, and we are going to death."

The unrest grew even greater near the gate in the last hour. Many who attempted to steal into the *lager* were caught by the Nazis. Some of them were shot, and others were driven back into the bunkers. People ran back and forth as if they were crazy. They tried with all their might to find ways to save themselves by getting into the Ruzhany bunkers, which at that point had become their sole objective. Those who had small children, fed them doses of Luminal and while the children slept, carried them over packed in sacks on their backs or in valises. There, they put the children on the bunks. Two hours later, *Tsirka* came into the lager with his henchmen, the SS troopers, in order to take a count. The children had to be given a new dose of Luminal and hide them among the sacks of merchandise. A few tens of older children also smuggled themselves in this way into the Ruzhany bunkers and lay hidden under the mud of the lower bunks.

The counters went from bunker to bunker. One went into the bunker followed by the two others, counting each group separately, using their truncheons at all times to beat the Jews about the head. After they finished their count, they appointed a number of the Jewish auxiliary police to the *Judenrat*, Tsirka then said that he has the required number. At two in the morning, the members of the *Judenrat* came into the bunker with the Jewish police and with that the selection ended.

It was in this manner that the "fortunate" seventeen hundred people were separated from their dearest ones on the other side of the *lager.* A gate connected the two parts. SS troops stood guard at that gate, to assure that anyone destined to go with the transport should not sneak into the other section, where the skilled Jews who were designated to remain in the *lager* were located.

Evacuation of the Jews of Volkovysk and Svislucz

The first Volkovysk transport left the bunkers on the nights of *December 5 and 6, 1942, the fourth night of Hanukkah.* The *second transport* left two days later, on the nights of *December 7 and 8, the sixth night of Hanukkah.*

Our witness, Zvi Roitman tells that, on the night of the *Saturday and Sunday, December 6,1942*, the SS Troops entered the city concentration camp, which was located in the old slaughterhouse near the hill of the Gymnasium, and ordered about sixty people, Roitman among them, to quickly dress themselves and follow them to another part of the Volkovysk bunkers. They were immediately led away under heavy guard.

From the wailing and crying that reached them on the way to the lager, the people understood that the expulsion from the bunkers had arrived. Even though their nearest and dearest were there, these sixty people were suddenly seized with a terrifying anxiety, fearing that perhaps the Nazis would cast their lot in with the thousands of other [Jews of] Volkovysk, paying no heed to fact that they were all on the list of the seventeen hundred. The more they walked, the stronger became the din of the voices of the Jews. But the cries were no longer from the lager, but from the central [railroad] station. Their hearts became embittered when the Germans ordered them to head in the direction of the central station. Then, it became clear to them that they were being taken to their deaths.

When they had gone half the distance, a policeman ran up to them, and ordered them to turn back to the *lager*, because they were on the list to remain. As was disclosed later, a mistake had been made in taking the sixty men to the transport.

The Image of the Empty Bunkers

Transports left the Volkovysk *lager* for the full three days from the 6th to the 8th of December. Only seventeen hundred remained out of twenty thousand Jews in a small part of the *lager.* All the empty bunkers were immediately hammered shut, and the lager, that only yesterday was full of tumult and motion, took on the appearance of a vast cemetery.

Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, one of our witnesses, tells that he was one of the first who came to look upon the scene of the abandoned Volkovysk bunkers. A frightening picture unfolded before his eyes. At the entrance to the block, near the small house used by the *Judenrat*, was a veritable mountain of corpses, one on another. Bloodied heads, broken arms and legs, half naked and pushed together bodies of people, who were killed in the final hours by the brutal Nazi murderers. And in and around the bunkers they found many sacks, parts of various utensils. Everything was tossed about and scattered, and almost everything had blood stains on it.

Between the bunkers, an old woman with gray hair ran about, screaming out loud: “Why did they not take me too?” She ran up to each and every person, and implored them, begging to be turned over to the Germans, so they would shoot her.

Out of the bunkers wafted the not-yet-cooled off miasma, laden with the sweat and odors of people that had just been driven out of there.

The Gassing of Bunker “Number Three”

A group of women, older men and abandoned children remained in the bunkers, who were not in any condition to go with the transport. The SS troops ordered that they be gathered in one bunker, in Bunker “Number Three.”

A few days later, Tsirka came to the Jewish doctors and demanded that they poison all of the old and the sick

in Bunker "Number Three." "You know," he told the doctors: "we have a quick method. But why should we cause such a tumult..." The doctors categorically refused to do this. "We have time," the cold-blooded murderer said, with a cynical smile.

Towards evening, the doors to all the bunkers were hammered shut, where they also left vessels with burning sulfur for disinfecting purposes. They did the same with Bunker "Number Three," where about eighty people were crammed in – the old, the sick, and children. This aktion against Bunker "Number Three" was carried out late at night, when everyone was already asleep. These vessels full of sulfur were placed in that bunker, and the doors were well closed up.

What happened that night in that bunker, where approximately eighty people were found, only the hapless victims know. When Bunker "Number Three" was opened two days later, they found dead bodies, a part of whom were contorted in a variety of twisted positions. The terrible suffering was etched on their faces. A few still breathed. A sick little girl still groaned in the silence, and called out in a weak voice, "water, water." A boy with amputated legs had put his head into the sulfur pot, and the rest of his body hung in mid-air. It appears that he wanted to put out the burning gas with is mouth and remained in that position.

The remaining bodies were emaciated, with open eyes glazed over staring at one point. So did about eighty Jews die, while undergoing terrible suffering from a gas that killed its victims slowly over a period of several hours.

Among those who were gassed were: *Abraham Ravitzky*, "Tekeleh"; the wife of *Yaakov Jesierski* the lumber merchant; *Zlatkeh Rutchik*, "Chana-Dob'eh's"; *Mindl Chana Lev's*; *Pin'iyeh Weinberg* (he was blind in one eye), and others.

The new, and last period of the Volkovysk [Jews] in the *lager* began on *December 8, 1942.* From the approximately twenty thousand Jews, as we know, there remained seventeen hundred, who a little at a time, began to settle themselves anew. One of the former Volkovysk blocks was designated for the use of these who remained behind, consisting of its eight bunkers and its one small house for the members of the *Judenrat*. The transfer process was a very long one, and lasted approximately a week's time. First, a German exterminator carried out a disinfection process in the eight bunkers, afterwards, the Jews were transferred from the Ruzhany bunkers to bathe, and from there to the sanitized bunkers.

A few days later, the period of the transfer ended. The Gestapo guard was removed, and Tsirka left the *lager*. Control of the lager was transferred to the hand of the Wehrmacht, and control of the remaining seventeen hundred people was transferred to the hands of the army.

The Life of the Seventeen Hundred in the *Lager*

As is known, seventeen hundred skilled workmen remained behind – mostly men, and a small number of young women and children. There were also found a number of small children whose parents had managed to smuggle into the *lager* in sacks and satchels. However, according to the official position, there were no children in the *lager.* Each and every person bemoaned his own family tragedy – one had his parents taken away, from another – his wife and children, sisters and brothers. But the tribulations and difficult conditions in the *lager* didn't even permit people to grieve.

Almost everyone was involved in doing work outside the *lager*. Everyone slept in the *lager* itself, even those who used to sleep in the Polish *lager* in the city before this, were now required to return at night to the *lager*. In the morning, they were taken to work by the police, and in the evening they were returned under the same guard to the *lager*.

The members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish auxiliary police would stay in the *lager* (about twenty men), with the doctors, the kitchen staff and the overseers of the bunkers.

At that time, there was a little more food in the lager, even if the portions that were allocated were the same as before. But the members of the *Judenrat*, who had freedom of movement, would buy bread from the Polish bakers, and bring it into the *lager.* The guard that accompanied them was bought off. Also, those who returned from work, would bring back bread and other food items with them. A loaf of bread had previously cost 150 marks, fell to six marks. For this reason the food situation became better.

The Bad Hygienic Conditions

Living conditions, however, got worse and worse. Seeing as how everybody had to go to work, there was no one to look after the sanitary conditions in the *lager*. Preparing warm food was not one of the easiest things to do either. There were no ovens there. A fire had to be lit out of doors, in the cold. The temperature would fall to 17 degrees [Fahrenheit], and people, exhausted from the forced labor, had to stand outside in the wind and storm to prepare something warm with which to assuage their hunger. The eyes would practically crawl out of one's head until one finally saw the potatoes cooked and the soup ready to eat. You can understand, that after a meal of this kind, and a hard days work, nobody was particularly concerned about cleanliness. Not only were the bunkers not cleaned, but also not even the bedding on which one slept. Every night, the people would return to the bunkers, drained from work, the cold, and hunger.

Incidents With The Germans

There was no shortage of aggravation, and often serious incidents, with the brutal Nazis, in whose hands lay the fate of the remaining Jews.

One such incident is described by our witnesses, Dr. Resnick and Yitzhak Tchopper. One Sunday, a German came into the *lager* and demanded five Jewish workers for Krisievich near the central station in Volkovysk. Among those who presented themselves to him were *Motya Zilberman* (the conductor of the fire-fighters orchestra); *Yehoshua Epstein*, from the glass business (a relative of Resnick's); the *son* of *Meir* the Glazier from the *Neuer Gessel,* and three other young men. Going about a couple of hundred meters from the *lager,* the German suddenly stopped and said to the Jews: "You stole my gloves. Return them to me immediately, and if you do not, you will be shot on the spot." He gave them five minutes. The Jews argued with him that they knew nothing about it, and asked of him that he accompany them to the *Judenrat,* where they will give him a better pair of gloves. The German, however, didn't want to hear of anything, and continued to count the minutes: "Four more minutes, three minutes, two minutes!" And exactly at five minutes, he fired on the Jews, wounding a number of them, among whom was *Epstein.* Two were wounded by his bullets. *Motya Zilberman* was among the wounded. He was brought to the bunker hospital, where he remained for a few days. The Germans then administered a poison to him from which he immediately died. Incidents of this sort were a daily occurrence in the lives of the seventeen hundred Jews in the *lager.*

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The winter by this time had reached its full strength. The greatest trouble was that the people in the *lager* almost all went around in bare feet. Life, however, slowly settled into a routine. The *Judenrat* set up a shoe shop in the bunker, and this eased the problem a little bit. The Jews acquired a number of ovens in the bunkers, and it became possible to warm up water for drinking, without having to stand outside in the cold. Warm water was distributed from the kitchen twice a day. In the evening, a portion of soup was distributed.

And in this fashion, days and nights went by, and people didn't even have the time to set aside in order to take stock of their circumstances, and their future.

A few facts were already known at that time about Treblinka. The Polish train employees and the conductors who rode the line to Treblinka, would from time-to-time communicate details about the gruesome extermination, the electric beds, crematoria and other brutal methods employed by the Nazis – where tens of thousands of Jews were killed daily.

The Typhus Epidemic

Because of the bad sanitary conditions, the bunkers became thoroughly infested with lice. Even the disinfection methods did not help get rid of them. An epidemic of dysentery broke out immediately. People would lose their strength from this sickness. They could barely stand on their feet because of their weakness. At the same time, at the *end of December 1942,* an epidemic of Typhus Fever broke out. Tens of people came down with the disease daily. We were fearful lest the Gestapo find out about this, and in the beginning, the sick were not segregated from those who were healthy, because we were certain that if the Gestapo found out about the typhus epidemic, the entire lager would be closed down, and then everyone would die of typhus and starvation.

No hospital existed in the lager before the outbreak of the typhus epidemic. Only a small dispensary functioned, with a few beds, which *Engineer Y. Fuchs* and the Pharmacist, *Nakhum Kroll* had set up. The director of the dispensary was *Dr. Horn* from Voltzlavek, who later lived in Volp. The following doctors worked in the dispensary: *Noah Kaplinsky, Yitzhak Resnick, Eliezer Epstein, Marek Kaplan and Yitzhak Goldberg.* When the doctors Horn and Epstein also got sick with typhus, the direction of the dispensary was taken over by *Dr. Chaim Salman* from Yalovka. Apart from those already mentioned, there were other doctors in the lager, such as *Dr. Joseph Wallach, Dr. Shulman, Dr. Alfred Schmutz, Dr. Rosenbaum, and Dr. Schneiberg*, who was sent from Bialystok to Volkovysk after the arrest of the Volkovysk doctors. Dr. Schneiberg immediately took ill at the onset of the typhus epidemic, and died. He was actually the first victim of the Typhus Fever.

The *Judenrat* Organizes the Doctors to Combat the Epidemic

As quickly as it was perceived that the typhus was gaining strength with each passing day, a special barracks was set up in one of the Volkovysk bunkers with one hundred beds, which were immediately filled.

The *Judenrat* arranged for the provision of medicines and also helped assure that the sick would get better nourishment. Despite this, the typhus epidemic got more intense, even if the death rate at the beginning was not high.

Dr. Yitzhak Resnick, one of our witnesses, tells that he was also among the first ones who got sick from typhus. However, in his case, it only lasted a few days, and he shortly afterwards was able to return to work. The disease affected him in a milder form, because in 1937 he had immunized himself against a strain of Typhus Fever.

Among the seriously ill were: *Bialosotsky, Sokolsky, Pesach Bayer, Goldenberg, Engineer Mulya Pshenitsky, Dr. Kaplinsky's brother*, and others.

In time, all of the doctors, except for Noah Kaplinsky, contracted typhus. Fortunately, however, they were not all sick at the same time, and those who began to feel better, immediately would return to work. The doctors worked day and night. The dedication of the doctors and nurses, who were among the first to contract the disease, was completely out of the ordinary.

Among the seriously ill, there were those who developed neurological complications. These patients became completely delirious. Among the victims were *Engineer Mulya Pshenitsky*, the *wife of Dr. M. Kaufman* (he had been shot together with the Volkovysk doctors), and *Fishl Goshchinsky* the Ironmonger.

The Epidemic Grows From Day-to-Day – Many Incidents of Death

At about the middle of *January 1943*, over eight hundred people were already ill with the disease. From thirty to forty percent of all the skilled workers were down with typhus.

When the disease began to claim larger numbers of people, three bunkers were designated for use only by the sick, with a disinfection division. The living conditions in these bunkers for the sick, were not any better than the regular bunkers. Despite this, not all those ill with typhus could be accommodated in the three hospital bunkers. Many of the sick lay in the regular bunkers, where the doctors would come and minister to them. Many would do this in order to create a subterfuge that would prevent the Nazis from finding out about their illness.

Dr. Marek Kaplan took charge of one of these three hospital bunkers. *Dr. Alfred Schmutz* also worked there; the head of the second hospital was *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky* and for a period of time, *Dr. Horn*. *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick* looked after the third hospital. There were about thirty sick [patients] in the first hospital; about sixty in the second hospital, and in the third hospital, under the direction of Dr. Resnick, between 120 and 140 sick people. Dr. Joseph Wallach handled the sick people in the [regular] bunkers. And so it was, that out of the seventeen hundred people, about eight hundred got sick at various times, but at all times, during the last stages of the epidemic, there were about four hundred people who were ill in the bunkers proper. Up to the time that the lager was finally liquidated, that is, on January 26, 1943, about two hundred people had survived the illness and were already back at work.
To the end of the epidemic, the momentum of the disease was unabated, and the daily death toll ran into tens of people.

Dr. Resnick tells, that among the people in his hospital who died, and whose names he remembers well, were: *Aizik Werner* (had a writing office); *Fishl Goshchinsky* (an electrical technician, the Ironmonger's son); *Shlomo Shkolnik* (from the saloon in Zamoscheh).

The following died of typhus in Yitzhak Tchopper's bunker: *Elkeh Gallin* (daughter of the Bialystoker Baker); *Volper* the Pharmacist; *Shayn'dl* (Dodzhkeh's); *Klempner-Shchupak*, and others. His wife and child also were ill with typhus in Tchopper's bunker. They didn't go to the hospital, first, because there was no

more room there, and second, Tchopper was able to look after his own sick better in the regular bunker.

Among the many other typhus victims were: *Dodzhkeh Smazanovich, Shmuel Yitzhak Spiegelglass* (a grandson of Leizer Shaliota) and many, many more.

This condition persisted until January 26, 1943. Because of the severe epidemic, the Nazis decided to liquidate the *lager* before the appointed time.

The Last Volkovysk Transport

The Order to Abandon the *Lager*

On *January 23, 1943* the former familiar Tsirka re-appeared in the *lager*. Before people became aware of the purpose of his visit, his presence alone threw everyone into a state of great panic. The "good" news spread from bunker to bunker with lightning speed, and everyone instinctively felt that a new danger was blowing in the air, that the Angel of Death had come to town...

Tsirka came to the *Judenrat,* where he told the members that all the prior transports were settled, and the time had come for the seventeen hundred Volkovysk people. He emphasized that for the first of the transports, it was difficult, but for this last transport, it will now be easier. The people will be transferred to another *lager*, where they will work and live normal lives and under better conditions.

He requested an accurate list from the members of the *Judenrat* of those found in the *lager*, by their family names, age, occupation, etc. He also promised that the sick would be transported to the train station on stretchers

The tumult grew from minute to minute.

Those Ill With Typhus Leave the Bunker-Hospital

On *January 25th*, an order was given to be prepared for transport on the following morning, the 26th. The sick were ordered to be ready a few hours before everyone else. The intention was to take them along at nine o'clock at night. Most of them, who had obtained a bed only with the greatest of difficulty in one of the bunker-hospitals, girded themselves with strength as if by magic. Running high fevers, they left their beds, and began to walk between the bunkers, as if they wanted to demonstrate that they had strength. Because, as sick people, they feared that they would get a death sentence on the spot.

The rest of the confused and downtrodden people prepared themselves for the way, straining themselves to take along only a loaf of bread and one more package.

New Pressure to Flee the Bunkers

But many people, during those two days, sought a variety of ways to save themselves by getting to Bialystok. The ghetto there was known to be the best in the area, and [reaching] it was the dream of every individual in the *lager.* According to the reports, Jews there had a better life, slept on beds, worked in factories, and had sufficient food. In fact, it was possible for several hundred Jews, during the various phases of life in the lager,

to get to Bialystok, even though the end turned out to be the same, regardless.

Now, more than ever, the *Judenrat* stood in their way, whose allied Jewish [auxiliary] police unfortunately kept a very strict watch over this, that any such attempts to escape in this manner would not succeed. And in fact, a number of such attempts to escape were stopped by them. The *Judenrat* argued that the only ones capable of fleeing were the financially productive Jews, and their money could better be used in the current place, in order to extend the existence of the *lager* [as much as possible].

During those days, it was made possible for a number of families to escape by carrying Aryan [identification] papers. Among them were: *Nakhum Kroll* the Pharmacist, and *Moshe Matskevich* (son of Yaakov Matskevich the Pharmacist) with his wife, *Nieta* and *child.*. *Nakhum Kroll* took advantage of a chance to flee and hide in a Christian home on the *Svislucz Gasse* – Zamoscheh. He was betrayed, and the Germans shot him, along with the Christian in whose house he had hidden. Yitzhak Tchopper tells us about *Moshe'l Matskevich*, since he had spoken with him a short while before Matskevich and he family left the bunkers on Aryan papers. Moshe'l communicated to him about his plans for leaving the bunkers. He told him that he still had a little bit of jewelry in his possession, in which he placed a great deal of hope that it would be of use in carrying out his plans. He was able to flee with his family to Lisokovo. A short time afterwards, however, he was recognized by a Polish policeman, who paid no attention to Matskevich's entreaties and his offer to buy him off, and turned them over to the hands of the Nazis. Moshe'l went to the execution with his child in his arms, accompanied by his wife, Nieta. Tchopper also relates the following episode about *Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky* and his wife, *Rachel.* She fled the bunkers together with her child, to her husband and older daughter, who were in Lisokovo, where they had hidden themselves at a Christian's in a potato storage pit. But she could not stand the frightful conditions there, and returned to the bunkers with her younger child. Shortly before the liquidation of the bunkers, she had another opportunity to get away from there. She returned to Lisokovo, and from there, their entire family fled into the forest. However, Rachel and her younger child were at that point already infected with typhus from the bunkers, and both died of their illnesses a short while after fleeing into the forest. *Yud'l*, and his older daughter *Ruth,* remained in the forest with the partisans and survived.

Panic and Confusion in the *Lager*

On the *evening of January 25th*, after finding out that the *lager* would be shut down the following morning, a great deal of movement was observed among the families of the members of the *Judenrat*. The womenfolk began to pack, the children were dressed in warm clothing and they were ready to flee. However, the Jewish police noticed this. After they surrounded this specific bunker, and conducted a search, they discovered that even the *Judenrat* members were prepared to send their families to Bialystok. The overseers, however, canceled this plan, and told them that they would not be permitted to leave the *lager.* The head of the Jewish police immediately arrived on the spot, and he warned that they should not attempt to escape.

Despite this, the doctors, *Noah Kaplinsky* and *Yitzhak Resnick* managed to take an opportunity, and escape from the bunkers. Both hid themselves in Krzemienica with Christians, until the Red Army entered and liberated the city.

On the *26th of January at about three o'clock in the afternoon*, the bunker where the office of the Judenrat was located was overflowing with people. They walked back and forth, as if they were waiting to hear from "higher authorities" that the order had been rescinded at the last moment. The mental state of everyone was one of confusion. Everyone looked at one another wildly.

The sick, wrapped in blankets and eyes burning from fever, walked around like wraiths from some other world. Those who felt a bit stronger already, went outside on their unsteady feet, seeking a place where they could hold on with their hands. The only ones remaining in the bunkers were those who were unable to lift themselves up from their sleeping places.

The Historic Night of the Last March of the Volkovysk Jews to the Train Station

That same night, in compliance with the order, those who were ill with typhus were made ready. They were dressed and led to the entrance of the bunker, in order to make it easier for them to be transported. A number of them had a very high temperature, but they girded themselves with all their might to stand on their own two feet and not to remain behind with the delirious in the bunkers, whose fate was most certainly already sealed. Among those who died that day from this exertion were: *Shayn'dl Shchupak*, and *Nissan Zapoliansky* (Shmuel Chaim Bayl'keh's from the yeast).

According to the order, all of the sick were made ready for departure from the bunkers before all the others. Stretchers were obtained for them, and about two hundred sick, and weak were transferred quickly in this way to the central train station. Among them was also our witness Herschel Roitman, who at that time was still infected with the typhus disease. However, there were not enough stretchers for the sick, and others among them had to be led along supported under the arms, or carried altogether, in order to save them from certain death that awaited them if they would have remained behind in the bunkers. Yitzhak Tchopper tells us about the following incident of that night: His son and wife were also ill with typhus. He got them ready for the trip, but regrettably, he could not procure stretchers for them. So, he stood in the cold with his two sick family members, and waited for stretchers. Suddenly a stretcher bearer went by, and he bought off the owner, who promised to carry his two sick family members. Standing in this way outside, he suddenly espied *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky*. It was about one o'clock at night. She ran over to him, full of tears, telling him that she had lost a package in which she had all her valuables. This was the last time Tchopper saw her.

The people were ordered to gather in a single place, and arrange themselves in rows of ten. Suddenly, Nazi soldiers surrounded the bunkers on all sides, in order to prevent anyone from escaping. It was already one o'clock at night, when there was a sudden burst of gunfire with shouted orders of: "Out of the bunkers! If not, everyone will be shot!" They then really did shoot a few people, who lay ill on the bunks. Among them were *Melekh Khantov* and his *wife*; the *wife* of *David Joseph Kaplan*, *Khien'keh Schein* (Nakh'keh's wife, the daughter of Yitzhak Galansky), and others. Among those whom the Nazis shot while they attempted to flee, were *Nakdimon's son* from Karczyzna, *'Nioma Lemkin's son,* 'Tromba,' *Berel Kotkovsky* (the artist), and others. The shooting in and around the bunkers continued without stopping. The sick were shot, who could not move from their bunks, those who could not move quickly enough were shot. Under the force of the bullets, they began to drive the assembled ranks of the Jews in the direction of the train station.

The historic night of January 26, 1943, when the final liquidation of the Volkovysk bunkers took place, and the Volkovysk Jews were ordered to be ready to depart with the last transport to be sent to Auschwitz (as was later discovered en route), sealed the last page of the history of the Jewish community of Volkovysk.

It was in this manner that the last Volkovysk transport, of those that yet remained alive out of the large Jewish Volkovysk community, was driven away from their home town forever.

The Brutal Onslaught At Being Driven Into the Wagons

Arriving at the train station, they were quickly driven into dark cars of a long freight train, that was already waiting for them. The cars of the train were wrapped in barbed wire, and guarded by Gestapo troops, in order to prevent anyone from escaping. Apart from this, after every several cars, there was a car filled only with Gestapo troops.
The people were driven into the cars literally like sheep, under the continuous blows of the Gestapo. At the point of entry into the cars, many families became separated, in order to avoid the beating by the Gestapo, and there was no opportunity to say goodbye to one another. In this manner, for example, a wife would be separated from her husband and children, who might be driven into a second car. This happened to the wives of Cooper the Carpenter and Mulya Cantor. Mulya Cantor, for example, entered the same car as Tchopper, with one child, and his wife with a second child got dragged off somewhere into another car. He didn't even have any food for the child. Another misfortune also befell him. He later lost his mind. His child would speak to him, but the father couldn't understand him. This was just one of the completely tragic scenes in that wagon.

In the Wagons

At five o'clock in the morning on January 27, 1943 (24 Shevat 5703), the train left the station. The people were at that point certain that they were being taken to Treblinka, the Malkin station.

The freight cars in which the people had been crammed worse than animals were very filthy. There was snow and mud on the floors. The sick people who walked about, received no special cars. They were put together with everyone else. More than eighty people were crammed into as single car in this manner. They only looked through the cracks in the barb-wired windows to determine the exact way the train was going.

When day began to break, only a few rays of light filtered through the narrow windows of the cars that were wired shut. The air there was bad, and stank. Those sick, who were still suffering from a high temperature complained of thirst, even though it was freezing cold outside. But there was not a drop of water in the wagons to give to them. In the indescribable congestion of the wagons there was no place to even attend to bodily functions.

Among the people in the wagon, where our witness *Dr. Marek Kaplan* was, the following were people were found: *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky* (the dentist, who was at that time already sick and broken), *the Shevakhovich family*, *Burdeh*, and others.

Meanwhile, the train drew further away from the home city of Volkovysk. They were traveling at great speed to an unknown destination, even though everyone in their own heart knew that it meant death.

Through the cracks in the wagons, people looked out at the names of the passing stations. And when a name was seen that was different from Malkin, everyone's heart was eased. When they arrived at Malkin, everyone became almost lifeless. People began saying goodbye to one another, knowing that these were the final moments of life. However, suddenly, instead of ordering the people to disembark from the wagons, the train, with a lurch, began to move yet again. The hapless Jews began to kiss one another out of joy, because a ray of hope had come to fill their tear-filled eyes. Perhaps the Nazis had changed their decision at the last minute, and instead of the gas chambers of Treblinka, they are being sent to work in Germany, just as the Germans had themselves said.

They traveled for yet another night, in this fashion, in the suffocating, crowded wagons. It became more and more difficult for the sick. The high fever of the typhus made them suffer, and all that they wanted was water. But unfortunately, there was no water in the wagons. On the following morning, their groans became even more frightening. Those who were healthy, gave up their water on account of the sick, but even this did not alleviate the water shortage.

Coming to a station, the people would beg the watchers, who came to look at the wagons, that they should bring a bit of water for the sick, or a little snow from the ground. A few did this, and others looked at the people on train as criminals behind the barbed wire, and refused to offer a helping hand. When the forces would observe how many would throw in a bit of snow into the wagons, they would quickly drive the people away.

The state of a number of the sick worsened because of the frightful conditions in the wagons, an part of them died along the way. When the sentries found out about these incidents of death, the dead bodies were immediately flung out onto the open field. For this reason, the people on the train exerted themselves to try and conceal the deceased, with the hope that when they would arrive at their destination, they would be able to give them a proper burial. The condition in the wagons was so frightful, and the crowding so unbearably great, that the bodies of these dead served as a bench on which the living could sit.

Among the people who died on the train were: *Millie Kaplan-Solkovich; Zlatkeh Berg* (Velvel Berg's wife – daughter of Solkovich the Butcher); *Tevel Sukenik* (the Teacher's son)-- he died in the same wagon where Tchopper was; *Fira Botvinsky* (Yaakov Jesierski's daughter), and others.

The trip lasted an additional two days until the train reached the Auschwitz station.

Even though people were told in Volkovysk that they were being taken to Auschwitz, they still believed that they were being taken to Treblinka, because at that time, they still did not know anything about Auschwitz, and what it meant.

Arrival In Auschwitz

The Tumult in Being Driven from the Wagons

On the third day, *nightfall of January 29, 1943*, the last Volkovysk transport with Jews arrived at the Auschwitz station.

The train came to a stop. With bated breath and beating hearts, everybody waited to see what else was going to happen.

It was a bit of a distance from the Auschwitz station to the ramp of the *lager*. The crowd readied itself to disembark. They stood around with packs on their backs holding the sick under the arms, and waited for the German order. Suddenly, the doors of the wagons opened, and the sound of the order, "Everyone quickly off the wagons!" was heard all around. "Leave your packages," – the order rang out again. The group dropped their packages down, and began to jump from the wagons in a disorderly fashion.

The sick and infirm, who could not get off under their own power, were literally tossed out of there.

After leaving the wagons, everyone was ordered to go in a specific direction, escorted and driven by German truncheons. Arriving at the ramp to the *lager,* the men and women were ordered to line up separately in rows of five.

Those sick with typhus were immediately taken out of the wagons, and they were laid out on the ground in cold snow. The driven people often were forced to step on the living bodies of the sick that were their own flesh and blood.
In the mass confusion and uncertainty, people were unable to give each other the required help. In this vein, our witness, Yitzhak Tchopper, tells us this characteristic episode. He left the wagon with his wife and child, who were both still sick with typhus. He had to hold them under the arms, because they were unable to stand on their own feet. When the men and women were ordered to fall out into separate rows of five, Tchopper approached a number of women, and asked that they look after both of his sick ones for a short period. The only one who offered to help was Sonya Rossiansky, the sister of Noah Fuchs.

The Selection for Life and Death

Several meters from the arrayed rows, stood SS officers. One of them, with a stick in his hand stood in front, looked over each passer-by, and gave an order in which direction to go – right or left.

Those who looked exhausted, old, and incapable of work, he ordered to the left, and those who looked young and capable of work, were sent to the right.

Our witness, Roitman, who was still infected with typhus, was sent to the left. Even though he didn't know which side was the good one, he had the instinctive feeling he was not being sent to the good side. Not even taking account of what he was doing, he said to the officer that he was an electrical technician. The officer looked at him again, and ordered him to go to the right. Joseph Kotliarsky's young wife was ordered to go to the right. But when they wanted to separate her from her child, she refused, and went with her child to the left.

Our witness Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg, was standing in line and saw how a number of the doctors are being sent to the left. He didn't know whether to identify himself as a doctor or not. But seeing that Dr. Marek Kaplan, who was in the same row ahead of him, had identified himself as a doctor, and was sent to the right, to life, he decided to identify himself as a doctor. In addition, observing that a healthy appearance would definitely help in the selection, he began to pinch himself in the cheeks, in order to draw blood to the surface, and give him a healthy appearance. When his row came up, he was ordered to the right. His brother, however, had to go to the left.

Those on the right were immediately ordered to form up in rows of five. The ones on the left were just gathered together in a group.

Suddenly an order was heard "Count off." And when the SS man announced that in the right group there was a count of 280 men, they were immediately ordered to march away on foot. The rest were gathered together near waiting automobiles. The bodies of the sick still lay on the ground, in the snow.

Meanwhile, the people began to clearly understand the new tragedy. A new outcry and wailing began. The people wanted some more time with their kin.

Our witness Zvi Roitman remarks on his feelings at that moment. That especially he, who still was weak from the typhus, was included in the number of those who were sent to the work camp, at the time when such strong and healthy young men, who looked as strong as lions, among them Katz, Mordetsky, Botvinsky, Saroka, and hundreds of others, were sent to the left, only because the quota for those who could remain alive had been filled.

The Tragic Fate of the Last Volkovysk Transport

From the last Volkovysk transport of seventeen hundred people, there remained *280 men* and *87 women*. The remainder were immediately sent to the gas ovens.

This remnant of Volkovysk Jewry in the amount of *367 souls* was sent under close guard to the work camp, which was found approximately three kilometers from the Auschwitz railroad station. The place was called Birkenau, and in Polish –Brzezinski.

The 367 men and women, going in rows on foot, were passed along the way by the packed automobiles full of Jews from Volkovysk – the last relatives and friends, the dearest and most beloved, who were now on their final journey of pain.

Suddenly the cry of a father was heard from one automobile, who recognized his son, *Shlomo Frack*, marching in the lines. His father called out to him: "Look, there they go to life, and we – to death." It appears that in the automobiles, the people already understood the fate that awaited them.

From one automobile, another heart-rending cry was heard from *Miss Panter*, who called out: Jews of Volkovysk! If you remain alive, tell the world about our end! Take revenge for our innocent, spilled blood!"

With each passing automobile, the people in the lines became increasingly more certain about the fate of those victims packed in the vehicles. The heart-rending screams and crying of the bewildered martyrs carried over the entire distance.

SS troops on motorcycles escorted the automobiles. After them, came a whole phalanx of vehicles from the "Red Cross." This "Red Cross" which should have bee used to serve as a calming sedative and palliative to the exhausted among the victims, regrettably, served an entirely different purpose – it carried poisons and gases, that were used to take tens of thousands of people from this world on a daily basis.

A Partial List of the Men and Women in the Auschwitz Camp

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.

The Men

A

Amstibovsky, Berel (Dr. Amstibovsky's brother)
Arkin, Feivel , the Technician (Rutchik's Brother-in-law)

B

Bakher (from Piesk)
Bashitsky, Katriel ("Bish")
Bayer, David (Pesach's son)
Bayer, Shmuel (A wagon driver)
Beckenstein, Itcheh (son of Leibeh Beckenstein the Tailor)
Beckenstein, Boruch (second son of Leibeh Beckenstein the Tailor)
Beckenstein, Gershon (of the Kanovals)
Belsky, Abraham – Alive
Bereshkovsky, Itcheh (son of Abba)
Birnbaum, Herman
Birnbaum (Herman's son)
Borodetzky, Michael ("Koshmetch")
Boyarsky, Hosea – Alive
Burdeh, Alter (Watchmaker from Svislucz)

D

Daniel, Abraham (*Avra'sheh* – Shammai's son)
Daniel, Herschel (son of Yerakhmiel the Headmaster of the Yeshiva)
Danya (A son of the Wagon Driver)

E

Elyeh – A Carpenter
Ehrenburg (the soccer player from Warsaw)
Epstein, Dr. Leizer (from Piesk)

F

Feitelevich, Shepsel (a Hair Dresser)
Fitkovsky, Moshe (Bashitsky's son-in-law)
Fitkovsky, Moshe (from Ruzhany)
Frack, Shlomo (Yoss'eleh's son)
Fuchs, Noah

G

Galai, Israel (The Butcher's son)]
Ginsberg, Eliyahu Motya (the Hassid, from the Hotel)
Glatt (from Lemberg)
Gokhovsky, Joseph
Goldberg, Dr. Yitzhak – Alive
Goldenberg, Min'yeh
Goldrei, Abraham (the Ironmonger)
Goshchinsky, Yud'l (from the Smokers)
Guskin, David (the Artist's son), Abraham Bayer's son-in-law)

H

Hochman, Mendel – Alive
Hoffman (a relative of Moshe Meir Shkolnik)

I

Itzkowitz, Berel – Alive
Itzkowitz, Moshe – Alive

Ivensky, Moshe (Fruma Movshovsky's son-in-law)

J

Jesierski (the Photographer's son)

K

Kagan, Isaac
Kaplan, Chaim Yitzhak
Kaplan, Gedaliah (son of Joseph the Tinsmith)
Kaplan, Leizer
Kaplan, Dr. Marek – Alive
Kaplinsky (a son of Yaakov Kaplinsky the Baker)
Kaplinsky, Dr. Itzel
Kass, Moshe (a Tailor)
Kessel (from Lemberg)
Khananovich, Fish'keh (from Porozovo)
Kossowsky, Ziss'l (Dr. Marek Kaplan's brother-in-law)
Kossowsky, Joseph (a Carpenter from the Wide Boulevard) – Alive
Kossowsky, Shakhna (son of Aaron Kossowsky)
Kravchik, Leibl (a Hair Dresser)

L

Lapidus, Leizer (Shmuel the Smith's son)
Lapin, Chaim (Zelda's son from the Wide Boulevard)
Lashowitz, Aharon (from Volp)
Lashowitz, Meir (Moshe'l the Butcher's son) – a Butcher
Lashowitz, Raphael (son of Taleh[274] Lashowitz) – an electronic technician
Leshchinsky, Daniel (a Bagel Baker)
Lev, Zaydl – Alive
Lev, (Shmuel Kravshchik's son-in-law) – Hair Dresser
Levin, Mottel ("Koval[275]" – son of Shlomo the Smith)
Levin, 'Nioma (from Svislucz)
Levin, Nakhum (a brother-in-law of Kossowsky the Carpenter) – a Carpenter
Livkin, Eliyahu (a Porter)
Lipshovich, Meir (the son of the Horse-hitcher)

M

Margolis (from Svislucz)
Melamed, Yaakov (Son-in-law of Botvinsky the *Shokhet*)
Mezheritzky, Yeshayahu (the Stone Paver's son)
Mopsik, Shalkeh (a Newspaper Vendor)
Mordetsky (Abraham the Artist's son)
Mordetsky, Herschel (Abraham the Artist's second son)
Movshovsky, Alter (a cut goods merchant)
Mushatsky, Chaim (Shimon the Tailor's son)

O

Offenberg, Abraham
Olshevsky, Lova[276] (A son of Yisrael from the Tobacco)
Olshevsky, Nakhum (son of Yisrael from the Tobacco, came to the Auschwitz camp from Skidel)

P

Pisetsky, Meir (a Watchmaker)
Pisetsky, Shlomo (Meir's son)
Pshenitsky, Mulka (a Watchmaker)

R

Reisner, Zhenya (a one-time fiddler)
Rosenbaum, Dr. Alexander (Nionia Kaplan's

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274 Nickname for Naphtali

275 A nickname seemingly derived from *Kowalczyk*, the Slavic name for a blacksmith.

276 Variant of *Leib* (*Loewe* in German)

husband)
Rosenberg, Sevik[277] (from Warsaw)
Rosenblum, Aharon son of Nakhum from the lemonade factory)
Rosenblum, Bonya (second son of Nakhum from the lemonade factory)
Roziansky, Ahareh (son of Alter)
Roziansky, Feivel (younger son of Alter)
Rutchik, Avreml (a son of Leib Rutchik of the Wagon Drivers)
Rutchik, Yoss'l (a second son of Leib Rutchik)
Rutchik Yitzhak (a third son of Leib Rutchik)
Rutchik, Yekhezkiel (Pesach's son)
Rutchik, Meir (Pesach's second son)
Rutchik, Pesach (a Wagon Driver)

S

Saladukha, Moshe
Shiff, Hona (Meir's son from the watch business)
Schmutz (Dr. Schmutz's son – the Veterinarian)
Shaliota, Yehuda (a son of Bora)
Shaliota, Yisrael (a son of Bora)
Shchupak, Isaac
Shevakhovich, Leizer (a Smith) – Alive
Shtumer, Isaac
Shtumer, David
Sulkes, Zalman (a son of Shmuel) – a Hair Dresser

T

Tchopper, Yitzhak – Alive
Teacher (lived in Lisitsky's house)
Tropp, Zaydl (from Porozovo)
Tsigelnitsky, Chaim
Turiansky, Yisrael-Nott'l (David the Butcher's son)

W

Weiner, Moshe (son of Shmuel-Sholom the flour merchant)
Wilk, Zhoma[278] (from the finished goods - Tzil'yeh Yankev's husband)
Wolfowitz, L. (Dereczin) – Alive
Wolsky, Moshe (the Optician) – Alive

Y

Yezernitsky, Mulya (Alter's son)
Yunovich, Zalman

Z

Zaklas, Yaakov Meir
Zapoliansky, Yaakov
Zapoliansky, Shmuel – Alive
Zernitsky, Yaakov (Shtovoi)
Zernitsky (Yaakov's son)
Zucker, Salek – Alive

[277] Nickname for *Shevakh* (Praise)

[278] Nickname for *Shlomo* (Solomon)

The Women

A

Amstibovsky, Sarah, Mir'el and Helen (sisters of Berel and Dr. Amstibovsky
Applebaum, Tcherneh – Alive
Arner, Fruma

B

Boyarsky, Chas'sheh (the Hatmaker's daughter) – Alive

E

Ein, Rachel (Yoss'l Ein's daughter)
Epstein, Gittl (Berel the Tank Repairer's daughter)
Epstein, Sonya (Granddaughter of Tailor from Rosh)
Epstein, Shayna (from the glass business)

F

Fan'keh (e.g. Fanny) from Slonim
Faralder (wife of Dr. Faralder from Rosh)
Feitelevich, Elkeh (the Miller's daughter) – Alive
Ferevolnik

G

Geldner (from Slonim)

K

Kaplan, Dr. Dora (Dr. Kaplan's wife)
Kaplan, Nionia
Kaplinsky (a sister of Dr. Kaplinsky)
Kimmelman, Paulia
Kossowsky, Sulka[279] (from Slonim)

L

Lifschitz, Shayn'eh – Alive
Lifschitz, Elkeh (Shayn'eh's sister)
Lev, Zaydl

M

Maliakovsky, Sonya (from Porozovo)

N

Nishvitsky, Rachel (from Lisokovo)

P

Pomerantz, Mikhlah (from Ruzhany)
Pshenitsky, Dora (Rosa Einhorn's daughter)

R

Resnick, Khemeh

S

Schulman, Tzil'eh (wife of Dr. Schulman from Podoroisk)
Sedletsky, Ed'zheh (Dr. Sedletsky's daughter)
Shereshevsky, Shifra (a sister of Moshe Shereshevsky)
Shevelevich, Alta (from Svislucz)
Shidlevich, Alta (from Svislucz)
Slonimsky, Guta (granddaughter of Shmuel the Tank Repairer's)
Smeizik, Masha – Alive

W

Weiner, Chaya (a daughter of Yaakov Weiner) – Alive
Wolsky (Moshe Wolsky's sister)

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[279] Also *Sule*; nickname for *Shulamit*

The *Lager* in Auschwitz

The *Auschwitz Lager* was not built with in the regular manner of such a camp. There were entire rows of various kinds of *lagers*, built one next to another. Each lager had its own name – following the alphabet, and also according to the designation given it by the people who were brought together there.

There was also a quarantine-*lager* for the new arrivals. Immediately after it, there was a Czech family *lager,* where the Germans had brought together about twenty thousand Jews from Theresienstadt. They kept them together with their families and children, under special privileged conditions, and they would force the Jews in that *lager* to write favorable letters back home. This helped the Germans concentrate the Jews of Czechoslovakia. After they no longer had a need for these letters, they gassed and burned all the Jews in that *lager*. After the Czech *lager,* there was a *lager* of Hungarian Jews and Jews from Lodz, a laborers *lager* for men and then also a "gypsy's-*lager*" where there were Jews from Radom, Skoroshisko[280], and other towns. After that, there was a *lager* for the sick; a *lager* where the Germans used to bring the remaining possessions of the victims, and store, pack and count them. The Jews would always bring along the last of what they had, because up to the bitter end, the Germans misled them, not revealing the truth of what was going to happen to them. Jews would drag along heavy bundles of the sum total of their worldly possessions, because up to the very end they were under the impression that the Germans were leading them to work.

All these *lagers* stood one next to the other. In each of the *lagers*, there were about twenty-odd bunkers, or similar wooden barracks, which stretched in long rows. The barracks had no windows, and were better suited for horses than people. Each barrack was surrounded by a high fence of electrified barb-wire. The fence was set in high pillars and iron stanchions.

In all of the lagers, there were about *sixty thousand people*, Jews and Christians. The Jews, however, always received an entirely separate treatment. There were about 400 to 500 people crammed into each bunker; and at times of a heavy influx of people, they would cram in up to nine hundred people in a bunker.

To the right of these bunkers were found the *lagers* of the women. Birkenau was three kilometers from the central Auschwitz *lager*, where there were five large crematoria. The transports were brought there for extermination.

The First Night in the *Lager*

When the ones selected from the last Volkovysk transport were taken into the Auschwitz *lager,* it was growing dark outside, and candles were burning in the bunkers. A very thorough personal search was conducted immediately. Everything was taken away from the people, and they were all taken to the bath.

The bath was located in a deep, cold cellar. The men stood around for about five or six hours in the cold, waiting for their turn. Their turn to wash came after half the night was gone. The Volkovysk transport was not the only one that had arrived there at the *lager* on that day. Daily, transports would arrive there from various European countries. In the end, they took away the clothing that they wore, and everyone had to stand out in an ice-cold wind.
After waiting naked, yet again for a longer period of time on the cold cement, they were finally given a few

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[280] *Skaryszew* in Polish.

things to wear, such as torn trousers, a jacket, worn out shoes and a couple of pieces of underwear.

Already in these first hours, two victims fell among the Volkovyskers, and they were two suicides. Standing at the entrance to the bath, the *son of Dr. Schmutz* took poison as did the *brother* of *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky*. The latter lived through the night, and in the morning, passed away while already unconscious. It would appear that on arrival in this new camp, the gruesome scene that unfolded before them robbed them of their last shred of hope, and out of great resignation they decided to end their lives. Many other people would have done so as well, but unfortunately didn't have any poison.

Frozen and completely drained, they were yet again driven outside, being escorted the entire way with the truncheons of the 'kapos' (these were the work overseers), and the block-seniors. They were led off to the registration building, where they had to go through the formalities of all newcomers. They were carefully recorded in the thick lager folios, where a variety of details were also entered.

Everyone had a number burned into his arm. The number of those from Volkovysk was '94,000' and higher. From that moment on, they stopped to exist as people with names, and they were transformed into living numbers.

All of these formalities lasted until about four in the morning. When it had almost gotten light already, they were first taken to sleep in a half dark barrack, where the air was heavy and stank.

The barrack where the Volkovyskers were taken, belonged to the 26th block in the quarantine. The head of the block was *Leon Stokhovik*.

Along the length of this bunker, and by its entrance, there were three-tier bunks built out of cement and brick, one on top of the other. On this cold base, in their torn rags and shoes, they threw themselves down on the bunks, pressed together, one next to the other, and in this manner fell asleep.

The Three Days of Quarantine

Before they even had a chance to get warmed up, they rang and called everyone to emerge from the bunker. Those that did not move quickly enough from the bunker, received a hail of blows from the truncheons of the block leaders. This was, it seems, a custom to confront the new arrivals with especially severe methods, the 'Green Ones,' notwithstanding the fact that beatings were the order of the day in the life of the camp.

The people were forced to stand for several hours out in the cold, doing a variety of tasks. Blows rained down on them from all sides. This same procedure was repeated in the evening. It was in this manner that they were detained for three days, entirely separated from the other people in the *lager.* Very early, they would be awakened and driven out of the bunkers to perform tasks, or simply to stand out in the cold and mud, and the same in the evening. The daily diet consisted of a small piece of bread of about 150-200 grams in the morning, a liter of warm soup at midday, and a quarter of a liter of cold tea in the evening. The block leader, Leon Stokhovik, was in the habit of taking two-thirds of these provisions, that were allocated for the entire block, for himself and his assistants.

People lost the last of their strength, and with the greatest impatience, waited for the hour when they would be sent to work.

The Life of Bondage in the *Lager*

A few days later, the quarantine period for the Volkovysk Jews ended. They were divided up among various commands and they were attached to a number of work groups.

They were led to work each day in rows of five to the sound of orchestra music.

But the hopes that the Jews placed in a betterment of the condition of their lives, that it would improve as soon as they would begin to work, also quickly dissipated. It was exactly the opposite, it was only now that their real troubles and suffering began in the camp.

The work was exceptionally difficult for the starved and tired men. They were forced to work under strict supervision, that did not even let them catch their breath. The work consisted of building bunkers dug deep ly into the ground, digging ditches and building roads. The men stood half naked in the cold, from early morning until night, and in deep mud up to the knees with the shovels in their hands.

For the smallest thing, and sometimes for no reason at all, the SS troops would beat the workers mercilessly. Those who could not stand the beating, and comply with the demands of the overseers, would be beaten to death on the spot. Every day, dead bodies would be brought back to the *lager.* They were brought back, because it was forbidden for anyone to be missing – living or dead – the count always had to match. The 'kapo' who brought back the greatest number of dead would receive commendation for this, and as a reward would receive a greater ration of food. The 'kapo' staff were Aryans, by and large Germans, who for certain specific crimes, were also interred in the *lager*. The lives of the Jews were placed in their hands.

Conditions in the *lager* itself were not any better. The overseers and their assistants would beat people at every opportunity, and often without any reason. The truncheons always hung over the heads of the people. At every turn, one would hear the following refrain that accompanied the beatings: "Do you think you came here to live?!"

Especially painful for the Jews was the fact that in addition to their suffering and tribulation, they were generally beaten by Jews [as well], their own brethren. At the outset, the people could not grasp this fact. These people were from that part of the Jewish populace, in which bestiality lurked deep in the recesses of their hearts and souls, which in that time found an auspicious time to spread its poison. Egoistic and sadistic tendencies surfaced among them. They believed, that through this manner of behavior they will be able to redeem their own lives at the expense of hundreds of other lives. In order to curry favor with the Nazis, they beat and tortured their own brethren.

It is therefore not any wonder that, under such working and living conditions, the Jews began to lose their capacity to resist – first their morale, and then their physical capacity.

Many were of the opinion that it wasn't worth suffering so much. Regardless of what they did, they would not be permitted to live much longer. The deterioration in morale that they suffered, the filth in the *lager*, and many other factors, brought them to the point where many people fell in their tracks, and died shortly thereafter. Also, death was not resisted, because it liberated people from much tribulation and suffering.

Bunker "Number Seven"

The *lager, Bunker Number 7 – the Seventh,* as it was called there, was especially notorious for its dismal condition. Anyone who was looking for a solution to his difficulties only had to go to this bunker, and the solution would find him very quickly. It was also called '*the Bunker of the Sick,*' and indeed, one could get "well" very quickly there. From time to time, when this bunker would fill up with people, the Nazis would come late at night, and bring automobiles to clean them out and take the people to the crematoria.

For this reason, people would attempt to avoid this bunker as far as was possible, even when they got sick. Also, those who got infected with typhus, would hide themselves and avoid seeing a doctor, because the doctor would have them sent immediately to "*Bunker Number Seven,"* from which one no longer came back alive.

Details of the Death of A Number of those from Volkovysk

Our witness Tchopper relates an episode to us that took place to *Avra'sheh Offenberg* (a son-in-law of Yaakov Weinberg of the lower quality merchandise business) and *Moshe Fitkovsky.* They were both sick, and they were both sent to Bunker 'Number Seven.' After spending only one day there, they got the drift of what was happening there. This was very shortly after the Volkovysk transport arrived at Auschwitz, and the exact nature of this bunker was not fully understood. They decided therefore, regardless of the fact that they were sick, that they would get themselves out of this bunker. This matter worked out for them, and they were able to return to the bunker with the rest of their Volkovysk comrades. But, in returning to the block, they were compelled to go to work right along with everyone else, even though they were not entirely recovered. Several days later, *Fitkovsky* had to be brought back [from work] supported under the arms, and he died that same night. The other one, *Offenberg*, didn't manage to live much longer either. One day, he too, had to be supported under the arms coming back from work. At the roll call, when everyone was lined up outside in deep mud, Offenberg could not stand on his own two feet, and fell down. There was another dead body not far from him. When Offenberg revived slightly, he wanted to pick himself up and sit on the corpse, but he didn't even have the strength to do that. The people, including Tchopper, were standing in line at the roll call, a scant few feet from him, but unfortunately no one could help him, because for that alone they would have paid with their lives. So, sitting in the mud, he lowered his head and leaned against the corpse. After a short while, he raised his head to take a look at the rows of the Volkovysk people, as if he beseeched them to give him help, until in the end, he expired, stretched out in the mud. At that point he was not brought back into the block. The Nazis disposed of him along with the other dead from that day.

Yitzhak Tchopper tells us another episode, which casts a stark light on the tribulations and suffering that the Jews had to endure in the Auschwitz camp.

The matter took place in the month of February, several weeks after their arrival in the Auschwitz camp. As was the custom, the men were awakened at four in the morning, and were driven out to the roll call. It was still dark outside, wet and cold. After the Germans took count of the dead for that day, as well as those who committed suicide – many people would take their lives in those days by hanging themselves from the electrical wire at the camp perimeter – they represented that they were missing one person, and therefore could not end the roll call. The entire *lager* was thrown into a panic. The block seniors, as well as the house servants were ordered to find the missing person. In the end, he was found under the bunks on the brick, where many used to sleep, because there was not enough room for everyone on the regular bunk beds. The Jew, whom the Germans eventually found, was in a deep sleep, and did not hear how the people in the block

arose for roll call. The block senior dragged him out of the block, and in front of everyone, shot him to death. The hapless victim didn't even have a chance to give any reason for the situation that had been created.

The remainder of the people in his block were punished that day. On that day, they did not go to work, the people were given no soup, which was poured out into the street in front of everyone. They had to remain standing outdoors in the cold for the entire day, and they were not permitted to go back into their bunkers. The day was terrifying. A mixture of snow and rain fell all day. The people herded together like sheep in the wet and cold, pressing up against one another, to get a little warmer. However, even this respite was denied them, because when the block overseers would see this, they would drive the people apart in various directions with truncheons.

One of the Volkovysk Jews, the artist, *Shmuel Mordetsky* (the older son of Abraham Gersh'keh's), whom the house servants had beaten severely the prior day, lost his mind standing outside that day. He stood leaning against a wall. Suddenly, in the cold, he took all of his clothes off, and shortly thereafter, he fell and expired. Also, his *younger brother, Herschel* died a short time afterwards, from heartache. The house servants brought Mordetsky back into the bunker, carried out the usual routine reporting, and ten minutes later, was brought outside by them and was tossed among the other corpses.

On that black day, over twenty people were killed in this manner, and approximately one hundred people got sick, of which the greater portion were taken to Bunker 'Number Seven.' Yitzhak Tchopper tell yet again about his two friends, *Hona Shiff* and *Alter Burdeh,* from Svislucz, who were with him in the bunker, how the two of them were killed in different ways on the same day. They were both watchmakers by trade, and in the beginning not bad ones, because the 'kapo' of their block was in the habit of asking their advice about the many watches and other valuables which fell into his hands. One day, however, Burdeh was severely injured in the knee from blows he received from an overseer, wielding a truncheon at work. His knee became swollen, but he did not reveal this to the doctor, for fear of being sent to Bunker 'Number Seven,' and mustering all his strength, continued to go to work. One day, *Hona Shiff*, who had become ill with dysentery from the bad water in the *lager*, could not get up to go to work, and Tchopper woke him up and warned him, that if he doesn't get up, he will be shot to death. The bunker overseer immediately entered and assaulted him with his truncheon. *Hona Shiff*, however, didn't move from his place. The house servant tore off his cover, and seeing that he lay there in bad condition from dysentery, he beat him even harder, and threw him down from the bunk. *Tchopper* then took *Burdeh*, who limped on one foot, and went off to work with him. On the way, the 'kapo' noticed how Burdeh was limping, and he didn't permit him to go to work. Burdeh's pleading to be allowed to go to work did not help him, because he knew fully well what awaited him if he had to remain back at the bunker. That evening, when Tchopper returned from work, he no longer ran into Burdeh and Shiff.

In these dark days in Auschwitz, a day would not go by without victims.

It was in this manner that *Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg* (the Hassid's son), who was fortunate during the selection of the Volkovyskers, to get over into the ranks of the 280 men, didn't last long in Auschwitz. Only a few weeks after the arrival in the Auschwitz camp, the Nazis beat him up terribly, he then became sick, and they permitted him to be sent to the crematorium. One night, he asked Hona Shiff, who was at that time still alive, to give him his strap, and he would hang himself. Hona would not let him commit suicide. In the morning, Ginsberg was again beaten by the Nazis, And when he finally did have the strap, he was totally powerless to do anything with it. The Nazis took him to the crematorium and killed him there.

A similar incident also took place with *Avra'sheh Daniel*, the son of Shammai Daniel. His parents were taken

to Auschwitz on the final transport, but from there, they were immediately sent to the crematorium. Avra'sheh remained in the Auschwitz camp.

Yitzhak Tchopper tells, that one day, he and *Moshe Saladukha*, who was in the same *lager*, were approached by an overseer after work, and ordered them to strip a corpse. The dead body lay not far from them in the mud, on the ground, and it was difficult to recognize the faced, because the entire body was smeared in mud. Only later, when he was undressed, they saw a number from the 94,000 series on his arm, which was the series of their own transport. They then scrutinized the dead man more carefully, and recognized Avra'sheh Daniel. They then inquired of the remaining people, who worked that day with Avra'shkeh, and they found out that he was killed by his overseer at work.

Among the others who fell at their work from beatings by the overseers, and whose deaths Tchopper can attest to, were the following: *Yeshayahu Mezheritzky, Herman Birnbaum, Katriel Bashitsky, Yaakov Meir Zaklas, Leizer Kossowsky, Min'yeh Goldenberg* (son-in-law of Khirurg), *Chaim Mushatsky, Motkeh Koval, Shmuel Bayer, Berel Amstibovsky, Avra'sheh Offenberg, Fish'keh the Butcher*, and many others. Hardly a day went by without victims, either at work or in the bunkers.

Noah Fuchs, the former head of the *Judenrat*, was on one occasion severely beaten by one of the block seniors, who took vengeance on him for his handling of a situation during the time Fuchs was head of the *Judenrat.* Fuchs had a heart attack, and died shortly thereafter.

Many, in those dark days, took their own lives out of great anguish. It became repulsive to them to continue to suffer, and since they could not see any way out of the situation for themselves, they chose death as a better alternative. For example, *Shepsel Feitelevich* the Hair Dresser slashed the veins in his wrists; *Feivel Arkin*, the dental technician (Rutchik's brother-in-law) hung himself. People at night would run to the electrified barb-wire fence, and upon first contact would electrocute themselves and die, either that, or get shot by the sentries near the perimeter. A large proportion would voluntarily register to go to the crematoria, in order to bring an end to their suffering. In this way, the population of the *lager* grew smaller and smaller.

The largest part of the last Volkovysk transport were exterminated, by the most brutal means at the hands of the Nazi murderers, in the first six weeks after their arrival. Even the strongest, such as the Bayers, and others like them, were unable to hold out. It was in this fashion, that after this initial period of six weeks in the Auschwitz camp, out of the 280 Volkovysk men, only about sixty remained alive; and in a short two months later – only 25 men.

Those who remained alive, and carried the full brunt of the terror from German brutality, apparently were able to do this thanks to a stiff resistant commitment of body and soul. Each helped the other under the worst of circumstances. Assistance was also rendered to those who eventually perished, and it is remarkably a miracle that even this small number managed to stay alive.

All those from Volkovysk who survived, and lived through the terrifying days in the Auschwitz camp, intone today with great pride that none of them in any way cooperated with the enemy in his extermination program. None of them took the position of a 'kapo' or any other position of responsibility. They simply assisted one another, and protected themselves to whatever extent was possible.

The Women's *Lager* In Auschwitz

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, the women were separated from the men. The selection process took place exactly as it had with the men, and only *eighty-seven young women*, able to work were separated to go to the labor camp. The remaining women were immediately sent to the gas chambers.

Upon arrival in the *lager,* they underwent approximately the same terrifying procedure that the men did. The hair was cut off their heads, almost to the point of baldness. They were given green uniforms, from the Russian captives. The lager number was tattooed onto their skin. Their number was 31,900 and higher. They were then thrown into the barracks, twelve to a bunk.

Life in the Women's *Lager*

Life in the women's *lager* was not different from that of the men. The same conditions prevailed in both camps, except for the relationship to the overseers, which was much worse in the women's bunkers than in the case of the men. It was because they were not physically capable of performing the same amount of work that was allocated to them, as the men, they were treated even more brutally.

The sanitary conditions for the women were much worse than those for the men. The bunkers were filthy, dark and thoroughly infested with lice. Their day began at three o'clock in the morning, when they were driven out of the bunkers and forced to stand outside, in the cold, until six in the morning. The daily morning inspection lasted for three hours. At six in the morning, they would be led to work. And then they would return at six in the evening to the bunkers. But, before they would be given the privilege of going into the bunkers, they had to stand outside from six to wight for the evening inspection.

Their daily diet was identical to that of the men. They would receive about 150 grams of bread a day, with a small bit of margarine, and warm soup in the evening. Also, that could only be gotten by standing on line outside, amidst a frenzy of pushing and shoving. The stronger girls would push themselves ahead in the race to get more, and the weaker ones, for whom the daily work routine sapped their strength to the point that they didn't have the strength to push themselves forward, would not even get this small portion of food to eat. However, a strong solidarity reigned among the girls from Volkovysk, and they would share their last bite with one another.

A Number of Episodes With the Girls from Volkovysk

Shayna Lifschitz, one of our witnesses, tells us an episode concerning *Dora Pshenitsky* (the daughter of *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky*) with whom she lived in the same bunker, and with whom she slept next to her.

Dora came to Auschwitz together with her mother. She could have actually saved her own life, because the Christian woman, *Stevka*, who raised her from infancy, wanted to take her and hide her in the village, but Dora did not want to be separated from her mother, and decided to go with her on the transport. Despite this, the Nazis separated them upon arrival in Auschwitz. Rosa was separated out with the people of Volkovysk who were sent to the crematorium, and Dora became part of the 87 women to remain behind in the Auschwitz labor camp.

Since the time she was separated from her mother, she was not the same person. She lost her will to live

entirely, and showed very little resistance and stamina. At the beginning, she did the daily quota of hard labor, forced on the women by the Nazis, along with everyone else. This continued until the month of April, two months after their arrival in the camp. She then became ill with dysentery. The girls in her bunker, would nevertheless take her along to work, where they would do her portion of work each day, in order to protect her from the scrutiny of the overseers. Her state of health, however, grew worse from day-to-day, until she became seriously ill. One day, she was no longer able to lift herself out of her place of sleep, because her legs were severely swollen. The girls were compelled to leave her behind in the bunker, because they knew that no good would come of this. And indeed, that evening, when they returned to the bunker, they no longer found Dora there.

Shayna Lifschitz also tells the episode of how she left her only sister, *Elkeh* behind who was in the same bunker with her, in a pitiless fashion. Something had gone wrong in the women's bunker. The German commander ordered that the girls, who did not want to confess, be punished. He ordered the girls to fall out into rows of five, and as punishment, he sent this cohort of girls to a special punishment barracks. Shayna's sister was in that cohort. Those five girls never returned.

In general, it needs to be recorded that more women came under the yoke of Nazi torture than men. This was because of the greater mortality rate among women. Many, in those days, were victims of lice born disease, dysentery, and other diseases.

"Death Bunker Number 25"

Bunker Number 25 was to the women, what 'Bunker Number Seven' was to the men. One did not return from there alive. That Bunker, Number 25, was also called "The Death Bunker." From there, inmates were sent directly to the crematorium. This bunker was always over-filled. Not only were the sick brought there, who could no longer be helped, but many women, out of great disheartenment would voluntarily go to that bunker, because they could no longer bear the severe conditions and suffering.

This is the way it happened to *Moshe Wolsky's sister*. Her one solace in life was that she also had a brother in the camp. She would often wait at the perimeter barbed wire fence, and visit with him there. When a longer period of time went by, and she no longer saw him, she understood that he had not survived the typhus, with which he was suffering when they had arrived in the camp, and also the severe conditions there. She presented herself to be taken to the crematorium voluntarily, out of great despair.

Our witness Tchopper tells, that one time it happened that he was working not far from Bunker 'Number 25.' A terrifying scene unfolded before him. Tens of women lay prostrate on the ground with stretched out arms in the manner of the dying. From time-to-time, the female overseer of the bunker would go over to them, and scrape dirt with her boot to cover the heads of the half dead women. It was in this manner that she determined which of them were no longer alive, and then proceed to fill out the appropriate death certificate. After filling out this document, she would put a noose around the head of the dead body, and use the rope to pull the body to the bunker over stones, to the burial pit.

The Selections

Among the incidents in the daily life of the camp, both with the men and the women, were the frequent selections. A Jewish holiday would not go by that the Germans would not, out of revenge, carry out a selection on that day. The fear of those selections dominated everyone.

At the selection, the men would be arranged in rows of five – three paces from one another. The camp doctor, accompanied by an SS man would pass through the rows of the people, who stood naked outside. Whomever the doctor so much as gave a look at, his fate was sealed. Each selection meant about 50 percent of the people would be sent to the crematorium. These people, who were condemned to death, were that same evening taken out of their bunkers, and in the course of two or three days, exterminated in the gas chambers. Many refused and did not want to go to the gas chambers. They preferred to be shot to death by a bullet, rather than be asphyxiated in the gas chambers. And the Germans, indeed, would shoot them for their resistance.

Free from the selections, were the Jewish commandos, those who worked at the baths. Also the clean-up commandos were free of these selections, that means, those who worked at the transports. Also, a third group, that worked at the crematoria.

These selections had the impact of a war of nerves on the exhausted people. They determined – who would live and who would die The selections in the hospital were especially terrible. From there, about 98 percent of the Jews would go to the crematoria.

For this reason, people paid no attention to how sick they might be, always looking for a way to avoid going to the hospital. It was forbidden to remain in the bunkers, so one would drag oneself to work, no matter how sick, and also keep an eye out, that the overseer not note the fact that one was sick.

The following incident occurred to Tchopper in *January, 1944*, after 14 months of being in the camp, in which his hair turned gray over one night.

One day at work, after he finished loading a vehicle that was high off the ground, he jumped down from it, and dislocated his right leg, which immediately became severely swollen. He was brought back to the lager, carried under the arms. His knee was in bad condition, and he was forced to present himself to the doctor. He was sent to the hospital, where he was put into the surgical block with one hundred other sick, among them 52 Jews. His condition improved, starting on the fifth day, thanks to the protection of Dr. Marek Kaplan, who was employed in that division, and he was allowed to be taken to another block, where he was supposed to be given lighter work. When he went to the administrative office about that transfer, he was told that this could not be done, because the following day, there was to be a selection at the hospital.

Tchopper knew very well what a selection at the hospital meant. That night, he didn't sleep a wink. Various thoughts ran through his mind for the entire night. He was in the grip of anxiety among the fifty-two Jews who were to be condemned to death in his barrack, and the fear of the gas chamber did not leave of him. At seven in the morning, all the sick were ordered to rise and strip naked. Tchopper took the bandage off of his foot, and washed the icthyol off of his foot, and fell into the row with the others, two to a row, between the beds. At 8:30AM, the doctor arrived with the SS suite. The head doctor of the hospital told them that there are *52 Jews*. They were immediately counted. *50 of them*, except for Tchopper and a convert, who died later anyway, were exterminated in the gas chambers two days later, on January 20, 1944. Among the fifty people was also a relative of Tchopper's from Narevka. These two days after the selection and before the sick were transferred to the gas chambers, were the most terrifying of Tchopper's life. The parting with the people, the looks of envy that they shot him, because he remained outside the number of the selected ones, were the most painful of all the things that he lived through, in the entire story of his life in the camps. He left the hospital entirely gray.

The Crematoria at Birkenau

Birkenau, which was three kilometers from the Auschwitz railroad station, represented the Hell of the Auschwitz camp. There were found the five crematoria with their five high smokestacks, from which smoke and fire belched day and night, reaching the heights of the blue heavens above. Ten of thousands of Jewish sacrifices were brought as burnt offerings on five altars. Black thick clouds of smoke would blot out the beautiful golden sun at midday, and red flames would light up the dark nights.

Bad-Anstalt – was inscribed at the entrance to the crematoria. *"Soap will be provided inside,"* – was written at the entrance to the gas chamber; *"Belongings are to be well packed, in order that they not be lost"* – the Germans cautioned the victims up to their last breath. Until they felt the suffocating gas begin to press on their lungs, up until the moment that they began to lose consciousness, the Germans did not stand down from their lies, or cease to mislead the unfortunate victims. When the bunker was filled up, it was hermetically sealed. The SS troops would then open up the special gas valves, which were connected to the bunker. In a couple of minutes, everyone inside was dead. Then they burned the bodies in the crematorium. Mountains of ash and bones were heaped up not far from the crematorium. It was used to cover up the ditches under the bridges, and on the roads that were being built every day. The remaining mountains of ash, which they could not use, were loaded on trucks and taken to be dumped in the river. They did this to conceal the traces of their mass-murdering. When the transports began to arrive from Hungary, the crematoria were already too small for the purpose that they served. Therefore, large pits were dug beside each of the crematoria, and thousands of Jews were incinerated at a time.

Not far from this hell, two of our witnesses, *Yitzhak Tchopper* and *Zvi Roitman* worked almost two years as slave laborers.

What Some from Volkovysk Lived Through

Roitman tells of those days, when one time, part of the people in his block, mostly from the Grodno and Bialystok vicinity, were told that they were to be transferred to Bona to do work. People were generally happy with this order. Despite the fact that no one knew what awaited them there, they felt that at the very least they would put some distance between themselves and the Hell at Birkenau, and not have to look at the five crematoria day-in and day-out.

Eighty men were taken to Bona at that time. Upon arrival, the Polish commissar spoke to them, and told them that they would not get out of their alive. He was an ardent believer in Hitler, especially for his program of exterminating Polish Jews, an outcome that the Polish people had long strived for. He ended his speech by saying that the Poles would yet erect a great monument in honor of Hitler. This commissar was a famous sportsman and boxer.

The men stood to their work the following morning, which turned out to be much harder than that which they did at Auschwitz. Large factories for synthetic rubber were being built there.

On top of this, one of their men fell ill with typhus, and immediately all eighty men were crammed into a quarantine for eight whole days. This actually gave them a chance to rest their aching bones, after two years of slave labor at Auschwitz. After the week, the order was given to return these people to Birkenau as sick. All of them were seized with a great panic, because they knew what awaited them in the hospital at

Auschwitz. Regrettably, nothing helped. They were packed into automobiles, and they were brought back to Auschwitz. Every one of them was embittered, every one of them was counting off the last minutes of his life. The last ration of bread was quickly eaten, at least not to die hungry. But the fear was for naught. Instead of sending the men infected with typhus to the hospital, the Germans immediately sent them to the work camp. And in this manner, these eighty people were saved from a certain death.

It just so happens, that Roitman then had the opportunity to get some work with a group of electrical technicians. This was a very important factor that in two instances decided between life and death.

Also a few other people from Volkovysk obtained work in their particular professions. Some as carpenters, others as cleaners. *Dr. Marek Kaplan* and *Dr. Leizer Epstein* were already at that time employed as doctors in the hospital. One Volkovysker went into the orchestra. Others were not so fortunate, even though they had special skills. A famous musician from Warsaw, *Zhenya Reisner* was with the Volkovyskers, whose fate at the outbreak of the war threw her into Volkovysk. Before the war, he was renown as the orchestra leader in a number of European countries. He was taken to Auschwitz from Volkovysk along with the local Jews from there, where he was forced to do hard physical labor. Being unable to meet the Nazi demands, he was one time the victim of a severe beating. He immediately presented himself voluntarily to Bunker 'Number Seven,' because he no longer could stand the gruesome suffering. Yet, there were others who manifested a strong will to live. Dr. Leizer Epstein can serve as such an example, who many times stood on the threshold of death. He was even considered in the *lager* to be a 'Muslim' – a sobriquet applied to those who were nothing more than a bag of skin and bones – a living skeleton. But he survived everything with stubbornness and stamina, until he was appointed as deputy physician, and then later as the head doctor of the hospital. From that time on, his condition became much improved.

In the short time of Roitman's stay in the Auschwitz camp, many changes took place there. In his block that formerly had eight hundred people in it, no more than three hundred remained. The remainder were exterminated in the crematoria. Of the 280 men from Volkovysk, only a few in number remained alive. In the month of May 1944 there were only *twelve people from Volkovysk* alive in the Auschwitz camp.

The Underground Movement and Resistance in the Auschwitz *Lager*

Those, who remained behind in the lager, began to seek means by which to escape and save themselves from there. The guard was very strict, and yet, a little at a time, the people in the lager developed an underground movement. A few men, were fortunate in finding a way to escape in an organized fashion. Many men were engaged in working out underground plans, but it was not an easy thing to put them into action. On the other hand, the people had nothing to lose.

A rebellion finally broke out in the camp in the *summer of 1944*, a crematorium was burned, and it was possible for a number of people to escape that day. But the Gestapo got wind of it in time, and pursued the men. Among those who fled was *Roitman*. They were brought back to the camp, where the most terrifying punishments were meted out to them. As great as the torture was for the people in reprisal for their transgression, the fact was, that when they were returned to their bunker after undergoing punishment, the rest of the people couldn't recognize them. They were then used for the hardest labor in the camp, and the truncheons were not spared from their heads for a moment. They were punished this way for five months for their attempted escape.

Liquidation of the *Lager*

In those days, an order was received to empty out the camps at Auschwitz and Birkenau. All the people were them sent to another camp, and from there to Dachau. At Dachau, permission was given to build another *lager*.

Part of [the people from] the Auschwitz camp were first transferred to a camp not far from Berlin, and from there, a portion were taken to Bergen-Belsen, and a portion to Buchenwald.

In the transport that transferred people from Auschwitz to Dachau, there were about a thousand people. Of those from Volkovysk in that transport were: *Zvi Roitman, Joseph Kotliarsky* (our witnesses), and *'Nioma Levin* from Svislucz.

Another portion of the people were taken to Schtutholz, not far from Danzig. *Moshe Wolsky* was in one of those transports.

Volkovysk After The War

Page 787: The Volkovysk Cemetery

The first ones to return to Volkovysk after the liberation of the city, were those who were partisans, and had spent the entire time of the war hidden in the forests, fighting the enemy with the little means that they had in their hands. Among these were: *Bom Zuckerman, Izzy Gallin* and *Eliezer Kovensky.* Then those from Volkovysk that survived the bunkers returned, but had escaped from there and had hidden out with Christians – such as *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky*, and *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*. Also a few people returned who survived all of the tribulations and the hell of the camps, and despite this, managed to stay alive long enough to be liberated from the Nazi murderers, such as *Moshe Shereshevsky*, and others. And finally, a number of families returned from Russia, among those were the ones who were exiled to Siberia in 1940, because they declined to accept Russian citizenship, and others who had just, in general, fled into Russia, simply to save themselves from a certain death.

All of these, returned to their home city, with the hope of finding their families. Tragically, not a single soul remained in Volkovysk. The Jews had been completely cleaned out of the city.

Only a number of families, about 25 souls, mostly from the partisan ranks, and those who returned from Russia, to date are the only ones living in Volkovysk, and represent the entire Jewish population there. The remainder who returned there, unfortunately did not possess either the physical or emotional strength to re-settle on the dead ruins of the city, over which floated only the souls of their nearest and dearest. With cold, mortified hearts, and a tragic image of the destruction of Volkovysk etched in their minds, they quickly fled from their home town with the thought of never returning there again.

From those who did settle down there, either permanently or temporarily, came letters to their relatives in America. Among these – from *Itchkeh Botvinsky* (a son of Chaim Moshe from Yatevich); *Shlomo Markus*, who lived near the bridge; *Moshe Orlansky* (the son of the Tailor from Odessa); *Hona Orlansky* (the Barber's brother); *Leizer Shevakhovich*, the Smith (son of Yeshayahu the Smith); *Moshe Izerelevich*, who lived on the Neuer Gessel (a son of Reb Saneh the Shammes of the '*Tiferet-Bakhurim*' Synagogue), and from a number of others. Their descriptions of the city puts before us a terrifying picture. The terrible loneliness, sadness, and sense of abandonment that the people are living with, having found no one who remained alive

from their families and friends, is literally indescribable. The few Jewish houses that remained intact in the various neighborhoods, were occupied by Christians. Leizer Shevakhovich, the Smith, who had returned there, reclaimed his home only with a great deal of effort from a Christian family. Moshe Izerelevich writes in his letter the following:

> "Now, our beloved city of Volkovysk looks like a wreckage. The streets are grown over with grass. I looked for the place where our house stood for a long time, and up to this moment, I have not been able to fix its location. One cannot even recognize the place where the former streets were, because no trace has remained of the houses that were there."

Our witness, Moshe Shereshevsky, who visited Volkovysk immediately after being liberated from the German camps, tells us about the current appearance of the city. He enumerates the few neighborhoods which still remained intact, and give testimony to the great destruction of the city.

The neighborhood from the new train station to the barracks remained intact. The barracks were burned down. A part of Zamoscheh remained intact, from the *Koleyover*[281] *Gasse* to Chazan's house, and a part of the *Grodno Gasse*, where a few houses are found, such as Rivka Einhorn's, Gershuni's, and Rubinovich's buildings. Shortly before their retreat, the Germans burned the Jewish hospital, the Polish administrative building across the street from the hospital, the houses in Zamoscheh, such as Frenkel's and Metchik's. The old [train] station, the post office building, Sevasevich's house, Kilikovsky's building, where Rosa Einhorn the dentist had her office, during the time of the German occupation, Khananovich's building, the court building, and Kaufman's building.

The place where the *market square stores stood*, had been covered with sand, and it was not possible to even recognize that there had once stood a large number of Jewish stores on that location. There was also no trace left of the small streets near Lapin, Shiff and Einhorn, up to the river. They look like one big heap of bricks. In a like manner, there was no trace of the little street where Manya the Baker lived, and also the little street where the *shtibl* of the Hassidim was located.

On the other side, the *Neuer Gessel* remained intact, and the street near Yitzhak Novogrudsky and Novick. The remaining streets, such as the *Wide Boulevard, Kosciuszko* (Ostroger), *Tatarski, Kholodoisker, Millner, Mitzrayim,* the *Gessel of the electric technicians*, the *Schulhof,* and many other *little streets*, were left entirely without houses.

Parts of Karczyzna survived, from the *Poritzisher Gasse*, partly under the hill, part of the *Grodno Gasse* in Botvinsky's neighborhood, the houses of Shevakhovich and Lapidus.

The entire area of the Schulhof was filled with grass, except for the Talmud Torah building, which remained standing. The market remained on the mud. The Russians re-built the place, and set up tables, where the gentiles conduct business.

The *old cemetery* remained standing, overgrown with high grass. Its entranceway knocked down, its most beautiful headstones uprooted, and the rest fallen over. *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*, who also saw this terrifying picture of a destroyed Volkovysk, writes the following:

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281 From its Polish name, *Ulica Kolejowa.*

"Volkovysk as a city, no longer exists. The skeletons of the buildings have been dismantled. Everything is overgrown with wild grass, thorns, knobby growths and yellow flowers. And that is not a real explanation. You have to understand it a letter at a time."

Today, by contrast, many new byways exist, shorter paths, that go from one place to the next, where the Jewish houses and buildings used to stand. Thus, for example, there is a new way to go from the *Neuer Gessel*, more or less from *Tiferet-Bakhurim Bet HaMedrash*, to the Volkovysk pharmacy (Tima-Leah Botvinsky's building). These paths are not in a straight line, and are barely visible in the high wild grass.

Dr. Noah Kaplinsky and *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*, who returned to Volkovysk immediately after the liberation, were also interested to see the place of the historic Volkovysk *lager* where they spent that short but gruesome period from November 2, 1942 to January 26, 1943 in those dark and God-forsaken bunkers. They found the bunkers abandoned. There were still some utensils and unimportant objects lying spread about. In the hospital, that is, Bunker 'Number Three,' there were still parts of the disinfecting equipment of the hospital, that were at the time, wrought by Jewish craftsmen. A deathly silence reigned all around. At that time, they were still physically weak, and also their nerves didn't permit them to tarry longer in that place, where the agony of over twenty thousand Jews of Volkovysk and its vicinity took place.

The writing of Eliezer Kovensky is characteristic, in the book *Hurban Volkovysk,*[282] concerning his visit to Volkovysk shortly after the war:

"When I returned to the hometown neighborhoods, after they had already been liberated, I found no one there any longer. Only graves, and graves. I came to Volkovysk, where I had spent the best years of my life, where I got married, where I had my dear children. I came to the dear city of Volkovysk – and I did not even find any graves there. All the Jews of Volkovysk had been transformed into ashes in the crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz. I wanted to stretch out on the ground and weep, weep without surcease... a Christian whom I knew, Bolish Sharieka, greeted me. He invited me into his house and asked me if I wanted something to eat. No, I said to him, I am full, and I thank you. Give me, I said to him, a little soil out of friendship!... I took the soil, and covered my head with it. I went out this way onto the *Neuer Gessel*, and sat down on a stone. I sat '*Shiva*' for my wife, my children, and for my dear friends – the Jews of Volkovysk. The Christians looked on me with sympathy. Well, I said to them, now everything is just fine. Now, there are no more Jews around. Well, now are you going to live forever?... They answered by saying that they were not responsible for what happened, that they didn't get involved...

I found the few remaining Jewish partisans who also returned from the forests to the city, took my leave of them, and once again took my load on my back, and went out on the road. I went through destroyed towns and villages, villages without Jews!... It was as if it were Yom Kippur, when all of the Jews were in the Synagogue for Kol Nidre – that's how everything about looked. I headed to the east, on the way that leads to the Land of Israel."

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282 *Hurban Volkovysk* is translated in its entirety as the second part of this trilogy.

The Tragic Fate of the Volkovysk Jews

By Yitzhak Tchopper

In memory of my father, *Reb Leib*, the son of Jedediah Tchopper, my mother *Ziss'l* (from the Zabludowsky family), who were killed in the bombing, my wife, *Batya*, and my son, *Emanuel.*

My worthy landsleit!

I, Yitzhak, the son of Reb Leib Tchopper, and a grandson of Jedediah, born in Volkovysk, lived in Zamoscheh until 1928, and afterwards in the center of the city, on the *Grodno Gasse*, in the house of Sholom Barash (which later belonged to Yud'l Bereshkovsky), where we also had an ironmonger's store.

I was a member of a many-branched and deeply rooted Volkovysk family. I spent the best of my young years in Volkovysk, had many friends, a number of which live today in Israel, America, Canada, and Argentina. My wife, *Batya*, the daughter of Mordechai Moorstein (from the Ostroger Gasse), and my son, *Emanuel*, *my parents*, and the rest of my entire family were all exterminated. It was fated that I alone remain alive from my entire family.

I survived the Polish-German War, the Soviet occupation, and later, the German occupation, with all the troubles of the Hitler-occupation – the bombing, the burning of our city, the countless anti-Semitic decrees from wearing the yellow insignias, going to the fields, living the entire time in fear of death – until they took us away on November 2, 1942 into the bunkers. I survived the horror of the bunkers, the time when they took all of our nearest to Treblinka (I remained behind in the count of the last 1,700 people), the great typhus epidemic – and to the last, deported with the last transport to Auschwitz on January 26, 1943, where I was among the "fortunate" 210 men, who were brought to the Auschwitz *lager*. I then survives all the decrees in the camp, the selections, in which almost all of our other brethren were exterminated – and it was fated that I remain alive.

I therefore take it upon myself as a *sacred obligation* – as one who has survived all of these sorrowful days and remained the only one alive, who also experienced all those former good and normal times in our city – to give an accounting to our *landsleit*, wherever they may be found, of the fate of all their near ones and friends, who fell in Sanctification of The Name. I will exert myself to communicate all the details, as far as it is possible – in the order of the streets and the houses – in order that it can be known what happened to them, and that it remain as a permanent memorial for our martyrs that we have lost – to be remembered for those generations that will follow us. And may God help that such occurrences will never, ever happen again.

Zamoscheh

The left side – From the train station in the direction of the city.

Yaakov Weinstein (a son of David Gisha's), a Porter. He had brothers in America. A *son* of his was shot at the barracks when he went there about an issue. His *wife* and a *second son* were killed in Treblinka. *He* came with us on the transport to Birkenau-Auschwitz, but was sent directly from the train station to the crematorium.

Simcha Berg, son of Herschel the contractor. His wife, *Shayna* was a daughter of 'Tal U'Mottor,' as he was

called. Her parents and sister are in America. His older son, *Ben'yeh,* went into the Polish army at the outbreak of the war in 1939. He was taken prisoner by the Germans, and was later killed in Germany. *Simcha Berg* was taken away by the Germans among the first 200 men in an aktion that they carried out a month after their occupation of Volkovysk, and was killed there. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka. His younger *daughter* and her *husband*, a son of Klempner, both came with us to Auschwitz, and died there. His daughter *Rosa*, is today found in Israel.

Metchik. One son of his, *Abraham Herschel*, went into the Polish Army at the outbreak of the war in 1939. The Germans captured him, and later killed him there. His wife, *Zina* (a daughter of Eliyahu M. Levin, who lives in Chile) along with her two children, *Chaim* and *Lena,* were killed in Treblinka. Metchik's daughter *Chana*, with her *husband* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. Two sons of his second daughter *Reizl, Feivel* and *Itzel,* fled on November 2, when the Nazis ordered the Jews to leave their homes and go to the bunkers. However, the Nazis caught them on the very same day in the train station park, and shot them immediately. Their mother, *Reizl* died a week later in the bunkers from heartbreak. Her husband, *Meir Velvel Zlotnitsky* was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Minkovich. He worked in the kitchen of the Kushnir's. His wife *Hinde* (a sister of Mopsik, the hatmaker's wife) and *the children*, were killed in Treblinka. Only one son, who was in Russia during the war, remained alive. A second son, *Shmeryl*, a hatmaker, who was married to a daughter of Abraham Lovzovsky the pearl merchant, was wounded during the bombardment, and had a foot amputated. His *child* was killed in the bombing. Later, *he* together with his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Shayna Shapiro, Or as she was called, '*Die Vatchachiner*.' Her family is in America. She was also in America for a while, but later returned to Volkovysk. There, she lived with a friend, and old maid, *Sarah Rivka Kolgavin.* Both were killed in Treblinka.

Aaron Riplansky's Family. His wife, and daughter *Tcherneh*, with her husband were killed in Treblinka. His son, Gershon, who lived in a village adjacent to Izavelin, was also killed in Treblinka along with his family. His sister, *Tzipa*, with her husband, *Leibeh Schorr*, a shoemaker, together with their *children,* were buried in a cellar on the *Tatarski Gasse* during the bombardment. Many people were buried in that location. One *daughter*, however, was rescued, but she was later killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Milkov, of the general store. He lived together with his youngest daughter, *Mirkeh.* They were killed in Treblinka. A second daughter of his, *Lyuba,* who got married in Slonim, was killed there in one of the mass slaughters that took place there. The other daughter, *Chaya*, and her family, were also killed, according to what I have heard. One son and one daughter reside in Israel.

Shmuel Pitotsky, a Hairdresser, was a Vice-President of the Hairdresser's Society in Volkovysk. He is a brother of Chaya Feygl (Motkeh Kilikovsky's wife). *He*, his *wife* and *two children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Leibeh Pereminsky, a carpenter (a son of Shayna Nat'teh's). *He,* and his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Aryeh Velvelsky, from the general store (Shimon Rutchik's son-in-law). *He,* together with his wife *Rachel* and son, *Shimshon* were killed in Treblinka. A second son, *Berel*, was a physician-surgeon, and was killed during the aktion against the Volkovysk doctors. A third son, *Eliyahu* was sentenced by the Soviets to five years in prison for speculation, and because of this remained alive. He is still in Russia. According to what

I have heard, he was sentenced to another eight years in prison.

Beckenstein, a tailor from Piesk, who had a handicapped son. The entire family was killed in Treblinka.

Shlomo Shkolnik, a son of Karpel's. At the end, he had a restaurant. His son, *Liova* went into the bunkers. There, together with 9 other men he worked out a plan for escaping into the forest. They escaped from the bunkers, and hid out in the *Neuer Gessel*, and waited for an opportunity to carry out their plan. The Germans, however, caught them in their hideout, and brought them to the barracks. At that time, the leaders of the *Judenrat* were called out of the bunkers, and all of these young people were shot in front of them. Shlomo's wife, *[H]Odel*, a daughter of the teacher from Dereczin, and a sister of Abraham and Meir Zaklas, later was killed in Treblinka.[283] Her husband, *Shlomo,* who remained with the rest of the children among the residual total of the 1700 people, later died in the *lager* from typhus. His son, *Itzel*, and his daughter, *Taiba* and her husband, *Yoss'l Langbord* (Pelteh the Moditskeh's son), and their *child*, were taken away on the last transport to Auschwitz, and killed there.

Nakhum Bayer, the butcher. He and his son, *Mottel* (also a butcher) and Moteleh's wife *Chana*, together with their son, *Yaakov,* were all killed in Treblinka. Bayer's son-in-law, *[A]vigdor Pshenitsky*, son of Manya the Baker, who was a bookkeeper, with his *wife* and *two daughters*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Frei, a Porter, a son of Golda Itcheh Muchnik. His wife, *Ethel*, and her son by her first husband, *Bor'eh*[284], were killed in Treblinka. Yaakov Frei, along with a number of other men, escaped from the bunkers to the forest. However, it appears that he was killed there, because nothing is heard from him. His second son, *Yud'l,* and his daughter, *Rosa* were killed at Auschwitz.

Berel Zavelevich, (White Head), the shoemaker. He was a popular figure in Volkovysk. The entire family was killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Dereczinsky, the baker. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka. *He* and his *two sons* and *daughter,* were killed at Auschwitz.

Benjamin Adelsky, of the general store, from Amstibova. *He*, his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Nakhum Lipshovich, from Amstibova. *He* and his son, *Zaydl* were killed in Treblinka. His daughter, *Sarah* lives in America.

Moshe Rutchik, (son of Shmuel-Chaim the Butcher). His wife, *Chas'shkeh* (the daughter of David Smazanovich the Carpenter), worked in the kitchen of the bunkers. When she stood at one point to mix the large cauldron full of soup, she slipped and fell into the pot. She was severely scalded, and later died from this. *Moshe Rutchik*, together with his two children, *Herschel* and *Yenta,* were killed at Auschwitz. One *son* was in Russia, and remained alive according to what I have heard.

Shammai Daniel, the son of the Headmaster of the Yeshiva, Yerakhmiel. His wife, *Gittl* was a sister of Moshe Rutchik. Together with my family, I lived with them after the fire, until a week prior to the

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283 *The Dereczin Memorial Book* has a reference to a *Zaklas* family (see p. 70 there).

284 Diminutive for *Boruch*

liquidation. During the period of the German occupation, Shammai was the work inspector of the *Judenrat,* and was one of its most focused members. He, his wife and son were with us on the final transport to Auschwitz. *He* and his *wife* were immediately sent to the crematoria. His son, *Avra'sheh* remained in the Auschwitz camp. The following incident occurred to him. One day, after work, Moshe Saladukha from our transport(who is no longer alive) and I were approached by one of the work overseers, who ordered us to strip a corpse. At first, we did not recognize the dead person, who lay on the ground, covered in mud. Only later, when we had undressed him, and seeing the number on his arm as being in the 94,000 series, which was the series of our transport, did we examine him more closely, and in doing so, recognized Avra'shkeh. As we learned later from those whom we knew, and who worked together with him, he was killed at work by an overseer.

Yaakov Lanievich (Moshe Zhelenevich's former son-in-law). He and his second wife, *Malka* (the daughter of Joseph Leib Rabinovich), went to Lida at the beginning of the Russian occupation, out of fear of the Bolsheviks. *Both of them*, together with their *son*, were killed in the Lida massacre, on May 18, 1942.

Mordechai Wilk, the shoemaker. *He* was killed in Treblinka. His son-in-law, *Khatzkel Sidransky*, was killed by the Germans in the first 200 men. Khatzkel's *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka. The second son-in-law, *Shmuel Khvalitsky*, a tanner who worked with sheepskins, was killed along with his wife, *Raina* and their *children* in Treblinka.

Shlomo Shklar, a locksmith (son of Yaakov Shakhna who traveled with a donkey). *He* and his *wife,* (a daughter of one of the "Stats" the glaziers) and their *child,* were killed in Treblinka.

Kaddel[285] ***Lapidus***, was a smith, but towards the end had a general store. *He* and his wife *Chana*, and their children: *Yitzhak, Berel, Chaya* and *Shayna-Feygl,* were killed in Treblinka. A married daughter of his, *Basheh*, and her husband, *Israel Eckstein*, a baker, were killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Livkin, a porter at the train station. His wife, Feyge-Kayla was killed in Treblinka. He was with me in the Auschwitz *lager*, and died there.

Velvel Bendenson, a butcher. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Nakdimon from Karczyzna), with their son, *Moshe,* a carpenter, were killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Chas'sheh*, and her husband, *Velvel Rubinstein* (Yud'l the Locksmith's son, and a nephew of my aunt Lena Tchopper), with their *child,* were also killed in Treblinka.

Shimon Bayer, a horse-handler. His son *Chaim*, and his *wife* and *child* were in Bialystok, and were killed in one of the *aktions* that took place there. The other son, *Shlomo*, fled from the bunkers into the forest, but it appears that he died there, because we never heard from him again. Shlomo's *wife*, and his father, *Shimon* were killed in Treblinka.

Esther Zapoliansky (the wife of Berel Zapoliansky), a storekeeper. Her son, *Hanokh* was mobilized into the Polish Army in 1939, and was killed there. The other son, *Yaakov,* was in the Auschwitz lager, and died there. Yaakov's *family* was killed in Treblinka. *Chaya*, the wife of the third son, *Shmuel* (daughter of Krum the Smith), was killed along with her *child* in Auschwitz. Shmuel was with me in the Auschwitz camp and

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285 The Yiddish diminutive for the Hebrew name, *Katriel* (also rendered as *Casrael* by those using the Ashkenazic pronunciation).

survived among the living. *Esther Zapoliansky* and her daughter *Reizl,* and her *child*, were killed in Treblinka. Reizl's husband, was exiled to Russia during the time of the Soviet occupation.

Aaron Leib Smazanovich the Shoemaker. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Berel Khazanovich, who sold ice cream during the summer. Both of his sons, *Shlomo* and *Yaakov* were Hairdressers. Together with *their families*, they were killed in Treblinka. One daughter lives in New York.

Shlomo Krinsky, from the fruit store. He was a popular figure in the city. At one time, he was a teacher. His daughter married Yud'l Frack, a tailor. *Shlomo,* together with his *daughter* and her *child,* were killed in Treblinka. His son *Mordechai*, or as he was called, 'Motcheh' (would sell fruits and vegetables in the streets), was killed in Treblinka with his *entire family.*

Chaim Rubinovich, lives today in Israel. His wife *Riv'l* was exiled into Russia by the Russians for speculation. Because of this, she remained alive. Their children, *two sons* and a *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka.

Zamoscheh

The right side – going from the train station in the direction of the city.

Mrs. Itzkowitz, from Ruzhany. She ran a food store. Her house had previously belonged to Tarma. Her two sons, *Berel* and *Moshe* were with me in the Auschwitz camp and they both remained alive. Both are found today in America. Their *mother,* and Moshe's *wife* (a daughter of Herschel Ravitz – in America today), were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Shmuel Segal a son of Raveh[286] the Baker, and Yeshayahu Segal. He had a big house and was known as someone with a good wit. His wife was the daughter of the pearl merchant, and a sister of Pin'iyeh Khomsky. *He* and his son *Pesach*, along with his *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Loyteh's[287], he and his daughter, *Yehudis* and son-in-law *Ben-Zion Zhukhovsky* (an ordained Rabbi who made paper bags for sale), were all killed in Treblinka.

Zalman Frenkel, the operator of the hotel near the train station. He was once a manufacturer of coverings in Bialystok. His two sons, *Yosh'keh* and *Avra'sheh* immediately left to go to Ruzhany to their oldest brother, after the Germans entered the city, where they were later killed along with Ruzhany Jews in one of the aktions that took place there. *Zalman Frenkel*, along with his *wife* and *daughter,* were killed in Treblinka.

Chaya Kleinbaum, from the hotel (a sister of Zalman Frenkel). She was killed in Treblinka along with her daughter. During the time of the occupation, the Germans took over her house to be used as a finance office. And Zalman and Chaya [then] lived with Shayna Shapiro on the same street. From what I heard, their house was destroyed, along with all the other houses at the time the Germans retreated from Volkovysk in 1944.

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286 A nickname for *Rivka.*

287 A variant of Lotte, derived from Charlotte.

Moshe Avigdor Taran. He had a combined business with colonial and ceramic pottery. His wife was *Chaya*, a daughter of Kalman Kaplan. His daughter, *Sarah* and her *son,* along with her *parents,* were killed in Treblinka. Sarah's husband, *Herschel Ditkovsky* (Leibeh Kalman's son) was taken away with the 200 men. A second daughter, *Hinde* (who had a limp), was killed in Treblinka. Hinde's husband *Shliv'keh,* suffered a heart attack when the Germans arrested him, and died of it; a third daughter, *Feygl,* along with her son, were killed in Treblinka. Feygl's husband, *Yitzhak Paveh* (from the Pharmacy) was also killed in Treblinka. Taran's fourth daughter, *Gittl* and her husband *Kovensky,* were also killed in Treblinka. His son, *Velvel Taran* was killed at Auschwitz. Velvel's *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Kalman Bartnovsky, the son-in-law of Hinde Lev from the Wide Boulevard. He lived with Taran during the time of the German occupation. The Germans took him away with the first 200 men. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Mottel Lev, Hinde's son. He lived at Taran's on Zamoscheh. He and his wife *Feygl Goyda* from Lida, and their *two children*, were killed in Treblinka.

David Shteiman, a tailor to the military (a son-in-law of Mindl'leh). *He,* his *wife* and *both of their children* were killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Kaplan. He was a storekeeper and a middleman. He was called 'Velvel Kalman's.' He was a well-known figure in the city. He died of a heart attack a short time after the German occupation. He lived together with his family, at the house of Abraham Milkov. His wife, *Chava*, and his daughter *Sarah* and her husband, *Shlomo Itzkowitz*, and their *child,* were all killed at Treblinka. Velvel Kaplan's second daughter, *Hinde*, who had previously lived in Zheludok, was killed in Treblinka with her husband, *Abraham Dereviansky*, and *their children.* A third daughter, *Rachel*, had lived in Argentina, married there, and had a child. Because of the climate, she became ill, and returned to Volkovysk to cure herself. However, she died in her home town during the time of the Soviet occupation. His fourth daughter, *Mikhlah*, went to Bialystok and was killed there in the local aktion against the Bialystok Jews, along with her husband, *Archik Shapiro* and *their children*.

Shayna Pereminsky, from the general store. The widow of Moshe the Carpenter. She and her daughter *Nechama*, and son-in-law Joseph Salateh, a carpenter along with their child, were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Pereminsky, Shayna's son. A Tailor. He, and his wife *Rosa* (a daughter of Sarah Shosha Rutchik) and their *child,* were killed in Treblinka.

Notteh Pereminsky, a Carpenter, a brother of Yaakov Pereminsky. He died in the bunkers. His wife, *Basheh* (a niece of David Vitka, who lives in America)was killed in Treblinka with *her child.*

Stanislav Jesierski, a Tank Repairer and Locksmith. A bomb hit his house in June 1941, and Joseph Beckenstein from the shoe business was killed there.

Shmuel Sulkes, a Shoemaker. A bomb hit his house. During the time of the occupation, he lived at his daughter's house in Karczyzna. *He* and his wife, *Reizl* (of the Munchiks), with their daughter, *Leah Lass* and her *husband*, were all killed in Treblinka.

Zalman Sulkes, the Hairdresser. (A son of Shmuel Sulkes). His wife, *Gittl Yunovich* (of the butchers), with

her *child,* were killed in Treblinka. He alone, was in the Auschwitz camp, however, he could not withstand the circumstances, and died there.

Eckstein, the Baker. (Son-in-law of Kaddel the Smith). *He*, and his *family*, were killed in Treblinka.

Shepsel Chazan, the Tailor. He, and his wife, *Chana Riva* were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Chazan, a Tailor (Shepsel's son). Killed in Treblinka with his *wife* and *children*.

Shmuel Krinsky from the manufacturing store (son-in-law of Shepsel Chazan). *He*, along with his wife *Chaya Reishl*[288], and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Rokh'eh Segal, the Baker. She and her daughter, Leah, were incinerated by an incendiary bomb that fell on Leibeh Vinnik's house. Eleven people were consumed there. She is the mother of Yaakov-Shmuel, and has children in New York.

Leibeh Vinnik, a Shoemaker, lived near the *Bet HaMedrash*. His house was hit by an incendiary bomb, from which, his daughter *Golda*, and ten other people were consumed. He was completely changed by this experience, and died a half year later. His wife *Reizl,* and daughter *Chaya,* were killed in Treblinka.

Berg (from Rosh), a father-in-law to Dr. Berel Velvelsky, lived in Gottleib's house on the *Brzezker Gasse He* and his *son* were consumed in Vinnik's house. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Boruch Furman's Widow. Lived near the Bet HaMedrash, and had a general store. *She* and her *daughter* were killed in Treblinka. Her son, *Mulya Furman*, a Carpenter, was killed in Treblinka with *his family*.

Mottel Smazanovich, was a Porter, a son of Dod'zheh the Carpenter. He was shot, when he hid himself to keep from going to the bunkers on November 2, 1942. His *wife,* a seamstress (from the a family of hat makers, and was a niece of Yos'keh Wilk), was killed in Treblinka. Her brothers live in Argentina.

Hosea Grunes. *He* and his *children* and *son-in-law*, were killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Grunes A horse-hitcher (Hosea's son). *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.. His son-in-law, a stocking maker (I don't remember his last name – he was not from Volkovysk), and *Isser*, Hosea's son, were taken away in the first German aktion, and they were killed. Also, the *wife* of *Mordechai Grunes* and their *son,* were killed at Treblinka.

Reuven Rutchik, the son of Yoss'l Chas'shkeh's. He was the editor of the '*Volkovysker Leben*,' and also composed songs and write the column, '*Matters from Home*.' His wife, *Bobel,* was from the Rappaport family. *Both of them*, with their *children,* were killed in Treblinka. From their family, a brother, Eliyahu Rutchik survives, and a sister, in Norwich, [Connecticut] in America. Their sister, *Chana*, and her *husband* and their *children* (the husband used to be employed by the butchers in the slaughterhouse, and also was a Tailor) – were all killed in Treblinka.

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[288] From *Royze* (Rose) or *Raytse* (Richenza/Richinza; German-Christian)

Svisluczkeh Gasse

Svisluczkeh Gasse is a small street in Zamoscheh. It begins near Tchopper's house.

Aaron Kossowsky, a flour merchant. *He*, and his wife *Hinde*, a daughter of Leibeh Ditkovsky, and their *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka. His son, *Shakhna*, who was with me in the Auschwitz camp, suffered from a swollen leg in the camp, and he was taken to the hospital, and from there to the crematorium. The other son, Meshel, lives in Israel, where he served in the Jewish Brigade during the Second World War.

Zechariah Tchopper. There was nobody in his house during all of these happenings. *Chaim Moshe Tchopper* and his *family* had gone to Slonim, and were killed there in the massacres.

Rivka Nakdimon, or as she was called, *Die Volerkeh*, because she once lived in the village of Volya [perhaps Wola]. *She,* along with her *daughter* and son-in-law, *Zaydl Pomerantz*, a carpenter, were killed in Treblinka. Her second daughter, *Fei'tcheh,* with her *child,* a little girl, were also killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Moshe Nakdimon, a porter (son of Rivka Nakdimon). He was a wagon driver for the Germans in the *Judenrat*. His *wife* and *son* were killed in Treblinka. *He* was brought to Auschwitz on the last transport, and was killed there.

Sarah Shosha Rutchik, the widow of Moshe Rutchik. *She*, along with her daughter-in-law, *Baylah Nekha's*, and her *grandchild* were killed in Treblinka. Her son, *Yaakov Rutchik*, a wagon-driver (who drove a wagon for the Judenrat), was killed in Auschwitz.

Israel Richter, a Carpenter, son-in-law to Sara Shosha. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Yitzhak Kaplan, a Tinsmith (a son of the Kaplan's near the Russian Orthodox Church, and a son-in-law of Sarah Shosha Rutchik). His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka. *He* and his *brother* were in the Auschwitz camp and were killed there.

Shakhna Kushnirovsky, a Tinsmith (Bebel the Tinsmith's son). *He* and his wife *Liebeh*, and their *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Berg, Herschel the Contractor's son. He was also a contractor of sorts. His wife *Zlateh* (daughter of Pelteh Shevakhovich, the Butcher's wife, from the Wide Boulevard), died in the train car of the last transport to Auschwitz. *He* and his *daughter* were killed in Auschwitz. His second daughter, *Paulia*, went away to Russia, but it is not known what happened to her.

Engineer Yaakov Shipiatsky, son-in-law to Velvel Berg. Along with his wife, *Kreineh*, and their *child*, were taken out of the bunkers and sent to Bialystok through the efforts of Ephraim Barash, the head of the *Judenrat* there at that time, but they were later killed there in one of the local aktions.

Herschel Smeizik (of the "Kvachuks"), a porter. He fled when the Germans entered the city. His *wife*, along with her *daughter* and *son-in-law* (Alteh Berestovitsky's son) were killed in Treblinka. A second daughter, *Masha*, was in the Auschwitz camp and survived.

Rachel Solomon, the widow of Sender the Baker. She lived in the house of Moshe Tchopper. One son,

Hosea, was mobilized into the Polish Army in 1939, and later came to Vilna. However, in the final hours before the occupation of Vilna by the Soviet military, he was killed by a bomb. I think that *Rachel* and her second son, *Velvel*, were killed in Treblinka.

Bet HaMedrash (Zamoschanskeh) Gasse

Yoss'l Rutchik (Leibeh's son), a Truck Driver. His *wife* (Sarah Shosha's daughter) and their *child* were killed in Treblinka. *He* was in the Auschwitz camp by himself, and was killed there.

Abraham Rutchik, the Porter (Leibeh's son). He was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. I think his brother *Yitzhak* was killed with him as well. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Malka Rutchik, a daughter of Leibeh Rutchik. She fled to the forest and remained alive. She now lives in Volkovysk.

Pesach Rutchik, a Truck Driver. During the period of the Nazis, he worked as a painter. He and his two sons, *Khatzkel* and *Meir* were in the Auschwitz camp and were killed there. The *wife* and *daughter* were killed in Treblinka. His sister, *Laskeh*, was killed in Treblinka.

Feivel Irmess, was a courier for the Hebrew School. *He*, along with his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Jonah Irmess, a Shoemaker. He was arrested as a communist and killed. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Shayna Irmess. *She* and her *husband,* a Tailor, were killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Mordechai Irmess. The entire family was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Rubinstein, the son of Yud'l Rubinstein the Locksmith. He was taken to Auschwitz, were he was killed. His wife *Chana* (from the Irmess family) and the *child,* were killed in Treblinka.

Brzezkeh Gasse

The street where *Bloch's* Leather Factory was located

Abraham Gottleib – his daughter, older girls, were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Gurevich. His wife, *Kreineh* (a daughter of Gottleib's from the 'Kielbasas') was incinerated in Vinnik's house along with eleven people. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka. Among them, killed in Treblinka were their son, *Zelig* and his *family*, and their son *Mendel* (a son-in-law of Krum) and his *family*.

Avreml Shapiro, from the factory. He was taken by the Russians into Russia, but is no longer alive. His *wife* (a daughter of Bogomilsky from the yards) along with the *children,* were also taken into Russia. After the war, they returned to Poland.

Asher Yanovsky, a son of Nissan Yanovsky of the Tobacco business. He and his wife *Matilda* and their children, *Dora* and *Chaya* were killed in Treblinka.

Sioma Gallin, the well-know public servant and president of *Linat-Kholim.* During the time of the German occupation, he was active in the *Judenrat.* In the bunkers, he was in charge of provisioning. The following incident occurred to him in the bunkers. At one time, he approached a chauffeur with a bottle, and asked for a small amount of benzene to be used for starting a fire. When an SS trooper noticed this, he called him over and beat him murderously, to the extent that he had to be supported under the arms and taken back to the bunkers. Towards evening, as he lay in pain, the same SS troops entered the bunker and he was called out of the bunker to go outside. He could barely stand on his own feet. Before he went outside, just as if he had a premonition of what awaited him, he took his formal leave of everyone. After he exited the bunker, the sound of beating and shouting was heard from the outside, and a few shots. When we went out to him, he lay dead already, near the entrance to the bunker. His *wife* and *son* were killed at Auschwitz. His son, *Izzy*, who fled from the bunkers to the forest on the night his father was killed, lives today in Volkovysk.

Ephraim Gallin, Sioma's older brother. *He* and his *son* were killed at Auschwitz. His wife, *Elkeh'leh* (the daughter of the Bialystoker Baker, from the Levs) died of typhus in the bunkers.

Joseph, Shakhna, Koppel and Yaakov Dworetsky (grandsons of Avigdor Bloch). No one survives from them. A portion were killed in Treblinka, and a portion in Auschwitz.

Israel Gubar. During the time of the German occupation, he manufactured soap and other articles. Before the liquidation of the ghetto, he lived with Amstibovsky in Karczyzna. *He* and his wife, *Fanya* (a daughter of Dworetsky, and grandchild of Bloch), were killed in Treblinka along with their *children.*

Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky, the bookkeeper. *He,* and his wife *Rachel* (a daughter of the Bialystoker Baker), and their *children*, hid themselves with a Christian in Lisokovo in a potato storage pit. The wife, later came to the bunkers with her younger daughter. She had the opportunity to escape yet again, on the last day before everyone was taken from the bunkers. She returned to her husband and oldest daughter, and they all went away into the forest. There, she and her younger daughter fell ill with typhus, which they had contracted in the bunkers, and they both dies. The father and older daughter remained alive. Now they live in Lodz.

Abraham Pines, father of Noah Pines from Philadelphia. Their house was near the river. A son of his, *Chaim,* went off to Russia on the second day of the war, in 1941, and nothing was ever heard from him. *Abraham Pines*, his *wife* and other *son,* were all killed in Treblinka.

Hertz Mostkov. His *daughter* lay sick in the Sejmikov Hospital near the forest, where she later died. During the time of the bombardment, he was wounded on his way back from visiting his daughter, and he later dies of his wounds. His son, *Joseph*, and his daughter *Lyuba* live in Israel.

Joseph Lemkin. *He* and his *wife* were both killed in Treblinka. Their son, *Dr. Rapahel Lemkin*, lives in America. The second son, *Eliyahu*, and his *wife* (from the Vinogradskys) and their *children*, traveled for a visit to Moscow during the time of the Russian occupation, and remained there. Today, they find themselves in Germany.

Abraham Ezra Glembotsky. He died before the war. His daughter, *Chan'tsheh*, was killed in Treblinka.

The Sukenik and Zneidik Families lived in a house that had previously belonged to Zalman Chafetz. Nobody from either of these families survived.

Yoss'l Damashevitsky, (*Yoss'l der Shaffer*). *He* and also *Liebeh* and *Feygl Damashevitsky* were all killed in Treblinka.

Shlomo Liss, the gravedigger, who lived at the cemetery. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Die Kakhelnya

The children of *Moshe Alter Kushnir* lived there. They were known as the *"Kakhelnikehs."*

Yaakov Abraham Kushnir. *He* and his *wife* (Moshe Zilberman's daughter) and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Joseph Kushnir. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Kushnir. *He* and his *wife* lived in Krinki[289] during the time of the German occupation, where he worked as a pharmacist. When the Jews of Krinik were taken away, he and his wife managed to escape. They hid themselves with a Christian whom they knew, who protected them for the entire time. As a result, both of them survived and today are found in Israel.

Shlomo Shipiatsky, son of the Garment Seamer and a brother of Chaim Yud'l (a son-in-law of Kushnir). *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Myrim Stein. He worked in Seletsky's factory. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydl Kaplan, the Baker, a Hassid. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Vishniatsky. He lived on the *Fabrichneh Gasse.* He worked in the *Judenrat* during the time of the occupation. His family was with me in the same bunker. He and his wife *Liotsha* (from the Glembotskys), and children, *Joseph* and *Esther*, went to Auschwitz on the last transport, and were killed there.

The Wide Boulevard

On the left – going from the bridge in the direction of the city

Shimon Lapidus, a Smith, lived near the pond. He once was in America. His entire family was killed in Treblinka.

Shemaya Shevakhovich, a Smith, lived near the little pond. His son, *'Nioma* was taken away by the Germans among the 200 men. The other son, *Leizer*, also a smith was in the Auschwitz camp and survived. He is found today in Volkovysk. Their mother, *Mirkeh*, was killed in Treblinka.

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289 Sometimes also called *Krinik* by the Jews.

Mopsik, the Hatmaker. He was known in the city as the maker of military hats. His son, *Shalkeh*, a newspaper vendor was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed in one of the selections. When he was being taken to the crematorium, he shouted to the Volkovyskers that he knew from the bus: "Take vengeance for me!" The rest of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mottel Shevakhovich. *He* and his wife *Sarah Elkeh*, a market vendor (a daughter of Zalman Khodzheh) and their *family* were all killed in Treblinka.

Shavzan, a tanner. He was also known in the city as the *"Gendarme."* He was popular in the city, and known as a Bundist. *He* and his *wife* and *daughter* were killed among the first 200 people.

Vatachiner (The Shammes's) Gessel

Joseph Mayer Levin. He was a popular figure. Everyone in Zamoscheh knew him. He once was a teacher, a very smart and humorous Jewish man, was a scholar and could lead the congregation in prayer. The women liked the way he lead services from the pulpit. At the time of the German aktion, he was an old man already, and he was brought to the bunkers as a sick man, where he died shortly thereafter. His son-in-law *Zaydl,* a shoemaker, with his *wife* and their *ten children* were all killed in Treblinka.

Miller, the Tinsmith, lived at the house of Joseph Mayer Levin. *He*, and his *wife* and their *three sets of twins* were all killed in Treblinka.

Golda Stolovitsky, the wife of Avrem'keh Berezhimky the Horse-hitcher, and daughter of the wagon driver Itcheh Rutchik Munchik. *She* was killed in Treblinka. Her son *Yoss'l*, a Carpenter was also killed in Treblinka, along with his *wife* and *child*. A second son, Moshe'l was in Russia, where he had been sent by the Russians, and survived.

Hanokh Lifschitz ("Tatkeh"), a Horse-hitcher. His son-in-law, 'Nioma was shot, along with other men, who were serving sentences in the Volkovysk jail (The Germans would arrest many men and throw them into jail, and when the jail became overcrowded, they would take out the arrested people near the "Mayak" and shoot them). From the family, *Reuven Lifschitz* and his *son* were killed in Auschwitz. All the other members of the *family,* along with the children, were killed in Treblinka.

Motkeh Lipsky Gottleib, ("Kielbasas") from the Horse-hitchers. According to what we have been told, the only survivor from this entire family is one grandchild. All the rest were killed.

Nye'sheh Levin, "The Dark One[290]" (A sister of Motkeh Kielbass and a daughter of Abraham Gottleib). The entire family was killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Shklavin, Yud'l Pikarsky's son-in-law. *He* and his wife *Henya* and their *children* were killed in Auschwitz.

Yitzhak Stolovitsky, a shoemaker. *He* and his wife *Alta* (her brothers live in America – Sam Krinsky and the other) and their children, *Reuven* and *Avreml*, were killed in Treblinka.

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290 See also the footnote regarding *Yaakov Kaplinsky* on page 422.

Yitzhak Lipshovich ("Tzanner") a Horse-hitcher. His son *Meir* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. His son-in-law, *Bor'eh Kaplan*, a Butcher, along with his *wife* and *children* were killed in Auschwitz. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Lapidus, a Smith, a son of Yaakov the Smith. His son, *Leizer* was in the Auschwitz camp and survived (I do not know his whereabouts, however). The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Issachar Lev, the Tailor. *He* and his son, *Alter*, a Tailor, daughter-in-law, *Chana* (a daughter of Joel Azriel Shishatsky) and their children: *Feyge, Taiba, Shayn'dl* and *Joel* were all killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Kaplan ("Kalman's"), he had a general merchandise store and a vegetable garden. *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka. One son, *Yoss'l,* can be found today in America.

Abraham Bayer, a Wagon Driver, *"Mareh."* The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. His son, who was in Russia, is alive, according to what we have been told. His son-in-law, David Guskin, a jeweler, was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. A sister of Bayer's, *Fraydl*, and her husband, *Abraham Katz*, were killed in Treblinka. Their son, *Jedediah*, was in Russia and remained alive.

Feitelevich, ("Gagush") the Miller. Only one daughter, *Elkeh* remained alive out of the entire *family*, who was in the Auschwitz camp. The rest were killed in Treblinka.

Shepsel Feitelevich, a son of "Gagush[291]," a Hairdresser. He alone was with me in the Auschwitz camp. He could not bear the tribulations of the and slashed the veins in his wrist with a razor and died. His *wife* (a daughter of Abraham Beckenstein the Horse-hitcher from the Veterinarian) was killed in Auschwitz with *her two children*.

Kaplan, a widow. She sold wood. Her father was a brother of Zelda Lapin. The entire *family* was killed at Treblinka.

"Blond Kalman" had a stand near Perekhodnik's *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydl Binkovich "Shmerkeh's", a Miller. *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Alter Berenstein, a brother-in-law of the Shammes from Zamoscheh. He had a paper business, and lived in Shevakhovich's house. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Chaya Khvalovsky. *She* and her son, *Herschel*, and daughter *Sarah* (who was married to Blaustein) were killed in Treblinka. Sarah's son *Max*, remained with *Nionia* (one of my best friends), who was married to Baylah Galiatsky (daughter of Kalman Galiatsky) among the [final] 1700. All of them, meaning: *Nionia,* his wife *Baylah*, Sarah's son *Max*, and *Yud'l Khvalovsky*, were all killed in Auschwitz.

Moshe Benjamin Shalakhovich. *He* and his wife *Milia* (a sister of Fanya Tropp), were killed. She was ill

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[291] Nickname drawn from the Russian word for an eider duck

with typhus, and died on the transport on the way to the *lager*. He died in Auschwitz. Their son, *Bebeh*[292], is alive.

The Furniture Turner's Family (Adelberg). No one remains from them. One *daughter* fled to her husband's family in Narevka immediately after the Germans entered [the city], but she was shot there. The other daughter, *Sarah Epstein*, was in Lisokovo with her family, from where they were sent in transports together with the other Jews of Lisokovo to Treblinka, and killed there. The Turner's two daughters live in Israel.

David Goshchinsky, the Smoker[293]. He was killed on the second day of the bombardment in the courtyard of the hospital. His *wife* and *three* children were killed together with my mother, and father-in-law, Mordechai Moorstein at home, during the bombing. Their son, *Yud'l*, who worked in the *Linat-Kholim* (was married to Manya Lev), was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

'Nioma Liss, the Shoemaker. *He* and his son, *Israel* the artist, together with his *family,* were killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Aberstein, a Wagon-Driver. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydl Mopsik. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Meshel Koss, a Tailor. He was in the Auschwitz camp and survived. His *wife* and *two children* were killed in Auschwitz.

Avreml "Columbus," a Porter. The *entire family* was killed in Treblinka. A relative of his, *Jesierski*, a photographer who lived with him, was also killed.

Golda Eisenstein, a (lady) Baker. Her son, *Aharon Mottel*, his *wife* and *the children*, and Golda's *four daughters* together with the son-in-law *Zelig Blumenthal* (a bank employee) were all killed in Treblinka.

Teltzkeh, from the Chickens, a sister of Feygl Rutchik, the mother of Reuven Rutchik the editor of *Volkovysker Leben. She* and her *son-in-law*, a Carpenter, and their daughters, were all killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Binkovich, a Tailor. A brother of Zaydkeh Shmerkeh's the Miller. The *entire family* was killed in Treblinka.

Kravitsky the Artist. Nobody survived from this family.

Guskin the Artist. Nobody survived from this family. His son, *Dr. Guskin* (a son-in-law of Abraham Bayer), was killed in the Auschwitz camp. The rest of this *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mottel Poyker, the Porter. He and his wife, *Chaya Dvora* (a daughter of Rutchik) were killed in Treblinka.

Volsky, "Stast," from the Glaziers. The entire family was killed in Treblinka. One grandson, Moshe Volsky,

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[292] A nickname for *Leib*.

[293] In the sense of preparing smoked foods, like *gevendzelteh herring*.

who was in the Auschwitz camp, survived.
Yitzhak Yazhernitsky "Blenkitner," (Der Yelinevitcher). He and his wife were killed in Treblinka. The fate of their son is unknown.

Shayn'keh Mezheritzky, the wife of the Garment Seamer. *She* fled to Lisokovo, and apparently was killed there. Her son, *Yeshayahu* was with me in the Auschwitz camp. On one occasion, *Ehrenburg* from Warsaw, who was a soccer player in Volkovysk, and was appointed as a house servant in the *lager*, beat him so badly that he could no longer to go to work. He was taken to the hospital. On that day, on return from work, I saw him standing at the entrance to the hospital. *Moshe Weiner*, Israel Weiner's son, was standing with him. *Yeshayahu Mezheritzky* approached me, and asked that if I should survive, that I should relate to his mother, Shayn'keh, that he died because of Ehrenburg. This was his last day [alive]. Weiner also was killed with him at that time. A short while thereafter, Ehrenburg himself was severely beaten at work, and he died of this beating in the hospital.

Hirsch Ravitz, the Shoemaker. He was active in the Burial Society and would participate in every funeral. Immediately as the Germans entered the city, he and his wife rode off to Vilna to their daughter. As is reported, they were killed in one of the aktions there.

Herschel Bayer, a teacher. *He* and his wife, *Sarah*, (known as Sarah Leah Mineh's) were killed in Treblinka. Their daughter, *Shayna Gittl* lived in Kiev, from where she was evacuated to Zhambyl[294] during the war, but there is no word from her. Herschel's son *Mulya*, lives in Canada.

Yitzhak Zelitsky, the Wood Merchant. He lived in the house of Mezheritzky the Garment Seamer. *He,* together with his *wife* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Kossowsky, a Carpenter. His son, *Chaim*, a bookkeeper, and the rest of the *family*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Joseph Kossowsky, a Carpenter. His wife, *Chava,* and two children, *Bluma* and *Itzel,* were killed in Treblinka. Joseph was in the Auschwitz camp, and survived.

Nakhum Lev the Carpenter (a son-in-law of Yitzhak Kossowsky). His wife *Sarah*, and their *three children*, were killed in Treblinka. *Nakhum* was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Rozhansky, a Shoemaker (lived in the cellar of the house that was adjacent to Herschel Ravitz's building). *He*, his *wife* and *children*, and *mother-in-law*, were killed in Treblinka.

Riva Fuchs. Thanks to the fact that her son, Noah Fuchs, was the head of the *Judenrat* in Volkovysk, she

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294 Zhambyl (jämbl´), Now Taraz. City (1993 est. pop. 317,000), in S Kazakhstan on the border with Kyrgyzstan, on the Taraz (Talas) River and the Turkestan-Siberia RR. Industries include food processing and the manufacture of chemicals, footwear, and leather goods. Founded in the 7th cent., it was called Taraz or Talas. In the 8th and 9th cent. it was ruled by Arabs. From the 10th to the 12th cent. it was the capital of the Karakhan state, and in 1864 it passed to Russia. It was called Aulie-Ata until 1936 and then Mirzoyan until 1938, when it was renamed for the Kazakh poet Zhambyl Zhabayev; in 1997 the original name was restored. Near Taraz are two mausoleums (11th and 12th cent.).

remained behind as one of the 1700. However, she was later killed in Auschwitz.

Noah Fuchs, Riva's son. He was in the camp at Auschwitz. He had worked himself up to the position of a command-secretary. However, in the Gypsy lager, he fell into dispute with a block senior officer, and was severely beaten by him, from which Noah became sick, and shortly after this incident, died in the hospital in April 1943. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Auschwitz, his sister *Sonya,* and her husband, *Yoss'l Rossiansky* and their *children* were killed in Auschwitz.

When the transport with Sonya Rossiansky arrived in Auschwitz, the wagons were opened, and everyone was being driven off. I had to carry my wife in my arms, because she was sick with typhus at the time, and also, my son had only recently recovered from typhus. When the order came to separate the men from the women, I approached a number of the women that I knew, and asked them to look after my wife until I returned – I was at that point certain that I would be back immediately – but they all refused. The only one who calmed me down, and promised me to look after my sick family, was Noah Fuchs's sister, Sonya Rossiansky. "Go, Tchopper, I will look after them," she promised me. I was, however, not privileged to see them ever again. They were all killed in Auschwitz.

Zaydl Lapin, worked in the brick factory. *He,* and his wife *Breindl*, and son *Abraham* were killed in Treblinka.

Dob'keh Movshovich, had a candy factory. The entire *family* left Volkovysk, and their fate is unknown.

Shlomo Mandelbaum, a bank director. *He,* his *wife*, *son* and *daughter-in-law* were killed. One *son* lived in Berestovitz, and was killed with the Jews of Berestovitz.

Berel Falkovich, a maker of horse straps. He lived in Shattai's house. He was a well-known Bundist. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Luniansky-Halpern. The *daughter*, and her husband, *Zilber*, a Teacher, and the other *daughter* and her *family,* were all killed.

Cooper, a Carpenter. He had a furniture business in the Luniansky-Halpern house. On the last transport of January 23, 1942[295], the Cooper family became separated while the trains were being boarded. *Mrs. Cooper* was with me in one wagon, and *he* and the *children* were in another wagon. They never saw one another again, because in the process of being driven from the wagons at Auschwitz, they were sent into different groups, and from there, taken immediately to the crematoria.

Yoss'l Wilk, the Tailor. Had a business in finished clothing. The entire *family* with his *four daughters* were killed in Treblinka and Auschwitz. His son, *Zhoma* was in Auschwitz and was killed there.

Dr. Feinberg. *He* was killed with the very first 200 men who were executed. His *father-in-law* died in the bunkers. His *wife* was killed in Auschwitz.

Yerakhmiel the Tailor. *He* was shot by the Germans in Karczyzna while going from the bunkers to work. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

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[295] I believe this to be an inadvertent error. The year was 1943.

Boruch Bastomsky, Galiatsky the Hairdresser's son-in-law. *He* and his wife *Reizl* and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.
Mottel Zilberman, the leader of the fire-fighter's orchestra. His wife *Chana* (a daughter of Motkeh Kilikovsky, who is today in Hartford, CT) was taken away to Treblinka. *Mottel* and his son *Shal'yeh* remained among the 1700. Mottel was shot by a German, who wounded him in the hand, concocting an accusation that he, along with other Volkovysk Jews, had stolen his gloves. *Mottel* died a short time afterwards from his wounds. His son, *Shal'yeh* remained alone, after his mother was taken to Treblinka, and his father died in the bunkers. I befriended him, and looked after him like a father. However, he later was killed at Auschwitz.

Moshe'keh Pisetsky, the Watchmaker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. His son, *Shlomo*, was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Moshe'l Shereshevsky, from the Bicycles. *He* went through several concentration camps and survived. He is today in America. His mother, *Bob'cheh*, and his sister, *Mindl,* were killed in Treblinka. The other sister, *Shifra,* was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Chaim Berel Lev, a Shoemaker. For a long time, he was counted by the Germans among the "necessary Jews," because they used him in the production of shoes (there were two such "necessary Jews" – he, and 'Niomka Solkovich the Tailor). *Chaim Berel* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Ben-Zion Rothwald, from the Shoe Store. *He* and his wife *Bertha*, and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Lifschitz, from the Herring Business (an uncle of Dr. Yitzhak Resnick). He and his wife *Henya*, were killed in Treblinka.

Lev Sasson, a Butcher. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Chay'keh* (married to Berel Shalakhovich, and lived in Lida) was in the forest with her *family*, and they survived, except for the daughter who died there.

Leibeh Patsovsky ("Chas'shkeh's"), a Hairdresser. *He* and his two sons, *Yisroel'ik* and *Yehoshua* were killed in Auschwitz. His older son, *Lalleh*, was killed in Baranovich. His daughter *Yenta* was killed in Kozlovshchina, along with her *husband*.

Rachel Leah Zuckerman (mother of Yankel Zuckerman, who lives in New York). *She* was killed in Treblinka. *Basheh*, Yankel's sister, and her daughter *Tzil'eh,* went from the bunkers to Bialystok. The daughter, *Tzil'eh*, was shot in Bialystok when she made an attempt to escape from the ghetto. *Basheh* was killed in one of the aktions there.

Mikhl Zohn-Mazya. He worked for many years for the magistrate and once lived at the Kavushatsky home. He was killed by the Germans with the first 200 men. His *wife* and *son* were killed in Treblinka. His older *son,* who was married and in Warsaw, was killed there.

Hona Kavushatsky. *Hona* and *Frum'keh* are in Israel today. The *daughter,* who was married to Dr. Rem, was killed along with her *child* in Auschwitz. The fate of Kavushatsky's sister, that had a paper business, is unknown.

Rappaport, a Hassid. He had a Fabric Business. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Perekhodnik, had a manufacturing business. The entire f*amily* was killed in Treblinka. His *daughter,* who was in Russia, remained alive and is today in Israel.
Chay'keh Ravitzky, the wife of Herschel Reb Teveleh's[296], had a general merchandise store. *She*, along with her *daughter* and *son-in-law*, were killed in Treblinka.

Dvora Rakhkin. Her son and daughter-in-law, Sarah Gisha's were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Novick, had a Ladies Fashion Shop. His wife, *Rachel'eh* (a daughter of Reuven the Glazier), and their *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Pisetsky, a Watchmaker. His wife was killed in Auschwitz. He was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Alexander Makov, from the Fabric Business. *He* was murdered by the Poles on September 18, 1939. His wife, *Dvora*, together with the son, *Dr. Yaakov Makov*, were killed in Bialystok.[297]

Shereshevsky from the Dye Business. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Herschel Grinsberg, ran a Sugar Store. His *wife, daughter*, son *Pesach*, and daughter-in-law *Masha*, along with their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Hirsch and Kalman Lev, they had a newspaper kiosk. *They* and their *families* were killed in Treblinka.

The Wide Boulevard

On the Right – From the bridge in the direction of the city

Bom Bliakher. He had a business in finished clothing. He and his wife *Rachel'eh* (a daughter of Leibeh Khananovich), and their *child*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Leibeh Khananovich, a mechanic. He died during the Nazi era. His daughter *Yenta* was killed in Auschwitz. His son, *Nakhum*, a Locksmith, together with his wife *Aydeleh* (a daughter of the Markuses that lived near the river), and their *child,* were killed in Treblinka. The other son, *Karpel,* went to Russia in 1941, but there is no information about him. Karpel's wife, *Sonya Berman*, and their *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Zlateh Kaufman, a daughter of Malka Pearl's, who had a hotel. She and her daughter *Liebeh*, were killed in Treblinka. The son, *David Kaufman*, a doctor, was killed in the aktion against the doctors. His *wife* was killed in Auschwitz.

Fishl Berezinsky, he had a general merchandise business and came from Karczyzna. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

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296 This should be read as *Herschel*, the son of *Reb Teveleh Ravitzky*, the *Dayan.*

297 See the memoir about Abraham Makov in Lashowitz's *Volkovysk* (the third part of this Trilogy).

Yaakov Kaplinsky, a Baker (son-in-law of Nye'sheh the Dark One[298]). *He* and his wife *Malka,* were killed in Auschwitz. One *son* was in the Auschwitz camp. One *daughter* hid herself in the home of a Christian, an employee of her father, a *Bekz*, and remained alive. Today, she is found in Volkovysk.

Meir Zeleviansky, "The Menaker," was previously a shoemaker. Through my efforts, he did not live in Volkovysk during the time of the Germans, and I do not know his fate. I recall his *daughter* in the documentation of the street where she lived.

Ephraim Yelsky, a Shoemaker. He died during the period of the German [occupation]. The *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Avreml Beckenstein, a Horse-hitcher (of the Kanovals). Together with his *family*, *he* was killed in Treblinka. His son, *Gershwin*, a musician, was with me in the Auschwitz camp. He played in the *lager* orchestra there. I was in one block with him for a long time. He was a very talented young man. Tragically, he was killed shortly before the evacuation. His *wife* (a daughter of Shifran from the *Tatarski Gasse*) was killed in Auschwitz.

Basheh Lipshovich, a general merchandise business (a daughter of Mot'yeh Kanoval). *She,* together with her *family*, were killed in Treblinka.

Tevel Smazanovich, the Photographer. *He* died during the time of the Russian occupation. His wife, *Andzhusha Grodzhensky*, and their *son*, as well as his wife's younger sister *Zhenya*, remained among the last 1700. All of them contracted typhus and afterwards were killed in Auschwitz. Tevel's *mother,* his *sister,* and her husband, *Yudelevich*, a Watchmaker, were all killed in Treblinka.

Dod'zheh Smazanovich, a Carpenter. Was known in the city because of his son, who was one of the Volkovysk 'heroes.' The Germans shot him on November 2, at the time they were driving all the Jews into the bunkers. Dod'zheh died in the bunkers.

Shlomo Sukenik, the Teacher – a son of Chana'leh the Butcher. He was a student of C. N. Bialik when he studied in Odessa and was a very popular teacher in Volkovysk. His wife was a sister of Tevel Smazanovich. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. A son of theirs, Tevel, while traveling to Auschwitz, was in the same wagon with me. He had just fallen ill with typhus, and lay with a high fever near the door to the train car. The frost outside was intense, and lying next to the door, he slipped into unconsciousness, and gave up the ghost. The second son, *Leizer,* was in Russia during the time of the war.

Pelteh Shevakhovich, the Butcher. She was killed in Treblinka. Her daughter, *Leah Botvinsky* (whose husband dealt in flour), was killed along with her *children* in Treblinka. The son, *Berel Shevakhovich*, with his wife, *Chay'keh* (a daughter of Sasson the Butcher), and their *children,* fled to the forest and remained alive. They lost one daughter in the forest.

Rubinstein from the *Gesseleh*. The entire *family* was killed.

Moshe Rutchik. He was also known by the name, *Der Zhelenevicher*. His wife, *Tzipa* died in the bunkers.

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298 It cannot easily be discerned if this nickname is due to black hair, or swarthy complexion. This appears to be *Nye'sheh Levin*, characterized on page 415.

Her two sons, *Yud'l* and the *other one*, who was married to Khomsky from the *Neuer Gessel*, were killed in Treblinka. Her *daughter,* who was married to *Feivel Arkin*, a dental technician, was killed in Auschwitz with her *children*. *Feivel* was with me in the Auschwitz camp, and being unable to bear the tribulations, hanged himself.

Bliakher, from the glazing business. Lived in Rutchik's house. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Feivel Bubliatsky, the Locksmith. *He* and his *son* and *daughter* (the wife was [daughter of] Shimon Koss the Scribe), were killed in Treblinka. *Shimon Koss* was killed in Auschwitz. It is interesting to tell, how *Moshe Koss*, Shimon's brother, who worked as a tailor in the Auschwitz camp, in a special detail where the clothing and possessions from the transports were brought, while at work one day, found his brother's belt and photograph. From then on, he kept it with him always, as a memento of his slain brother.

Herschel Linevsky, the Teacher. He and his wife *Shayn'keh* (a daughter of Shmuel David Pines) and their children, *Yeshayahu* and *Yokh'eh*[299] were killed in Treblinka. One son, *Shmuel David*, and a *daughter* are today in Israel.

Nissan Kagan, a *Shokhet.* Their daughter and her husband *Yazhernitsky,* and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka together with the Lastovskys.

Travinsky the Bookbinder. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Taiba Yoshpeh's Family. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. His nephew, *Leibl Travinsky* with his *wife* and *child* were also killed in Treblinka.

Blumenthal's Family (He was the last Jewish mailman). His son, *Zelig*, who worked in the bank, with his *wife* (a daughter of Eisenstein the Baker), were killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Rash'eh-Min'yeh*, was in Warsaw with Leah Marotchnik, and they were killed there.

Mordechai Leib Kaplan, the editor of *Volkovysker Leben*. *He* and his *family* were all killed in Treblinka.

Vashchilkeh, the Shoemaker. He was known in Volkovysk for his singing. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Bobiansky, Berezniak's son-in-law. He had a chemical goods business And lived at Kaminsky's house. The entire family was killed in Treblinka. His brother-in-law, *Greenberg*, a bookkeeper was also killed in Treblinka with his family.

Shepsel Yudzhik, the Expediter. *He* was killed with his *family* in Treblinka. His brother, Herschel, at the time of the German [occupation] went away to his wife's family in Dereczin and was killed there at the time of an aktion. The sister, *Kreineh*, with her husband *Abraham Shalkovich* (he had a printing business together with Herschel in Volkovysk) were also killed in Treblinka.

Saul Markus of the Leather Factory (a son of Abraham Eli Markus, the well known Torah reader, and a brother-in-law of Eliezer Kalir). *He* was killed in the aktion against the first 200 men.

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[299] Yiddish nickname for *Yocheved*

Poliak's Family, (from the Butchers). *Gittl Poliak* and her daughter, *Itkeh*, with her son-in-law *Boruch Geller* (a Hairdresser), and the other daughter, *Min'yeh* (who was married to *Abraham Golub*, a Garment Seamer), and the son, *Yankel* (also a Butcher), were all killed in Treblinka.

Kaminsky's Family, the Fishermen. *Leizer* and his wife, *Chaya Mereh*, were killed in Treblinka. The brother, *Yaakov* was in Russia, but his fate is unknown.

Herschel Gordon, the Scribe – from the Schulhof. His son, *Shabtai*, worked at the orphanage. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Gamaliel Tchopper. *He* died before the war. His *wife* and *two children* were killed in Treblinka.

Bialosotsky the Baker. His *wife* and the *children* (one of them was named Kalman, and was a bookkeeper) were killed in Treblinka and in Auschwitz.

Abraham Shpak, a Leather Tanner. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zhameh Schein, from the Cork Factory (a brother of Mulya who lives in Israel today). During the time of the Germans, Zhameh was with his father-in-law in Svislucz. Later on, he was brought with his family to the Volkovysk bunkers, along with all the other Jews of Svislucz. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zlateh Rutchik, "Chana Dob'eh's." She was a sick woman, and she was gassed by the Germans in the bunkers, along with the old and the sick.

Masha Goldrei, a daughter of Naphtali the Teacher. *She* and her daughter, *Golda (Mazya)* and *Ronya*, and son, *Naphtali* were killed. Her son-in-law, *Izzy Mazya*, who was in Russia, remained alive. Masha's son, *Chaim Simcha*, lives in America.

Herschel Zuckerman. He had a paper business in the house of Zlateh Rutchik. Along with his wife *Yehudis* (a sister of Leibeh Khananovich), and his son *Moshe*, *he* was taken away by the Germans among the first 200 people. The other son, *Bom,* went into the forest and survived. He is today in Volkovysk.

Weiner the Hairdresser. He had a overcoat business. *He* and his *wife* and *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Werner. He had an Overcoat Business. *He*, along with his wife, *Sarah* and their *three children* were killed in Treblinka.

Yud'l Zlotnitsky, a Shoemaker. None of his *family* survived. The fate of his two sons who were imprisoned by the Russians is unknown. However, I heard of one Zlotnitsky that is still alive.

Shimon Mushatsky, or Shimon Chaikel's the Tailor. His wife, *Chan'tsheh,* a daughter of Nakhumovsky's had a kosher restaurant. They were very popular in the city. One daughter was killed in Treblinka. The son, Chaim was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there.

'Niomka Solkovich, the Tailor. His wife, *Chana* (a daughter of Alter Savuolsky the Butcher), and his *children* were killed in Auschwitz. It was thought that the Germans would not execute him, because he was counted among the "Necessary Jews," and had great privileges from the Germans. However, this was of no

help to him, and he was later killed in the Auschwitz camp. His son *Munya,* fled before the arrival of the Germans, however, he was shot on the road.

Abraham Zalman Rabinovich, a Garment Seamer. *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Reuven Pisetsky, a Watchmaker. During the time of the Germans, *he* traveled to Grodno with his family, and was killed there in one of the aktions. His daughter, *Chaya*, who was in Russia, remained alive, and is still there.

Gass, a Pharmacist. *He* was killed in Treblinka. Before the arrival of the Germans, his family left Volkovysk, because they had been accused of being communists. One daughter, *Elkeh*, lived with her sister-in-law, Pes'sha Galiatsky. When the aktion against the 200 people took place, and they came looking for here in that house, she hid herself. However, when the Germans began to threaten, and she heard through the door of another room that the Germans wanted to take away her sister-in-law, she gave herself up into their hands. They executed her immediately. The brother, *Mottel Gass*, together with his wife *Fanya*, survived, and are found today in Volkovysk. The rest of the family appears to have been killed.

Golda Levin, or as she was called, "Golda the Black[300]." She had a Soda-water Store. *She* and her *daughter* were killed in Treblinka. Her son, *Yud'l*, who worked in the bank, was in Zelva at the start of the war. However, he was wounded by a bullet there, while sitting at home, and later died from this [wound].

Kuzinsky, from the Shoemaker accessories business. *He*, his *wife* and *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka. The son, *Zelig,* who was married to the sister of Silvia Bayer-Leselrot (from New York), was killed in Treblinka with his *family*.

Yaakov Gandz, from the Ironmongery. *Yaakov* and his son *Velvel,* and the second son, *Joseph* along with one of his *children*, were killed in Treblinka. Joseph's wife, *Nieta Khvonyik* (a daughter of Milia and a sister of Chaim Khvonyik), left the bunkers for Bialystok by herself, leaving her two children with her husband and mother. *One child* was taken along with her husband, *Joseph* – in one transport – to Treblinka and were killed there. The *second child* as sent away with the mother, *Milia Khvonyik* – in a second transport – to Treblinka, and killed there. Yaakov's daughter, *Ethel,* and her husband, *Abraham Yunovich*, and another son of Yaakov, *Moshe'l* with his wife *Sarah* (a daughter of Reizl Farber), were also killed in Treblinka. The youngest son, *Simcha,* together with his sister *Manya* and her husband, *Meir Farber*, remained among the 1700 and afterwards were killed in Auschwitz. *Zalman Zamoschansky* (his present name is Senor), a son-in-law of Yaakov Gandz, along with his wife, *Miriam* and their *three children*, fled to Vilna during the time of the Russian occupation. Zalman, along with other accused parties, was sent by the Russians to Siberia. His *wife* with the *three children* later were killed in one of the aktions in Vilna. Zalman survived, and today is in New York.

Yaakov Lytus. His *wife* was killed in the bombardment, but her body could not be found. *Yaakov* and his *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Kaplan from the Shoemaker's accessories. *He* and his *family,* and his son-in-law, *Feivel Tzemakh* were killed in Treblinka.

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[300] Once again, it is not clear that this nickname was due to hair color or swarthiness.

Yoss'l Yunovich, "Shustak." Yoss'l's wife, *Chaya Feygl*, died previously. *He* and his daughter, *Khien'keh* (the wife of Yaakov Botvinsky of the Cinema, who was mobilized in 1939 into the Polish Army and was killed there), were killed in Treblinka. His son, *Abraham*, the Ironmonger, with his wife (a daughter of Yaakov Gandz), and the *children*, were killed in Treblinka. The second son, *Ephraim,* who lived in Bialystok, was also killed with his *family.* The daughter, *Gittl,* and her husband, Dr. *Malzak*, were in Russia with their children, and survived. They are today in Africa.

Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg, "The Hassid," from the Hotel. *He* was killed in the Auschwitz camp. His brother, *Moshe'keh* the Watchmaker, traveled away to Lida with his family during the time of the German occupation, and was killed there. His *sister* and brother-in-law, *Petritzer*, (who also was a Hassid), who had an olive oil factory, were killed in Auschwitz.

Joseph Leib Shipiatsky, a Garment Seamer, father of Chaim Yud'l. *Joseph Leib*, and his *wife*, and their daughter *Chana*, and her *husband* (who had a shoe business), and their *children*, as well as his son, *Shlomo,* with his *wife* (a daughter of the Kushnirs), were all killed in Treblinka. His son *Yaakov* with his wife *Kreineh* (a daughter of Velvel Berg), thanks to the protection offered by Engineer Ephraim Barash, were transferred from the bunkers to Bialystok, but were killed there in one of the aktions. *Chaim Yud'l*, was in Lisokovo with his wife *Rachel* (a daughter of Lev, the Bialystoker Baker), and their *children*, during the time of the German occupation, where they hid out with a Christian in a potato storage pit. Rachel, however, was unable to bear the difficult circumstances in their hiding place, and came back with her younger child to Volkovysk, in the bunkers. Shortly before the transports left, she returned to Lisokovo. They then all went off into the forest. However, Rachel at that point was already infected with typhus, and she and her younger child died from the disease. He, *Chaim Yud'l*, and the older daughter, *Ruth*, were in the forest as partisans, and they survived. They are in Poland.

The Wide Boulevard

Left – Going from Zamoscheh

Jonah Becker, a Tailor. *He* was killed with his *family* in Treblinka.

Abraham Katz , *He* and his wife, *Fraydl* (from the Bayers) were killed in Treblinka. Their son, *Jedediah* was in Russia, and survived. He is in Poland.

Chaim Aberstein, a Wagon Driver. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Bernstein, "The Rebbeleh," a Paper Merchant. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Itcheh Falkovich, a Tailor (lived in the house of Zaydkeh the Artist). He was killed by the bomb that fell on Nakdimon's house. His *family*, as also his *daughter* (who was married to Avreml Lifschitz's son from the *Ostroger Gasse*) were killed in Treblinka.

Boruch Akhrimsky, "Gergeleh," the Shoemaker. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yoss'l Moshe Boruch's, a Miller. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaltzburg, a Pharmacist (lived in the house of Alter Savuolsky the Butcher). At the time that the Germans

entered, no member of this family was in Volkovysk, they having traveled to their home town.

Alter Tzofnass, a Grain Merchant (was an old bachelor). *He* was killed in Treblinka.

Lichtin, a Potter (he lived near the furniture turner). No one survived from this family.

Shepsel Ravitzky, Moshe's son. During the time of the German occupation, *he* and his *family* lived in Lida and they were killed there in one of the aktions.

Feivel Tzemakh, a Lumber Merchant (a son-in-law of Kaplan from the Shoemaker's accessories. He went insane and was later killed.

The Gesseleh

Shmuel David , a Horse-Hitcher (he is told about in the record of the *Grodno Gasse*, because that is where he last lived).

Elkeh Gallin, the daughter of the Bialystoker Baker. She made corsets. Her husband, *Fei'tcheh Gallin*, with their *son*, were killed in Auschwitz. *Elkeh* died in the bunkers from typhus.

Silver, a Teacher. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Nakhum Halpern) and his sister-in-law, were killed in Treblinka.

The Schulhof

Kryer, a Tinsmith. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka, except for one *son* who survived, and is living in Volkovysk.

Simcha Ein, a Wagon Driver. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydkeh Bogomilsky, a Tailor. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Berel Zavelevich, "White Head," a Shoemaker. Already recorded in the description of Zamoscheh, where he last lived.

Not'keh Schwartz. *He* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Herschel Gordon, the Scribe. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Zvi Inker. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Mindl, Chana Lev's. The Germans gassed her in the bunkers. Her son *Raphael* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydl Shcheglovitsky, a Furniture Turner. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

The Wide Boulevard

The side on which the *Blond Hassid's* house was located

Alter Rossiansky, or as he was called, Alter Berman. He had a hotel. His son *Yerakhmiel* was severely wounded in the German bombardment. *He* was later killed with his *father* in Treblinka. The other two sons, *Ahareh*, and his *younger brother*, were killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Goshchinsky, the Ironmonger. *He* and his *wife* were killed during the German bombardment, at the priest's on the swamp, near the river on the *Millner Gasse*, opposite the mill. His son, *Fishl* died in the bunkers from typhus. Fishl's wife *Chana* (a daughter of Glatzer the Locksmith, who is today in America) was in the same wagon with me, along with her *child* on the way to Auschwitz. Both were killed there. Fishl's brother, *Moshe'l* also was killed in Auschwitz.

Shammai Mordetsky's Children (The "Gershkeh's"). They were millers. The *daughters*, with the *son*, a Hairdresser, were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Mordetsky ("Gershkeh's"). His *daughter* and her *husband* were killed in Treblinka. His *two sons,* millers, were in the Auschwitz camp. The *older son* was with me in the camp. Once, in February 1943, he was severely beaten by a "House Servant." The next morning, when everyone stood at roll call outside in the cold and snow, he suddenly went insane. He stripped off all his clothes and leaned against a block. When I asked him the reason for this, he no longer answered me, and fell down in the mud and expired. It was only a few hours earlier that the incident with the House Servant who had beaten him so severely, had been related to me. His *brother* also was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Yaakov Paveh, from the Cigarettes. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. His *son* (a son-in-law to Taran), who had a pharmacy in Zamoscheh, was also killed with the family in Treblinka.

Nakhum Lytus. The entire *family* with the *daughter* and her *husband,* that had a paper business, were all killed in Treblinka.

Zelda Lapin. *She*, along with her daughters, *Rivka, Tzirel, Chana* and their *husbands,* and *children*, were all killed in Treblinka. Zelda's son, *Chaim*, was with me in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. *Zaydl Lapin* and his *family* were all killed in Treblinka. Zelda's son *Joseph* is today in America.

Chaim Slapak, a Baker, who lived in Lapin's building. During the time of the aktion against Volkovysk, he was in Svislucz. However, it appears that no one from this *family* survived.

Aizik Werner. He died in the bunkers from typhus. His *wife* with the *children* and his sister *Chana*, were all killed in Treblinka.

Sarah Epstein, the daughter of the Furniture Turner, that had a fashion store. At the time of the German occupation, she was with her sister and her family in Lisokovo. When the Jews of Lisokovo were driven on foot to Volkovysk on November 2, 1942, she couldn't make the trip, and the Germans shot *her* along the way. The remainder of her *family* were killed in Treblinka. Her younger *sister* was killed in Narevka.

Nissan Zapoliansky, Shmuel Chaim Bayl'keh's son, who dealt in yeast and lived in the stores opposite Einhorn's house. He was one of my uncles. *Nissan Zapoliansky* died in the bunkers. His wife, *Shosha* died during the Nazi period. His son, *Chaim Yitzhak,* his wife *Bobel* and son *Israel,* were killed in Treblinka.

The Einhorn Family

Before the outbreak of the last World War, the following members of the Einhorn Family were found in Volkovysk; *Rosa Einhorn-Pshenitsky*, the Dentist, with her husband, *Mulya* and daughter *Dora*, who lived on the first floor of their house; and *Pes'shka Einhorn-Yanovsky* with her husband, *Joseph*, and *two children.* Pes'shka ran the pharmacy, and lived in the same house. When the Russians took control of Volkovysk, both families remained in their homes and carried on with their day-to-day lives. On June 21, 1942[301], when the Germans began to bomb the city, the Einhorns fled to Karczyzna like many other Jewish residents of Volkovysk, where they hid themselves in the mounds. Rosa managed to take along a number of dental instruments. Their house was completely destroyed by the bombing. After the Germans entered the city and took over control, the Einhorn's settled themselves in Kilikovsky's house in Zamoscheh, where Rosa opened a small office and continued her practice. Stepka, the Christian lady who raised Rosa's daughter Dora, remained with them. This condition continued until November 2, 1942, when the Germans ordered the entire Jewish population to leave their homes. The Einhorns were also among all the other Jews who, on that day, were driven into the bunkers. During their first days in the bunkers, Stepka the Christian lady would bring them food every day, and even for their friends. A few days after being in the bunkers, the Germans permitted Rosa to resume her practice in her prior office in Kilikovsky's house in Zamoscheh. They permitted her daughter, Dora, to leave the bunkers with her. However, her husband, Mulya Pshenitsky, and Pes'shka with her entire family, remained with all the rest in the bunkers. Mulya was later appointed among the sixty workers who were given permission to go to work in the city, and thanks to this, he was able to see Rosa outside the bunkers. During the time that Rosa was located in the city, many Christians used to send food parcels to their Jewish friends in the bunkers.

At the beginning of November 1942, the Germans began to send the Volkovysk Jews out of the bunkers to Treblinka. They promised Rosa that her sister Pes'shka, with her family, would be permitted to stay in the bunkers among the 1700 people. Tragically, a change in the plan took place, and at the last minute they were sent with everyone else to Treblinka. In that second transport, *Pes'shka,* her husband *Joseph Yunovich*, their *two children*, as well as the large *Yanovsky family* were then killed. Mulya Pshenitsky, Rosa's husband, then remained among the 1700 Jews in the bunkers. Rosa and her daughter Dora still lived in Zamoscheh at that point. When the typhus epidemic broke out in the lager, Mulya Pshenitsky also fell ill. When the last Volkovysk transport was sent out on January 23, 1943 to Auschwitz, Mulya was unconscious. The Germans allowed him to remain lying in the bunker hospital, and the next morning they shot him, along with all the other old and sick people. At the time the bunkers were liquidated, they were yet inclined to let Rosa remain in the city, but her daughter was to be sent to Auschwitz with the others. Rosa did not want to be separated from her daughter, and she refused the German proposal, and went with all the other Jews on the last transport together with her daughter.

On the night that the last transport was sent out from the bunkers, I saw Rosa Einhorn for the last time. When I stood outdoors in the cold, together with my sick wife and child, and waited for stretchers, because my sick ones were unable to walk to the train station, I ran into Rosa. She was at that precise moment, highly distracted, because she had at that time lost a package of hers, which contained everything that she owned. As Dr. Marek Kaplan tells, Rosa was later with him in the train car. She was then already very defeated and broken. Rosa arrived in Auschwitz with her daughter. The Nazis, however, separated them. Rosa was sent with the other Volkovysk [Jews] to the Auschwitz crematorium, and Dora went into the count of the 87 women that remained in the Auschwitz labor camp. However, the separation from her mother had a terrifying

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[301] Seemingly an error: this was 1941.

effect on Dora. Despite the fact that she was still very young, she completely lost her will to live, and demonstrated little ability to resist and survive. She compliantly did the heavy work that the Nazis imposed on the women in the camp, and in April 1943, when dysentery broke out and spread all over the camp, Dora was among the first to fall ill. Shayna Lifschitz and her sister Elkeh were together with her in the bunker. Shayna tells, that despite her illness, the girls in the bunker would take Dora along to work, in order to protect her from certain death, which the Nazis would instantly impose against everyone who was sick. Dora's health, however, go worse day by day. And one day, she was no longer able to lift herself up from the place where she slept, because her feet were badly swollen. That evening, when the girls returned to the bunker from their work, *Dora* could no longer be found.

The Shiff Family. At the time of the German occupation, *Berel Shiff* (of the Gold Business) was in Warsaw with his *family,* and nothing was heard from them. *Chaya Shiff*, the wife of Leizer, was taken away in the first transport to Treblinka. *Leizer* and his two sons, *Lialkeh*, and *Naphtali Hertz* were left behind in Volkovysk with the 1700 people, and were later killed in Auschwitz. *Itzel Shiff* lived in Belgium and the fate of him and his family is not known to me.

Hona Shiff. His wife *Chana*, was killed along with her daughter, *Rachel Leah,* in Auschwitz. *Hona* was with me in the Auschwitz *lager.* He worked with me in the 'command.' Hona Shiff, Alter Burdeh, a watchmaker from Svislucz, Jekuthiel Bashitsky ("Bish") and I would sleep on one bunk. During the entire time in the camp, Hona Shiff felt well. However, he did not give heed to the warning not to drink the bad water in the camp, from which people became sick with dysentery in droves. I myself would often warn him not to drink the water. He argued, however, that it didn't affect him. One day in the morning, when the men were awakened to go to work, Hona, who slept at the edge of the bunk, no longer moved. We awakened him, and warned him that the "House Servant" will beat him severely if he finds him in his sleeping place. However, Hona said absolutely nothing. When the "House Servant" entered, he began to beat Hona with his rubber truncheon, and when he didn't move, the "House Servant" tore off his covering. He then saw that Hona was sick with a bad case of dysentery. The "House Servant" nevertheless pushed him off the bunk, which was soiled with excrement, and beat him even more. On that day, Hona no longer went to work, and when we returned in the evening top the camp, *Hona* was not there anymore. *Alter Burdeh* from Svislucz was killed that same day.

Chaya Esther "Fira" (Meir Shiff's daughter). During the time of the Russian occupation, she went away to her brother, *Tzal'yeh* in Kharkov (Russia), and remained alive. Most recently, she returned to Poland. Her husband, *Roman Blumstein*, with her daughter *Ruzhya*[302] went away to his parents in Warsaw during the time of the German occupation, and it appears they were killed along with the local Jews there.

Bontsheh Slutsky. Nobody remains from this family. One *daughter,* married to *Volkovysky*, a Hatmaker, and was killed with her husband and children in Treblinka.

Israel Olshevsky. *He* and his wife, *Zina* and their children, *Herzl* and *Malka* were killed in Treblinka. His two sons, *Liova* and *Nakhum*, were in the Auschwitz camp, and were killed there.
The following happened to Liova: In the morning, as usual, we all went to work after the roll call. On that day, about 150 men were left in the camp by the commander. When the workers returned to the bunkers in the evening, they no longer found those men there. It was later discovered, that on that day, automobiles came, and all the people who remained behind in the camp were taken to the gas chambers. Among these

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[302] Nickname for *Rosa* or *Rose* (German-Christian).

unfortunates were the following from Volkovysk: *Liova Olshevsky, Mulka Pshenitsky* (the watchmaker), and a certain *Kessel*, who came to Auschwitz with the Volkovysk transport.

Yud'l Scharf, a Shoe Merchant. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

The *Gesseleh*

Yekhiel Pshenitsky. *He* died during the time of the Soviet occupation. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Yerakhmiel Babitch, a Tailor, son of Reuven the Tailor (lived in Nakhumovsky's house). The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mania Pshenitsky, a Baker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son, Mula[303], a Watchmaker, was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Nakheh Yunovich, 'The Dairyman.' The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Leibeh Kaplan, a Tinsmith (son of Alter the Tinsmith). *He* and his brother *Shmuel*, also a Tinsmith, were killed in Treblinka. Leibeh's two sons, *Chaim Yitzhak* and the *younger one* (whose name I cannot remember), were with me in the Auschwitz camp and were killed there.

Chas'sheh Leah Yunovich. *She,* and her daughter *Rachel Epstein*, were killed in Treblinka. Rachel's son, *Herschel Epstein*, who was in Russia, remained alive.

Meir Podorovsky, The Feldscher. Part of the *family* was killed in Treblinka, and the fate of the remaining members is unknown.

Zadok Lev, a Baker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Hinde Lev's Children. The fate of her daughter *Rosa Bartnovsky*, and her son, *Mottel Lev* is told in the description of Zamoscheh, where they last lived.

Goldberg. He had a general merchandise store in Bartnovsky's house. No one survived from the family.

Yaakov Goldberg, from the Manufacturing concern. The mother, *Chana*, was killed on the last day of the bombardment in Kalman Levitt's house near the river, near the Hassidic building. Levitt's wife was also killed there, and a child of Breineh (a grandchild of the Pearl Merchant). The father, *Yaakov*, was killed in Treblinka with those of the second Volkovysk transport. The older son, Mendel, remained with the 1700 men, and was killed in Auschwitz. The younger son, *Morris*, left for Ruzhany during the time of the German occupation, and fled to the forest from there. However, nothing more was ever heard from him. Their son, *Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg*, who worked as a physician for the entire time of the German occupation of Ruzhany, went from there to Lisokovo. However, he was later transferred on November 2, [1942], together with the Jews of Lisokovo, to the Volkovysk bunkers. During the time of the typhus epidemic, he did a great deal for the benefit of the Jews in the bunkers. When the bunkers were emptied, together with the last Volkovysk

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[303] Variant of *Mulya*, nickname for *Shmuel*.

transport, he came to Auschwitz. There he was separated out among the 210 men, and remained in the Auschwitz camp. He was later sent to the Lendzin coal mines by the Nazis as punishment for the assistance that he rendered to the Jews in the camp. When the Germans evacuated the camps, he fled to the forest and hid until the Russian Army took control of the area. Today, Dr. Goldberg is in New York, where he practices as a doctor.

***Yaakov Goldberg's Daughter**, Shoshana*, who was married to *Yitzhak Pearman* in Pinsk, went to Sarna during the time of the German [occupation], but nothing more was heard from them.

Tzil'yeh Medvedev (Bartnovsky), a daughter of Zelig Bartnovsky the lumber merchant, who was a well-know worker on behalf of the community, and a *Gabbai* of the Great Synagogue. Together with her husband, *Medvedev*, and her *children,* she was killed in Treblinka.

Dr. Menashe Niemchik. At the beginning of the war he left Volkovysk and remained alive. *He* is today in Israel. His wife *Clara* and daughter *Irkeh*[304] were killed in Treblinka.

Abba Yehuda Winetsky, "The *Hassid.*" (*Der Vashilishker*[305]). He was popular in the city, and died before the outbreak of the war. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Aizik Lev, The Butcher (from the *Gesseleh)*. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Kalman Levitt, of the General Merchandise store. His *wife* was killed in the bombardment, in Levitt's house near the *Hassidim shtibl*. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mordechai, Hosea's, The *Boyger*[306] No one from this family survived.

Pelteh Langbord, the Milliner (she bought Tzipa Katzin's building). *She* and her *husband* were killed in Treblinka. The son, ***Joseph***, who had lived in Argentina for many years, and then came home and married *Taiba Shkolnik*, was killed with his wife and *child* in Auschwitz. Pelteh's daughter, *Mal'yeh*[307] who was married to *Chaim Khvonyik*, voluntarily turned herself over to the Nazis, after they had taken her husband away among the first 200 [men]. This was one of the instances where a wife did not want to be parted from her husband, and was killed along with him.

Ozer Kaplan, a Lumber Merchant (a brother of Zelda Lapin. He also lived in the house of Pelteh the Moditskeh). He died before the war. His *family* was killed.

Joshua Movshovsky, The 'Factor,' had a hotel. His *two daughters* were killed in Treblinka. His son, *Velvel,*

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304 Nickname for *Yerusha* (See II Kings 15:33. Readers of James A. Michener's novel, *Hawaii*, will recall one of the characters, a wife of a missionary, named Jerusha Hale).

305 Indicating his origin to be in *Vasiliski*, to the north in the Lida *Guberniya*. Called *Vasilishok* by the resident Jews.

306 Seemingly someone who bent objects into shape, such as barrel hoops, and possibly wheel frames.

307 Nickname for Malka

who also dealt in lumber, was also killed in Treblinka.

Feinsod. He was a very fine Jewish person. He died yet before the outbreak of the war. His wife, *Basheh* (a daughter of Chaim Yud'l of the Fine Clothing store), was paralyzed for many years. Her *daughter*, and son-in-law, *Ben-Zion Zhukhovsky,* who had rabbinic ordination, went to Bialystok, where they were killed together with the Jews of Bialystok. The remainder of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yanovsky, from the Tobacco Factory, who in the last years, sold herring. His wife, *Baylah,* died when the Germans entered the city. The son, *Moshe,* who was a friend of mine, was married to *Rosa Kaplan* (a daughter of Velvel Kaplan from the *Kholodoisker Gasse*, and who is now in Israel). When the Germans entered the city, Moshe and Rosa traveled to her mother's family near Podoroisk. Moshe had a heart attack there and died. Rosa brought his body back to Volkovysk, where a funeral was conducted for him, during those trying days. This was New Years of 1942. A sister of Moshe, *Ethel,* was killed in Treblinka. His brother *David* was killed in Auschwitz. The fate of his other brothers, *Joseph* (who was married to *Pes'shka Einhorn*) and *Asher*, is described in another part of the book.

Fabrichneh Gasse

Dr. A. Shlackman (Lived in Finkelevich's house). Shortly before the outbreak of the Russian-German War, he went to Russia on a vacation, and as a result, survived. His *wife* and *child* were killed.

The Tailor from Rosh. His son-in-law, *Kleinbaum* (also a Tailor) along with his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Kaplan, a son of Zundel Kaplan from the *Neuer Gessel*. When the Russians occupied Volkovysk in 1939, Shmuel Kaplan, among many other Jews, was exiled to Siberia. After the war her returned to Poland, and is today in America. His wife *Chasia* was killed in Auschwitz. His son, *Dr. Marek Kaplan* and also his daughter *Nunya*, survived the Auschwitz camp and are today in America.

Aizik Margolis, the lumber merchant (he was known in the city as a very fine man). His *wife*, and daughter *Dina*, were killed in Treblinka. The older daughter, *Raleh*[308] went to Germany on Aryan papers, together with Rachel Lev's daughter. I do not know, however, what became of her.

Markus, the Tanner. The family was popular in the city, and active in the *Bund* movement. I think that *Markus*, his *wife* and *daughter* were killed by the Germans among the first 200 people. Their son *Dr. Shlomo Markus*, went to the forest to the partisans, and was killed there. Shlomo's wife, *Nechama* (from the Schein family) re-married, and today lives in Rumania. Shlomo's second sister, *Adela* (a medical doctor who was married to *Nakhum Khananovich*) was killed along with her husband in Treblinka. Only one son survived from this popular family.

Enosh, an Orchard Produce Merchant. Nobody remained from this large family.

Berel Press, from the Pharmacy-Storage. His wife was a daughter of Bayer the Teacher. *He* along with his

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[308] Nickname variant to *Raytse.* Therefore equivalent to *Reishl.*

wife and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Press, Berel's partner. He and his wife fled from the bunkers, but the Nazis caught and killed them.

Shimon Press, a Dental Technician. His wife, *Rash'eh Miriam* (a sister of Pinchas Steinwax, who lives in America) was killed along with her *two children,* in Margolis' cellar, during the time of the bombardment of the city. Shortly before the Russian-German war, Shimon went to Minsk in June 1941, and when he returned a few days after the outbreak of the war, he found the dead bodies in the cellar. Out of his entire family there, only his father-in-law remained alive. Along with his father-in-law, Shimon then proceeded to dig out the bodies of his kin from the buried cellar, and buried them. *He* was shortly thereafter also killed in the aktion against the Volkovysk doctors. His father-in-law, who had managed survive this great family tragedy in his old age, was also killed in Treblinka.

Gurevich, a Grain Merchant (lived near Press's house). *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Berel Kaplan (Worked at Kolontai). The Russians took him to Russia as a tenant farmer, and from what I heard, he was killed there. His wife *Baylah*, and his daughter *Paulia* were also taken out, but they survived, and today find themselves in Poland. The second daughter, *Nieta* fled from the bunkers to the partisans in the forest, and also survived. She is today with her mother in Poland. Nieta's husband, *Willi Salz* was killed along with their *child.*

Pin'iyeh Khomsky, son of the Pearl Merchant. His first wife (Hanokh Neiman's daughter) died while still young and left two children behind, a daughter and a son. The second wife was from Bialystok. He personally was a very energetic and thorough individual, and during the time of the Germans, worked in the *Judenrat.* His daughter, *Genya*, was a cleaning lady under the Germans, employed by the police. She worked there with Dora Pshenitsky (Rosa Einhorn's daughter). *Pin'iyeh* with his *wife* and *children*, were with me in one train car on the way to Auschwitz, but they were all sent off to the crematoria.

The Wide Boulevard

The second side from the stores

Tzapak, from the leather store, a son-in-law of the pearl merchant. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Avreml Lavzovsky, the Pearl Merchant. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Shmeryl Minkovich, a Hatmaker (a son-in-law of the Pearl Merchant). His child was killed by the bombs. *Shmeryl* lost a foot during the bombardment, and later died, together with his *wife,* in Treblinka.

Duvchansky, from the Hotel, Zalman Isser's daughter. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Epstein, from Kolontai, who lived at Werner's house. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One *daughter,* who married a doctor in Bialystok, was also killed.

Yochanan Khasman. He and his wife, *Sarah* (a daughter of Eliyahu Shykevich), and one *son,* were killed in Treblinka. The *other son* was killed during the bombardment. The names of their children were *Sholom Shakhneh* and *Leibl'leh.*

Yunovich, the Butcher. He died before the war. His *wife* was killed in the bombardment, along with her son *Chaim,* at David Epstein's house on the *Rynkower Gasse*. Her daughter *Masha*, who was married to *Pesach Grinsberg* (Herschel's son), was killed in Treblinka, along with the *children.* Her other daughter, *Gittl*, who was married to *Zalman Sulkes*, a hairdresser, was killed in Treblinka along with her *child. Zalman* was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. Yunovich's second son, *Berel*, went into the army in 1939, and later was killed while under imprisonment by the Germans. While I was in the Auschwitz camp, I learned from people, who came there from Maidanek, that Berel Yunovich was an important individual in Maidanek. However, it appeared that he was, nevertheless, also killed.

Sholom Yunovich, 'Shalkeh the Miller.' The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Weinstein, from the Finished Clothing, or as he was called, *Der Podriashchik*. His son, Abraham, with his *family* were killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Lana*, and her *child,* were killed in Auschwitz. Lana's husband, *Avra'sheh Offenberg* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

Daughter of Noah the Shokhet. *She* and her *husband* (a bookkeeper) were killed in Treblinka.

Millner Gasse

The Side of the Mill

Berel Kaplan, '*Berel Moteleh's*.' He was killed by the Germans among the first 200 people. His *wife* and the *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Zaydl the Policeman. Members of his family had not resided in Volkovysk for a long time already. A *son* of his was in Svislucz, and was killed.

Milia Khirurg-Goldenberg. *She* and her son, *Kuva* were killed in Auschwitz. Her husband, *Min'yeh Goldenberg* was in the Auschwitz camp. He fell ill there, and voluntarily presented himself to the hospital, and died shortly thereafter.

Khilier from the Mill. No one from this *family* survived.

Sholom Lev. *He* and his daughters – *And'zheh, Alia* and a child, *Manya*, and her husband, *Yud'l Goshchinsky* (a son of David the Smoker who worked for many years at the *Linat Kholim*), remained with the 1700 and were later taken away on the last transport. *Manya* was killed in Auschwitz. Her husband *Yud'l* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. The oldest daughter of Sholom Lev *Rachel*, a dentist, was killed in Treblinka together with her husband *Yoffeh*, and a *child.*

Mintz. The entire family – *Izzy Mintz* and his wife *Tzil'yeh* (daughter of Motkeh Kilikovsky of Hartford [CT], America), with their *children,* Izzy's brother, *Fei'eh*, Izzy's sister, *Sarah* and her husband, *Mendel Solomiansky* – were all killed in Treblinka. I had a conversation with Mendel Solomiansky on the last night before he was taken away to Treblinka. I would travel into the city three times a day then, in order to bring potatoes into the bunkers from the Jewish cellars. A number of wagons would make the trip with about twenty men. That evening, Mendel Solomiansky asked Feivel Yunovich to permit him to take his place on the trip, in order for him to buy a number of items for the journey, for which the Volkovysk Jews were being

summoned for that very evening out of the bunkers. Riding along the way into the city, Mendel said to me that despite the fact that a number of Jews would yet [be allowed to] remain in the bunkers, the Germans would exterminate them as well in a short time. This pessimistic view, which was however realistic, was not characteristic of the Jews in the bunkers, who up to the last moment of their lives, hoped that they would still be rescued. It was a frequent occurrence, even in the Auschwitz camp, that when people were being taken by automobiles to the gas chambers, accompanied by the music of an orchestra, they would make a variety of cheerful remarks to the passers by that were being taken from the camp to do work.

Moshe Mendel Schwartz. His two daughters, *Matilda* (married to Asher Yanovsky) and *Riv'cheh* (married to Leizer Farber) were killed in Treblinka. More details are presented in the description of the streets where they lived. Moshe Mendel lives in Israel.

Meir Farber, (lived in Schwartz's house). He worked for many years at the Magistrate's, where he was the only Jewish employee. He and his wife, *Manya Gandz*, and their children, *Esther* and *Emanuel* as well as his wife's brother, *Simcha Gandz*, remained among the 1700 in the bunkers. They later went away on the last transport to Auschwitz, and from there they were immediately taken to the gas chambers.

Israel Pidta of the Radio Business (lived near Schwartz's house). Along with his *wife, he* was killed in Treblinka.

Salman, the owner of the house in which the Pidtas lived. *He*, along with his *wife*, and a *son* who was sick, were killed in Treblinka.

Latzkovsky the Lawyer. *He* and his *wife* went to Grodno at the time of the German occupation. Since she was of the Jewish faith, they were sent to the local ghetto. Their fate is not known to me.

The Turbovich Family. *Mush'keh Turbovich*, a Corset-maker and her sister, *Miriam*, an English Teacher, and *Chana* a Teacher in the Tarbut School, were all killed in Treblinka. The fate of *Nakhum Zvi* is unknown.

Lifschitz from the Hotel. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Moshe Lipiak, a Tailor. *He* and his wife, *Feygl'eh* (maiden name Shpak, from Petroshovits), were killed in Treblinka. Their son, *Yoss'l* and his *wife* and *child,* as also their daughter *Nechama,* who was a nurse, with her husband *Resnick* (a brother of Dr. Resnick) – were all killed in Treblinka.

Millner Gasse

The Second Side

Solomiansky. Already written up in the description of the Mintz Family.

Moshe Zilberman. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Ephraim Zilberman. No one from this *family* survived.

Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich (lived in Zilberman's house). He was the last Rabbi of the Volkovysk community. At the outbreak of the war, he left his congregation and went with his family to his father in Szczucin.

However, they were killed there. Also, the Rabbi's father was killed there.

Mordechai Giller, active in the orphanage and an member of the staff of *Volkovysker Leben. He* and his wife *Henya* (a daughter of Zimmel Lev), were killed in Treblinka.

Berman, from the 'Assayers.' *He* and one *child* were killed in the bombardment in Nakdimon's house in Karczyzna. His *wife* and a *second child* traveled to Ruzhany, and were killed there.

Iglevich from the General Merchandise Business. They lived in Khmelnitsky's house. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Goldberg) and *family*, were killed.

Marantz, from the Hat Business. He was very well-known in the city. The entire *family* was wiped out except for *one daughter* who was in Grodno. However, her fate is not known to me.

Dr. P. Bebchuk. The Russians took him to Russia and he survived. His wife, *Emma* and their son, *Not'keh*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Rachel Lev, daughter-in-law of the Koshchilker[309]. *She* and *one* daughter were killed in Treblinka. Her *second daughter* was able to leave Volkovysk on Aryan papers, but we do not hear from her.

Enosh, Dealt in Orchard Produce (He lived behind Lev's house). No one survived from the entire *family.*

Dr. Schmutz, Veterinarian (lived near Rachel Lev's house). One *son*, who was a doctor, took poison the very first night that he arrived in the Auschwitz camp. All the remaining members of the *family* were killed in Auschwitz.

Leibeh Heller, or as he was called, '*Leibeh the White*.' He died alone during the time of the German occupation.

Dr. Joseph Kaplan. *He* was killed in Treblinka. His *wife,* who had broken a foot, and was unable to go with him on the transport, was shot by the Nazis in the bunkers. His son, *Gedaliah* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. His daughter, *Nieta*, and her husband, *Moshe'l Matskevich* (from the Pharmacy), and [their] *child,* fled to Lisokovo on the day before the final transport was to be sent out from the bunkers in January 1943. A Christian, however, recognized them and turned them in. They wanted to buy him off, but they regrettably failed to succeed, and the Germans shot them. One son, *Chaim*, who was in the Jewish Brigade, is today in Israel.

Bogomilsky. He and his entire family – the daughter, *Zhenya* (wife of Avreml Shapiro), and children – *Grisha, Ben'yeh, Samuel* and *Volodya* – were sent [sic: exiled] by the Russians to Siberia as landowners and wealthy people[310]. According to what I heard, Zhenya, Ben'yeh and Volodya survived. I do not know about the others. *Avreml Shapiro* was arrested by the Russians and sent away from Volkovysk. I do not know what happened to him.

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309 Referring to *Hillel Lev-Koshchilker*. See page 179

310 The well-to-do, were called the *Borzoi* by the Communists, using the name of the swift Russian hounds as a metaphor.

Leizer Bliakher, a Lawyer. *He* was taken away by the Germans, along with his brother, *Anshel,* among the first 200 men. His wife, *Niu'teh* went from the bunkers to Bialystok with her *child*, and was killed there.

Zuss'l Kaminetsky, lived on the *Millner Gasse*. He was an appointed individual overseeing the forests. I do not remember what happened to the family.

The Market Street (Rynkowa)

Mottel Rothford, from the Liquor Store. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. Only one daughter, *Rivka* who was in Russia, survives, and today she is found in Poland.

Asher Stolovitsky, a Flour Storekeeper. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. His two daughters, *Bluma* and *Tzirel*, with her husband *Dr. Mashitsky*, who were in Volhyn and later in the partisan movement, survived.

Chaim Yud'l Malsky from the Fashion Business.. *He* and his *daughter* and son-in-law *Zlotagur[a]*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Boyarsky, a Milliner. *He* along with his daughter *Dvora* and [her] *child* were killed in Treblinka. Dvora's husband, *Mendel Rutchik* was killed in the second aktion, which took place several months after the aktion against the first 200 men. A grandchild, Chas'sheh Boyarsky, was in the Auschwitz camp and survived. She is today in Argentina.

Yitzhak Bliakher. *He* and his daughter-in-law, *Niu'teh* (wife of Leizer Bliakher the Lawyer), left the bunkers to go to Bialystok, but were killed there. His sons, *Leizer* and *Anshel* were taken away among the first 200 men. Anshel's wife, *Sonya* (from the Kovensky family), and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Bom Bliakher. He and his family were killed in Auschwitz.

Niss'l Bliakher. During the time of the German occupation, he and his wife and child were in Bialystok, and were killed there.

Berel Epstein, the Tank Repairer from the Beer Brewery. His wife, *Chas'sheh* with the *children* were killed in Treblinka. The *son-in-law*, who was a teacher in the Trades School and also an officer in the Polish Army, was wounded during the bombardment of the city, and later died. His *wife* (Berel Epstein's daughter), was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

Kalman Galiatsky, The Shoemaker. *He* was killed in Treblinka. His son *Herschel*, an engineer, and his *child*, and Herschel's; sister *Feygl,* with her *husband*, and the other sister *Pes'sha* (Gam's wife) with her *child,* and another sister *Baylah* (Nionia Khvalovsky's wife) – were all killed in Auschwitz. His youngest son, *Joseph,* was shot by the Poles in the pogrom, of September 18, 1939.

Markus. The entire *family* was killed.

Benush the Carpenter. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Rachel'eh Stein '*Rachel'keh*' the Lady Butcher. *She,* along with her *daughters, son* and son-in-law, *Taleh*

Lashowitz (Meshel's son), were killed in Treblinka. A son of Lashowitz, *Raphael,* an electronic technician was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

The Duner Family. They lived together with the Galiatskys. A blind daughter and a grandson with a physical handicap were taken away by the Germans during the aktion against 'defective' children. Also, the remaining members of the family were killed.

Joshua Borkowsky. *He*, his wife *Rivka* and their *sons* were killed.

Lev, the Bialystoker Baker. *He* remained alive together with his son-in-law *Chaim Yud'l Shipiatsky*, and one *grandchild* (Shipiatsky's daughter). The rest [of the *family*] were all killed. More details are presented in the descriptions of the streets where they lived. Their brother, *Yaakov Lev* was also killed.

Shakhnovich. Nobody from the *family* remained alive. One son-in-law, *Morgenstern*, hanged himself at the outbreak of the war.

Volkovysky, a Milliner. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Bontsheh Slutsky) and the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Aryeh David Epstein, '*The Short One.*' Was an insurance agent for many years. *He* and his wife *Masha* and the *children* were killed in Treblinka. I think that one *daughter* was in Auschwitz, and was killed there.

Y. Merkin, The Teacher. He was killed in Auschwitz. During the time of the bombardment, The mother of the artist Blinderman and his son Volpeh were killed in his house.

Zelda Tzipkin, from the Wine Business in the market row-stores. *She* and her *family* were killed in Treblinka.

The *Neuer Gessel*

Zundel Kaplan, Shmuel Kaplan's father. His *wife* died in the summer of 1942 under the German regime. *He* was shot by the Germans on November 2, 1942 when everyone was being driven into the bunkers. I have written about their daughters, *Fanya Tropp* and *Milia Shalakhovich* in the description of the streets where they lived.

Krapivkeh The Shoemaker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Reuven Lev, The Artist. (Rachel Novick's father). *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Zamoschansky. During the time of the Russian occupation, he fled to Vilna, and in addition, brought his family over there. However, the Russians later sent him off to Siberia. His wife, *Mere,* and the children: *Rosa, Leibl* and *Geneh'leh*, remained in Vilna, but were subsequently killed in one of the aktions there. Leizer survived, and is today in New York.

Meir Epstein, a Glass Merchant. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. Both of his children, *Hosea* and *Shosha* remained among the 1700 people. The following incident happened to Hosea. When, on the first day, a number of the men were taken away from the group of the 1700 to work in Krisievich, Hosea was in that group. On the way, one of the SS guards created a suspicion and accused someone of having stolen his gloves, and when he fired his gun, *Hosea Epstein* fell dead. *Motya Zilberman* was wounded at that time, and died [of his wounds] later. *Shosha Epstein* arrived at Auschwitz with the transport, and was killed there.

David Epstein of the Newspaper Kiosk (Meir's brother). The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Aharon Solodovnik '*Freidkeh's*' a Grain and Flour Merchant. *He* was killed.

Meir Davidson, a son-in-law of Aharon Solodovnik. *He* and his *wife*, *Esther*, and the children: *Hodel, Shimon* and *Gittl* were killed in Treblinka.

Shlomo Kvintovsky. His daughter *Breineh* died before the war from cancer. Her husband, *Herschel Galiatsky* with their *child*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Dvora Slonimsky, from the Woodworking Factory (a daughter of Shmuel the Tank Repairer and a sister of Berel Epstein from the Beer Business). *She*, along with her *husband* and *son,* were killed in Treblinka. Her daughter, *Gut'sheh* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

Smeizik 'Kvachuk' from the Horse-hitchers. His son, *Itzel* was taken away by the Germans among the first 200 men. The rest of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Alter Lev, a Rag Merchant. *He*, his *wife* and *daughter,* and their son-in-law *Moritz Piestka* (from the lime business), were killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Velvel Lev (Alter's son), an Expediter. *He* and his wife *Shayna* (daughter of the Dayan, Yaakov Berestovitsky) and the children, *Aryeh* and *Miriam*, were killed in Treblinka.

The Feinzilber Family. They did not live in Volkovysk in the final years.

Bebel Kushnirovsky, The Tinsmith. *He,* his *wife*, and the children – one son, *Shakhna*, a Tinsmith, with his wife *Liebeh* (a daughter of Joel Shishatsky), and the other son, *Yaakov* (got married and lived in Porozovo), as well as the *younger son* (a son-in-law to Sarah Shosha Rutchik) – were all killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Bonchevsky, '*The Baranovicher*.' (Leizer Ravitzky's brother-in-law). He dealt in Orchard Produce. *He* was captured along with several others, attempting to escape from the bunkers. The Germans brought them to a place near the barracks, and there, opposite the members of the *Judenrat* and an assembled crowd, shot them on the spot. In this manner, the Germans wanted to illustrate the punishment that awaits anyone who was captured while attempting to flee. Abraham Bonchevsky's *wife* and *children* as also his *mother,* were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Ravitzky, '*Tekeleh,*' from the Shoe Business (in the Market). The Germans [attempted] to gas him along with the sick people in the bunkers. However, when *he* emerged still alive, they sent him back into the bunker and gassed him to death. His *daughter* and her *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Schwartzbuch, '*Niezhnik,*' from the Fruit Business. His entire *family* was killed, partly in Treblinka, and partly in Auschwitz.

Beckenstein from the Shoe Business. The son, *Joseph* was killed by a bomb that fell on Zamoscheh, near Jesierski's factory. The other son, *Boruch* went away with Lyuba Gam's daughter into the forest, but their fate is unknown. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Meir Pisetsky, a Watchmaker. He was a member of the *Judenrat*. *He* was later with me in the Auschwitz camp, but was killed there.

Meir Pisetsky's Brother-in-law, a *Shokhet*. He and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

David Beckenstein, '*Kott*,' a Butcher. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Dov'cheh Pitotsky, from the Food Store. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Pripstein, an Artist. Nobody remained from this *family.*

Yitzhak Markus, from the Glass Business. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Aharon Pilatovsky, from the Manufacturing Business (a son-in-law of Leibeh Markus). *He* and his wife, *Chana,* and the rest of the *family*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Epstein, a Rag Merchant. He was among those who established a *Khevra Kadisha* in the bunkers. He was an observant and reliable individual. He was killed along with his family in Treblinka. One *son* was an officer in the Russian Army, and survived. After the war, he found himself in Lodz, and in traveling around Poland on business in 1945, he was shot and killed by Poles.

Rutchik, son of the *Zhelenevicher*. *He* and his *wife,* (Khomsky's daughter) and the remaining members of their *family*, were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Kapelyushnik, of the Ironmongery (a son-in-law of Markus). His wife *Sarah*, with her son, *Aharon*, were killed in Treblinka. *Leizer* with his other *two children*, remained with the 1700 people and were killed in Auschwitz.

Abraham Uryonovsky, the Leather Strap maker. *He*, his wife *Reizl* and their *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka.

Herschel Uryonovsky, son of Abraham. *He* hung himself on the day the Germans entered Volkovysk. His *wife* (a daughter of Kadish Pikarsky, and sister of Yoss'l Pikarsky from New York) along with her *children,* were killed in Treblinka.

David Uryonovsky. *He*, along with his *wife* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Motcheh Segal, a Grain Handler (a son of Rokheh the lady Baker, and a brother of Yaakov Shmuel from Zamoscheh). *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yocheved (Yokh'eh) Jesierski, the Bandage Maker. She was killed in Treblinka.

Aizik Weinstein, '*Gisha's*' a Porter. *He* and his *wife* (Moshe Meir the Teacher's daughter), with the *children,* were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Shaliota, had a large general merchandise business, and a soap factory. He was a well-known speaker in the city. He died during the time of the German occupation.

Tvarkovsky, the Hairdresser (a son-in-law of Yud'l the Carpenter). *He* was killed in Auschwitz. His *wife* and *daughter* ran away. The Germans caught them seven months later and shot them.

Yud'l Beckenstein, The Carpenter. I wrote about his family on the Wide Boulevard, where they last lived.

Zayantzer, the Lady Tailor. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Meir Lashowitz (Meshel's son), a Butcher. *He* was killed in the Auschwitz camp. His *family* was killed in Treblinka. Only one son, *Katriel* survived, and lives today in Israel.

Itcheh the Horse-hitcher. *He,* his *wife* and *child*, and brother, *Yankel* and his *son*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yefim Renzon. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka. *He* and his *son* – in Auschwitz.

Shlomo Vant, '*Panich*,' a Carpenter. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Chaim Vant, a Carpenter (Shlomo's brother).*He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Shimon Levkov, a Musician. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mendel Freidin. At one time, he handled leather (suede), and afterwards had a general store. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Pick, from the Rope [Business]. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. According to what I heard, one *son* survived.

Zaydl Kotkovsky, The Artist. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son, *Berel*, was shot during the time of the leaving of the bunkers.

Benjamin Lemkin, '*'Nioma*' from the Dye Business. *He*, and a *son* of his, rode together with me on the transport to Auschwitz and they were killed there. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son, *Daniel* was in Russia and survived. Another *son* was shot when he was found in hiding. His *brother-in-law* (from the Zuckermans) with the *sister*, was killed in Treblinka.

Saneh, the *Shammes* of the '*Tiferet Bakhurim*.' He was a popular figure in the city. Because he was exotic and so well learned, he was regarded as a *Lamed-Vovnik.*[311] The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son survived by being in Russia. Today, he finds himself in Volkovysk.

Joseph, the *Shammes* of the '*Bet-Din*,' or as he was called, 'the Gendarme.' *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Benush Kagan, from the Dye Store (a brother-in-law of Khien'keh Shalkovich). The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

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311 Jewish legend has it, that the existence of the world is predicated on the lives of thirty-six totally just and righteous individuals. They are considered to be pure in their character, and not necessarily people of note. The Hebrew 'count' for thirty-six is given by the two letters *Lamed Vov*. One of the thirty-six, is then a *Lamed-Vovnik.*

Shklavin, Benush's sister. *She* and her *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Kovensky. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Zhetl, where they lived during the time of the German occupation. *He* was an active partisan in the forest, and lost a hand there. Now he lives in Israel.

Moshe Frei, a son-in-law of Shustak. *He,* his wife *Sarah,* and the *children,* were killed in Treblinka.

Matityahu, a Porter. He with his *family,* and also his *daughter-in-law*, were killed in Treblinka.

Hosea Petritzer, the son-in-law of the *Hassid*. The entire *family* was killed in Auschwitz.

Novogrudskeh Gessel

It was also known as "Yitzhak Shmuel Jonah's *Gessel.*"

Simcha Freidin, from the General Merchandise Store, a son of Mendel the Leather Goods Storekeeper. *He* and his *wife (*a daughter of Halpert the Taveliner – her brothers live in Argentina), and the remaining members of the *family,* were killed in Treblinka.

Kaller, the Dyer. *He*, his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka. His son-in-law, Liss (dealt in shellfish[312])
was killed by the Germans among the first 200 people. Liss' *wife* was also killed in Treblinka.

Pin'iyeh der Brisker, a Horse-hitcher (a son-in-law of Dreyzel the Marketplace Handler). *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Israel Novick, a Lumber Merchant. His daughter, *Chana*, and son *Irving,* live in America. One son, *Abraham*, lives in Israel. His houses in Volkovysk remained intact after the bombardment. Many families lived in them, until the expulsion into the bunkers. Israel's son, *Velvel* was killed by the Germans among the first 200 men. Velvel's wife, *Rachel,* and their two *children* were killed in Treblinka. *Israel Novick* died during the time of the German occupation, after they took away his son, Velvel. His wife, *Kras'sheh*, was also killed.

Kholodoiskeh Gasse

Shayna Chaya Enosh's step-children. No one of them survived.

Abba Bereshkovsky. The entire *family,* including the son-in-law, *Gershon Metchik*, were killed in Treblinka. One son, *Itcheh*, a blond, was with me in the Auschwitz camp. I feel a responsibility to write in greater detail about him because he acted well towards me in the camp and helped me out in a great measure. He came on my transport to Auschwitz to the labor camp. But, he was one of the first that were transported to a second *lager.* A few weeks later, he was again sent back to the Auschwitz camp, in Birkenau, where I was for the entire time. There he was designated to work in a detail that was called the 'Living Command,' meaning with

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312 Probably fished from local waters, and sold as foodstuffs to the gentiles of the area.

the dead [bodies]. In this detail, the workers received better food rations. He was in the habit of slipping me a few potatoes and a piece of bread, every time I passed by there, which under those circumstances literally meant the ability to sustain one's own life. He was later transported from the detail and sent to work in the coal mines for work in 'Yavonzha.' He suffered greatly there, and in a short time he was designated by the Germans as a 'Muslim,' which was the way the people in the camp referred to those who were emaciated and weakened. When he could no longer go on with the work, he was brought back to Birkenau to the hospital. There, along with *Berel Itzkowitz* (who is today in America), and a few other men from Volkovysk, such as *Joseph Kossowsky, Mulya Zapoliansky, Dr. Marek Kaplan*, and *Dr. Leizer Epstein*, I did all that I could to help him get back on his feet, so that he could leave the hospital where it was dangerous to stay because of the frequent 'selections.' We even worked out a deal, through bribery, for him to return to his work in the 'Live Command.' However, his condition no longer permitted him to go on with his work, and he was again taken to the hospital. Before he was sent to the gas chambers in a selection, I was the last person to take leave of him. We kissed one another, and he thanked me fervently for everything and wished me that I might survive the Nazi Hell.

Khien'keh Shalkovich, a Dye Storekeeper, and her son-in-law, *Chaim Rosenblum* from the Soda Water. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Epstein, a son of Itcheh the Smith from Karczyzna. He had a business consisting of wagons. *He* and his *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Sarah Peisik, a Dentist, s daughter of Itcheh Shmuel Jonah Novogrudsky. At the outset, she was arrested along with the Volkovysk doctors. She was released from there. Ephraim Barash later helped her to go over to Bialystok from the bunkers. However, she was killed in one of the aktions [there].

A. Turiansky, a Lawyer. I do not remember what happened to him. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Reizl Farber, had a Liquor Business. One son, *Leizer* and his wife *Rivka* (a daughter of Mendel Schwartz), and their daughter *Rachel,* were killed in Treblinka. Another son, *Meir*, and his wife *Manya Gandz*, and their children *Esther* and *Emanuel*, were killed in Treblinka. The daughter *Sarah,* and her husband *Meshel Gandz,* and their two children, *Yud'l* and *Ephraim*, were killed in Treblinka. *Sonya,* the wife of the other son *Avreml,* and their only child *Lili*, were killed in Auschwitz. *Avreml* left for Bialystok on the last day before the transports left the bunkers, and later came to Auschwitz with a transport from there. According to what I have heard, he survived, but I do not know where he is to be found.

Meshel Lashowitz. One son, Meir (through me), was in the Auschwitz camp. The entire *family* was wiped out. Only one grandson, *Katriel Lashowitz*, who was a partisan in the forest, survived, and is found in Israel today.

Misha Krapyuvnik. He worked in the *Judenrat* during the time of the German occupation. His wife, *Chava'keh* the Midwife (a daughter of Ozernitsky) and their *daughter*, were killed in Auschwitz. The son, *Saul,* was in Russia and survived. He later came to Italy, and from there went to Australia.

Herman Birnbaum. His father-in-law is in America (Yoss'l Poliak Pikarsky is his brother-in-law). *Herman Birnbaum* and his son were in the Auschwitz camp. The son died shortly after their arrival in the *lager.* Herman was shot on a command duty. I saw how he was being carried after being shot. At that time he worked together with Noah Fuchs.

Bashitsky. The entire *family* was wiped out. His son-in-law, *Moshe Piskovsky* from Ruzhany, was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. I was a witness to this. One son, *Katriel*, or as he was called, '*Bish*,' was also together with me in the camp. He died of dysentery. A son, *Benjamin,* was in Russia, and survived.

Jekuthiel Yunovich, Nakheh the Cheese maker's son. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Stolovitsky, from the Fashion Store. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Joseph Vinogradsky. According to my recollection, I think he died in the bunkers.

Velvel Movshovsky, a Lumber Handler, a son of Hosea the Factor. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Leibl Smazanovich, 'Kvachuk. His son was killed at work during the time of the German occupation. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Itcheh Lazarovsky The Baker. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Lazarovsky. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka. *He*, by himself, was killed in Auschwitz.

Lazarovsky. A *son* of his was shot, while fleeing, by the Soviets during the time they were retreating. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son was in Russia, and survived.

Kovensky. No one survived from the entire *family.*

Israel Rogov, a son-in-law of Abraham the Tailor. No one from this *family* remains.

Lisitsky. The *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

The Teacher. Lived in Lisitsky's house (I don't remember his name). His *wife* and *child* were killed in Auschwitz. He was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Ben'yeh, from the Goats. Nobody survived from this *family.*

Itcheh Liskovsky, a Wagon Driver. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir, a Carpenter (a son-in-law of Gottleib's), his wife was a middleman-jobber for household help. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Bor'eh Shaliota (son of Leizer). *He* and his wife *Leah,* were killed in Treblinka. Their two sons, *Yehuda* and *Israel* were in the Auschwitz camp and were killed there.

Shammai Padarosky, the son of the *Feldscher. He* and his wife, *Ida* (Panter's daughter), and a *child,* were killed in Treblinka.
Itzel Berman, a Bookkeeper. He was killed among the first 200 men. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Israel Panter, a Grain Handler. He was killed among the first 200 men. His wife, *Tamar,* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yekhiel (Khili'eh) Panter. *He* and his wife *Chaya*, and *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Novick, the *Shammes* of the *Kholodoisker Bet HaMedrash*. His *son-in-law*, a stone road paver, was killed by the Germans among the first 200 men. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Eliyahu Scher. Only one daughter survived out of the entire *family.*

Chas'sheh Boyarsky. She was in the Auschwitz camp, and was among the few women who survived in that camp. From what I know, she is today in Argentina.

Eliyahu Eliyovich from the Guest-house. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Avreml Shereshevsky. *He* and his *family* were killed in Auschwitz.

Yaakov Salman, a well-known Lumber Merchant and Public Servant (father-in-law of Shmuel Kaplan). *He* died in the bunkers. His daughter *Chasia* was killed in Auschwitz. His two sons live in America.

Asher and Berel Shalkovich, sons of Aharon Shalkovich '*Koroshel.*' They dealt in flour. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Shalkovich, a son of Aharon Shalkovich. He had a Dye Store. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Baylah Schein, '*Die Lopenitser*[313],' lived in Aharon Shalkovich's house. *She* was killed in Treblinka. Her *children* went off to Russia and remained alive. *Dr. Shlomo Markus* was killed in the forest with the partisans.
His parents, the *Markuses* from near the river, were taken away with the [first] 200 people. His wife, *Nechama*, lives with her second husband in Rumania. *Tzirel,* Baylah's daughter, and her husband *Friedman,* went to Australia. *Kayla*, the other daughter, lives in Poland with her husband *Herschel Volsky.*

David Weinstein, '*Der Meshonzhik*[314],' a Horse-hitcher, lived on *Tchisteh Gasse*. He and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Volksy, a Glazier from the *Tchisteh Gasse*. His son *Herschel*, with his family, were in Russia and survived. Today they are found in Poland. His *sister* was a partisan, and also survived.

Mulya Shkolnikovich. He and his wife *Paulia,* and the *children,* were killed in Treblinka. Also his *sister*, along with her *family,* were killed in Treblinka.
Moshe Movshovsky, the son of Fruma from the *Grodno Gasse*. *He,* his *wife*, and *children,* were killed in Treblinka.

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313 Indicating her origin to have been the shtetl of *Lopenitsa.*

314 Possibly a reference to someone who hauled merchandise packed in sacks.

Wilenska Gasse

Kalman Levitt, The Military Tailor. The entire *family* was wiped out.

The Khvonyik Family. *Milia*, along with the *two children* from her daughter Nieta were killed in Treblinka. The daughter, *Nieta*, left the bunkers and went to Bialystok and was killed there in one of the aktions. Her husband, *Joseph Gandz*, was also killed in Treblinka. I have already written about Khvonyik's son *Chaim* and his wife *Lolyeh*[315] (a daughter of Pelteh the Moditskeh), in the description of the streets where they lived.

Yud'l Novick. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. Their *daughter* and her husband, *Kiva Ein* (a son of Yoss'l Ein, from Kolontai), were killed in Auschwitz.

Yoss'l Davidovsky '*Khrakun,*' the Vinegar Maker. Already documented in the description of the street where he lived.

Kaplan, the Lumber Handler (a brother of Velvel Kaplan, who is in Israel).The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Berel Narozimsky, '*Tchistorozum*,' an Ironmonger. He was killed by the Germans in the second party, a few months after they entered the city. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka.

Feygl Resnick. No one remains from this *family*.

Rivka Gershuni. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Aizik Werner, last lived at Gershuni's. He died in the bunkers from typhus. His *wife, children,* and sister, *Anna,* were killed in Treblinka.

Applebaum. Only the daughter *Tcherneh* survived out of the entire *family*. She was in the Auschwitz camp.

Gymnasialneh Gessel

Only a few families lived there:

Shlomo Levin, '*Koval*,' the Smith. Already documented in the description of the *Tatarski Gasse*, where he last lived.

Herschel Zuckerman, from the Paper Business. Already documented in the description of the *Wide Boulevard.*

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315 Diminutive for *Leah.*

Ravitzky. Herschel, Reb Teveleh's brother[316]. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Noah Steinberg, Ravitzky's brother-in-law, an electronic technician. He was killed in Treblinka.

Mikhelson. Had a Brick Works. The entire *family* (two sons and a mother)was killed in Treblinka. His son, *Izzy* with his wife *Buzya Rozhansky* (a grandchild of the Bialystoker Baker), were in Pruzhany before the Germans came. Buzya survived, and today is in Volkovysk.

Tatarski Gasse

"Pastrigach" (I don't remember their family name). *No one* of them survived.

Shlomo Weinstein, a Horse-hitcher. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Hosea Moorstein, a Shoemaker (he was also called 'the fifteen-minute man'). *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

"Alibuder." The *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. The son-in-law, *Israel Tzemakh* was shot by the Germans on the first day of their occupation.

Khvalitsky, a Tailor from the villages. His son *Chaim*, a Porter, was wounded in the bombardment and later died. Chaim's *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. His *brother*, a Tanner (a son-in-law of Mordechai the Shoemaker from Zamoscheh), was also killed in Treblinka along with his *family*.

'Niomka Solkovich – He is written up in the description of the Wide Boulevard.

Abraham Zaklas. *He* and his wife *Myteh* (a daughter of Pikarsky), and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Yanovsky (lived in the house of the son of the White-Haired One) – already documented. His wife *Rosa* (a daughter of Velvel Kaplan from the *Kholodoisker Gasse*) was killed in Treblinka with the *child.*

Leibl Draznin, A Gardener. The entire *family* was killed in Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Moshe Lastovsky, The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Tzipa Pashinker. *She* and her *son* and *daughter-in-law* (a daughter of Yud'l Rubinstein), and their *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Yud'l Rubinstein the Locksmith. *He* was wounded by a bomb on the last day of the bombardment, and died shortly thereafter. His son, *Velvel,* also a Locksmith, with his wife, *Chas'sheh* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

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316 Jewish family references can be circuitous and subject to misinterpretation. This reference is to a brother of *Herschel. Herschel* in turn is identified as the son of The *Dayan, Reb Tuvia (Teveleh) Ravitzky.*

Shlomo Levin, A Smith. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. His son, *Mottel* was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there.

Dvora Rokhkin. *She*, her *grandchild* and *daughter-in-law* (a daughter of Sarah Gisha from the *Svisluczkeh Gasse*) were killed in Treblinka.

Fishl Ozernitsky, son-in-law to Kagan the *Shokhet*. *He*, his *wife* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Shimon the Rebbe – No longer lived there.

Yaakov Lanievich. During the time of the German occupation, *he* and his *family* found themselves in Lida., and were killed there.

Shmuel Bayer, a Wagoner. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Auschwitz. *He* was in the Auschwitz camp, and constantly bemoaned the fact that his entire family was taken away, and he was left behind. After a short time, he became sick, and was taken to the hospital, and from there to the gas chambers.

Leibl Travinsky, A Carpenter, a brother-in-law of Shmuel Bayer. He, along with his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Lidiavsky, A Cabinetmaker, and son-in-law to the Pashinkers. The entire *family* was wiped out.

Shifmanovich. During the time of the German occupation, only the *Mother,* and daughter *Tzil'eh* remained in Volkovysk. They lived at the Draznins. Both were killed in Treblinka.

Itchkeh Botvinsky. Immediately at the beginning of the war, *he* went away to Russia with his entire *family*. They all survived and are today in Volkovysk.

Shepsel Zelitsky. He, his *wife, child,* and *mother,* were killed in Treblinka.

Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg. He was president of the Judenrat during the time of the German occupation. He was a very energetic and heroic man, in whom the entire Jewish population of Volkovysk had great trust because of his endeavors on behalf of the welfare of the local Jews. Sadly, he was among the first of the Volkovysk martyrs, and was killed in the aktion against the doctors in connection with the accusation that a Jewish doctor had tended to a wounded partisan. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Tatarski Gasse

The Second Side

Arkin. The *mother* was killed in Treblinka. The older son, *Feivel,* a Dental Technician, was in the Auschwitz camp, who hung himself there immediately after his arrival, putting an end to his suffering. His wife *Sonya* (a daughter of Rutchik the Zhelenevicher), and the *children*, were killed in Auschwitz. I do not know what happened to Feivel's younger brother.

***Itcheh Shchupak**, 'Der Niezner.*[317]*'* He and his *family,* with the daughter, *Chana Kaplan,* were killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Sidransky, *'Kaban*,' A Butcher. He, with his *wife* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Israel Tzemakh. The Germans shot *him* on the first day they entered the city, in his yard on the *Tatarski Gasse*. The remaining members of his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Orlansky, A Tailor (a son of the Odessa Tailor, and a brother-in-law of Shmuel Sidransky). *He* and his *child* were killed in Treblinka. He was a son-in-law to the Pashinkers.

Polonsky, A Tailor, known at one time as '*The Old Bachelor*.' He and his wife *Chas'shkeh*, from the laundry, were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Pintel, A Carpenter, a son of Chas'shkeh from the Laundry. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Kadish Pikarsky), were killed in Treblinka.

Tkach. The *parents* were killed in Treblinka. One son, *Itcheh*, who was a cinema director before the Soviets, was killed by the Germans among the first 200 men. The second *son* served in the military, and was captured by the Germans. However, we do not hear anything from him.

Shlomo the Horse-hitcher (Blind Pin'iyeh's son-in-law). The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Berel Milvansky, a Horse-hitcher, son-in-law of Pin'iyeh. *He* and the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Zernitsky, a Miller '*Shchavoi*.' *He* with his *youngest son* were killed in Auschwitz. During the time of the Soviets, the *older son* was a director of a woodworking factory. He later fled from Volkovysk to Russia, but nothing is heard from him. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Abba the Shoemaker. *He,* and his entire *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Ryder, A Shoemaker. Abba the Shoemaker's son-in-law. He, and the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Joseph Nachman Shifran, A Shoemaker. His son *David* went off to war in 1939, and was killed there. The youngest son *Mottel,* fought with the partisans and survived. He is found today in Volkovysk. The son-in-law, *Gershon Beckenstein* was a musician in the orchestra of the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. *Joseph* and his wife, *Taiba*, along with the children *Yeshayahu, Dob'eh* and *Chana*, were all killed in Treblinka.

Khatzkel Berlin, '*The Dancer*.' His *son* died a sudden death in the movie house during the time of the Soviet occupation. The remainder of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Kimmelman. His *wife* was in Warsaw during the time of the war. One daughter, *Paulia*, was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. I have already written about the older daughter (the wife of Lipa Davidovsky).

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317 Yiddish for a person from *Hnezna.*

Moshe Leib Levinsky, A Butcher. *He*, his wife *Ethel* and daughter *Chana* (married to Leon Shiff), were killed in Treblinka.

Gisha, '*Tzatzkehs*.' The *son,* who had returned from America, was killed with his *family* in Treblinka. The sister, *Pes'sha* was also killed along with them.

Leibl Shapiro. *He* and his wife *Tcherneh* (a daughter of Rachel Leah Cantor, the Storekeeper), and the *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Joseph Yezernitsky,[318] '*The Gypsy*,' an Artist. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Alter Yezernitsky, A Porter. A son of Joseph Yezernitsky. His son, *Mula*, was killed in the Auschwitz camp. *Alter,* and the remaining members of his *family* were killed in Auschwitz.

Alexander Makov, a Cut Goods Storekeeper. *He* alone was killed by the Poles on September 18, 1939 during the pogrom against the Volkovysk Jews. His *wife* traveled to her son, *Yaakov* the doctor, in Bialystok. We do not hear from them. The younger *son* is married and lives in Israel.[319]

Yitzhak Weiner, A Butcher. *He* and his *son*, a Hairdresser, and the *family,* were killed in Treblinka. Yitzhak Weiner's other *son,* a blond, and also a hairdresser, went off to Russia at the start of the war. However, nothing is heard from him.

Walitsky. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Gainsay. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Joseph Davidovsky, 'Khrakun.' He was a very rich man. Before the Jews were taken out to the bunkers, money was gathered in the hope of succeeding in deflecting the decree. When they came to Davidovsky for his contribution, he argued while giving over the money: "what, money, you know what money is, for money I will buy myself out of death at the last moment." Regardless, *he* went off to Treblinka with his *wife*, and was killed there along with everyone else. His son, *Chaim,* with his *family*, were killed in Treblinka. His son *Lipa* with his *wife* and *child*, as also *Herschel*, were killed in Auschwitz.

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318 Former Israeli Prime Minister *Yitzhak Shamir* was born as *Yitzhak Yazhernitsky* in Ruzhany, and attended Gymnasium in Volkovysk. Because of the similarity in names, I inquired of him regarding these people. He had this to say in a reply dated 13Jun01:

I lived in Volkovysk with my family for three years before coming to Israel.

I was a young boy at the time (I was 20 years old when I arrived in Israel in 1935). I was active in Betar, although no one else in my family was a member of Betar.

I know of no connection to the two people you mentioned in your letter. I do not remember them as relatives of my family.

Sincerely,
Yitzhak Shamir

319 This must be Abraham Makov, who is profiled in Lashowitz's book, *Volkovysk* (the third part of this Trilogy).

Shmuel Sholom Weiner. His son *Israel,* a Flour Merchant, was killed along with his *wife* in Treblinka. The *older son* went off to war in 1939 and was captured by the Germans. From what it appears, he was killed. The younger son, *Moshe*,.was with me in the Auschwitz camp. There he fell sick, and was killed on the same day as Yeshayahu Mezheritzky. Shmuel Sholom's *daughter* with her *husband* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Lev, '*The Koshchilker*' Most of the family – his daughters, *Koritiansky* and *Goldberg*, with their families – were in Piesk at the time of German occupation, where they had a mill. However, later, they were all brought to Volkovysk, and into the bunkers, with the Piesk Jews, where together with the others sent there, were then shipped to Treblinka where they were killed. Only one daughter remained in Volkovysk, *Many*a, with her husband, *Meshengisser*. They had a Soda-water Factory. Together with the *children*, they were killed in Auschwitz.

Leibeh Ein, an old bachelor. He lived at the Lev's, together with his *sister*, also an old maid who used to carry and sell milk. He used to purchase licenses for the merchants at the Kasse-Skarbova. Both were killed in Treblinka.

Hona Kavushatsky. *He* and his wife, *Frum'keh*, went away to Vilna before the Soviets, and from there to Israel.

Dr. Remen, Kavushatsky's son-in-law. *He* went to Lida, and was killed there. *His* wife and *child* were killed in Auschwitz.

Berezinsky, a General Merchandise Storekeeper, an uncle of Israel Gurevich. *He,* his *wife* and *two daughters,* were killed in Treblinka.

Rabinovich from the Herring. The older son, *Moshe*, was an active Zionist, and a leader of the Volkovysk community. Thanks to the influence of [Engineer Ephraim] Barash, it became possible for him to leave the bunkers and go to Bialystok. However, he was later brought to the Auschwitz camp on one of the transports from Bialystok, where I met him after his arrival. Later, I heard that he had been killed there. His brother, *'Nioma*, and the *younger sister*, as also the *older sister*, her *husband* and *child,* were all killed in Treblinka.

Rivka Einhorn, had a Food Store. Her son, *Chaim Ozer* went off to Vilna before the Soviets. However, he later returned to Volkovysk when the Germans invaded. On November 2, he did not go into the bunkers according to the German order, and wanted to flee. The Germans caught him, and shot him on the spot. *Rivka*, and her daughter *Dina* with her *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Yud'l Gershuni, An Expediter. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Nakhum Gershuni. *He* was captured, along with nine other men attempting to escape from the bunkers, and they were all shot.

Shlomo'keh Davidovsky, '*Shustak*,' and his brother. They had a Guest House and a Tavern. *Both families* were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Kossowsky, a Tavern Keeper. *He,* his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka. A *son*, who was blond, fled from the bunkers to Pruzhany. However afterwards, as a result of a selection that took place there,

was sent to the Auschwitz camp, where I met him. He was killed in a selection there, a short time afterwards. One *daughter,* who was married to Milikovsky's son, also went off to Pruzhany with her *husband*, and was killed there on one of the transports.

Meir, 'The Blond,' An Ironmonger. His *son,* with his *wife* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Karashinsky of the Tea House. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe'keh Yunovich, Tamara's son. *He,* his *wife* and *son*, were killed in Treblinka.

Weissenberg, from the Paper Store. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Golub, a Stone Paver, a son-in-law of Moshe Poliak the Butcher. *He* and the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Feivel Yunovich, the son of Joseph, Tamara's from the Ironmongery. *He* with his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka. In the month of December 1942, when he was being taken by the Nazis on his last journey, he said to me, that if I could hold out until March of the following year, then I will survive, because the war could not continue any longer than that.

Grodno Gasse

Die Bontzerkeh, from the Grain Handlers. (I don't remember their name). Nobody from this family survived.

Feinzilberg, from the Boineh `The son, Yoss'l was shot by the Germans immediately after they entered the city. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Krum, from the Lock Factory. The *entire family* was killed – part of them in Treblinka, and part in Auschwitz.

Meir Krum. *He,* his *wife* (the daughter of Pin'iyeh Weinberg) and his *two children* decided, on the last day prior to the intent to drive them into the bunkers, to hide themselves in the home of a friend, who was a Christian. The Germans caught them, and shot them on the spot.

Hananiah, a Miller. One *son* was in Russia, but we hear nothing from him. His son, *Chaim* with his *family*, were killed in Treblinka.. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Auschwitz.

Tzal'keh Liss, a Porter. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Kravchik, a Shoe Merchant. His daughter, *Mereh*, and her husband, *Lev*, a Hairdresser (a grandson of Yehuda Hirsh'keh), were killed – he in the Auschwitz *lager*, and she in Auschwitz. *Shmuel* and his second wife *Hinde*, and her children: *Ahareh, Hanokh, Pin'iyeh* and *Henya* – were all killed.

Leibl Kravchik, a Hairdresser (Shmuel's son). *He* was in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there.

Yoss'l Shkolnikovich. *He*, his *wife* and *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka. One son, *Avreml*, a Carpenter, was in the Auschwitz camp. He became sick with dysentery there, and decided to present himself to the hospital, but unlike the majority there, decided not to go to work. He didn't come out of the hospital, and was killed in the gas chambers.

Moshe'l Shifran, a Flour Merchant, he used to be called '*Peretzess*' (he was stout). *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Zimmel Wand and the brothers. They dealt in calves and orchard produce. *All the brothers* with their *families* were killed in Treblinka.

Schaja Shifran, a Locksmith. His *wife* was known as '*Shayna die Bontzerkeh.*' One *son* was shot by the Germans trying to flee from the bunkers together with Abraham Bonchevsky, from Baranovich. *Shayna* and the *daughters* were killed in Treblinka. One son, Ephraim, who was a Russian prisoner of war, survived.

Itcheh Gurevich, from the *Bontzers* was known by the name, '*Koya.*' He played the drum in the Fire-fighter's orchestra. He, his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Herschel Gurevich, a Food Storekeeper and also a member of the Fire-fighters. He, his *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Grunes, The '*Metches*,' Wagon Drivers. He, his *son* and the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yud'l Orlin, a son-in-law of Grunes. He, and *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir 'Metch,' a Wagon Driver. A son-in-law of Grunes. *He* was shot in the bunkers over a quarrel about a few potatoes. He was shot in front of my eyes. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Golubovich, '*Kindzhuk*' the Miller (he was very stout). *He*, with his *children* and their *families* were all killed – a part of them in Auschwitz, and a part in Treblinka.

Sholom Golubovich from the Fashion Corner. His *family* was killed in Treblinka. He was with me in the train car on the transport to Auschwitz. However, along with other hundreds of Volkovyskers, *he* was immediately sent to the gas chambers.

Nos'keh Shifran, a Shoemaker. He, his wife *Taiba*, and *family,* were killed in Treblinka.

Mattes Schur, a Manufacturer-merchant. He had not lived in Volkovysk for many years before the war.

Berel Milvansky, a Horse-hitcher. *He* and his *wife* (a daughter of Tzipa Pin'iyeh's) and the *family*, were killed in Treblinka.

Barishansky, a Storekeeper of Cut Goods. A son-in-law of Palteh. *He* died before the war. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Tchopkin '*Palteh's*' from the Brick Works. His sons – *Alter, Israel* and *Ephraim* – did not go into the bunkers on November 2, in accordance with the decree. The hid themselves in the brick factory in a previously prepared bunker. They were however informed upon, and the Germans took them out of their hiding place, and shot them on the spot. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Tchopkin, '*Palteh's.*' He had the concession for waste removal from the Jewish houses. Also, in the bunkers, he also had horses, and he would take out the waste and horse manure from the bunkers. Thanks

to his work, he would come in contact with the free world and [was able] to bring a variety of foodstuffs into the bunkers, for which he used to get very high prices. He would also take out the corpses of the dead, and hide those living people underneath them, that wanted to attempt to save themselves from the bunkers. Shortly before the liquidation of the bunkers, *he* fled to Bialystok with his *children*, but they *all* were killed there in one of the aktions.

Weinstein, a Rope Merchant. He lived at the Tchopkin's. He, his *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Leibeh Schein, from the Inn. Thanks to the fact that his son, *Nakh'keh* worked in the *Judenrat,* he remained with his wife among the last group of the 1700 in the bunkers. However, *he* later died there from typhus. His son's wife, *Khien'keh* (Yitzhak Galansky's 'Koshmetch' daughter), was shot in the bunker on January 26, 1943, at the time the *lager* was being liquidated, because she was sick with typhus, and was unable to go with the others in the last transport. Also, *Noah Khantov* was shot at that time for the same reason. Leibeh's son, *Nakh'keh* , his children, and Leibeh's *wife* were killed in Auschwitz.

Malka Perel's from the Restaurant. Her daughter *Tcherneh,* with her husband, *Pomerianetz*, and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Shmuel Shalkovich, a Tank Repairer (a son-in-law of Malka Perel's). He, his wife *Rachel* and their *daughter* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Shalkovich, a brother-in-law to Yudzhik the Expediter. He, and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Berel, the *Shammes* of the *'Ein-Yaakov' Bet HaMedrash*. The Poles shot him in Karczyzna. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Alshimover Gasse

The 'Pulzhidkehs' (I don't remember their family name). He was a Handler. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mottel, from [the] *Boineh*, A Butcher. He, and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Peckerman, A Butcher, a blond. *He* and his *brother,* and their *families* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Shmuel David's, a Horse-hitcher. *He*, and his large *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Herzl and Yaakov Azef, *'Die Alubinehs,'* Wagoners. *They*, and their *families* were killed in Treblinka.

Feygl Sasson, daughter of the Butcher. *She*, her husband *Zusa,* and the *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Pin'iyeh Weinberg. He was blind in one eye and was known in the city for his long gray beard. His *wife* was a cook at all the weddings. He was gassed with all the old people in the bunkers. His *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son, *Itzel*, lived in Grodno. I later met up with him in the Auschwitz camp. However, I do not know what finally happened to him.

The Horse-hitchers from Brisk – *Yitzhak, Pin'iyeh* and *Mottel. They,* and their *families* were all killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov and Jonah 'Helkehs' *They,* and their *families* were all killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Lifschitz 'Tatkeh,' a Horse-hitcher. His *wife* and *child* were killed by a bomb which fell on their house. *He* was killed in Treblinka.

Khatzkel Savuolsky, a Butcher (a son of Alter the Butcher). His sons were killed in the second aktion in the city, a couple of months after the entry of the Germans. *He,* his wife, *Zlatkeh,* and the remainder of his *family,* were all killed in Treblinka.

Alteh Weissenberg, A Writer. *She* was shot by the Germans on November 2, on the way to the bunkers, when she attempted to flee into the forest. The remaining members of her *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Leshchinsky, A Bagel-Baker, '*Guzeh's*.' One son, *Daniel*, a Carpenter, was killed in the Auschwitz camp. The remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Itcheh Nakhum's, A Shoemaker. The entire *family* was wiped out in Treblinka.

Moshe Meir Shkolnik, A Food Storekeeper. *He* and his wife, *Chas'sheh* were killed in Treblinka. His son, *'Nioma* (from the Wool Factory), with his wife *Dvora* and children, *Isser* and *Mer'keh*, were killed in Treblinka. Moshe Meir's daughter *Rachel*, with her husband, *Yaakov Rosenblum*, were also killed in Treblinka.
Their two sons, *Yud'l* and *Markel,* survived.

Khatzkel Adin, father-in-law of Yaakov Palteh's. *He* and his wife *Reizl,* and son *Shmuel* with his *family*, and son-in-law *Itzel* (a Tailor), with his *family*, were all killed in Treblinka.

Hochman, from Kosovo (Shkolnik's relatives). They lived with their son at Moshe Meir's. Their *son* was killed in the Auschwitz camp. The remaining members of the f*amily* were killed in Auschwitz.

The Hospital Gasse

Winnick, a Rope Maker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Berel Gadder '*Katrina*' a Porter. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Smeizik, '*Kushehs*,' a Horse-hitcher. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka. His brother *Jekuthiel*, went off to Porozovo during the time of the Germans. But he was killed by German bullets together with a number of other Porozovo Jews. The rest of his family was wiped out in Treblinka.

Isser, a Horse-hitcher, a son-in-law of The Brisker. The entire *family* was wiped out in Treblinka.

Zalman Rodzhes, '*Kvachuk*,' Sarah Elkeh's brother. The son, Alinka was already known before the war for his bad behavior. When the Germans entered, he became an informer, and the city suffered a great deal from this. The *Judenrat*, with Dr. Weinberg at the head, could not rid itself of him, because the Germans considered him to be useful. Once, however, he got drunk and was arrested. The Germans were in the habit, when the jails became too full with arrested people, to dispose of the excess when no one was paying attention. They would take the arrested people to the Izaveliner forest on the morning after the separation, and shoot them there. Dr. Weinberg, who still had considerable influence with the Germans command at that

time in his capacity as head of the *Judenrat*, which used to hand over large sums of money in the name of the Jewish community, exerted himself to assure that such a selection should include Alinka. This matter came out as he wanted to, and Alinka was taken out the next morning from the jail to the forest, and he was shot there. The entire city breathed more easily.

Beinish Ogulnick, A Porter, he was also called, '*Beinish'keh.*' *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Shalakhovich, from the Vinegar Works. I have already written about the daughter, who was married to Joseph Davidovsky-Khrakun. The other *daughte*r, with her *husband* who was a scholar, were killed in Treblinka

Pesach Bayer, A Horse-handler. He died in the bunkers. His son, *Dr. David*, was with me in the Auschwitz camp, but he was killed there. The rest of the *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son of his brother David survived. His brother *Chaim* with his *family* were in Bialystok, and were killed there.

Benjamin Nishevsky, A Carpenter. *He*, his *wife,* and *children* were killed in Auschwitz. His son-in-law, *Yaakov Beletz*, was killed by the Germans among the first 200 men, Beletz's *wife* and *children*, and a *brother* of his, were all killed in Treblinka.

Reuven Nishevsky, a brother of Nishevsky the Carpenter. At the outbreak of the war he found himself in Warsaw, and participated in the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto. I later met up with him in the Auschwitz camp. However, he was killed in one of the selections. I have written about him already.

Ovadiah Weinstein '*Kot,*' a Grain-handler. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Gruna Halpern, A Midwife (Leib Halpern's daughter). *She* and her sisters, *Leah* and *Lyuba Rak*, with her *husband*(who worked in the electricity plant), with their *children,* were killed in Treblinka.

Israel Aharon Dworetsky. He lived at the corner of the Hospital and *Grodno Gasse*. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mikhal Jesierski, A Photographer. The entire *family* was killed – a part in Treblinka, and a part in Auschwitz.

The Sister and Brother from the Food Store (I don't remember their [family] name, they lived near Jesierski). Both were killed in Treblinka.

Zusa Ziskindovich, a former Forest Merchant, who later worked for Movshovich in petroleum products. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Beletz. *He* was killed among the first 200 men. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yoss'l Beletz. The Germans shot him on the first day of their occupation. His *wife* (Kwiat's daughter), was killed in Treblinka. His sister, *Feygl* was shot by the Germans on November 2, when she attempted to escape from the bunkers.

Fruma Movshovsky, from the General Merchandise Business. Her daughter *Manya* and *son-in-law* (a Lawyer), were killed by the Germans shortly after their occupation, among the first 200 people. The son-in-law, *Moshe Ivensky*, was with me in the Auschwitz camp and was killed there. His *wife* and *children* were killed in Auschwitz.

Moshe Movshovsky, Fruma's son. *He,* and his wife *Esther Yezernitsky*, and the *children*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Matus Fuchsman, A Tanner (lived at Movshovsky's). He and his wife, Shayn'dehleh (a daughter of Zelitsky), and the children, were killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Winetsky, A Purse Maker. His *daughters* were killed in Treblinka.

Malka Weinstein, '*Korovoi*,' (a daughter of Abraham Yalovsky). *She* and her husband, *Eliyahu*, were killed in Auschwitz. Her *son* (by her first husband), went to war in 1939, but we heard nothing from him [since]. Her *daughter* fled from the bunkers and survived. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Auschwitz.

Berezniak, The entire *family*, with their *sons-in-law* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

The Deaf Shoemaker. *He*, and his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Nachman Papa from the Ironmongery. *He* died shortly after the German occupation. His wife, *Miriam*, and daughter *Zhenya*, were killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Yudzhik from the Gardeners. His son, *Ahareh Yos'keh*, was killed in the bombardment. The second son, *Leibeh,* who was crippled, was taken away by the Germans with the 'defective' children. The rest of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yoss'l Frack. *He* and his *family* were killed in Auschwitz. I wish to tell the following episode about him here. When the last transport was brought to Auschwitz, only a small group was separated off into the Auschwitz camp. Yoss'l Frack's son, Shlomo was in that group with me. We were required to go on foot to the labor camp. By contrast, the majority of those in the transport were designated to be taken by car immediately to the gas chambers. Going on foot in the direction of the work camp, Yoss'l Frack cried out from an automobile that was passing by, to me and his son who was walking in the same row with me: "You are being taken to life, and we – to death." *Shlomo Frack* was later killed in the Auschwitz camp. But Yoss'l's words always echoed in my ears, because even then, in the transport cars, they knew they were being taken to their death. I was later told by one of the *Sonderkommandos*[320] who worked in the crematoria, that half of our transport did not want to enter the gas chamber, and the Germans shot them on the spot.

Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse

Mendel Ein '*Zaharchik*' (a brother of Yoss'l Ein), a Grain Handler. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Ein, '*Zaharchik*,' A Baker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Israel Gurevich, a Flour Handler. He worked in the *Judenrat* during the time of the German occupation. The entire *family* was killed in Auschwitz.

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320 Special staff appointed by the Nazis in the concentration camps to do the dirty work. Often indigenous people, but occasionally Jews, deluded into believing they could save themselves by cooperating in this way.

Itchkeh Ozernitsky, a son-in-law of Chaya-Shosha Saroka. He dealt in eggs. He was arrested for speculation by the Germans a short time before the lager was closed up. In connection with him, I will relate the following episode. I, along with a number of other workers, were designated to work in the city. After we underwent a disinfection, we were allowed to sleep in the prison lager, which had been made to order on the place of the former bathhouse. We were approximately 120 men, and our work consisted of transporting potatoes and other similar tasks, which as carried out under the oversight of the police. We were awakened at six in the morning, and by 6:30AM were already being taken to work. On the historic night of December 1942, when the last transport was taken away at night from Volkovysk to Treblinka, we were awakened at 4:30AM. We were no longer given any food, and conducted under a much stronger police guard that on every other day, to the police station, which was then found in a former house in Zamoscheh. At 5:00AM, we already found ourselves at the police [station]. The six arrested Jews, which were up till that time found in the arrest-house, were also led into that place at the same time. We had already heard that night, that the Jews had been driven out of Volkovysk, and as we subsequently found out some time later, it was to Treblinka. Itchkeh Ozernitsky and Alteh Berestovitsky were among those who were arrested, along with four other Jews whose names I do not remember. We were immediately surrounded by a strong guard of police and German gendarmes, armed with machine guns, and we were ordered to march. We went quietly, and we were certain that we were being taken to the train, where we will be taken away along with the other Jews from the bunkers. We were brought up to the end of the barracks, to the gate [leading to] the bunkers. We were ordered to stand there. A few minutes later, a number of workers emerged from the barracks. It was still dark, and in passing they told us, that the remaining Volkovysk Jews were taken out of the bunkers on the previous night, and only they remained in the bunkers as able-bodied workers and 'necessary' Jews. A few minutes later, a German officer came out of the barracks, ordered the six arrested people to be separated out from the rest of the workers, and they were immediately taken in the direction of the train, where they were sent away with the Jews in the transport. We, the workers, were led back to the bunkers. That is how *Itcheh Ozernitsky* was killed at that time, with the remaining members of his *family* in Treblinka.

Chaya Shosha Saroka. Her *son*, an old bachelor, was killed in Auschwitz.

Chas'shkeh Yellin, the widow of Shlomo'keh Nachman's. *She* and her *children* were killed in Treblinka. She was in the same bunker as my father, and my in-laws, the Moorsteins. I saw her on the last night before she was taken away on the transport to Treblinka.

Reuven Lifschitz. *He* and his wife, *Leah* (a cousin of mine), were killed in Treblinka. Their two daughters, *Elkeh* and *Shayn'keh,* were in the Auschwitz camp. *Elkeh* died there in a tragic way. *Shayn'eh* survived all the tribulations, and is today in Israel.

Nissan Zapoliansky, dealt in yeast (Lifschitz's father-in-law, and my uncle). *He* died in the bunkers.

Sarah'keh Lev '*Dodzhkeh's,*' the mother of Sylvia (Sima) Lersselroth. *She* and her daughter *Chay'cheh*, and son-in-law *Zelig Kuznitsky*, a bookkeeper, and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Aizik Shchupak. His wife was *Shayn'dl Dodzhkeh's* (from the first husband Klempner; aunt of Sylvia Lesselroth from New York) She died in the bunkers on January 26, 1943, the night they were driven out of the *lager*. One of her *sons,* who was married to a daughter of Simcha Berg, was killed with his *wife* in Auschwitz. The other *son* was [also] in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed a short time afterwards.

Khatzkel Moorstein (my brother-in-law). He was taken away by the Germans along with the 200 men on

August 7, 1941. His wife *Baylah* (a daughter of Nachman), and their two children, *Henya* and *Aharon,* were killed in Auschwitz. The older son, Moshe, went off to war in 1939. He was later captured by the Germans, and subsequently dies in imprisonment in 1941. The German chief headquarters in those days, when Volkovysk was still under Russia, sent all the details to the family – where, under which number, and in which city he was interred. (They were so helpful still in those times!).

Noah Leshchinsky, a Shoemaker, from the known '*Guzes*.' *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Jedediah Marotchnik, a Leather Merchant. He died during the time of the Soviet occupation. His wife *Mindl*, his daughter, *Nieta*, and his son, *Zaydl,* were killed in Auschwitz. One son, *Meir,* fled on the way to the bunkers on *November* 2, 1942, but nothing is heard from him, and it would appear that he was killed.

Feivel Tzirulnitsky, from the Fashion Store in the row stores (a son-in-law of the American Tailor). *He*, his *wife, daughter* and son-in-law, *Govzeh*, were killed in Treblinka. His son *Velvel* (a soccer player), was killed by the Germans during the first week of their occupation. Velvel's *wife* (a daughter of Turiansky the Butcher), was killed in Treblinka. The remaining *children* were killed in Auschwitz.

Chaim Berel Klatchkeh, a Carpenter. He also had a Tea House. Nobody from this family survived.

Eliyahu Lemkin, the brother of the lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who is in Washington [D.C.]. His wife was *Liza*, a daughter of Yenta Feygl Vinogradsky from the Fashion Store. Her mother, with the remaining members of her family were in Russia for many years before the war. She never heard from them, because the correspondence with the Russian Jews was forbidden. After the Russians occupied Volkovysk, Liza exchanged letters with her family, and through them, she received permission from Moscow for herself and her children to travel, in order that they may visit with relatives. A few weeks before the outbreak of the Russo-German war in 1941, her husband, Eliyahu Lemkin also received permission to travel to Russia to these relatives. When the war between Russia and Germany broke out in June 1941, they remained in Russia, and in this way the entire family survived.

Leibeh and Ziss'l Tchopper, my parents. My mother *Ziss'l* was killed by a bomb in the house of my father-in-law, Mordechai Moorstein. My father *Leibeh* was killed in Treblinka. My wife *Batya,* and my son *Emmanuel,* to whom I dedicate my current writing, became ill with typhus in the bunkers, and in sickness, they came with me to Auschwitz, where they were killed. *I* was at that time taken to the Auschwitz lager, from where I was later taken to a number of other camps, until in the end I was liberated.

Sakhar, the Director of the *Tarbut* School in Volkovysk. He and his family lived in our house. When a bomb fell on Chaim Berel Klatchkeh's house (where two Jewish children were killed, but I do not remember their names), the shrapnel from the explosion hit Sakhar's quarters. His *wife*, also a teacher, was killed instantly by this, and he lost a hand. Later, *he* and his *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Niss'l Bliakher. *He,* his *wife* and *child*, left for Bialystok, where they lived with the parent's of his wife. They were *all* killed in one of the local aktions there.

Yaakov Meir Zaklas, a Wallpaper Hanger, brother of Abraham Zaklas. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka. *He* was with me in the Auschwitz camp. He became severely weakened from all the troubles, and could not make roll call. The 'house servants' no longer wanted to let him back into the block. They beat him even more, and in this way they ended his life.

Goldrei, an Ironmonger. The son, *Abraham'l*, was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. The *mother* and the remainder of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

David Peremolnik, a Gardener. *He,* his *wife*, son *Berel*, and *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka.

Leizer Shaliota. *He* died during the time of the German occupation. His son, *Gedaliah*, was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Boruch Yunovich, from the Bank. His *father*, a Tinsmith, and *mother*, as well as his *sisters* and *brothers* were all killed in Treblinka.

Khemeh Yunovich, a Hatmaker, son-in-law to Meshel Lashowitz. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son fled to Russia at the beginning of the war, but nothing is heard from him. His *daughter* fled with Meir Marotchnik on November 2, 1942 going to the bunkers. Because nothing further was ever heard from them, it appears that they were killed.

Itcheh Uryonovsky, A Leather Harness Maker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. One son, *David*, who happened to be in Russia during the time of the war, survived.

Leibeh Beckenstein, '*Beiteleh*,' a Tailor. His *two sons* were with me in the Auschwitz camp. *Boruch* was killed immediately after we arrived in the camp; the other son, *Itcheh,* was killed later. A third son, *Shlomo*, who studied the law, arrived in a transport from Luna. He worked in the *Sonderkommando,* where he was called '*The Lawyer*.' I would see him quite often, despite the fact that his block was closed off, and they were not given freedom of movement about the camp. Later, during the evacuation, hew was also killed. *Zuss'l Kossowsky* from *Volp,* a brother-in-law of Dr. Marek Kaplan who came on our transport, worked in that commando unit towards the end. He was shot there at the time of the uprising of the *Sonderkommando*. The commando unit consisted of those who worked in the crematoria.

Isaac Shchupak. His mother *Dina*, and sister *Golda,* and her husband *Leferer* with the *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Mottel Stolovitsky. He had a Tavern. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Yaakov Matskevich, a Pharmacist. *He* was killed in Treblinka. His wife, *Fanya*, was killed by a bomb on June 26, 1941 that fell near Nakdimon's house in Karczyzna. The son, *Moshe'l* and his wife, *Nieta* (a daughter of Joseph Kaplan), and their *child,* left the bunkers on Aryan papers. I spoke with Moshe'leh on the day before they left the bunkers, and her told me his plan and that he had set aside a little bit of jewelry, which he thought would help him to carry out his plan. As was later deduced, they were captured some time later in Lisokovo. A Christian policeman recognized them, and ignoring their bitter pleas, and the representations to bribe him, he turned them over into German hands. Moshe went to the execution with his child in his arms, and in this fashion, they were all shot.

Abraham Grodzhensky. Towards the last, he had a Tea House. *He,* and his wife *Sonya*(a sister of Feivel Tzemakh), with the *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Falkovich, A Tailor from Karczyzna. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Mazover, A Wurst Handler. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Bluma*, who was married to *Chaim Dworetsky* from the *Kharkuns*, was killed in Treblinka also, along with her *husband* and *child.*

Abraham Galiatsky The Barber. *He* was shot bu the Germans on November 2, in the Talmud Torah along with the old people who were unable to go along with everyone else into the bunkers. I have already written about his daughter Riv'l and her husband *Bostomsky*.

Herschel Mazover, a Paper Merchant. *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. One daughter, *Ida*, was saved. She leapt from the wagon that was the transport to Maidanek, and in jumping, she broke a leg. What she endured is separately documented later in this Yizkor Book. She lives today in Poland, and is married. Her [married] name is Rak. Her sister *Fanya,* also jumped from the wagon that was taking a transport from Bialystok to Maidanek, but it is not known what happened to her.

Melekh Khantov, a Fashion Storekeeper. *He* was the leader of the Fire-fighting Command for many years. The Germans shot him in the bunkers, on the historic night of January 26, 1943 when because of illness, he was unable to go with the rest of the Jews to the last transport. His *wife,* and daughter, *Zhenya*, with her husband, *Zelitsky* and their *child*, were killed in Auschwitz.

David Poliachek from the Restaurant. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Nionia and Lollek Poliachek. They were *all* killed in Treblinka.

A. Mant, A Dentist. His wife *Dora* (from the Marantz's), and *daughter*, were killed in Treblinka. He was killed in the aktion against the Jewish doctors of Volkovysk.

Schein. The *mother* was killed by the bombs [that fell on] Margolis's cellar.

Zhameh Schein. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Epstein, a Dye Storekeeper, '*Sarah-Yocheved's*' *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

David Turiansky, a Butcher. His son, '*Nott'l*' *Israel*, was with me in the Auschwitz camp. He fell sick there with dysentery. He had become so weakened, that on the final day before he died, he was taken into the block, and placed under the bed bunk on the bare earth. When, on that night, I went to him, with his cousin Israel (*Fish'keh*) Galai who was still alive, to see how he felt, we found him undressed already (the able used to strip off the clothing from the half-dead), and that is the way he expired. I have already written about his *daughter* and son-in-law, *Velvel Tzirulnitsky*.

Nakhum Rosenblum '*Getch*,' a Maker of Soda-Water. His two sons, *Ahareh* and *Bonya*[321] were with me in the Auschwitz camp, and they were killed there. The remainder of the *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Kobrinsky. From all of the *three brothers* and *three sisters* and their *families,* no one is left. A brother-in-law

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321 Nickname for *Bune* or *Bona*. It is of Romance origin: French = Bon & Italian = Bono. Curiously, in modern Hebrew, it is the feminine form, *Tova* that seems to have gained popularity as a first name, and not the masculine form.

of Leibl Kobrinsky, *Feivel Lakhovitsky* from *Svislucz* was with me for a short while before the liberation from the German camps. He survived the evacuation of the camps. I took my leave of him three weeks before the liberation, but according to what I heard from people that I knew with whom we were together, he died only a few days before the liberation, in Ebensee, Austria.

Golub, A Stone Paver (a son-in-law of Polack the Butcher).*He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Pes'sha Blinderman. The *mother* and oldest son, *Volpeh*, were killed during the time of the bombardment in Epstein's building (The Agent). The second son, *Danya,* was killed in Auschwitz.

Herschel Yudzhik, from the Printing Works. He was in *Dereczin* with is wife's family at the time of the German occupation. They were killed there during the massacre.

Meir Shalkovich, Yudzhik's brother-in-law and partner. His wife, *Kreineh* and *child*, were killed in Treblinka.

Rapahel Patsovsky, A Cabinet Maker. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Berel Press, The Technician. He lived in Manya Galai's building. I have already written about him, together with the other Presses, in the description of the Wide Boulevard.

Natan Spiegelglass, son-in-law of Leizer Shaliota. He had a Coffee House. His wife, *Mirkeh*, was killed in Treblinka. His younger son, *Shmuel Yitzhak*, died in the bunkers. *He*, and his older son *Khatzkel*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Dr. Aaronson. He died in Volkovysk a few years before the war. His *wife* and *son* went away to Russia, but nothing has been heard from them.

Leizer Shaliota. '*Zahaliker*.' *He* and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka. His *daughter*, and her husband, *Saneh Lifschitz*, were in Bialystok, and it looks like they were killed in an aktion there.

Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Auschwitz. On daughter, *Ed'zheh* was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. *Yaakov Sedletsky* was very active in the *Judenrat*, and was killed in the aktion against the Volkovysk Jewish doctors.

Boruch Yunovich, A Bookkeeper that worked at Bank '*Kupetsky*.' His wife *Hadassah,* died during the time of the German occupation. He and his *child* were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Nakhinson, a Bookkeeper, had a Billiard Parlor. He, his *wife,* and daughter *Rosa*, who was a Medical Doctor, were killed in Treblinka. The son, *Shlomo* (had a Pharmacy), with his *wife* and *child,* were killed in Treblinka.

Mordechai Moorstein, A Tailor (my father-in-law). He and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Yitzhak Galansky '*Koshmetch,*' from the Ready-made Clothes. *He,* his *wife* and *children,* were killed in Treblinka. One daughter, Khien'keh (Nakh'keh Schein's wife), was shot by the Germans in the bunkers, as I have previously documented.

Yaakov Salaman '*Der Haminicher*,' a Watchmaker. He and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Shipiatsky, A Gardener. A son-in-law of *Der Haminicher*. He and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Herschel Daniel, a son of Yerakhmiel the Head of the Yeshiva. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Treblinka. *He* was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there.

Salaman, a Shoemaker. A son-in-law of Moshe Weiner. He and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Chaya Neiman (Hanokh's wife). *She*, and her son *Yaakov*, a Teacher, with his wife *Chana* and son *Mottel,* were killed in Treblinka.

Guralnik, a son of Bontsheh the Shoemaker. He was shot in 1905. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Meir Weiner, a Shoemaker. He was also the *Gabbai* of the *Khevra-Kadisha.* His son *Moshe*, a Carpenter and a Fire-fighter, with his *family*, were killed in Treblinka. The other son, *Yaakov,* also a Carpenter and Fire-fighter, with his family, were killed in Auschwitz. One daughter *Chaya*, was in the Auschwitz camp, and survived. She is today in Israel.

Galler. The family had a mother, and I think, two children. Their fate is unknown.

Itkeh Zoyman, A Widow. *She* was killed by the bombs in Mordechai Moorstein's house. Her son, *Markel,* a Tailor, went off to Russia several weeks before the outbreak of the war. I do not know, however, what happened to him.

Galands. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Ein, From the '*Potato Pudding Makers*.' Nobody from this *family* survived.

Yaakov Goldberg, Husband of Shosh'keh Kvachuk. He was a Fire-fighter and had a Fruit Store. *He* was killed on June 26,1941 when the Germans bombed the city. He was at that time at Nakdimon's in Karczyzna, because it was more tranquil in that section. When the airplanes flew by in the sky, Goldberg went out of the house to see where they were flying to, when at the same moment a bomb fell and tore his head off. His wife *Shosh'keh* was killed in Auschwitz. The following were also killed along with Goldberg at Nakdimon's house: *Fanya Matskevich, Itcheh Poliakovich* (a Tailor), and his son-in-law *Sholom Lifschitz*, *Berman* from the Assayers, with a *child*, and *others,* whose names I cannot remember.

Reuven Lifschitz. Already documented on the street where he last lived.

Mulya Cantor. He worked in the *Judenrat.* At the time of the last transport to Auschwitz, when the people were driven into the wagons, he was separated from his wife and child, as was the case with many families in that transport. He and his younger son, Reuven, were in the same wagon with me. Along the way, he went insane. It was terrifying to look at the image of his child talking to him, and he was no longer able to respond meaningfully. The foodstuffs that the Cantors had taken for themselves for the trip had remained with the mother in the other wagon. The child who was with him, however, refused to accept food from strangers, and his father was at that point no longer in his senses. The entire *family* was killed in Auschwitz.

Yitzhak Salaman (A Forest-Handler). *He* and his wife, *Hinde Shapiro* left Volkovysk before the Russians came in, fearing that they would be sent to Siberia. They went off to Grodno, but were killed there in one of the aktions.

Issachar Lidsky, A Forest-Handler, a brother-in-law to Yitzhak Salaman. *He* and his *family* left Volkovysk out of fear of the Soviets and went to Ruzhany, but they were killed there in one of the aktions.

Dr. A. Shlackman[322]. He was the only Jew who remained living in Olkhovsky's house. Shortly before the war, he went on vacation to Russia, and because of this, survived. He is today in Poland. His *wife* and *child* were killed.

Israel Rossiansky, A Grain-Handler. The entire *family* was killed except for one daughter, *Tcherneh*, who saved herself.

Abraham Berestovitsky, A Pharmacist, Yaakov the Postman's son. *He* and his *child* were killed.

From May 3rd on, on the street, which at one time was called the *Poritzisher Gasse*, no Jews lived towards the end.

Ostroger (Kosciuszko) Gasse

The Other Side

Glickfeld. Nobody remains from this *family.*

Melakovsky Their daughter *Rachel* got married, and lived in Pruzhany, and their entire *family* relocated there during the time of the German occupation. They were *all* wiped out with the Jews of Pruzhany.
Gedaliah Burdeh, A Wallpaper Hanger. He and his *wife* were killed in Treblinka.

Ilyovich, a Widow. *She* and her *family* were killed in Treblinka. Only one son, *Yaakov* a Photographer, who found himself in Russia, survived.

Mazover Gesseleh

Tzipa Levin, '*Sweet Tzipa*.' The entire *family* was wiped out. According to what I have heard, only one *grandchild* survived.

Alter Movshovsky, A Cut Goods Merchant. His *wife* was killed in Treblinka. His *son* was killed in Auschwitz. *He* himself was in the Auschwitz camp and fell there as a martyr.

'Nioma Zakheim, An Old Bachelor, and his *sisters,* also old maids, were *all* killed in Treblinka.

Spindler, from the Ready-made Clothes. He and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

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322 Seemingly duplicate entry.

Spindler, Moshe Tchopkin's son-in-law. He was also a relative to Spindler from the Ready-made Clothes. *He* was a German war prisoner, and it looks like he was killed there.

Lev, A Shoemaker (Brother of the Bialystoker Baker). The entire *family* was wiped out.

Mottel Rothford from the Liquor Business (Already written about him in the description of the Market Place).

Israel Efrat, A Lawyer. He died a number of years before the war. His *family* with the *daughters*, and one son-in-law, *Lostov,* and a *grandchild*, were killed in Treblinka.

Kwiat, A daughter of the Rabbi of Piesk. The entire *family* was wiped out.

Pelteh Langbord, A Milliner. Already documented in the description of the Wide Boulevard, where she last lived.

Yaakov Goldberg from the Fruit Business. Already documented on the street where he last lived.

Meir Epstein, from the Glass Business. Already documented in the description of the *Neuer Gessel*.

Chaim Schwartzbuch, A Shoemaker. The entire *family* was wiped out. I have already written about the son, *Eliyahu,* in the description of the *Neuer Gessel*.

Hona Shiff, A Watchmaker. Already documented in the description of the Wide Boulevard.

Alter and Yaakov Galai, Butchers. One son, Israel 'Fish'keh' was together with me in the Auschwitz camp. He developed poisoning from an ulcerous skin abscess, and he died in the hospital during the same week as Noah Fuchs. One Galai, who was in Russia, survived. All the other members of *both families* were killed.

Dr. David Tropp, a Dentist. He was killed in the aktion against the Volkovysk Jewish doctors. His wife, *Fanya,* poisoned herself. Their *two sons*, twins, later found themselves in the bunkers with an aunt and uncle, Milia and Moshe Benjamin Shalakhovich. When the Volkovysk transport was sent out to Treblinka, the two orphans went away with the others.

Nakhum Kroll, a Pharmacist. *He* and his *family* came out of the bunkers a day before January 26, 1943, when it was planned to send out the last transport from the Volkovysk bunkers. They hid themselves on the *Svisluczkeh Gasse* (Zamoscheh) at a Christian's. The son, *Lolleh*, went out in the street on one day, and he was recognized by Christians who then informed on him. The entire family was shot, along with the family of the Christian who hid them.

Shakhnovich. Already written about this family in the description of the *Rynkower Gasse*.

Schwartzbuch, A Barber. The entire *family* was wiped out.

Chaim Yitzhak Zapoliansky (my cousin). *He* and his *wife* and *son*, were killed in Treblinka.

Kaplan, A Tinsmith. The entire *family* was wiped out.

Yoss'l Ain, '*Der Kolontayer*.' The Russians sent him to Russia, and he survived. His *wife* and *son* were killed in Treblinka. His daughter, *Rachel*, was killed in the Auschwitz camp. His son *Kuva,* his *wife* and *child,* were killed in Auschwitz. The son, *Mottel*, during the time of the German occupation, found himself along with his wife *Dora Greenberg*, at her parents' in Sokolka, and they were killed there in one of the aktions.

Gittl Shereshevsky, A Widow. She, and her sons, *Moshe Leib* and *Joseph Boruch*, were killed.

The Shammes from Piesk. In connection with him, I wish to tell about the following episode here. After the last bombardment, when I ran to find out about my parents, from whom I had been separated the last day, I ran into my father on the way. We then ran to see my mother. Near my father-in-law's house (Moorstein), we were met by the *Shammes* from Piesk , where he also lived with his family. He begged us with entreaties to help him pull out the bodies of his wife and two children that were buried in the rubble. When we entered the house, we heard the cries of people: "take the soffit off of us." We began to raise the soffit, but it was entirely covered with the wood from the wrecked house. When I then ran out on the second side, to see if something could be done from there to rescue the unfortunate people underneath, I suddenly saw a covered body, and because of the dress, I recognized my mother. She was lightly covered, and almost not broken up, although she was no longer alive. In the middle of all this, the house was entirely engulfed in flames. We were forced to step back from that place into the garden. In the meantime, a new air attack arrived. I, my wife and child, as also the remaining members of my family, all fled to the Russian cemetery (*Die 'Mogilkehs'*) The entire city, at that point, was already in flames. Later on, we found out that the Shammes was able to rescue only his *wife*, and his *two children* were burned alive, also, *he* and his *wife* were later killed in Treblinka..

Abraham Lifschitz from the Hotel, a son-in-law of Yehuda Hirsh'keh. *He,* his wife *Chaya,* and son, *Sholom,* were killed in Treblinka. His *daughter*, who was married to Kaplan the Lumber Merchant, was killed in Treblinka with her *husband.* The other daughter, *Ethel*, and her husband, *Chaim Shelyuvsky*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Israel Gubar[323], David Gubar's son. *He* and his wife, *Feygl* (a daughter of the Dworetskys and a granddaughter of Bloch), and their *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Velvel Bliakher. *He* and his *wife,* together with their *sons* and *daughter*, were all killed in Treblinka.

Leibl Darevsky, he worked in a bank. *He* was killed in Treblinka.

Khatzkel Geller, A Baker. *He*, his *son* and *wife*, were killed in Auschwitz. According to what I have heard, one *son* survived.

Fishl Berezinsky from the Food Store. They last lived at Khananovich's in Zamoscheh, near the bridge. They were *all* wiped out in Treblinka.

Herschel Mordetsky's Family. He was a Miller. His wife, *Etta*, and son *Yoss'l,* a Carpenter – he was also a well-known soccer player for *Maccabi* – were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Lifschitz, '*Tchemmeh,*' a Miller. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

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323 This is a duplicated entry, but shows the Yiddish name *Feygl* for his wife, *Fanya*.

Aharon Hirsch Greengass. The entire *family* was killed.

Abraham Aharon Manokh (Zadok's son). He was killed by a bomb at the home of my father-in-law, Mordechai Moorstein. As I discovered later, after he was wounded, Abraham Aharon Manokh asked my mother to give him water. She went to get him water, and in the meantime, the air attack was renewed again. A second bomb fell on the house, and my mother along with the others, were not seen to leave the house, and they were all killed.

Yekhiel Yankov, from the Undergarments (Yitzhak Neiman's son-in-law). *He* and his wife, *Bobel*, were killed in Treblinka. His daughter *Manya,* with her husband, *Liova Glickfeld*, and the other daughter, *Tzil'eh Wilk* – were all killed in Auschwitz. Tzil'eh's husband, *Zhoma Wilk*, was killed in the Auschwitz camp.

Shlomo Zakheim. *He* and his wife, *Dvo'shkeh,* and his daughter *Taiba*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Joseph Ravitz. *He* and his wife, *Masha,* and his the *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Yitzhak Podolinsky, the Carpenter. *He* was shot by the Germans on November 2, in the Talmud Torah along with the other old and sick people, who were unable to go with the transport. His wife, *Rivka,* and his daughters, *Min'yeh* and *Chana Zyets* were killed in Auschwitz.

Mordechai Gurevich. His wife *Basheh* died the day the Germans entered the city. Their children: *Lip'sheh* with her husband and sons, *Itcheh* and *Yaakov,* were killed in Treblinka; *Chana* and her *family* were killed in the Slonim massacres.

Berel and David Joseph Kaplan. I wrote about them already in the description of the streets where they lived.

Berel Amstibovsky, Avreml's son. *He* was a member of the Judenrat. His *wife* and *child* were killed in Auschwitz. He was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. His *brother* and *sisters* were killed in Auschwitz.

Yaakov Jesierski, A Lumber-Handler. *He* died the day the Germans entered the city. His *wife* was gassed in the bunkers with the elderly. His daughter *Fira* died of typhus in the train car on the way to Auschwitz. Her husband, *Yos'keh Botvinsky*, and their *son*, were killed in Auschwitz.

Herschel Ravitz. He lives in America. His wife, *Shifra*, and the daughters, *Taiba* and *Rosa,* with the *children,* and one son, *Itzel,* were killed in Treblinka. The remaining two sons, *Yaakov* and *David*, were prisoners of the Germans, but nothing is heard from them. It would appear that they were killed.

Karczyzna

Itcheh Epstein, A Smith. *He* and his *family*, together with his son, *Yerakhmiel,* with his *wife* (a daughter of Koppel Turiansky the Beer Brewer), and their *child,* were killed in Treblinka.

Yoss'l, '*Der Polivnik*,' A Pot Maker. The entire *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Dr. A. Amstibovsky. He was a partisan in Volhyn and survived. His *sister* and her husband, *Menashe Gottesfeld*, were killed in Treblinka. His brother *Berel* and the remaining three sisters, *Sarah, Mir'el* and

Helen, were in the Auschwitz camp, and were killed there.

Lam, The Grain-Handler. His entire substantial family – *three sons* with their *families,* the *daughter* and her husband, *Brunda* – were all killed in Treblinka.

Leibl Yalovsky, '*Korovoi*,' A Shoemaker. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Meir Seletsky from the Factory. The Russians sent him and his entire family to Russia. His *sons* live in Russia.

Anshel Shlep's. *He*, his *wife* and *children*, were killed in Treblinka.

Moshe Bereznitsky. *He* and his *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Borodetzky, '*Koshmetch.*' Two *Borodetzky brothers* together with their *families* were killed in Treblinka. The third brother, *Michael,* was in the Auschwitz camp, and was killed there. His *family* was killed in Treblinka.

Joseph Garbarsky, A Pot Maker. The entire *family* was wiped out in Treblinka.

Hodel Botvinsky, Wife of the *Shokhet. She*, her *daughter* and her *children*, were killed in Treblinka. The *son* was killed in Auschwitz. The son-in-law, *Yaakov Melamed,* was with me in the Auschwitz camp, but a short time before the liberation, the Germans shot him when he tried to escape.

Abraham Wand. The entire *family* was wiped out in Treblinka.

Eliezer Nakdimon, A Forest-Handler. A bomb fell on his house, and many people were killed there. The Germans shot Nakdimon's *son* in the bunkers. One *son* was killed in Auschwitz. *Eliezer*, and his wife *Rachel,* with the remaining members of the *family* were killed in Treblinka.

Abraham Kalonsky. *He* and his wife *Rachel*, and their children, *Fei'tcheh, Lip'sheh* and the *others,* were all killed.

Brunda. Nobody from this *family* survived.

Moshe Pribulsky. The entire *family* was wiped out in Treblinka.

Grodzhensky, A Milkman. His *wife,* and daughter *Bayl'keh* with her husband, *Pribulsky*, a Shoemaker, were killed in Treblinka.

Eliyahu Zaklas, A Hatmaker. *He* and his wife *Dvo'shkeh*, and their *four children* (among them *Sarah* and *Israel*, I do not remember the names of the other two), were killed in Treblinka.

The Tribulations of Ida Mazover

Composed in accordance with her letter to Dr. Moses Einhorn

Page 879: *Ida Mazover-Rak*

Ida Mazover, a daughter of *Herschel Mazover* from the paper business, is one of the few Jewish young women from Volkovysk who were rescued from the enemy's murderous hand. Her memoirs regarding the tribulations she endured, under the German occupation, bears witness for the world [to see] the terrifying suffering and torture that Jews had to undergo, of the physical and spiritual degradation to which they were forced to descend by the pitiless bullet from the enemy's gun, the suffocating gases and burning flames in the death-chambers, which finally brought an end to their suffering and, at the same time, sealed off this sorrowful chapter in Jewish history.

Ida Mazover was born in Volkovysk, spent the best years of her youth there, and lived a quiet life with her family until that black day, when the Germans entered Volkovysk. Immediately, the well-known Nazi decrees against the Jews were promulgated, which hall pointed in one direction – the complete extermination of the Jewish people.

On November 2, 1942, Ida Mazover and her family were driven into the bunkers outside of the city, along with all of the other Jews of Volkovysk. Three hundred young girls from Bialystok were driven into the bunkers along with the Volkovysk Jews, who by order of the Nazi Command in Volkovysk, were brought down from their home city to Volkovysk to do forced labor. The Head of the Bialystok *Judenrat, Engineer Ephraim Barash*, immediately after the Volkovysk Jews were driven into the bunkers, began to work on the Bialystok Nazi Command to obtain permission for the Jewish Bialystok girls to return to their home city. This finally took place after a long effort. In between, thanks to their own efforts, a number of the Bialystok girls managed by various means, to save themselves from the Volkovysk bunkers and return home. The Nazi Command was unaware of this, and it enabled Engineer Barash to demand the original count of girls from the Volkovysk bunkers, that had been lent by the Bialystok community for work in Volkovysk.. The Volkovysk Judenrat then decided to fill out the quota with girls from Volkovysk, because saving oneself by going from the Volkovysk bunkers to Bialystok was at that time considered a great achievement.

A dispute then broke out among the girls of Volkovysk. They began to offer money and jewelry in order to get selected for the Bialystok list. The girls had to be young, and only one member of a family could be included in the list. The work overseer of the Bialystok girls was Rita Kinishevska, and the fate of the candidates designated for Bialystok was strongly dependent on her. She set the price, and parents gave her whatever she asked in order to save their children by taking them to Bialystok. She divided the money up with the Chief of the *lager*. It happens that she was intensely hated by the Jews of the camp for her cooperation with the Nazis, and later during an aktion in Bialystok, on February 5, when she informed to the Gestapo about a number of Jews that had hidden themselves, she was stoned in the streets, and wounded. After this incident, the Nazis sent Fraulein Rita Kinishevska to Warsaw, where she again worked for the Germans.

From the Mazover family, the eldest daughter, *Fanya*, left Volkovysk together with the girls from Bialystok. Her sister, *Ida*, remained in the Volkovysk bunkers with her parents.

Among those, committed to the list of the Bialystok girls were the following: *Fanya Mazover, Shosh'keh Goldberg* (Kvachuk); *Kha'leh Margolis* (the older daughter); *Liebeh Lashowitz* (Meshel's granddaughter);

Rachel Lev and her younger daughter *Musia*[324]*;* The wife of *Velvelsky's* older son, who had been sent to Russia; *Elkeh Neiduz* (from Kartuz-Bereza); *Sarah Levin* (from the ready-made Clothes); Mrs. *Bedanken* (from Slonim); *Yudkovsky's two sisters* from Slonim, and others.

At the end of November the transports commenced from the bunkers. Ida Mazover carried around the thought of saving herself by getting to Bialystok for the entire time, in order to meet up with her sister Fanya, who was working with the people in Bialystok, and lived in the ghetto that was there. The conditions in Bialystok, according to the news we used to receive in the bunkers, were much better than those under which the Jews of Volkovysk lived at that same time. At the beginning of December, the Germans decided to liquidate the *lager.* It was barely possible to persuade them to allow the young and able-bodied people to be left behind. It worked out for Ida Mazover, that she was selected to be among the "fortunate" number of the seventeen hundred Jews, who were given permission to remain in the Volkovysk *lager.* Unfortunately, her parents went into the general count which had been designated for the transport. Ida Mazover was sent out to work in the city, thanks to the intervention of a friendly policeman, and she was given permission to sleep in the work camp, in the building of the slaughterhouse.

At 5:00AM on December 8, 1942, the people in the municipal concentration camp in the slaughterhouse were awakened, to the daily roll call, and then under a heavy guard, were taken in the direction of the bunkers. In that group, were found: *Rosa Einhorn with her husband and daughter*, and Ida's friend, *Esther Markus*. On the way, they added four more men who had been in jail. On drawing near to the bunkers, they saw a large mass of Jews, being led by a heavily armed military guard, in the direction of the railroad station. These were the people of Volkovysk designated for transport. Ida's parents were among them. This was all of them going on their Last Journey – to the gas-chambers of Treblinka. Ida did not know what to do with herself – to join up with her parents and share in the general fate of the entire mass of Jews, or to remain in the work camp and in this manner, stretch out for a while longer, this tortured life under the Nazi yoke. A few days before, when she saw her parents in the bunkers, her mother demanded of her that she should remain in the work camp, and if she should be privileged to survive, that she should tell her sister Fanya, and her brother in Israel about the last moments of their lives in the bunkers.

Escape from the Bunkers

On January 14, 1943, an opportunity presented itself for Ida Mazover, and a friend of hers, *Alia Glickfeld*, to leave the bunkers. A policeman known to them assisted them in carrying out their plan. That same morning, when the police assembled the work force, they presented themselves as usual, only they stayed behind as the work force left the *lager,* then they ran after the work force, so to speak, and on their way into the city, they disappeared. They were able to reach the house of the Christian, *Maria Rodnitska*, who was a friend of the Mazover family. The Christian woman took them in, and promised them she would conceal them until an opportunity presented itself for them to flee to Bialystok.

However, they came to the Christian woman infected with typhus – which by that time had spread itself throughout all the people in the bunkers – and they both walked around with a high temperature. Alia Glickfeld developed a typhus with a rash. Maria Rodnitska took care of them while they were sick, but when she found out that the Germans were going to completely liquidate the camp in the bunkers, she became very frightened, and wanted both girls to be taken to the Sejmikover Hospital. The sick girls, however, did not want to go to the hospital out of fear that they will be recognized. On *January 26,* when the last Volkovysk transport was dispatched from the bunkers, Maria Rodnitska worked on the girls to leave her home. Along

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[324] A diminutive from the German, *Muskat*, meaning Nutmeg

with this, she hid the fact from the girls that the *lager* and the bunkers had been emptied.

On January 29, both girls left the house of the Christian woman, and went on the road to the bunkers. When they arrived at the bunkers, they found no one there at that time. The watchman told them that a mere two days ago, the lager had been shut down. They both then returned to the Christian woman. However, she didn't let them back into the house, and advised them to go to the hospital. *Alia Glickfeld* then went to acquaintances she knew in the city, by herself. What subsequently happened to her, is not known.

On Foot to Bialystok

Despite the fact that she was going around with a high temperature, *Ida Mazover* then decided, in the cold winter, not to go to the hospital, and she set out on foot in the direction of Bialystok, where she hoped to run into her only sister, who was still alive. Walking the entire day in the cold, by evening she finally reached a village on the road to Bialystok. She knocked on the door of a peasant's small dwelling, and asked of him to permit her to spend the night. The peasant, however, forcibly took her to the Head official of the village (Soltis). The Soltis gave her a place to lodge for the night, and because she had no documents with her, he ordered her to come to him again, early in the morning, in order to be sent to Volkovysk, from where she had come. Ida awoke at four in the morning, while it was still good and dark outside, and she left the peasant's house and again resumed her way. She took pains to avoid the Gestapo house, which was located on the border between the Volkovysk district and Bialystok. After the Valil station, a number of gentiles who worked in the area detained her. She bribed her way out of their hands, but they sent a number of Germans after her, and she was brought back to *Valil*. They demanded documents from her, and when she offered that she possessed no documents of any kind, the placed a telephone call to Horodok, and in the space of a half hour, two Germans came to Valil with a Polish policeman, and she was taken to jail in Horodok.

She was kept in jail for six days, and interrogated under all a variety of threats. Ida Mazover argued the entire time that she was not a Jewish girl. When she was asked why she had no documents, she argued that she came from Slonim (then White Russia), where they wanted to send her to work, and she decided to run away, and in order that she not be sent back home, she did not take any documents with her. They then got in touch with Slonim, in connection with the name and address that she had given them, but even before the reply came back from Slonim, the matter became clarified, and they concluded in any case that she was a Jewish girl. This happened by coincidence. She was sitting in the Chief's office, where a translator sat the entire time, who translated everything that she said in Polish into German. The Chief actually dealt with her in a civilized manner, and even did not permit the others to beat her. She then had a high temperature, which she tried with all her might to conceal from the Germans. She was cold, and she went over to the oven to warm herself up. Suddenly, she hear an inhuman shriek: "*What are you doing sitting near the oven, stand up!*" Instinctively, she stood up, but she did not lose her composure. Seeing how she reacted to his approach in German, he quickly ran over to her and started to hit her in the face, shouting at the top of his voice: "*You understand German –Jawohl! You are Jewish – Jawohl!*"She was immediately taken to a cell. A day later, he called her to him again, and demanded an explanation from her. It was at that point that Ida Mazover told him that she was from Bialystok, and that she had been brought to Volkovysk for forced labor, where she had become ill with an inflammation of the lungs, and for this reason had remained in Volkovysk. However, because she was very lonesome for home, the Chief permitted her to return to Bialystok. He gave her no written permission, because this was certainly against the decree. In about a day later, Ida Mazover was taken away in chains along with two Christian partisans, to the Gestapo in Bialystok. This took place on February 4, 1943, on the eve of an aktion in the Bialystok ghetto, which by that time was entirely sealed off from the [outside] world. They were all stood against the wall, and were certain they were going to be shot on the spot. Suddenly, a man from the Gestapo approached Ida Mazover and asked her if she wants to go to the ghetto.

This offer was as if it had dropped from heaven. The thought that she would finally be able to meet with her sister Fanya was literally drowned in great joy. A few minutes later, she was in the ghetto already. Tragically, that night, one of the sorrowfully famous aktions by the Germans commenced.

In the Bialystok Ghetto

Immediately upon arrival in the Bialystok ghetto, she was sent to the ghetto baths, and when she emerged from their overheated, she immediately caught a frightening cough, which followed her for many months and caused he a great deal of trouble for her and her sister.

Ida Mazover met many other Volkovysk people in the Bialystok ghetto, besides her sister Fanya. Among them were: the *Smazanovich Family* (from the boards); *Shosh'keh Goldberg* (Kvachuk); *Liebeh Lashowitz* (Meshel's granddaughter); *Kha'leh Margolis, Hanokh Rappaport*; The Dentist *Sarah Peisik* and her daughter, *Ruth; Moshe'l Shereshevsky; Tzil'ikeh Zuckerman* with her *daughter; Wolsky; Shosha Rubin; Rachel Lev* and her daughter *Musia. Sonya Botvinsky* (from the Movie House) was no longer in the ghetto, because she was sent out with the first aktion. The Patriarch of all the people from Volkovysk was *Smazanovich* who took a great interest in the fate of his *landsleit,* and offer them help wherever it was possible. The condition of the Jews in the Bialystok ghetto, when Ida Mazover arrived there in February 1943, was already a very bad one. The ghetto there was no longer a place of refuge, as it was during the initial period of the German occupation. The Jews in that ghetto, at that time, already were looking for various ways to get out and save themselves from Bialystok.

Ida Mazover and her sister Fanya also went around with that very same thought. The only way out was to flee the ghetto and join up with the partisans in the forest. But this was a difficult thing for them to do, because as girls from Volkovysk, they were not acquainted with the local people and their ways, and simply did not know how to make contact with the local partisan movement. And so, a few months went by this way, consisting of hard forced labor and sleepless nights, when they occupied themselves with looking for ways and working out plans for how to flee the ghetto. Finally, they were fortunate in making a contact with the young man *Sulkes,* from *Volp,* who promised to put them in contact with the partisans.

From Bialystok to Maidanek

However, nothing came of this plan, because on August 18, 1943, both sisters, Ida and Fanya Mazover, were sent with a transport of Jews from Bialystok to Maidanek. The train cars were packed with people. When the train stopped in Lublin, near the Maidanek camp, the Gestapo people opened the doors to the train cars. From one of the cars, practically no one appeared, and when the men of the Gestapo jumped in there, they saw several tens of dead bodies of girls. According to the recounting of two girls who were in that car, a mass suicide was carried out there. The girls in that car were young and beautiful, and they knew fully well what awaited them when they would fall into the hands of the enemy. They decided that it would be better for them to kill themselves by slashing their wrists. There was a lady doctor in that train car, who carried this out. Also, the two girls who remained alive from that train car did the same thing, but in their case, the blood vessels in their hands were not cut deeply enough, and they were spared.

According to what Ida Mazover tells, shortly before this, prior to the train coming to a stop in Lublin, she saw how her sister *Fanya* and her friend *Sarah Levin* (from the Ready-made Clothes) jumped from the train in a last -ditch effort to save themselves. Sarah Levin was shot by the Germans on the spot. Fanya manages to run a distance, but Ida never heard from her again, and she doesn't even know what finally happened to her, whether she realized her dream and joined the partisans, or fell along the way from a German bullet.

In Maidanek

After coming out of the wagons, the people were ordered to fall into rows of five abreast, and they were driven to the general imprisonment camp. The two girls who had cut their wrists were in Ida's group.

The people were immediately taken to bathe, where they had to be separated from their packages of possessions, which they had brought with them. They were also required to turn over their money and jewelry for safekeeping, threatening with death those would refuse to comply. Barefoot and dressed in rags – they were driven across to the fifth field, to a women's barracks, where all the women underwent a gynecological examination, to discover whether any of them had so hidden any money.

Two transports came to Maidanek in August from Bialystok – one on the 18th of August, and the second on August 20, 1943, there was a general concentration camp there already, which consisted of five fields where Jews and Christians were kept together, and a second camp, which was called *Flug-Platter,* where there were only Jews – this was a work camp. Apart from this, there were many Jews in the ghetto of the *Lipovo Gasse* in Lublin proper.

The first Volkovysk Jews in the camp were military prisoners taken captive from the Polish Army. Among them were: *Ben'yeh Berg, Yud'l Weiner, Yoss'l Yunovich, Hona Sarekshabes, David Spendler, Ravitz* and others. They had been there since the camp was established. Apart from Ben'yeh Berg, they were all still alive at the time Ida Mazover arrived there in August 1943. According to what Ida Mazover was told, Ben'yeh Berg had a terrifying death. He was beaten to death with truncheons.

Among the others from Volkovysk who were in the Maidanek camp, were many Jews who had previously managed to reach Bialystok by a variety of means, hoping to find a refuge there, but later, they were driven to Maidanek along with the other Jews of Bialystok. Among them were: Engineer *Bor'eh Weiner*, (a son of Dr. Weiner) with his wife, brought from Grodno; *Feinsod's* son-in-law with his son (from the Fashion Store); *Tzal'yeh Goldberg* (from the mill on Kosciuszko Gasse); *Paveh's* son from the pharmacy (who lived in Grodno); *Smazanovich* from the Factory; *Leibeh Barash* (a brother of Ephraim Barash); *Ephraim Barash*, who arrived in Maidanek in September 1943, after the entire Bialystok ghetto was liquidated; *Inker's* older son; *Chaim Tchopkin*; One of the *Mopsiks*; *Moshe Shereshevsky*. Among the women found there were: *Niota*[325] *Bliakher, Fruma Wand, Rosa Kviatkovska* (Ozernitska) and *Ida Mazover. Yocheved Barash* also came there in September 1943.

Niota Bliakher, Fruma Wand, and *Ida Mazover* immediately at the baths gave everything to Bereshel-Makherin and they were sent to a work camp called *Flug-Platte*r. At that time, permission still was given to the girls to visit the men's camp for two hours each evening. *Yoss'l Yunovich* (the Butcher's son) became a colony leader there. He gave the girls 500 zlotys apiece with which they bought themselves things, and they still had some money left over with which they could deal. *Yud'l Weiner*, who worked in the laundry, always provided clean clothes and fresh water – which was a big thing there. Their work day ran from early in the morning until late at night.

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325 Nickname for *Nete* (Nettie) (German-Christian).

The Major Aktion in Maidanek

And so, several weeks went by, until November 3, 1943, when one of the large local aktions was implemented in the camp. At that time, nineteen thousand four hundred (19,400) people were shot and killed. After the massacre, only three hundred men and three hundred women remained in the camp. Among those from Volkovysk who remained alive after the major aktion were: *Inker, Ravitz, David Spendler, Mrs. Yocheved Barash, Rosa Ozernitska,* and *Ida Mazover. Moshe Shereshevsky* managed to save himself from that place about two weeks after he arrived.

The plight of the several hundred men was worse than that of the women, because the women worked with the possessions of the dead where they would find money and precious stones and were often able to conceal them from the Germans. Among the men after the massacre was one *Galman* from Izavelin. However, shortly before the liquidation, he became ill with typhus, and died.

Under the terrifying conditions, with a perpetual fear for what the next day would bring, they lived until April 1944, when the Nazis decided to entirely liquidate the Maidanek camp, because the Red Army was in the process of getting ever closer. The Jewish men and women who remained in the last group, and were the only living witnesses to the hostile actions of the Nazis – before whose eyes the mass murder of tens of thousands of Jews took place – were all marked with the letter "A," which stood for *Aktions Juden*. The Germans kept them separate, and when shortly before the liquidation of the Maidanek camp, Jews from Radom arrived, they also were kept separated, out of a fear that the 'older' residents of the Maidanek camp would tell their brethren about the terrifying selections and aktions that had taken place in the very same camp.

Departure from Maidanek

Finally, on *April 14, 1944*, those who remained from the three hundred men and three hundred women, were dressed in rags, and without shoes, packed sixty to a train car, were taken away from Maidanek. No one knew where they were being taken, but everyone knew what the end result would be.

Ida Mazover and *Dr. Yocheved Barash,* the wife of Ephraim Barash, were in this group. It was at that point very clear to Ida, that if she didn't use this final opportunity to tear herself out of the enemy's talons, her path to the gas-chambers is a certainty. She decided to do what her sister Fanya had done at an earlier time – to jump from the train car. She had nothing to lose: even if she was killed – it would still be better than a gas- chamber. This time, she decided to carry out her plan under any circumstances. It was, however, not one of the easiest things to do. According to her description, each train car was divided into three sections, with thirty girls in the forward and rear compartments, and in the middle were the Gestapo troops, armed to the teeth. The girls were forbidden to move from their spot. The Gestapo troops took notice of every move. The situation eased in the evening, when the Gestapo troops doused some of the lights in the car, because one of them wanted to sleep. It became midnight, and the train raced ahead into the deep darkness of the night.

The Jump from the Train

It became still in the car, and Ida decided to carry out her plan. She jumped off into the field and remained lying there. She wanted to begin running, out of fear that if they looked around in the train car and see what had happened, that they would start shooting, but she couldn't move from the spot. She then saw that her leg was broken in two places. After she regained her composure, she didn't know what to do. One thing was clear to her, that she should not remain there much longer, because the Germans will find her in the daylight and shoot her. With all her might, Ida got herself up, and limping, she set off in the direction where she saw the light of several houses from a nearby village. Again, she decided, that she must play the part of a Christian. Only this could save her from certain death. She finally reached a peasant's little house, and knocked on the door. The peasant opened the door, and she told him that she is near death, and that he must fetch a priest to hear her last confession. The peasant carried her into the house, and laid her down on straw. He gave her some water and immediately began to pepper her with questions. Ida then decided that it would be much better for her if she gave the impression of being unconscious, and immediately fell asleep. Very early in the morning, the Village Head (Soltis) came to the peasant, and they both took her to the nearby village of *Vovolnitsa,* where a priest could be found, and a first aid station. The police immediately set up a whole protocol, in which she identified herself as *Helena Rodnitska* from Volkovysk, and her aunt *Maria Rodnitska* as her next of kin. A religious young woman from that village immediately took an interest in her. Ida, who was then called Helena Rodnitska, was transported to a nearby village called *Apola Lubelskia* There was a hospital there, where it was intended to give Ida the necessary medical assistance. Regrettably, the local doctor was firm in his decision that it was too late to save the leg, and he carried out an amputation.

In the Hospital

After the operation, Ida wrote a letter to Maria Rodnitska in Volkovysk, and told her what had happened to her. Maria Rodnitska replied to Ida's letter, and verified with the police that she was her aunt. She also wrote a letter to the hospital administrator, and asked him to keep her niece there, until such time that someone from Volkovysk would come to get her. Ida's religious acquaintance from *Vovolnitsa* used to come and visit her in the hospital, bringing gifts for the patient. Once, she also brought her a Catholic missal, and also worked out the necessary documents on her behalf. However, a crisis came in the hospital, where rumors began to circulate that Helena Rodnitska was really a Jewish girl. It appeared, that during the operation, when she did no completely have control of herself, Ida cried out a number of times in Yiddish, and this cast suspicion on her true origins. The matter underwent scrutiny and investigation. The suspicions about her true origins became stronger, when in the course of several weeks, nobody from her family came to visit her in the hospital. The head doctor of the hospital, however, treated Ida finely, and to all the accusations replied that it is his responsibility as a doctor to give her the necessary medical help, especially since the police themselves had brought her to the hospital. Also, the commandant of the local police was not in a position to occupy himself with this issue and reveal the truth, because the strengthened activity of the partisan movement literally tied the hands of the police.

In the meantime, several weeks went by, and the wounds from the operation were practically healed. The doctor then told Ida that he would no longer be able to keep her in the hospital. Because she had no other place to run to, and out of fear of showing herself to the Christian world, she began to irritate the not fully-healed wounds, in order to get a favorable opinion from the doctor to extend her stay in the hospital.

In the meantime, the liberation came....

After the liberation, Ida Mazover went to Lublin and from there to Posen, where she married.

The transport with the three hundred girls, from which she was saved by a miracle, was brought to Auschwitz, and as related by survivors of the Auschwitz camp, all the girls were killed in the gas-chambers.

Photographs

Page 892:

Top (Right): The headstone on the grave of my sister *Liza* in Tel-Aviv. Her husband, *Shimshon Kharakh* is in the picture.

(Left): The headstone on the grave of my *father, Zvi Hirsch Einhorn* in the Volkovysk Cemetery.

Bottom: My sister Liza and her husband, Shimshon Kharakh in Israel
Photographed in June 1946, only a few hours before her sudden death

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Page 893:

Top (Right, Left): Wife of Chaim Leib Kagan from Lida
(My mother's mother)

Reb Chaim Leib Kagan
(My mother's father from Lida)

Bottom: Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky, The Rabbi of Vilna
(My Cousin)

Page 894: My mother, and sister Liza, and her husband, Shimshon Kharakh in the year 1910

Page 895: Picture captions given on page 894

Top Right: My sisters Rosa, Liza and Liotsha Glembotsky

Left: Sitting: My mother and Liza, Standing: Rosa and Pes'shka

Bottom Right: Sitting: My mother and Rosa, Standing: Moshe'keh and Pes'shka

Left: Sitting: Moshe'keh and Liza, Standing: Liza's husband (Kharakh), and Rosa

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Page 896:

Top: Dr. Benjamin Einhorn
My Uncle – David Einhorn's Father
Right: As a military doctor; Left: In his last years

Bottom: My Sister Rosa in the Year 1937

Page 897:

Top: My Sisters Liza and Rosa in the Year 1938
Photographed in Volkovysk during Liza's last visit

Bottom: The Family at the Grave of My Sister Dvora in the Year 1922
(Right to Left): Moshe'keh, Pes'shka, My Mother, My Sisters Rosa and Liza

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Page 898:

Top: My Family in the Year 1910

(Right to Left): My Brother Oscar, My Sisters, Rosa and Liza with her husband, Shimshon

Bottom (Right): My Mother
In the Year She Was Married

(Left): My Sisters and I During Childhood
Right to Left: Moshe'keh, Pes'shka and Dvora

Local News

(Heimishe Inyonim)

by Reuven Rutchik, ל"ז

(Excerpts from *Volkovysker Leben*)

Jews, it is a festive day today
And a holiday for the town,
Is this a small matter? – It would appear
That we have a Yiddish periodical!

How many days and years
Have we become used to
Sitting, and looking at what people
Write from afar.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

All weddings and circumcisions –
You will immediately be the first to know,
And what anyone does or makes,
Whether by day or night,
Will not be withheld from you –
Everything will be told.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Apart from that, you will find
In the *Volkovysker Leben*
Every Friday, quite early
Everything worth relating,
Always, energies permitting,
From what has transpired in every week.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

And to this, my friends,
Let us raise a glass,
And let us wish *L'Chaim.*
Let us live to reach the New
Year and let it be possible
To publish her daily,
Full of details, clean and pure.
Indeed, fit for proper gentlefolk!

Number One, August 1926

●

There is great festivity in town right now:
There is going to be a set of elections
To the municipal government, to the beloved one
That must be selected
And also be freshly renewed.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Heaven, earth and candidates!....
All we do is take counsel with one another,
And we argue and dispute with each other
With an impetus that is both solid and strong –
All because of the new mark.
A mark here, and a mark there:
"A Bog: – "One", "One" – "Bog".....

Number 40, July 1927

●

Nobody dreamt it
Nobody, really nobody!
The first edition
Surprised everyone,
Even though it was modest
And small in it s format –
And what will you say now
To number *one hundred?*
It is a jubilee!
And such an occurrence –
Is a real joy among friends,
As to enemies – let their gall bladders burst....

What a journey it was! –
Laid out with blocks...
All we saw continuously
Were turned up noses...
The noses of the printers
The noses of the typesetters
The noses of the writers
The noses of the readers.
Let it be said, my friends,
What critics!
It is, after all, a holiday today –

So we toast *L'Chaim!*
Let us gather strength
And move on the journey,
Prepared to serve the reader,
Again being true to him.
We did something
And great was the result
Volkovysker Leben –
May you live long! *Vivat!*

Number 100, Year 1929

●

God does not abandon our town,
Does not let her fall into crisis –
Doles out success with a shovel
And a living – in substantial quantity ...
Everyone's mind is at ease,
The belly also has no complaints...
The world is talking about some crisis,
We – we have nothing to say of this nature!...

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

And the tongues also wag...
All we do is talk and talk...
Wheels are standing, and we complain
And it is difficult only to part.
Is there a lack of subjects? –
God does not abandon us
Here is a bench – a fortune!
Here, go kill yourself for glory,
Or – just for the hell of it....

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Our beloved Magistrate wants,
Only to provide us with aggravation
And [he] wants the few storekeepers
To be deeply drowned in the muck...

Two cantors now hold
Our city in a tight vise –
Both are wanted for the High Holy Days
To be retained in the Great Synagogue.
This is good – except it is the Devil's handiwork
(There are no lack of wagging tongues in town)
Shortcomings are researched and surfaced
Indeed, in connection with both singers.

And what? About one it is said,
That... (a spiteful thing, a whopper!)
On the Holy Day, Yom Kippur,
He tasted some food...
And the second one – at the Hairdresser's
(so he said),that he
Demanded his beard be shaped to a tip
"This should be left for the Boors"....

The town is spinning on wheels
And this finally reached The Rabbi –
The Rabbi lays down an exposition,
And pours his wrath out on both of them.

Number 173, August 1930

●

Well, it has been sinned already, thank God,
Also the little market of the town,
It has been sealed that way already,
It looks like the list was long...
Shout there and shout here –
Nothing helps any longer

It is quiet in the street, no one is to be seen
Let the wagons come from the villages
And set themselves up here –
Whoever with wheat, and whoever with rye,
Whoever with seeds, whoever with flax –
Nobody comes to town.
Not a calf and not a cow,
No fowl and no grain,
Out with onions and potatoes –
There is nothing for succor!
No gentile woman brings even an egg –
Everything is lost – oh, woe!
Stores stand silent as if orphaned
The storekeepers sit, sunk in worry;
An executor enters –
An now first one hears a song,
He writes here, he writes there –
The 'merchant' turns green with gall.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

The town becomes "sanitized,"
Magically clean without a dust mote;
The house swept clean of all the mud
Everywhere, in each and every corner.

Everything in the tub, and everything in the wash,
Clean in the streets, and the pockets cleaned out...

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

It isn't going well for the teachers,
Pity, it's not in their minds,
I am referring here to the *Tarbut* teachers,
Find no solace for themselves:
The committee has let them go
And left them a drift.
The "Committee of Two Protagonists" contends
Against old, loyal servants
Doesn't think a great deal, and imports
New teachers for the school.
It doesn't seem like it's too bad
And go figure out who is right.
Classes stand tightly locked;
The pupils wander around all over;
All the children – for the veterans!
For the veterans – all are "Good Fellows!"...
Locks are torn off ..
And in the committee and among the pedagogues
A full-blown fight starts
And blows are traded...
After a fine meeting,
The parties are brought together...
And the dispute – proceeds further,
A new committee will be selected,
Studies will resume again –
Everything will be exactly as it was.

The personnel have won –
Hurrah! Hurrah! The conflict is over!
What a time! – Even teachers
Make more and more progress.
Fighting for their existence
Nothing like, indeed – teachers!
(The teacher will have to forgive
What doesn't end in a rhyme).

Number 175, September 1930

●

The issue of cantorial style
Was bruited about town for a long time.
Now we have yet a different tune –
"Let us sing a song about the Rabbi of the town"...
The town has been reduced to chaos, and
We are like a flock of sheep without its shepherd,
The spiritual leader is absent
With the broad and unswerving idealism.

The town has been abandoned to its core
And covered in crooked paths –
So everyone goes whichever way pleases him
And we sink ever further into impurity.

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

So the congregation has yet another meeting,
With a rather short debate,
Setting a course immediately
For Rabbis, by a certain date.
And a hail cut loose...

- — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

Whether coming in a *shtrymel*,
Whether coming all decked out in a top hat...
And streaming into the *Bet HaMedrash*
Old, young, women, children.
Sermons, sermons,...and experts.....

Shortly, as that day drew near
For the evening of the selection –
A bomb fell
And destroyed the building...

And a decree then went out:
The "old order" is nullified,
And a Rabbi is to be selected,
Either from Svislucz, or from Mottel!...

Number 467, August 1936

DRM Software Review

Volkovysk
וואלקאוויסק
The Trilogy

Part II

חורבן וואלקוֹביסק
The Destruction of Volkovysk

Published by
The Committee of Émigrés of Volkovysk
In the Land of Israel

Tel-Aviv **1946**

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Sons of Volkovysk!

Fate has burdened us with the difficult and bitter mission, to set before you the awesome and earthshaking story about the loss of Volkovysk, the city of our birth, and of the extermination of its Jewish residents, our brothers and sisters – yours, parents, acquaintances and good friends, at the hands of the despised Nazis, whose like had until now never been seen in the world.

It has fallen upon us, to tell you, and the generations to come, what took place to the residents of Volkovysk in the way of the final awesome tribulations that they endured, the sons of our city that now no longer exists as a Jewish city, as it did from olden times onward.

We present this depressing folio of blood to you, in order to discharge our historical obligation: ***"Remember What Amalek Has Done To You!"*** [1]

Our entreaty is, that this sad historical record be found in the home of every descendant of Volkovysk in the entire world, regardless of location, and that it be handed down as a legacy from generation to generation.

Adherence to this behest need not be only for the purpose of remembrance, but also in order to know how to react and relate to the murderers, their children and children's children: ***"A War With Amalek from Generation to Generation."***

And there is yet one further objective before us: This folio will serve as a memorial for the thousands of our brothers and sisters, from Volkovysk and its environs, that were exterminated in tragic, earthshattering ways, in Volkovysk, in Treblinka, and in Auschwitz, in the crematoria of the gas-chambers – and not brought to a proper Jewish burial, and of whom no trace remains...

Their anniversary day falls during the Hanukkah festival! Let every Jew throughout the world, whose origins are from Volkovysk, together with the Hanukkah candles – which themselves are a symbol of out national struggle and national survival – light a *Candle of the Spirit* in memory of the Jews of Volkovysk that were exterminated, and just like our early elders, who for centuries told our children of our heroic and the glorious history, so shall the *Candle of Spirit* convey to future generations, this great tragedy of our Days of Blood, ***"Woe, What Has Befallen Us!"***

The material in the first part of the folio, was written by people who themselves underwent all these terrifying events, and were saved only by a miracle, and came to the Land of Israel in order to start their lives anew.

Part of the material was transcribed by us on the basis of conversations we had with eye witnesses.

Tel-Aviv, 1946

Organizing Committee
Emigrants from Volkovysk in Eretz-Israel

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[1] Deuteronomy 25:17

The Destruction of Volkovysk

by Zvi Herschel Roitman

From my childhood on, I lived my entire live in Warsaw. I was raised there, educated there, worked there, and together with this, took an active role in the political and organizational life of the labor movement, *Poalei Tzion*. The war in 1939, put an end to this orderly way of life; it brought us a period of cruel and terrifying events of a nature that is beyond the capacity of the human imagination to conceive of them. I went through the siege of Warsaw; the city was bombed day and night, and had artillery shells rained down on it. Yet, the morale of its citizenry did not fall, and they conducted themselves with honor and heroism. Even the masses of the Jews of Warsaw stood in the front lines and in the first columns. After the capture of Warsaw by German divisions, I became convinced that I cannot continue to pursue my life under the regime of the Nazi murderers.

I left Warsaw on December 21, 1941 with my friends. At night, we forded the Russo-German border across the Bug River, not far from the town of Smiaticz. After blundering around for the night, we fell into the hands of the Soviet border guards in the morning. After a short interrogation and search, regarding the reason that we crossed the Russian border, and our purpose, they set us free. From Smiaticz we walked to Bialystock, where we enlisted to be sent to distant Russian for work. However, we couldn't wait for our turn, because of the extensive anger of the people, and we decided, for lack of alternatives and the poor conditions, to go to a smaller town where we hoped to find an easier arrangement.

We rode to Volkovysk, I and two of my friends: Epstein and Fantofelmacher.

From that hour on, my life and fate became inextricably bound up in the fate of the Jews of Volkovysk. One of my friends and I found lodging at Number 12 *Tatarski Gasse* on the hill, with the Gardener, Leibl Draznin, and his wife, Rivka Bernstein, at which location also lived Rivka's parents, Sarah Baylah and Reb Naphtali. They were originally from Amstibova. They were marvelous people, with dear souls of great substance. I got used to them very quickly, and their residence turned into my new home. Their children, and they themselves, soothed the yearnings I had for my own home, and for the dear kin that I held most dear. Rivka, was dark-eyed and a pretty woman, full of life and hope for a bright future, a symbol of everything good and charitable, possessing all desirable qualities. And Sarah Baylah, the typical Jewish mother, dedicated, with everyone's concerns on her, a *Balabusta* of unending energy, who worked from daybreak until evening, the entire time for the welfare of her grandchildren and children.

I obtained work as an electrician in the slaughterhouse, and from that point onwards, my life continued on an even keel, and peacefully in relation to the circumstances about me. Generally speaking, the Jews did not live badly, and the Jewish community of Volkovysk got used to the new conditions imposed by the Soviets. Collective work units were created, cooperatives and collectives. Every Jew found a means of sustenance under the new circumstances.

From a cultural point of view, we felt ourselves better off, more secure and established; there was no fear to appear [in public] as a Jew. We didn't have the fear of Polish anti-Semitism hovering over us. However, fate would not have it this way, because the martyrs sacrificed in the lands captured thus far, were insufficient. The murderers and harborers of [malevolent] designs thirsted for new rivers and cascades of Jewish blood.

The Russo-German war broke out. Volkovysk, by virtue of being close to the border was one of the first to

suffer from the war. Literally, on the first day of the war, German planes fell upon Volkovysk, and set the entire center of the city on fire, beginning from the small bridge to Zamoscheh, from one side, all the way to Karczyzna on the other side. The entire city was engulfed in flames. The Jewish homes burned for days and nights. The nights were lit up from the flames. The days were dark from the pillars of black smoke from the effort and energies of the Jews being burned up. People totally exhausted and out of energy from too many sleepless nights, ran around as if insane, with their children in their arms, from one street to the next, in order to escape from the tongues of fire and the asphyxiating smoke. The market square stores burns, the *Schulhof,* the entire *Wide Boulevard* is surrounded by fire. Botvinsky's house send tongues of flame shooting skyward. The fire reaches the edge of the *Grodzhensky Gasse,* part of *Tatarski, Kosciuszko Gasse,* – fire coming from every quarter, and there is no place to hide from it; the tongues of flame spread with lightning speed from house to house, entire streets are immersed in flame, as if they were burning torches. However, it appears that the Nazi sadists are not satisfied with this, because in addition to this, the German planes are dropping bombs on every house, on every wrecked structure. It appears that they had decided to wipe out everything, and not leave any stone standing on another stone. People hide out in the cellars of the burned houses, in the potato storage pits. However, even there, the murdering hand reaches them. They drop bombs on the wrecked homes, and people are buried alive.

The bombing began on the first day. First to be destroyed was Rosh, where they had been working for a week, day and night without stop, on constructing an air field, the bombing did not stop. On Friday, the cruelty reached its zenith. Near Shifmanovich's house, scarred by fire, a bomb hit the cellar underneath the burned house, and over thirty people were covered in earth and dust – men, women and children. This image is etched into my memory to this day. A shuddering picture. It will never leave me, forever. I am hiding in the cellar of a wrecked house, not far from Weiner's house. I hear the droning of an airplane flying very low, seeking targets for its bombs. There is a deathly silence for a moment, the house shakes, I wait with bated breath to see if the impact will reach me. Moments like this took place by the hundreds, every day. Suddenly, there is the noise of the drone of many airplanes – tremendous explosions. Everything is shaking, and once again, it is quiet; one continues to hear the sound of airplanes flying about. I peek outside, and I see a gigantic pit not far from me, created by the bomb that fell nearby, and a cellar that was near this pit, in which people were hidden, was completely covered in earth. The distressed sound of wailing can be heard – Jewish people, save us! Without paying any attention to the deadly danger from the low-flying airplanes overhead, Jews run, boys, the elderly, from their various hideouts, and with shovels and metal crowbars, digging even with their hands, literally cleaning off the dirt with their fingers, and dig out the covered people. Hands, feet, bodies on top of bodies, mothers with children in their arms – all these pressed together and mixed in with the earth. The wailing of the partially buried, begging for help, to be saved from the earth. And those completely covered in earth, partially suffocated, whose cries we are not certain we hear. The feeling of committing one's own life a feeling of kinship, was mixed into the will to survive. The danger is great, the pilots are shooting from the airplanes with machine guns. Despite this, people do not leave their places. Old people with hoary beards dig in the ground and pull out body after body. Were we able to conceive that a time so bad would come, that we would envy those who had the good fortune to be killed in those first days of the war? That those whom we did save, would curse the day of their salvation. And indeed, such an hour did arrive.

The first German patrols entered Volkovysk on Saturday. Everyone of the remaining Jews waited with their relatives in their hiding places, and waited with a fluttering heart of the unfolding of the events. Without victims and plunder, the remaining material assets were not enough. But we were accustomed to victims already; whoever died, was dead. However, whoever remained alive wanted to go on living. Those who were hidden began to confront the depressing results. The lives of the Jews centered on the *Neuer Gasse*; it was

the only street that was spared.

Because of the shortage of dwelling space, the crowding was great, several families to a house. A *Judenrat* was established headed by Dr. Weinberg and Noah Fuchs. A [new] chapter of arrests began, in which it was sufficient for a Pole to inform the police that a Polish Jew was a communist under the Russians, in order to cause him to be arrested, and shot on the morrow. And "good friends" among the Poles were never in short supply at any time – but at this point, a whole stream of prevarications and arrests commenced. On each and every day, buses loaded with Jews accused of transgressions were taken out of the city and to the forest, and there killed besides pits that had been dug in advance, and afterwards, they were buried at the hands of other Jews.

One of my very good friends, who worked with me at the slaughterhouse, was sent out in one of these groups. This was Markus. He was shot immediately in the first days. Despite all of this, people had the will to live. But the belly demands its needs; if so, this need creates a requirement for new sources of sustenance.

Living conditions became harsh, the decrees promulgated against the Jews deprived us of all privileges. Signs were introduced for Jews – the yellow badge. It was forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. Carrying on commerce was off limits. It was forbidden to own land or domestic animals. In one stroke – all forms of making a living were cut off. Despite this, we all lived; there were people who sold off a garment, and from the pennies that they managed to save during the holidays, from work, or black marketing, and there were those who died of hunger. However, despite all of this, they lived, some badly, and some very badly, but they lived; with fear and trepidation for tomorrow, always with an assured sense of hope for a better future. I immediately began to work at the same place I had worked under the Russians, at the slaughterhouse fro export. In the initial period, I was the only Jew working for the Germans. They held on to me because they had great need of me. I worked as an electrician at the side of the machines, and there was no one else to take my place. I excelled at my work, and very quickly, I gained the trust of the Germans that ran the slaughterhouse. The Germans did not install a ghetto in Volkovysk; and not because the Jews of Volkovysk were better than others. The destruction of Volkovysk was so great, that there literally was no place left where a ghetto could be built. In order to put up a ghetto, it would have been necessary to drive out the Poles from a part of the property that remained intact in the city; Zamoscheh, Wola or Karczyzna – and they did not want to do this. These circumstances made it easier for the Jews to find a way to make a living.

However, circumstances got worse from day to day in any event. The levies and taxed imposed on the Jews by the Germans from one side, and the forced hard labor without pay, sucked the vigor and blood from the handful of Jews that survived. Poverty and want grew daily. On top of all this, our lives were made miserable by the auxiliary Polish police, who enforced the German decrees, and even those not promulgated by the Germans, with avenging detail. Every day, searched of Jewish homes were conducted, and they confiscated all items, whether they had any value or not.

In the summer of 1942, when the situation was so serious that the vicinity was plagued with outbursts of pogroms and mass slaughtering, and tides of Jewish blood were being spilled in Slonim, Baranovich, Lida, and many other places – there was relative quiet in Volkovysk. Despite this, a part of the young people perforce understood the seriousness of the situation, and they took stock of the imminent danger that was preparing to arrive. They decided to manifest a strong resistance through attack. We worked in secret, we organized and carried out an explanation of our intent. We managed to generate contact with a larger group of Russian partisans, that was located in the Zamkova Forest. The first ones to establish contact with the partisans were Sarah Rubin and her brother-in-law; they were active during this entire period. Once, Sarah's

brother-in-law turned to me (this was before we started to work together), and asked me if I would go into the forest to repair a radio there that belonged to a group of partisans. I received this mandate with happiness; and my dream was realized, my desire to participate in a practical way with real partisans. During one of the days at the beginning of the week, I went into the forest, taking along tools suitable to repair the radio. It is superfluous to add that this step was fraught with danger, There was a standing order that any Jew found outside of the city was to be shot. As to entry into the forest, that goes without saying. There, it was forbidden even for non-Jews to enter. Anyone found in the forest or in its vicinity was taken for a partisan and shot on the spot. However, we reached the designated point without incident. A sentry from the partisans waited for us in the forest. I saw before me a sympathetic young Russian boy with a light machine gun in his hand. We identified ourselves, and afterwards we were taken into the depths of the forest to his group. After an hour of walked through byways and various paths, and contact with a variety of sentry posts, we reached a camouflaged location among trees that were low and close together. A number of tents stood on a small square . A campfire burned in the middle of the square, and a cheerful group of Russian men and women soldiers were carrying on a lively conversation. I saw that I was in a different world. The situation that unfolded before my eyes exceeded all my expectations, all the ideas that I ever had about the partisans. The sense of security, the vigor, the tranquility of spirit, all affected me, and inspired me. I presented myself to the commander, a tall pleasant looking fellow from Georgia,[2] who had the rank of Lieutenant. He was called Grisha. They showed me the place where the radio was, and asked me to repair it, because it had been several days without any news from Moscow, and because of this, they were cut off from the outside world. In a matter of several hours, I returned the radio to its normal state, and it began to function again. As can be understood, the joy was very great. They were very satisfied with the work that was done. This was a great day, and I had sufficient time to engage in conversation, and become familiar with their work. All of them were soldiers of the Red Army that had retreated. There were even a number of Jews among them. They were engaged in a great endeavor. Despite the extent of the work, this was a small group. They subjected the entire vicinity to their program of sabotage. A day did not go by without some incident; here they would tear up railroad tracks, there they would blow up a bridge, they attacked German airplanes and set fire to grain storage facilities. Each time it was something different, and always to the surprise of the Germans. The Germans had the impression that the area contained an entire army, a large force. It reached me, that the Germans at night, had to mount a watch of peasant farmers with staves along the entire length of the rail line, but even this was to no avail. In the mornings, they would find piles of peasant farmers from their district – stuck together like stamps to the ripped up rail lines. The role of young people from Volkovysk was far from minimal in these actions. They provided all the necessary materiel, starting with medicines, and ending with the tools for destruction. One of the most dedicated of the workers in connection with this important work, was the Smith, Bom Zuckerman, Lemkin's son, and others. The freedom, the sense of assurance, and the concept behind this so inspired me, that I was prepared to stay behind with them, and not to return to the city any longer. But here, it was not a case of personal preference; the need forced the issue. They decided that it was incumbent upon me to continue working with the existing group that already existed in the city, whose primary mission was to organize young Jewish men, and in a measured process, transfer them out to the forest. Apart from this: to organize all the young people in the city, in the event of a German action against the Jews, and to be able to mount a defensive attack. We also engages in provisioning the forest with all manner of necessities that they required to facilitate their work. Towards evening they escorted me out of the forest, and we returned to the city. The forest was the province of the partisans. In the forest, they felt safe, and no German had the nerve to even set foot in the forest.

Thanks to my work in the export slaughterhouse, I had the opportunity to procure many different things that

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[2] That is *Russian Georgia*, or Gruzinia.

were needed by the partisans. I was able to obtain the trust of the manager – his name was Talkes; He was, incidentally, the head of the Nazi division in Volkovysk. In the meat factory, I worked as an overseer of the machines and the electrical equipment. All the tools and keys and technical equipment were under my supervision. Because of this alone, I frequently traveled with the permission of the chief, to the storage warehouse (this was a warehouse where good and damaged equipment was kept, that was found in the vicinity after the Russian retreat). I would travel there to take various items that were necessary for the factory. It is understood, that my concern was to assure that there would always be a lack of various items. At every opportunity, I would take thinks that would be useful to the group. Various radio parts, tools, pliers, weapons parts, electrical parts, capacitors, oil, Vaseline and many other necessities. I would bring these things with me to the factory, and afterwards, send them onward, putting them in Sarah Rubin's hands, and she would get them to the right place. Several times, on Sunday, the day of rest, I would myself go into the forest. Largely, this was because I had been designated to communicate a specific mission. I became very friendly with the group. I felt wonderful and safe in the forest. They lived well, at the outset they had plenty of food. The work of the group was divided into two parts – one part dealt with carrying out the work of the partisans in the area of sabotage. The second part , a much smaller one, dealt with obtaining food. They would go at night to the peasants and force them to turn over foodstuffs.

Cooperative endeavor between the youth of Volkovysk and the partisans went on for a long time; many of the young people went into the partisan ranks in the forest. The group grew in recognizable measure. In that same time, conditions in the city grew steadily worse. The fire of Jewish slaughter blazed in the entire vicinity, with mass killings as a daily occurrence. Yet in Volkovysk at that time, there was relative quiet. Occasional survivors, who managed to escape the clutches of the murderers found, for the moment, a refuge and place to rest in Volkovysk. However, we all knew that the evil would not pass us by, that our turn would also come, and the tragic moment arrived. However, *to our great sadness*, not in the manner we had anticipated; there was not a mass slaughter. A punitive expedition of Ukrainians and Germans did not come to Volkovysk to carry out this work, as they had done in other towns like Dereczin, Zelva, and Slonim, and I emphasize *to our great sadness*, because in such an instance, we would have mounted a respectable resistance, and it is possible that a part of us could have been saved. However, the Evil began in an entirely different place. The process began in the ninth month [September] of 1942, a week before Rosh Hashana, with the arrest of all the Jewish doctors and dentists. That same night Sarah Rubin came and told me that I was being summoned, and I understood the meaning of these said words, and I immediately went. A Russian girl was waiting for me, and she told me to go along with her, because she is an emissary of the commander. I went without reservation. Any refusal was out of the question, because I was committed to the partisan cause, and where a mission was involved, its fulfillment took priority, and the punishment was death. The truth of the matter was, that the situation was not conducive to thinking things out, because on the following day, I was required to be at work, and that would no longer be possible, and not to show up for work to the Germans was called 'sabotage,' engendering a suspicion that something 'not kosher' was going on, and this also was tied to a death sentence. But a mission is a mission , and not only that – the commitment to the issue, and the desire not to fear going to battle, for revenge that transcends commitment, directed me to do this thing. When we left the city it was dark – the safest time; At night, the Germans were afraid to walk the Piesk Road because of the Zamkova Forest. The roadway was not familiar to me. She was the leader along the way, and I followed in her steps. We proceeded rapidly for a few hours, by different byways and paths, and on the way, many thoughts ran through my mind. In no way could I divine why I was being called for in so sudden a manner. My feelings were varied. Perhaps they want me to remain permanently with them in the forest – that would be good, except for the unpleasantness of being separated from my relatives. And maybe it has some connection to the arrest of the doctors. Or perhaps, they have lost their trust in me, in which case this is my last journey, because in this instance, the partisans don't fool around, and they don't

engage in extensive investigations. Thoughts by the hundreds consumed me, and with a fluttering heart I awaited the resolution of the matter. In the meantime, the road receded behind us, and we sank into the thick depths of the forest. We encountered a number of partisan sentries, armed from head to foot, and my guide exchanged various passwords with them. At about midnight, we reached the camp. Everyone except for the watch were already asleep. They showed me to a place where I could lie down. Only on the morrow would I be able to talk to the commander regarding the matter that I had been sent for. In the morning, after question about what was going on in the city, and other things, he told me that the radio had malfunctioned, and that I would have to fix it rapidly. The commander told me, that because of the large size of the group, and apart from this, because of the oncoming winter, the position of the group in a small forest in relation to bare trees, was not secure enough, and it is incumbent upon them to move to larger forests, with the intent of going to Bielovez. He told me to get ready, to provision myself with a variety of necessities, and with tools, and in the following week I was responsible to come on the day of the planned move.

I worked there until afternoon, and fixed the radio, and the day and location of the meeting was set for the coming week, at approximately one o'clock, one of them escorted me out of the forest, and from there I walked into the city. I did not know the way very well, because I had come out of the other side of the forest, not far from Rosh. The way was longer than anticipated, and I skipped over the roads, choosing to walk through fields, in order to avoid passing people and buses. When I arrived at the city itself, from the side of the slaughterhouse, very near to Volya, it was already five o'clock. Even before I entered my house, as I was walking along the *Grodno Gasse*, facing *Tatarski [Gasse]*, I met Fish'keh, a butcher who worked with me. He ran to me greatly upset; Roitman, where have you been? The Chief of Police is looking for you. A cold sweat covered me, and I thought, who knows where evil lurks for me. I told him that I had worked the entire day at Steinberg the Electrician, in connection with repairing a motor in the factory. Having calmed down, he then told me that today, in the afternoon, the Chief of Police was with the manager Taller, and asked that I be called. This was all that he related to me, and I didn't know what to do – or more correctly, I knew what to do – to return to the forest and the group; but [the question was] where were they now, and how to meet up with them? I always went with an escort of other people, who showed me the way, and I did not know the way myself; apart from this, with my disappearance in such a sudden manner, I endanger the members of my household; Draznin and the members of his family are likely to answer with their heads on account of me. And another thing, it was not clear to me that the summons by the Chief of Police had anything to do with what was worrying me. Amidst this plethora of thoughts, I decided to go home, and to see what was being discussed there. When I entered the house, they all surrounded me with one question: Herschel, where have you been? The Chief of Police was here looking for you. I apprehended that the matter was serious, because it was not usual for the Chief of Police (A German Officer, SD) to personally come for a matter of an arrest, but rather to send members of the auxiliary police. It became known to me, that in addition to arresting the doctors, they had yesterday also arrested electricians and several radio technicians, among them: Herschel Galiatsky, Polya, and others. The matter was totally incomprehensible to me. If they were looking for me, and it is possible that something became known to them, perhaps they were investigating me, perhaps I had been informed on, I didn't know what to think. There was no opportunity to think, because when he was in the house, the Chief of Police said that I had until 9:00PM to appear at the police station, and if not — there isn't more to say... the atmosphere in the house was like that of Yom Kippur , Sarah, Baylah and Rivka cried, and were already mourning me, because an imprisoned Jew was 99% certain to be lost. I was already calm, and I decided what was incumbent upon me to do. It was 7:00PM, and I still had two hours time. I hurriedly went to Rubin's brother-in-law to take counsel with him, however to my chagrin, I found not a person, I then went to Bom Zuckerman, and could not find him at home as well. And since I was not able to find anyone, I decided to go to the factory and talk to the machinist and see if I could extract anything form him in connection with the reason I was being sought, and in the event of a danger, I didn't want to return to the city

not knowing where they where. And that's what I did, and I approached the factory, and the machinist anticipated me, by asking where I had been all day? I gave him the same evasive answer, that I had repaired a motor in the city on behalf of the factory (a burned out motor indeed was at that time with Steinberg). The machinist told me the same thing that Fish'keh did, adding that the secretary to the plant manager was there and she had called for me. But he told her to tell the manager that just now, I had gone to the city to obtain an available machine part. We agreed among ourselves, that in the event that one of us should be absent, the second party would seek an alibi, and indicate that the sought party was away taking care of something, but the rest of his replies were not helpful. As it happens, the replies of the machinist actually proved to be more useful than ever. I decided to go in to see the manager and to advise him of what had transpired, and he liked me and had trust in me. His good attitude towards me, despite the fact that I was a Jew, came from the fact that I was very much in demand to do the work I did, and secondly, he had no one else to take my place. I came to him as if nothing had happened and I said, that the Chief of Police had been looking for me at home, and asked me to come at 9:00PM, with this, I gave the impression that I had been at work all along. He soothed me, and told me that I am very diligent in my work, and there is nothing to fear, that at the police station they will ask me something, and then let me go immediately, and in fact, I calmed down a little, but not because of the word of the manager, because I never believed the words of the Germans. I took comfort from the fact that I was convinced that he believed that his opinion was that I had been at work that day, just like on other days, and that I was not missing from work. In the meantime, nine o'clock had arrived, and it was almost that I had barely left the manager's office, when I see two Polish auxiliary policemen from Volkovysk coming at me, Chmienecki and Mihalczek, saying that they had a warrant to arrest me; they had already been to my house, and they were told that I was at the factory. There was nothing to do; all my plans went up in the void; under the barrels of two guns, it is hard to run away. I had a visceral feeling of regret that I hadn't done so previously, but in spite of this, I felt that maybe it was better this way, because were I to flee, I might save myself, but the people with whom I lived were condemned to be killed on my behalf. It was with thoughts of this kind that I was brought to the police station. There, I met up with four men who had already been arrested, two strangers whom I did not recognize, and: Galiatsky and Polya. According to the reception we got, I caught on immediately that this was not a simple interrogation, as the manager had indicated, but rather something quite serious. One of the three SS men, who were well-known in Volkovysk, the three Angels of Death, in whose hands lay the life and death of the Volkovysk Jews, said to Galiatsky: "Where have you been dog, with the 'bandits?'" (that what the Germans called the partisans). They asked me, why had I come so late? Where was I, I relied on my manager, and I said that I was busy at work, and they ordered me to go outside, and at a designated place where they got into the ordinary taxi of the three SS men, two got in and one drove. The second one, with pistol in hand, didn't take his eyes off me for a minute. We recognized the taxi only too well, it was the taxi with which they would take all the accused Jews of the city, to be taken out and shot with machine guns outside of the city in the nearby forest. They drove with us as well, away from the city. It is easy to understand how we felt. After a short hour of riding in the dark, he turned the car and entered a gate. We did not know in advance where they were taking us, but when the car stopped and they ordered us to get out, and they took us into an underground bunker (a cellar), we saw that we were in the Barracks extermination camp. This was the famous camp that the Germans put up in 1941 using Russian prisoners of war. There, there were tens of bunkers dug deep into the ground, covered only with a roof. At the outset, in 1941, the bunkers held about thirty thousand Russian prisoners of war. After a number of months, a number died off, almost all from starvation, filth and disease. The Russian dead were buried in mass graves, several thousand to a pit, not far from the Barracks near the stream to Kuvia, on the way from the Barracks to the export slaughterhouse. There, beside the Russian war prisoners, all our own near and dear ones found their eternal resting place later, who were fortunate enough to be killed before leaving Volkovysk. In that dark, damp bunker, we introduced ourselves to our new neighbors., these largely being Russians that the Gestapo had captured in various locations, and accused them of providing assistance

to the partisans. What became clear to us, is that we were also being accused of this in the same manner. It appears that it already was quite late at night. A deathly silence pervaded, all of us were packed together, and we shivered from the cold. Each one of us was sunken in his own thoughts. All of us knew what awaited us, we understood clearly and all arrivals do not return.

The one in the worst condition was me; what I want to say in this way that my ethical position was the worst. From the conversation that was carried on regarding the reason for our arrest, that each of us heard, it became clear to me that we were being [collectively] accused for the repairs that I had made to the radio of the partisans. It is self-understood, that not one of us had so clear position in this as myself. I understood that the intention was directed at me. I was especially concerned about Galiatsky, the oldest Jew among us, a sympathy and concern that didn't stop from our tongues: what do they want from me? I don't have a clue as to what this is all about, Polya would review the facts: if I were at least separated from them, it wouldn't have bothered me so much. I also had to feign ignorance, and was forced to give this impression in order not to arouse any suspicion. I say this with full honesty: I lied in front of my comrades. I lied, not because of any fear, not from any egoistic impulses, and also not because of any fear of death. It was clear to me, that should I confess, it is possible that the other three radio technicians might be set free, but along with this, I would provide credibility for another thing, *that the Jews of Volkovysk were providing assistance to the partisans,* and it was this that the SS worked mightily to prove with singular focus. This conclusion had the implications of causing extremely serious consequences for all the Jews of Volkovysk. For this reason, I held my own counsel, and concluded it was best to admit nothing. I was resolute in my conviction, that even under the heaviest assault, the most extreme torture, not to say anything. On the following morning at daybreak, we saw through the single tine window that was above the door to the bunker, that was flat with the ground, that the doctors were coming out of the bunker opposite us. They took them under guard to a source of water to wash themselves. To our good fortune, the water source was close to our bunker, and it was in this fashion that we were able to exchange a few words through the iron bars on the tiny window. Dr. Weinberg told us in a few words that they were accused of providing medical help to the partisans. He related that a number of them had already been interrogated. On our part, we related that according to the charge we are being accused of repairing the partisan radio. In general the doctors presented themselves as not having fallen in their spirits. They looked tired, and without adequate sleep. However, in general, they appeared to hold themselves well. Especially Weinberg, who stood looking fresh and energetic. At that time we saw Dr. Weinberg, [Dr.]Velvelsky, Dr. Cantor, Dr. Tropp, Dr. Press, Dr. Sedletsky, and others. Afterwards, when the men had finished washing, they brought out the women. Among many Russian women, and also Jewish ones from the vicinity, we saw Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova.

That's how it started. The days seemed long and endless in the dark, perpetually damp and stifling bunkers, and with ceaseless retrieval that they came to take us, to be questioned and interrogated, and maybe to death. The routine tired us out quickly; at the beginning we would tell one another different things, everyone expressing his latest hopes. Later one, we became tired of this as well, and everyone sat silently, each sunk deeply in his own thoughts. The nights were much worse. We sat or slept on worn wooden bunks, we huddled together from the cold, with heart aching and stomach grinding from hunger. And this is the way we waited in a condition of limbo, with an uncertain tomorrow. We waited a few days, and no person asked about us. No person called to us. The Gestapo was in no hurry. They were sure of us, and we were in their hands. In the intermittent times, we did meet with the doctors. With the proceeding of the interrogation, their spirits fell. They were interrogated each and every day, and during the interrogation they were even beaten. They wanted to force them to confess in this way. The SS had certain evidence that one of the doctors helped the partisans and healed a wounded partisan, but they didn't know which one. The interrogation was stuck on this one unmoving point. Each one of the doctors argued that it was not his fault, that he has no

relationship whatsoever with the partisans. The situation was without hope. Weinberg let the city know, and asked of the *Judenrat* to make an effort from the outside, but he lacked resources. The only Jew who had any access to the three men of the Gestapo, whose hand was spread over the city, was Weinberg himself. , to whom they showed some measure of decency, perhaps not because of his own worth, but rather because of the sums of money he brought to them, the various taxes, the pennies from the last sweat of the local Jewish population, in order to at least postpone the enactment of one decree or another. He, the liaison, himself sat in the seat of the accused of an accessory in assisting the partisans. All stood on their morale, that is to say, from an ethical point of view. Because from a physical standpoint, they were already broken by a week of imprisonment. The appearance of their faces was bad. Age had jumped on them, because of a lack of sleep and lack of food. On the fourth day of our imprisonment, they began to interrogate us: the first one they took was Galiatsky, after several hours of being pressured with a variety of questions, and tortured, he returned to the bunker broken and spent. All of us jumped on him to find out what the question were that he was asked. It became clear that one of us had been accused of repairing the radio of the partisans. One of the important proofs in the interrogation lay in demonstrating that we were occupied for every day, working for the Germans, and by such, that there was no possibility of us being in the forest. Galiatsky proved truthfully and with reports that he had not lost even one single day of work. A less pressured situation was created for me, since I was called third. According to the fact that they had called Galiatsky and Polya ahead of me, I arranged my answers in my memory in order to support my 'alibi.' When I was called, I was received by two SS men. After recording my biographical information, up to the day of arrest, one of them said to me: were you not in the forest to repair a radio for the partisans? I felt my heart leap, but I quickly got control of myself, and I quietly answered with wonder in my voice: I know nothing about the partisans, on that day, as on all other days, I was at my place of work, and my manager, Mr. Taller can vouch for me. They showed me implements, pliers, keys, which I recognized quite well, they showed me a piece of antenna wire that I had put in place for the group in the forest. In all of the answers I gave, I was consistent, that I knew nothing of this matter. They threatened me, yelled at me, spoke gently and then badly to me, but always, I gave them the same answer. They pressured me for more than two hours, and in the end, indicated that they wished to terminate the protocol, because everything had been recorded in a typewriter. After a few days, we got a good report that they were letting Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova go free. This was the first instance of good fortune, that people, especially Jews, left the camp alive, and our spirits improved, and the spirits of the doctors improved; they began to believe in an auspicious future where they would be set free. But in this connection, their circumstance was much worse because the practice of medicine is 'free' and their work was not tied to a specific place of work, and because of this, they were unable to prove that they were always tied to their work. By contrast to this, we were all able to demonstrate an unbroken presence at our place of work. Three of my comrades were able to prove this as a mat5ter of the actual truth, and I was able to do so by relying on an agreement with my manager that he would vouch for me being at work on that day. Despite this, the matter did not stop to bore into my mind for even a minute, how do they know exactly how all of this had happened? Various thoughts coursed through my mind. I thought that maybe a spy was in the midst of the partisans, and he relays all of this? Or maybe, there is someone in the city who is really in the ranks of the Gestapo (there were such people in other towns) and tells about everything, but then the question arises: what is the purpose of such an interrogation? Should they not have arrested only me? Everything that I considered in regard to this issue seemed like a paradox to me. A moment of breakthrough occurred: they sent for me a second time, they interrogated me for a short time, and then told me that I was free to go, that I could return to my work. It is hard to describe the feeling of good fortune that welled up inside of me; I could not believe my ears, it was as if I were in a dream. That this was the real outcome, was proved to me only when I made my second pass through the camp, and I was on my way, near the barracks. I thought to myself about the iron of the fate: I am the guilty one, and here I am free, and those that don't have so much as a clue, are still detained. In another day, they released Galiatsky, and three days later, all of the electricians were set free.

It became clear that it was not our successful justifications that stood us in good stead, but rather the German managers for whom we worked, involved themselves in the matter, and indicated that our work was very critical for them. The elation in the city was substantial, and morale soared; the hope was created that the doctors too, would be released. A few more days went by, but not a single person appeared, the Gestapo brought a number of Jewish doctors from Bialystock for the city, in place of those who were arrested. This occurrence was a bad omen. With a fluttering heart, every one of us waited for the resumption of this issue and how it would play out, and the matter was not long in coming. On October 14, 1942, the Gestapo took a group of Jews for work on a special detail; it took them out to the Izavelin Forest, and forced them to dig a pit. When the pit was dug, they took them away to a distance of several hundred meters from it, a place from which they heard, after barely an hour, the sound of machine gun fire. When they were brought back to the pit, they saw what was covered with dirt, the writhing bodies of the most dear to us; they covered the grave...

There is no secret in the matter any longer, and there is also no reason for it to remain a secret, that Weinberg himself, the Head of the *Judenrat* gave the medical attention to the partisans. It is only a pity that there were so few like Weinberg! He understood that the only means left to us was to come to the aid of the partisans, and to make common cause with them, and if he did not confess under interrogation in order to save the other doctors from death – as it appears – it was not out of any fear, but because of the clear and correct thought, that in taking the blame on himself, he would be placing the entire Jewish community and Jewish people of Volkovysk in danger, For the sake of truth, this too, however, was of no avail, because in any event, all the Jews were exterminated after a short while.

The day on which the Jewish doctors died was a bitter and abrupt one for the Jewish populace of Volkovysk. With the sacrifice of the lives of the doctors, the end of the Volkovysk Jewry was initiated. The difficult condition became unbearable, the escalation of abuse rose to great heights, and the rights of the Jews and their entreaties amounted to nothing. The entire vicinity was roiled with the fires of Jewish massacres, and it was felt that our turn was drawing nigh. The contact with the partisans was broken off while I was still under detention. When I came out of arrest, I met a Jewish partisan whose origin was from Slonim. He had been with the partisans in the forest the entire time, and I recognized him from there; he related the following items to me, from which it became clear what the reason was for the arrest of the doctors and the electricians: seeing as the Germans could not find a way to take action against the partisans without knowing their exact location, they deployed Ukrainians in their ranks, and sent them into the forest, to pretend that they were Russian soldiers that had remained behind, who were seeking ways to affiliate with partisan groups, and after they found out the location of a group of this nature – they would communicate the details to the Germans. Such was the case with our group; Two Ukrainian spies entered the Zamovka Forest, and ran into a sentry guard of two partisans of our group; the Ukrainians acted friendly towards them, and said that they wanted to join the group, and on the strength of that, they toasted each other.... it is self-evident that the Ukrainians saw to it that the partisans got drunk, and that they didn't; And as the partisans got drunk, their tongues loosened up, and they began to talk about the exploits of their group. They told everything, including the episode about the Jewish medical assistance to the partisans, and the incident of the radio repair by a Jewish radio technician. As soon as this became known to the Ukrainians, they returned to the city, and told all of this to the Gestapo. And this was the day before the arrest of the doctors. At the time that we were in detention, under the direction of the Ukrainians, hundreds of SS troops and Polish auxiliary police surrounded that part of the forest where the partisans were, and with the help of tracking dogs, they found the location of the camp. To their good fortune, the partisans picked up the signs of the incursion very early, and opened up with machine gun fire, however the Germans had superior forces by a significant measure. The band of constriction grew tighter and tighter. They then made a daring move: the threw themselves with

all their might and shouts of 'Hurrah!' at one point of the chain, and broke through, creating an [escape] route for themselves. As can be understood, in a swift action like this, many things had to be abandoned, and it was from this that the many of the tools and implements came, that the SS showed us during interrogation. The one who told me this was present at that hour when it took place. During that time of retreat into the forest among the trees, the remnants of the group vanished entirely. He climbed up into a tree, and waited until the force of men participating in the encirclement to leave the forest at nightfall, and at night, came into the city. It appears that the partisans transferred themselves to the depths of the Forest of Bielovez, and this was how contact with the partisans was broken, and the Jewish youth began to feel itself even more alone and orphaned. Those that were killed, were killed, and for them there were no longer any questions. But those who survived, also wanted to live. And that is how the saying was created, that until his last breath, man does not cease to struggle for his existence.

The same was true with the our Jews in Volkovysk. The noose around the neck tightened further and further, and the calamity was unquestionably drawing nearer, and the noose was hung over our heads, it was just a case of not knowing exactly when it would happen. With no certainty about tomorrow, for that evening, or even the next hour, caused people to go about in a state of constant fear, they were afraid to sleep in the houses; when it barely had grown dark, they took all their belongings, crawled into a lean-to of wood, a potato storage pit, or a specially prepared hiding place. The Jews of Volkovysk especially had prepared hiding places. The most ingenious methods were employed in this regard; The art of constructing a hiding place or a bunker was done as a matter of preserving life. This was a battle objective of the Jews, and the core of their activity. For example, in our house, at Draznin's on the hillock of the *Tatarski Gasse*, Leibl, Itchkeh and I, built an underground bunker, in which 10 people could fit. The pit was about a meter underground, in the form of an elongated tunnel. The height of the tunnel was a meter and a half, and two meters wide, and the walls and lookout posts were covered with boards, and leaned against the ends. There were two ways into the pit; one was an entrance form a room; in the middle of the floor, we had cut a trapdoor that was not detectable , and opened from the inside; on top of the trapdoor stood an armoire, and the cover to the bottom of the armoire was opened in such a way, that by entering the armoire, you could then descend into the bunker. The exit from the bunker was in the year, underneath the compost heap, and in this way it was possible to get out through the compost heap. This was just one of the ways in which bunkers were constructed.

As can be appreciated, these bunkers had to be built stealthily, and not only because of the Poles and the Germans, but also because of Jewish neighbors. The bunkers were provisioned with whatever we had, in case it was necessary to hold out for an extended period of time. And that's how will lived for some time longer, and the time would not have seemed so long were it not for the troubles and abuses that continued without let up and without bounds. We were forced to work by day; Each day, the *Judenrat* received a list of workplaces, how many Jews were required, and where they were to report fro work, day in and day out. They performed all manner of hard labor, beginning with tearing down the walls of destroyed houses, and ending with digging trenches, and other types of military-related labor. The bricks of the destroyed houses were cleaned and smoothed; this work was reserved for the girls. The bricks were then sold by the Germans to the peasants. Trains of peasants by the tens, would stream into the city each day and take the remains of the Jewish houses out with them. A large group of Jews, numbering in the hundreds, went every day to work in Petroshovitsa, not far from central Volkovysk; the Germans had a rest and relaxation camp there for the soldiers who returned from the front.

The Germans paid no wages, to the contrary! We thanked God that they needed us to do work. This was the sole consolation and the sole hope, that as long as they had a need for us, they would not dispose of us. The

Judenrat was responsible for this matter, and was motivated to provide the correct number of people to the requirement. Opposite the Germans, the members of the *Judenrat* were viewed as the official representatives of the Jews, and after the death of Dr. Weinberg, it was headed by Noah Fuchs by himself. Botvinsky, Amstibovsky and Gallin worked with him. The Jewish police supposedly was there to serve the *Judenrat,* and the interests of the Jewish community of Volkovysk, but in reality, this was not the case. The reason for this, is that the Jewish police was staffed with people from the underworld; they took advantage of their power and the privileges accorded to them for personal advantages. I especially remember one, Khiller, י"ש , who deliberately cause Jews distress, who in his relationship and actions towards the Jews didn't put the Germans themselves to shame. There were many "Khillers" of this nature, who thought they could out-Pope the Pope, and at the expense of other people, they could save themselves.

After the Gestapo released me, I returned to work at the slaughterhouse and packing plant. In the meantime, several other Jewish workers were added, such as: Dud'zhka Botvinsky, who worked with me in the machinery unit, Katz, Fish'keh, Galai, and others. A total of eight of us were employed there. Relatively speaking, we were better off than other Jews elsewhere, because we would obtain provisions from the rejects, such as bones, feet, and like things. I felt well enough in this place; I looked upon the plant as my good fortune. I had worked in the same place for almost two years for the Russians. Consequently, I felt safer there than at home, and I frequently spent the night there, next to the steam stack, I would arrange a sleeping place for myself on a bench, and sleep the entire night; as understood, this was done without the manager knowing about it.

In the late fall of 1942, when the cold winds began to penetrate to the bone, and when endless rain would soak you to the flesh, and dark clouds would blacken the sky, as if it were an added abuse to the general suffering, the first phase of the calamity arrived. It was not an accident that the Germans picked this kind season for the time to implement their satanic plans. They were accomplished psychologists, and in every instance, they chose those times when the ambience was the worst, of hopelessness, fear and piles of snow, in order carry out their massacres and deportations, because at times like this, the morale of the masses of Jews was even worse than usual. On the one hand, there was the emotional suffering because the situation was without hope or rescue, because of the seemingly endless string of military victories of the Germans at that time, when with giant steps, the German divisions sped forward deep into Russia, and when the Ukraine and all of Byelorussia were enveloped in a brown shirt. At the gates of Moscow, Stalingrad and Leningrad, stood the partisan brigades, and when we saw that the world is being overrun, and we, beneath our wrecked houses, forgotten and rejected by the entire world, without protection, given over to disposal, without worth and having no assets in the face of this gigantic conflict, and when powerful unions, nations and lands fell; and the poverty, hunger, and cold, impaired the strength of spirit, and the will to live fell even further. It was at times like this, and under such circumstances, that the murderers carried out their program of extermination against the Jews without restraint. People were treated like cattle, and more than this, because an animal sensing danger will balk, and does not want to go to the slaughter, but people, even when they see the imminent danger, went into the arms of death, having given up, exhausted and tired. On November 2, 1942 a message was sent out that all the Jews of the city were required to assemble at noon near the barracks, in the camp previously used for the prisoners of war. Everyone was to take food for two days; and any Jew who was found outside the camp after the appointed time – will be shot! This was on a Monday. Even up to the day before, we knew nothing. The morale had actually improved, the Germans who had turned over their garments to Jewish tailors, were in a rush to retrieve the pieces of cut fabric that had not yet even been sewn, and partially sewn garments; Germans who had ordered shoes from Jewish shoemakers got them back incomplete; the reason behind this tumult was unknown. Being great optimists as usual, the Jews explained this in a favorable light; a rumor began to spread that the Germans were packing up their valises

and preparing to retreat to the rear, and it was because of this they were rushing to pick up their orders from the Jewish tradesmen. On Monday, when the announcement was spread about, I was at work already; it was my habit to get to work early, and so it was that by the time I was at work there was mourning and lamentation in the city already, not only I didn't know, but also others who worked with me, knew nothing. About an hour later, the manager entered the machinery area and said that I was required to go home, because today, a general search of the Jews was to take place; I and the rest of my comrades returned immediately to the city. Walking home, we observed that many Guards were about, and surrounding the city; we caught on that something was afoot, but we didn't know what it was. When we arrived in the city, the depressing truth became known to us; people with knapsacks on their shoulders, with children in their arms, or being led by the hand, streamed for the length and breadth of the streets and roads in the direction of Zamoscheh to the area beside the barracks. All the streets from Karczyzna to the barracks were filled with a living stream of humanity of wailing people. Women, old people, children, old and young with a slow step, stricken in spirit, and in a silence broken only by a wild outburst here and there by crying children, the stream slowly progressed further and further on, to the *Tatarski Gasse*, it passed the Gymnasium on the hillock, through the Wide Boulevard, through the Kolyuba to the barracks. And for the entire time, the stream moves as if it is one body, one feeling of being stricken, frightened and resigned. Fear of the uncertain tomorrow, what might happen, and no person could know what is imminent. The orders of the Germans were replete with deception and cleverness; the assault, the attack, always came from an unanticipated direction, and always without any apparent purpose. They said that the Jews were being assembled at the barracks in order to conduct intensive searches in the homes at that time; they also said that the Jews would live in the barracks, and a ghetto would be established there, and we would go to work from there. And all of these stories acted as a narcotic to the spirit, and when added to the Jewish conviction, that things would be all right at the last minute, served to facilitate greater calamities.

Bunkers and hideouts were constructed, but almost nobody was saved by using them, because everyone thought of a radical solution to the question of the Jews in Volkovysk. They imagined massacres similar to the ones that had taken place in cities elsewhere in the vicinity, and here came a seemingly routine order to assemble at the barracks. If so, there didn't seem to be any reason to hide, because one could not remain in a bunker for an extended period of time, and certainly not to live there, and so everyone left their homes and bunkers, and went to the barracks. When I returned to the city, I first went home, and there I found everyone ready to go. Leibl had already hidden everything of value in the bunker, closed the false door, and we left. The old couple, Sarah Baylah and her husband, and the young couple with their three children, Avreml, Yocheved and Nioma. Along the way, we met up with other families, the Meshengissers, Itchkeh, Liss, Rossman, Parmalnik, Rappaport, and many others, for whom did we not run into? All, all of them, all of them went. When we got higher, behind the hill, we could see the Christians standing by the houses, they incited us through the windows, smiling cynically, with expressions of satisfaction, they were gleeful about our plight, and were happy at the prospect that the hour was near when they could plunder Jewish possessions. German guards and Polish auxiliary policemen lined the way on both sides of the street driving the river of humanity in one direction. Through a high and wide barbed wire gate, the mass of people entered the camp. This was a camp of several tens of underground earthen pits, constructed five to a row, and the rows were fenced in with barbed wire. A few bunkers comprised a small camp in the middle of the larger camp. The entire camp was sealed off with a double fence, three meters high. There was a distance of two meters between each fence, and in the in-between space, there were piles of barbed wire nearly a meter high. Watchtowers stood in each area at a distance of several hundred meters apart, with searchlights and SS troops. The camp was under guard day and night. The bunkers were dug three meters into the ground, at a length of fifty meters, and ten meters wide. There were triple sets of lighting on both sides, bottom, middle and top, the bunker had no window, and light got in only though the door. On the top expanse, there was only

the roof. Between 600-700 people occupied such a bunker. When we entered the camp, SS troops stood in front of us, and they separated the men from the women. The bunkers for the men were fenced and sealed off from the bunkers for the women; and we did not know what was going to happen, what will be our fate? Regardless, we sensed this situation was bad. When all the people from Volkovysk were concentrated in this fashion, cohorts of Jews from the environs began to arrive. From all directions, and all roads, the Jews streamed in under the escort of SS guards, and they were driven into the Volkovysk camp. By that Tuesday at nightfall, all the Jews of Zelva, Porozovo, Amstibova, Piesk, Mosty', Svislucz, Ruzhany, Lisokovo and Izavelin had been concentrated in the camp. Twenty thousand Jews had been concentrated in the course of those two days into the concentration camp in Volkovysk. The people cam torn, beaten, and exhausted, they were given no opportunity to take anything with them. The entire way, they went on foot, and only in exceptional circumstances were children brought by wagon. The worst journey was for the Jews of Ruzhany. Along the entire way, they were beaten, and made to run, and those that passed out on the way, were shot by the SS troops on the spot. Each town has a designated place in the camp. On the first day after the concentration, we were notified that we were confined to the camp, and we were to view it as our residence. The women, their husbands and children, were again brought together, and arranged themselves in the bunkers according to their families. The situation was very depressing; there was no food – they didn't take any with them – and it never occurred to the Germans at all to provide anything. The hunger grew more intense from day to day. Hand in hand with the hunger, the sanitary conditions grew worse from day to day; there was no water with which to wash. The few wells that existed served to still the thirst of so large a mass of people. The dirt and filth spread. After a few days, the appearance of the people grew so bad, that they couldn't recognize one another; disease broke out, and there were practically no doctors. The doctors from the small towns put together a dispensary in one of the sheds, but their efforts were in vain, seeing as there were no medicines and bandages. The camp was sealed, meaning that no person could go to work. This, despite the fact that various Germans, the managers of factories and businesses, demanded from the camp command that Jews be permitted to work for them. This matter was done for a practical purpose, that the camp was sealed off because of the diseases that were afoot within, and it was for this reason that no one was permitted to go out, in order to assure that the diseases would not spread. After a few days went by, a kitchen began to get organized; the Germans provided bread; peasants brought potatoes in accordance with German orders, and the kitchen began to operate. Sonya Botvinsky stood as the head and overseer of the kitchen in all matters pertaining to food, while Sioma Gallin and others assisted. This kitchen had to cook for the entire camp, for 20,000 people. During the day, a single portion of one liter of thin soup was given. There was a shortage every day, because the kitchen was insufficient, and complete bunkers of people did not receive their allotted rations. The hunger was so enormous, that if a train car of potatoes came into the camp under a strong guard, people took no account of this, and tore open the car in order to grab the potatoes alive. In instances like this, the SS opened fire, and people fell. But the pangs of hunger were great, and without giving heed to the danger, people continued to run to the train cars. It goes with out saying that the death toll rose with each passing day. Rappaport, as one of the more observant Jews of the city, was occupied with burying the dead. There was a separate group of people, who engaged in the task of taking the dead out of the camp for burial, not far from the barracks, and bury them there in mass graves. After three weeks had gone by, the Germans began to take specific groups of Jews out of the camp for work/ I was one of the first ones. My manager was able to get me out of the camp after a considerable number of tries. He was pressed to have me at work. My elation was great, not only because of my own personal circumstances; I had enough to eat – but because of the idea, that from the outside, I would be able to help my friends. And I had many of these: first, there were all the people with whom I lived, who suffered from hunger along with everyone else. My heart was torn to pieces listening to the children cry without stopping; "Mother, I am hungry." And the mother, that good Rivka, who did so many favors and good things for other people, who helped me personally so much, didn't have the wherewithal in her hands to even divide up a piece of bread among her

children. Apart from me, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky also went out of the camp, and we worked together. Bakers were allowed out, those who were to bake bread for the Jews, wagon drivers, and part of the work force that did work for the army, such as: Red Cross and the administration. Rosa Einhorn went out, and others, all together about sixty people. All these people worked at their places of work during the day, and at night a policeman brought us back to the camp to sleep. We didn't sleep any longer in our camp, but rather in a Polish forced labor camp, that was in the municipal slaughterhouse. As can be understood, the situation of the Jews in the camp improved somewhat, because each of us did whatever we could to bring food into the camp. Life got better from the instant that a large portion of the Jews of Volkovysk began to leave the camp to do various kinds of work. Some took advantage of this opportunity, and went off into the forest. Things of this sort cannot be completely described in words. Winter, snow, freezing days. There is no place to disappear into, eyes are on you from all sides. The Polish and White Russian populace turned over every Jew that was found outside the camp to the police. Foodstuffs are not available, the peasants do not which to offer support, and additionally point out infractions to the police. Despite this, a group did go into the forest. By many ways, they [ultimately] did not free themselves from the camp. Many got out with the dead, that is, they pretended to be dead, and naturally, with the complicity of the burial detail and the *Khevra Kadisha*, they were taken out as if they were dead, together with the other bodies. At a distance from the camp, in a field, they arose, as if resurrected, and ran off into the forest. But what became of this, if not several days later, they would voluntarily, and sneak back into the camp among the people returning from work. And do you think this was for lack of courage, or yearning for the Camp? They returned because despite their best of intentions – and is there any stronger will than the will to live – because it was simply impossible to survive in the forest without food and without nourishment. There were large bands of partisans who had food provisions and who were armed, but where were they? Far, far from the forests around Volkovysk. Despite this, a group of our comrades did establish itself in the forest, they built bunkers in the earth, camouflaged according to the environment. And they were there for a long time, at night they stole into the city, and the bakery would provision them, they collected foodstuffs from the abandoned Jewish homes, and brought them to the forest. After some days, the forest watchman discovered their hiding place and informed the police. The police attacked them by surprise, and a number of the people were killed on the spot. Several escaped, and three were brought back to the camp alive, where they were shot to death at the cemetery, in the presence of the members of the *Judenrat*, Fuchs. Life in the camp settled into a pattern of sorts. This is not to say that conditions got better, but rather we became accustomed to the tribulations, the hunger, the filth, and we lived as we could, if you wish to call this living by any definition. On December 4, 1942, the camp commander came, an SS officer who commanded a storm trooper division, and told a gathering of thousands of Jews, that part of them will have to leave the camp, they will be sent with their wives and children deep into Germany, and there they will work and live normal lives. And that was the promise of the camp commander. Understandably, no faith was placed in such assurances, however this brought some relief to that segment of the Jews who were of an optimistic inclination. And there was no need to wait for long.

After several days, they ordered the Jews of the vicinity, specifically the Jews of Svislucz and Ruzhany, to pack up their belongings and prepare to travel. It was a freezing day in which snow was falling, and as soon as dawn broke, a large body of SS troops and police came into the camp, and they began to drive the Jews out the bunkers. They beat them with staves and rubber truncheons, and rushed them to the gathering place, not giving them an opportunity to take along anything larger than a small package that could be carried in hand. They were arranged in rows under a very tight guard. When the count of the people was filled, the train moved in the direction of the central station in Volkovysk. At a freezing temperature of 20°F, with a heavy snow falling, men, women and children, went, half barefoot, in torn and worn rags. The cries and wailing went up into the heart of the heavens. I was then in at work in the packing plant, this is about a kilometer from the track leading to the train station, and from there, I was able to actually see the train with the people

on the track. The train went along for hours, and we could hear the sounds that continued, unending. From time to time, we heard the sound of machine gun fire. The train reached the station, and there they loaded the people onto transport trains and sent them off, approximately 3000 at a time.

The suffering was immense, and by the method used to transfer the people, it was clear that this was no transfer to Germany to do work. However, we did not know where they were being taken. In every corner, it was clear that this trip was not a trip to life. This situation let to an upheaval, and illustrated the seriousness of the situation. They had barely completed one transport, when we received notification of a second transport.

This was to have been a transport of those people not capable of work, and among them partly some of the able-bodied workers from Volkovysk. The period of the transports had begun: The camp became emptier from day to day. By December 20, only five thousand people remained out of the original twenty thousand. These were largely Jews from Volkovysk and Svislucz. But even with this, it was not over. An order was issued that did not permit more than two thousand Jews, capable of doing work, to remain in the camp, who were engaged in various municipal and military jobs. The situation became serious; the decision as to who would be left in the ranks of the two thousand was put in the hands of the *Judenrat*. Of importance, these were supposed to be people from Volkovysk, because they were the ones who were employed in jobs of this kind. Among these, were to be included the 'camp people;' these were Jews from various towns that even before the camp was established, were in Volkovysk working on the railroad lines. I, Dodzhkeh Botvinsky, Katz, Sardetsky, Fish'keh, Galai and others had worked all this time in the slaughterhouse for export. I was able to get my former landlord, Leibl Draznin into the plant with me. Leibl and I didn't move so much as a hand without the other. If we obtained any food, we immediately passed it on to Rivka, Draznin's wife, and his family. This helped alleviate their circumstances to a degree. The children did not suffer from hunger anymore. The situation became worse in the extreme the minute we discovered that people who were unable to work, and those not engaged in specific jobs would be compelled to leave the camp to be sent out. Only 2000 people were to remain in the camp. It is understood that there was no room for children in such a camp. We began to make an effort to get Rivka and the children out, so they would not be sent away on the transport. We already understood the implications of this matter; we did not know clearly or with certainty, but we understood that this transport meant death. For this reason, the days before the transfer, especially for the Jews of Volkovysk – because this transport was only people from Volkovysk – very heated. In this transfer – a transfer to death, without doubt – the basest instincts for survival came to the surface; the most savage of instincts, of selfish egotism rather than consideration for the common good. Yet, among others, an extraordinary spiritual elevation, a boundless sense of self-sacrifice, and commitment for their kin, great feelings of affection, feelings of the deepest love and devotion to one's fellow man. Leibl took advantage of every connection to the Germans, and did everything possible to get Rivka and the children to be nominated to stay behind; he convinced the manager of the factory to go to the camp commander, and ask him to let the wife and children of the gardener remain behind (he worked as a gardener at that time). But even this didn't help. They agreed to let only Rivka stay behind. But under no circumstances would they permit the children to stay. You can imagine the condition of these people. They almost went insane, not knowing what to do, seeking advice from each and every person. It was not evident what to do; there were two possibilities: either to travel with the wife and children, or to remain behind without them; or in the best possible case, to convince his wife to let the children go, and stay behind with him. Could I offer advice to him, at a time that I was so close to Rivka and the children that they were no less dear to me than to Leibl himself? And please don't think for a minute that Leibl was the exception here. Every man loved his wife and children, and everyone tried every conceivable way to get his own family out of the transport, however, not everyone had an equal opportunity. And do you think that such opportunity was in the hands of a man and his conscience? No, they were generated only through bribery, and the weight of silver and gold. To our

terrible chagrin, instances of this nature are found only too often as stains in the history of inflamed days of bloodletting during times of war and heroism. Pure feelings of commitment, affection, and closeness, are sullied by egotism, and the bestial instincts of a certain number of people. We must emphasize this matter, and review it in our minds, because what took place during these days of blood in our midst, needs to be made clear to coming generations. It is on this basis that we have the obligation to educate and teach our children. And it is incumbent upon us to recognize not only that which is good and beautiful, but also the bad and despicable. There were people, who in these tragic minutes, of confrontation with death, of monumentally deep resignation, of ethical suffering and physical wasting, took the opportunity to line their pockets. I will not recall names, because in any event, these people are no longer alive. At a time when the bellies in the camp were swollen with hunger, there were 'people' who brought bread into the camp for fantastically high prices, that only very few were capable of paying. The most despicable of these individuals were the ones who used their positions in the Jewish auxiliary police to carry out their most heinous activities. During the time of the transports, when people used every means to save themselves from being transported, these opportunists squeezed monies out of the unfortunates, with promises that they would get them off the list of those to be transported. During the time of the transport this repulsive group assisted in finding those who were missing to fill out the transport [quota]. They thought that by doing this, they would curry added favor with the Germans, and in this way would be allowed to live in the midst of the extermination. To our good fortune, these were only a small group of the filth of the group, who cannot besmirch the seal of the pure martyrdom of our dearest. I have said that everyone attempted to save their kin from the transport, but not everyone could accomplish this. And whoever did not succeed, did one of two things, either he gave up, and of his own free will decided to go along with his kin, or he left them to their fate, and remained behind alone. For example, Rak, an engineer at the electricity plant, could not arrange for his wife and children to stay. He was designated to stay, because they had a need for him. However, he did not want to stay without them, and voluntarily went with them. It is possible to count tens of such instances, that came to instances of the highest feelings of dedication and sacrifice in the face of death.

The motto spread: If we have to die – then together. There were other instances, for example, as in the case of the Meshengisser family: a father, mother and four children. The father and the two older children, Salia and Liova were selected to remain behind, because they worked, and the mother with the young daughter and son were designated for transport. They tried with all their might, but to no avail, and they went. For the sake of truth, one of the two boys, the youngster, hid himself at the last minute, because it became possible for him to remain behind; and because of this, the mother and one child went, and the father with three children stayed behind. Instances of this nature where families parted and were broken up, occurred by the hundreds. There were instances where mothers abandoned their children in an attempt to save themselves. There were reverse situations, where mature children left their parents and grabbed at a chance to escape.

Enormous complications beyond the imagination confronted individual families. It is far from easy to blame or justify one type of behavior or another in the case where families were broken up and separated. Whether a mother left a child behind to save herself, or a husband behaved this way to his wife, in the midst of trying to save her as well, first by all the available means, this does not mean that one should blame the husband who abandoned his wife, or the woman, her child, or that there was some shortcoming in the way they acted towards their kin. In order to be able to grasp this thing and assess it, it would be necessary to have found oneself in this same place under these same circumstances. All those who were not in the ghettoes, concentration and extermination camps – apprehend these things from a different perspective, from the position of freedom, they do not take into account the negative conditions that caused one type of behavior or another. I will not dwell on these matter any longer. Even though they are of unending seriousness and importance if one wants to assess ands analyze the behavior of the lives of the Jews in countries that were

captured by the Nazis.

On Sunday, December 20, 1942 we were told that the transfer would take place in a few days. It had been impossible to extract Rivka and the children at that point. A remarkable plan occurred to Leibl in connection with rescuing his wife and children. His wife could stay behind in a totally legal way, but the children had to go; she firmly refused to do this thing; she said that without the children, she had nothing to live for. And so, on Sunday, with the permission of our manager, we took a horse and wagon, and under the pretense (with the consent of the manager, naturally) that we were going to the camp to remove certain articles before the departure, such as pots and other things that the manager had lent for the use as camp equipment. At this opportunity, Leibl wanted to secretly hide Rivka and the children in the wagon among the equipment. When we arrived at the camp, we were distracted by the general suffering, and the fear that reached near panic proportions. In the general camp, there were two separate areas, one separated from the other with barbed wire. A gate connected one to the other. One part, the old section for the Jews of Volkovysk, this was the place where almost all the people designated for transport were located; the second part was where all those required for work were located, the Jewish machinists, assistants, that is to say, all those designated to remain behind. The SS Troops guarded the gate, to assure that nobody sneaked into the second part that had not been previously designated. Leibl got down by Rivka, and laid out his plan for her, but to his great despair, she refused to consent, she didn't want to leave her elderly father and mother behind; she argued that her parents did not deserve to be abandoned like orphans at such a tragic moment. She pleaded with Leibl to try and take all of them out together. We rode home alone, but with the hope of being able to save them, nevertheless. On Sunday night, before the dawn on Monday, we came to our camp, where about sixty people slept, city workers, police awakened us and ordered us to get dressed. They said that they had received an order to bring us to the camp. Under heavy guard, they led us to the main camp, and along the way, the voices of people who had given up hope reached us. We understood that the people were being taken out for transport. It is difficult to describe what was in our hearts at that moment. The idea that perhaps they would take us too, increased our fright, even though we knew we were among those selected to stay among the remainder because of our work. The closer we got to the camp, the cries became more and more distinct. But these cries were no longer from the camp, but rather from the central railroad station. Even more bitter to us, was when we were taken through the camp on our way to the central station; we no longer doubted our bitter fate. But what could we do? To try and extract ourselves from so strong a guard was denied to us. Everyone carried the deep sadness within, that our near and dear ones had been trod underfoot. However, in our calamity, we had one bit of fortune; when we had gone about half the way, a policeman intercepted us with an order for us to be taken back to the camp, seeing as we were counted among those who were supposed to remain behind. Apparently there was a misunderstanding, and we were included with the others to be transported by mistake. When we returned to the camp, and the immediate danger to us abated, everyone saw the true extent of the calamity. The camp, which up to yesterday had been teeming with people, a place where one saw life, heard a din, groaning and noise, was empty now, without a single soul, its appearance like that of a huge cemetery. At the side of the bunkers there was torn bed coverings, clothing, and pieces of cloth. From the bunkers, one could sense the fetid air still, laden with sweat and the odor of people that had just been driven out. One could realistically feel, and it seemed as if one could still hear the screams and cries of the mothers and children. Here, in this camp that had just been emptied, there was a small number of women, elderly people and abandoned children. All those who were not able to go under their own power to the transport, the SS troops gathered into one bunker, and afterwards put burning pots of sulfur into the bunkers and sealed them. The nominal reason for doing this was to rid the bunker of lice. The bunker was sealed for two days, and the suffocating odor of burning sulfur wafted all over the camp. When they opened the bunker, the people were naturally, dead. The Germans referred to this as elimination of lice. In the second section of the camp, where the assisting Jews were assembled, who worked in the various locations, there were

approximately two thousand Jews, mostly young men and women, almost no children at all. There were a few children that the women had managed to sneak in inside suitcases or bundles in moving over from the first section of the camp to the second. For practical purposes, it was said that there were no children at all. Everyone bemoaned his own fate, and there was enough to cry over. In one case, they had taken his wife, in another, his children, the third, a brother, the fourth, a sister, and so on, without end. I was particularly pained over Rivka and her children. Leibl stayed behind voluntarily; he was spent and broken from his great loss. His conscience nagged him for not joining them as well. After a few days, everything returned to an ordinary pace of sorts in relative terms..Everyone inured themselves to their pain; everyone made peace with the idea that he had lost everyone who was dear and beloved to him. There were those who took comfort in the hope that maybe they would not be exterminated, and that perhaps the camp commandant had told the truth, that they were being taken to do work. This feeling of conviction, and everyone's hope, acted as a healing agent, and served as a narcotic to the spirit, and enveloped the tragic facts in a mantle of illusion.

About two thousand people were left, almost all of which worked in the various different places outside the camp. All of them slept in the camp, including all of us who at one time had slept in the city, at the Polish workers camp. In the morning, Polish police would escort us to work, and at night, they returned us to the camp. The material condition improved, and food was not lacking as was the prior case, all those who came in contact with Christians during working hours bought necessary foodstuffs either with money or by barter. People did not lack for food to eat. We learned to live for the day, the person became like an automaton, all hopes and desires evaporated, only one instinct remained, the instinct to survive and to be able to witness vengeance. This will became sharpened and strengthened precisely in the hour when the danger to life was great. It goes without saying that under such circumstances, there was no room for ethical rules and social niceties. A principal ideal was to eat, and to eat well, this was the only issue in life. Despite the fact that from a material point of view things improved, the condition of the camp and the circumstances under which we lived became more and more worse. Because everyone had to leave and go to work, there was no one left to look after the sanitation and order in the camp. In the evening, on return from work, food was prepared individually or in small groups. The simple things to prepare a warm meal were missing. There were no ovens.

Outside, in front of the bunkers, on days of intense cold, when the temperature was between 15 and 20°F, and when the snow crunched underfoot, and a cold snowy wind cut to the bone, with teeth gritted tightly, a fire was lit for the entire day, after hard labor, between two bricks, with damp wood that used to be gathered during working hours and brought into the camp. The eyes would crawl out of their sockets by the time we had the privilege of seeing a few boiled potatoes or a little bit of groats. It is easy to understand that after this kind of an evening meal, amidst fatigue and dwindling energy, people were not too concerned about cleanliness. It wasn't only that they didn't clean out the bunker itself, but also the bedding on which they slept. Leibl and I continued to work at the export slaughterhouse; our situation improved somewhat; it was easier for us to get a hold of food, and apart from this, the working conditions were much better and easier. Evening upon evening, we were brought back to the camp to sleep, and in the morning they took us back. We were very isolated; he because his family was driven out, and I was also under this impression because of the bad news that I would receive from my home in Warsaw. I received a letter illegally from Warsaw, in which I was informed that they had driven out my mother and sister, and one of my brothers. Regarding Treblinka, we had finally learned something; The Polish railroad employees and locomotive drivers who traveled these lines, told us bit-by-bit about electric wires, and murders with electric current, about lime pits into which tens of thousands of people were thrown. You can appreciate that despite all the trouble we had gone through up till now, and despite all the tribulations we had endured under the Germans, we did not want to believe these things at all. The mind simply could not grasp it. Generally speaking, we believed that the

gentiles were intentionally spreading stories of this kind about, in order to aggravate us. In the camp, Leibl and I were devoted to one another; and the calamity that we shared, drew us even closer together. And this was not only in our case, but with everyone, where a greater feeling of friendship and relationship manifested itself. I was at that time very friendly with Meshengisser; Sali was a very good friend of mine, and tried by every means to help them out, given that their material circumstances were worse than mine. From the desperation of the circumstances in which we found ourselves, came the idea in connection with procuring Aryan papers, and thereby flee the camp. This was not one of the easiest things to do, it was dependent on large monetary outlays, and not many had the means to do this. Apart from this, it was wound up in great difficulties, because the Christians recognized each and every Jew and in every place they ran into them, they would inform on them. In the meantime, I created a plan for myself, in the event of a final transport, how to extract myself and run away from it. And I began to put my plan into action. The plan called for finding a small area, in the slaughterhouse for export, in which two or three people could hide for an extended period of time. I found such a place. Up above, on top of the slaughterhouse buildings, on four pillars, stood a large water tank that was surrounded by walls, in order that the water not freeze during the days of the winter, and between the walls and the water tank was a space of about a half meter around the water tank. This entire empty space was filled with straw, and there was no need for anyone to pay any attention to it, or go there. With it, I related the plan to the machinist who looked after the factory machines, and I was good friends with him; he promised to assist us for the time we would be hidden there. In the time that we planned to be there, he had to concern himself with getting us suitable [travel] documents. I made all the preparations, gathering a large quantity of food, and various items of clothing, shirts and other things. We took care of all the arrangements, and made it possible for us to remain concealed for an extended period. But fate didn't want it this way; not everything in life goes according to plan. From the extremely bad sanitary conditions in the camp, a typhus epidemic broke out; people sickened by the tens each and every day; and for the first time, the sick would not leave the well; they were afraid that the SS would find out, and seal off the camp and this would bring death from typhus and starvation. Much later, when the epidemic began to claim large numbers of victims, special blocks were set aside for the sick, they were the same earthen bunkers, but only for the sick. Leibl and I both fell sick with typhus; Dr. Epstein certified that we were ill, and we were taken to the sick block. Dr. Epstein was the most senior in this block. The conditions in this block were no better than those in the block where the healthy people were. We sizzled with a high fever for three weeks; there was no medicine; each patient was given over to the good graces of the Lord; either he would recover from it, or he would die, all according to chance. We hadn't completely recovered yet, and the temperature hadn't dropped even halfway from the point of delirium – when an order came that on January 26, 1943 the entire camp will be liquidated. Volkovysk and its surroundings must become *Judenrein*. As usual, we were promised that we were to be taken to a different labor camp, and there we will live ordinary lives in better conditions. On the evening of January 26, the camp was surrounded by reinforced guards of SS and German Army troops, and began the work of driving us out. The order said that the healthy ones will go on foot to the train station, and the weak and elderly will travel in automobile conveyances.

I see that last night in Volkovysk as if through a dark cloud; I lay sick, not completely conscious, totally bereft of any resources; the block was dark, and half the occupants were fevered; everyone was consumed with preparation for the transport. The word transport was recalled by everyone, and the fear it engendered was etched on everyone's face. I was still; various ideas, unconnected to on another, flitted through my mind. Transport, hideout, bunker, death, life, all of this filled the corners of my mind, and I babbled words that were incoherent, I spoke words without meaning. The friends that sat with me looked upon me pitifully, and attempted to help me in every way possible. The auto transports arrived. Liova and Sali carried Leibl and I to the vehicle, and took us together with the other people to the train. The auto sat by the train for a long time, and the assessment of the train car was that it was dark and dirty. The following day, at daybreak, when my

senses began to return to me, I saw the extent of our destruction: in the crowding of 60people to a car, we lay pressed and bent up one against the other, rays of light streamed in from tow tiny barred windows. The air in the train car was suffocating and rank, despite the fact that outside it was bitter cold. Thirst tortured us, and their was no water container. In the meantime, the train began to distance itself from the place where we had lived, moving with speed into a future that was not known to us. At the same time that others passed out from the heat and thirst, to my satisfaction, I felt my strength beginning to return to me. My mind was focused on me, and I became physically stronger. Some inner strength from below strengthened me against the seriousness of the circumstances. On Thursday, the train stopped moving; with bated breath and a fluttering heart, everyone waited for a resumption of the issue at hand. From the eyes of everyone, you could read the question, where have we come to? The doors opened noisily, and with our departure from the train car, we heard a menacing guttural voice: *"Schnell, schnell, alles raus! Paketten lassen!* Upset, disturbed and intimidated, everyone jumped as quickly as possible from the train car. Those that couldn't, whose strength abandoned them during the trip, were thrown from the cars.

We went forward for the length of the path in a specified direction. From the rear we were pushed with blows and terrible beatings. The screaming and the tumult were so awful, until we filled all the spaces, frightened and confused. Several tens of meters ahead of us, stood a few SS officers, one with a short stick in his hand, who looked over each person that passed by, and then indicated with his stick in which direction to proceed – right or left. The young and strong were gathering to the right – and to the left, the older and weak. The ones on the right were arranged in rows of five, the ones on the left simply gathered together in an amorphous crowd. Leibl and I, both weak, stood on our own two feet with difficulty, as would be the usual case after a severe illness, approached 'The Broker' that is the doctor, if you will, who was doing the selection, the winnowing. As we approached him, he threw us a glance and indicated with his stick that we should go to the left, to the side of the weak and the old. It was hard to know which was better, but the heart foretold that the place indicated for us was a bad one. And inside a moment, in an instinctive manner, without taking account of the consequences of what I was doing, I said to the SS doctor that I was an electrician, I know how to do good work. He looked at me a second time, and asked me my age, and indicated to me to return to the right. He did not permit Leibl to come along with me. All of us felt that those assembled to the left were in a worse situation, but even we didn't know what they would do to us. All of us were full of worry, despite the representations by the SS that those not feeling well would be taken ahead by automobiles to the camp, and that the healthy and young would walk on foot to the camp.

The screams and weeping were awesome. People ran from one group to another; under a rain of blows, several ran from one group to the next, out of a desire to be together with a wife, or a sister, and in the ranks there were 180 people, most of them from the first train cars, because these got off first onto the platform, and I was among them, from the first train cars, because I had been taken to the train as a sick person on a bus. An irony of fate – as a sick person, I now found myself among those standing to remain alive; and young men, such as – like young lions, who worked with me, such as: Katz, Mordetsky, Botvinsky, Siroka, and hundreds, hundreds of other healthy people, were sent to the left, because the quota of those people who would be allowed to live had already been filled.

180 people, we walked under heavy guard to the camp.

The camp was located about three kilometers from the Auschwitz railroad station, and it was called Birkenau. The Poles called it Brzezinka. Tired and spent, we were brought for the length of the way, to the steel and concrete perimeter that glistened in the distance from the rays of the setting sun, to the extermination camp, notorious for its sorrow, Birkenau.

Every minute, buses passed by our field of vision, crammed and packed with the Jews of Volkovysk, ours, our friends, dear ones, beloved ones. After each auto passed us, we no longer doubted at all the fate of those people. And not only those of us who were walking had given up hope, but from every passing bus, anticipating their end, there came heartrending wails born of hopelessness and lack of any alternatives. The road was littered with letters, pictures, currency, and torn clothing. They wanted to show, at least in this way, their protest against the monumental evil and sin that was being committed against them. The buses were escorted by the SS on bicycles, and behind all the buses, as an ending to the caravan of death – a Red Cross ambulance rode – the very white vehicle with large red crosses on all sides, that to the observer was there to serve as a visual narcotic, a device to calm the innocent martyrs – that is to say, that this ambulance was standing by to render assistance in case of an accident. The truth was, that the ambulance transported canisters of the poison gas, 'Zyklon,' in place of bandages and medicine, that was used to poison ans suffocate tens of thousands of Jews.

Yes, their fat was swift and bitter. We felt that the minutes of their lives were numbered. We, who were fortunate enough to have been designated by fate to live, had no illusion that life in the camp was going to be good for us. We knew that what awaited us was a hard, driven existence – but at this instant, we didn't believe that a time would come when we would envy these [victims], who were privileged to die immediately, without such extensive torture and suffering.

We entered the camp. Long rows of wooden bunkers, partly built, long and wide, without windows, and mine among them, better suited for horses, surrounded by electrified fences of barbed wire three meters high, imbedded in steel and concrete bases. We entered one of the blocks where we received the first assignment.

Jewish detainees in striped uniforms search us in a set manner, and took everything from us. After the task of taking away our things, we were brought into the cellar. We stood in a freezing cold for five or six hours, gritting our teeth, and we waited for our turn to bathe. We certainly were not distinguished guests; many transports such as ours, arrived every day from all parts of Europe. Our turn to bathe arrived at midnight. And in this way, we also waited naked in the cold corridor, until we entered underneath a shower as cold as ice. Our clothing was taken away – and in their place, we received old, worn rags. Without jackets, frozen and without strength, they first drove us outside again. We thanked God that we had survived the ordeal, and here they brought us to complete the remainder of the additional formalities. We entered one of the bunkers, where we were registered in detail in ledgers, questioning each of us in detail, and transcribing it in German, afterwards, they tattooed a serial number on everyone's arm. From that moment on, we ceased to be human beings with names: we had become living numbers. Carrying out the formalities lasted until 3-4AM; the purpose of this was the intake of the transported individual. Before morning, we were taken to "sleep" in a half-darkened block, whose air was fetid and asphyxiating, and with our entrance, that there is some forced suffocation in this place, because there was nothing to breathe. For the entire length of the block, against each wall, three-tiered bunks were built out of bricks, one above the other. On the bare concrete surface, dressed in rags, with shoes on their feet, people were in a deep sleep, pushed up one against the other, but it was not quiet.

There was no opportunity for extensive reflection; we had not been brought there for observation and thought. The shout of the head of the block was heard: *"Vshitsi na Buksi"* (everyone to the boxes) – and immediately there opened up a hail of blows with truncheons over our heads, such that everyone sough to quickly find their way to the inside of an box, by crawling over the bodies of the sleepers, and especially not to stand up in passing, and especially to avoid being hit. In the boxes, we also didn't get a good reception. We were hit and beaten on all our extremities in order to keep the new arrivals at a distance, and disorient

him. As to sleep, there is nothing to say; before we managed to warm ourselves up properly – we heard the call to get up, and they shouted, everyone outside. We were the novices, they were called 'Greens' by us, and these required a beating in this manner. It is necessary for them to feel the meaning of Auschwitz and Birkenau on their hides. And this was the order of the day for every new transport that arrived. And there was someone to look after this, to make sure that it all took place. The designated block people and servants were appointed to do this. At every opportunity, and instances where there was no special reason, they were beaten about the head with truncheons. And unceasingly, we heard the refrain, *"You have been brought here to live!"* And it was from this that we began to perceive that one is not brought to Birkenau in order to live. And the longer we thought about it, out thoughts were confirmed more and more. More that it could astonish and anger us – but later on we grasped the matter – that among those who made are lives miserable, were also Jews. We did not understand why, and to what purpose, that in addition to the travails of one's own brother, that a Jew should be prepared to strike a fellow Jew. However, the matter became clear to us, that these were the scum of the Jewish populace, that in their souls and polluted hearts, a beast lurked deep in their core, and this was the hour in which it could show its horns. Egotistic and sadistic tendencies came to the surface. They wanted to purchase their own lives at the expense of the lives of hundreds of other people. In order to curry favor with the SS, they murdered and tortured their own brethren. It was like a Sabbath in the ambience of the Good Lord, on the day we finished the formalities, and passed through the ranks of transit, in order to get settled in Auschwitz. We had three days of quarantine of sorts. This was not to enable us to regain some energy, but rather to sap us of our strength even more, before we went to work. During those three days our entire lives passed before us. From morning until late at night we stood in the frost and snow, believing all sorts of things. From all directions they beat us, and on top of this, hunger pained us to the point of death. A piece of bread of 150-200 grams in the morning, and a liter of watery soup at noon, and in the evening, only a quarter of a liter of cold tea. This was the daily ration. Our strength was sapped, and one could only stand on one's own legs with difficulty. It was no wonder that everyone waited for the moment when we could all go out to work. We thought that once we started to work, they would treat us differently. We began to work. On Monday morning we were attached to different work groups, and we went out to work. In an arrangement of five to a row, we went off to work each day to the strains of a large orchestra. However, we had been mistaken in our belief that from now on things would get better. We worked at various forms of hard labor; building bunkers, digging for buildings, on roads, and other varieties of work, connected to the construction of the camp.

Half naked, we stood from morning until night in freezing snowy days with the shovel and spade in hand under these conditions of negligence; if they would have at least given us some rest at work. The *kapos* and the trustee prisoners looked after that (with the permission of the SS). They beat us terribly and cruelly. And whoever couldn't stand it, or perform his work, was taken care of on the spot, such an individual was brought back to the camp dead. Day in and day out, the work group brought back dead bodies to the camp. Everything was done according to a precise deliberate protocol; at the entrance to the camp, it was forbidden for anyone to be missing, whether alive or dead, just so long as the count was full. A *kapo* that brought in the largest number of dead was designated as an excellent *kapo,* and his reward was a bonus of extra food. The *kapos* were Aryans, mostly Germans, who were in the camp on criminal charges. These people held life and death in their hands over us. It is no surprise, that as a result of working conditions like these, and it was no better in the camp, that our people began to break down. First it was from a morale point of view, and later from a physical point of view.

The general situation: the news that we received on a daily basis from new arrivals, from all ends of Europe, on the unending victories of the Germans, indicated that our circumstances were beyond hopeless. Many thought that there was no point to resist, because regardless of what we did, we could not hope for salvation.

From the second side, a life without purpose in the camp, the beatings, hunger and relentless pursuit, the low morale, lack of sanitation, and many other reasons, brought about the condition where people wanted to die. And whoever want to, found an easy way. Many ways led to a release of this kind. At that same time, in Birkenau, there was a block called "Seven." Everyone who wanted to find a redemption from his suffering simply had to apply to that block. This block was called the block of the sick, and there it was possible to "recuperate" quickly. From time to time, after the block filled up with people, in the space of a few days, vehicles would come at night to empty out the block, and the people were taken to the crematorium. Even though people were registered there every day, there were tens of volunteers. They could not stand living anymore. They no longer wanted to resist, or they simply had no more strength to withstand the torture. And this was not the only way to get out of the misery. At night, people would run into the wire – as we called it, that is ti say, those who could no longer carry the burden of living, would run into the fence at night, and by coming in contact with the electric current – would be killed, or he was shot by the SS guards, in accordance with their duty. Similar to the seventh block for the men, the women had block "Twenty Five." The lives of the women did not differ from the lives of the men. The same condition, but the relationship to them was much worse, because of their generally weaker physical stature, they were more often unable to fulfil the physical demands of the labor in the same way as the men. If, after being in the camp for a while, a man could obtain something additional, that was called "Organization" – but most of the women were unable to achieve this, and were given only the ration of food allotted to them. Apart from this, the sanitary conditions of the women's bunkers were much worse than that of the men. And it is necessary to add to this, that the women were broken more often than the men. It was possible to see this from the rate of suicide among the women, which surpassed that of the men. The leprosy (?) and dysentery reached epidemic proportions, and caused the deaths of tens of thousands of women. Block 25 was always full and overcrowded, and was called the Block of Death. Every woman who went into the block did not come out alive. I once was given an assignment to work near that block, and I saw how tens of women were lying with arms and legs stretched out, near the block near death, and from time to time, the overseer of the block would come close to them, and move the heads of the half-dead with her foot, to ascertain which of them was already dead, so she could make out a death certificate. A sort of belt was thrown around the head of the dead, and in this manner, they would be dragged across stones to the cave of the dead. This work was carried out by women, the notorious daughters of Slovakia.

The selections were a forgettable event in the camps, with men as with women. There was not a Jewish holiday when the Germans didn't arrange for a selection to take place on the same day. Fear of the selection would destroy the equanimity of anyone who had been in the camp for the entire time. The motive of this process was known to everyone who was in Birkenau. The meaning of a selection was clear, and they would gather up the men, and a doctor would come, and looked at each individual with an eye to determining who would live and who would die. If a man was weak and incapable of doing work, his sentence was to death. In every selection of this kind, fifty percent of the Jews were registered to go to the crematorium. And two or three days did not pass before they were exterminated. The worst of it was, that everyone who was registered in this way, knew that he would be incinerated or gassed in two or three days.

Weeks went by, and circumstances did not change. We, that is to say, the people from Volkovysk, dwindled and went. Cedars, like Motkeh Koval, Shmuel Bayer, Ginsberg, Amstibovsky, Offenberg, Shereshevsky, Fish'keh the Butcher, Noah Fuchs, and tens of others, flickered from day to day like candles, and died in various ways.

On one of the days of hard work, in moving parts for the bunkers, and amidst exhaustion and oppression – we received the gladdening news that part of the men from our transport, and from Grodno and Bialystock,

will be sent to Buna to do work. My number was also among the fortunate ones. We did not know the type of work we would be doing, or what the conditions were like there, but as one, we were satisfied that we were leaving this Hell, and we could not imagine that there could be anything worse. Immediately on that day, we traveled to Auschwitz, where we underwent a physical examination. We were there for a few days, in which we rested a bit, and we then traveled to the Buna camp. Buna was a city in which they were building plants to produce synthetic rubber. 80 men traveled to Buna. We received without any sign of welcome. The Polish Commissar of the block gave us a speech, and promised us that we would not leave there alive, and finished by saying that Poland would erect a monument to Hitler for this alone, that he had helped to exterminate the Jews of Poland, a thing that the Polish people had carried in their souls for lo, these many years. This commissar was a famous Polish sports figure, a boxer. After assurances and encouragement of this sort, we went to work on the second day. There was not much to be disappointed in his words. The work was indeed very hard, much harder than in Auschwitz. After a few days, we realized that we wouldn't be here either for any length of time. In one way it was better for us here, in that we received food that was a little better. And then an incident took place where all the members of a transport caught typhus, and the entire camp was suspected of having this disease. And for this reason, we remained solitary in the block for a period of a week – we were idle – and this wasn't all bad. We rested in part, but after a week, an order came to have us returned to Birkenau as being suspect of carrying typhus. Just our bad luck. We knew what awaited us in Birkenau as sick people. If they were sending healthy people to the crematoria, what chance do sick people have? It is hard to describe our state of mind and the pain that we felt as we got on the train to go on our trip. Everyone was bitter-hearted, everyone counted off the last minutes of his life. Among ourselves and to each other, we had conveyed our last wills. We ate the portions of bread that we had quickly, to at least die full. However, not everything went according to plan with the Germans, and as it happened, when we arrived at Birkenau, instead of taking us to the crematorium, they took us to the camp and we remained alive.

In a short time, during which we were absent, there had been changes. In the same block where we lived, that originally held 800 people, there remained only 300 people. The rest were exterminated. Of the 180 men from Volkovysk, we saw almost none of them. We were detained in camp for three weeks, as suspect carriers of typhus, in a separate block. After three weeks passed, we resumed going to work. The hard labor began again, in various forms. I suffered through various forms of hard manual labor for four months. I was able to familiarize myself with the various aspects of the camp, and succeeded in getting myself attached to the electrical division. This was a great accomplishment, and was an issue that could decide between life and death. The facts proved that those who would survive were those, first of all, with skills in the various trades, because skilled work is always easier to do than hard manual labor. Even though they were small in number, several people from Volkovysk also were able at that time to join up to do other work of a lighter kind. Some as carpenters, others as cleaners – those that worked on cleaning out packages from all the train cars that arrived. That was called "Canada Command." A number of doctors got work in the hospitals: Marek Kaplan and Epstein; one joined the orchestra, and a few others to other places, and that was all. For others, luck didn't work out, despite their skills and abilities. A famous musician from Warsaw, named Wiener, was with us, who had already traveled the world, had led an orchestra and had appeared in a number of European lands. The war brought him to Volkovysk, and from there he came with everyone else to Auschwitz, and did the hardest labor. Once, he was hit so hard, that he volunteered himself for Block Seven. He told me that he didn't want to suffer any longer, and he said it was madness to suffer, if there are no prospects to be set free one day. There were others who were unbending, and fought stubbornly to survive. Among these was Dr. Epstein, for example. In the first times, he slept in my area. He stood at the edge of annihilation. He was a bona fide 'Muslim;' a person who seemed to be made from only skin and bones was called a 'Muslim,' a living skeleton. He bore it all stubbornly, and maintained his position until they employed him initially as an assistant to the physician, and after a while, when he had a chance to demonstrate his skills, they

appointed him as the doctor. From that time on, his condition improved.

My work in the electrical division afforded me the best opportunity to become more informed about life in the camp and how it was managed. As an electrician for the arrangement and repair of electric lights in the camp, and for the SS, I had freedom of movement throughout all the camps. In Birkenau, there was not one specific camp. There was a whole row of different camps, built one next to the other. These buildings took up an enormous amount of area, and gave the impression of an entire city. Birkenau consisted of ten camps or more, separated from one another by electrified fences. Each camp had its own name; first according to the alphabet; A, B, C, D, and secondly by the type of people concentrated there. There was a quarantine camp for new arrivals. There were particularly poor conditions in that camp, because there they provided the means to sense the purpose of the extermination camp. After that, there was a Czech family camp, where the Germans brought about twenty thousand Jews from Theresienstadt, keeping them all together, giving their women and children especially better conditions, forcing them to write letters to Czechoslovakia that their circumstances were good, which made it easier for the Germans to round up the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Afterwards, when they no longer needed them, they poisoned them with gas and incinerated them in gas ovens. After it came the camp for the women of Hungary and Lodz. Then a work camp for men, then a 'Gypsy' camp, in which there were Jews from Lodz, Radom, Skarzhiski and other towns, brought together from other camps. There was a camp for the sick, and a camp for packages, where the Germans, with the help of prisoners, counted and packaged the contents of the goods brought by the Jews into the camp. And the Jews brought a lot, and that is no wonder: up to the last minute, the Germans misled them and fooled them by cunning means, causing Jews to drag along full chests and valises full of the most precious valuables, beginning with clothes and ending with a variety of household utensils. They believed that they were bringing this to work, because this is what the murderers represented. What's more, at the hour that the transport from Holland arrived at the Auschwitz train station, the Jews asked through the windows of the train cars – have we arrived yet at "The Auschwitz Factory?" Because that is what they told them in Holland, that they were going to work at a big factory. All of these bundles were counted, and every day, trains filled with Jewish booty – trains full of shoes, white goods, clothing, bedding, and other things, it really was a gigantic factory, of extermination, pillaging and murder.

These camps stood next to one another, each camp consisting of thirty and some blocks, Each block held between four and five hundred people; in the event of a large influx of people, even up to eight and nine hundred people. To the right of these camps were two large camps for women, and to the left of the camp, they were building a gigantic camp to surround all the previously mentioned camps – "Maxsik[3]" , as it was

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[3] In the last phase of the war, when the armament industry required more and more slave workers, the deportees kept alive because they still were able to work, were transferred into a part of the camp which was called "Mexico". This section of Auschwitz-Birkenau was not completely finished. The inmates waited for a further transport to one of the labour camps. Since they should not remain in Auschwitz, they did not receive a prisoner's number typical for Auschwitz.

In this new camp section, the indescribable conditions which had such horrible consequences in the Birkenau women's camp and the gypsy camp, went on just the same. The lack of even the most primitive hygienic installations, the absence of water caused a high rate of mortality.

In the camp jargon, the new section was called "Mexico". The inmates neither had prisoners clothes nor blankets. They received blankets of different colors and styles from the stock-camp section "Canada", where all goods of the deportees were collected. Covered with all these blankets, the prisoners in that camp section appeared like Mexicans.

named by us. In this camp the Germans concentrated the women from Hungary during the great transports from Hungary.

Opposite all of these camps, by row, stood five large crematoria. Five wide and tall smokestacks spanned and watched over the camp, from above a grove of trees that concealed the secret of the attainment of twentieth century civilization. Five smokestacks that never vanished from the horizon of our life in the camp for two years. Day and night they belched forth fire and smoke, in to the high blue heavens. Here, tens of thousands of Jewish sacrifices were bound to the altar. Thick black clouds of smoke hid the golden beautiful sun during the day, and red shooting flames lit up the dark nights. *"Bad Anstalt"* was written beside the entrance to one of the crematoria. *"Soap Can Be Obtained Here,"* was written beside the entrance to a gas chamber. *"Pack Your Belongings Neatly, so nothing will get lost,"* they warned, and so up to the last breath, until they felt the burning gas beginning to press on the lungs, until the minute that they lost consciousness, they didn't stop to deceive them and lead them astray. And there were those who were so sent, who took the opportunity presented to them, and they rose up – there were many occurrences like this. In one incident, there was a woman from France, who when already in the gas chamber, forcibly took the pistol from the head of the troops of the camp, and shot him with his own pistol. Apart from him, several other SS troops were wounded. In instances of uprisings, the SS went took everyone into the bunkers, pushing with their rifle butts. When the bunker was full of people, they sealed it hermetically, and the SS then piped in gas through a special opening into the bunker, and after a few minutes, everyone was dead. And after this, the bodies were burned in the crematoria. Complete mountains of ash and human bones were created; in the construction of roads, they used the ash from people as a covering under the bridge. The various roads and alleys in the camp were "decorated" with human remains, Jewish remains. The supply, or more aptly, the supply of the amount of human ash, exceeded the demand for building requirements in the camp; then the ash was transported in mechanized vehicles to the Wesel River and dumped there; It was in this fashion that they tried to cover up the traces of the enormous killing [they had done]. When the transports arrived from Hungary, the crematoria could not meet the demand, and accordingly, they dug huge pits next to each crematorium and burned thousands of people in them at a time.

Despite the severe policing of the camp, an underground carried out its work. There were several organized escapes from the camp, as well as other instances of uprising.

The uprising of the *Sonderkommando* crematorium took place in the summer of 1944. People were being burned daily then. Part of them managed to escape. In 1945, a second uprising took place, and two crematoria were blown up.

During my entire time in Auschwitz, I carried within me a plan to escape. Many people conceived escape plans, but to carry out such a plan was not one of the easiest things to do. It was difficult to extricate oneself from the talons of death. In the meantime, I fell sick with a lung inflammation, and I lay with a high fever for several weeks, and once again luck was in my favor, and I got well. I then continued to weave my dream of escape.

In the month of June 1944, I brought my plan to fruition with tow of my other friends. We had escaped from the camp for several hours already, when the SS, assisted by Polish prisoners succeeded in catching us. They brought us back. To relate how they treated us is entirely superfluous. It is enough to mention that by the time

we got back to the camp, even our friends didn't recognize us. We thought we were sentenced to be hung, but to our good fortune, we paid for what we did with receiving a beating only, whose consequences we continued to feel for several weeks, and we were sentenced to the S.K., that is to say, the punishment division, such that for the remaining time we were in the camp, we had to work at especially hard labor. From that time on began a chapter of especially hard times, working hard ground, digging tunnels through swamps. They stood with truncheons over us to speed the work along. Inside the camp, we were kept separate from all the other prisoners that we knew. Our block was shut off and left alone. We could only live from the rations that were given to us. I suffered like this for close to five months, I was certain I would not be able to stand it in the coming winter. Fortunately, the time of liquidation of Auschwitz and Birkenau arrived, and even the SS were sent off in transports; after Oranienberg, Sachsenhausen, we were brought to Dachau, a branch in the Dachau vicinity. Our transport, consisting of about a thousand people, began to build a camp there for itself, and this was November 1944. From that point on a new chapter of different troubles began in our lives.

From the Volkovysk transport, Joseph Kotliarsky and 'Nioma Levin from Svislucz came with me to Dachau. We didn't know at all whether other people from Volkovysk survived, who were in Birkenau up to the last minute, and were then sent away in other transports. Only after the liberation – when we came to Israel, did we come to known that Kossowsky, Epstein, Marek Kaplan, Tchopper, and Hochberg from Warsaw who came to Auschwitz on the Volkovysk transport, were located in various parts of Europe. Apart from this,. Joseph the Dyer, Makosov, Lotte Wolfowitz from Dereczin, and one Munyaker Gershon survived.

Only a few young women from Volkovysk survived: Kaplan's sister, Shayn'eh Lifschitz, Sulka Lifschitz from Slonim, Chas'shkeh Boyarska, Gendler from Slonim, Alta Shidlevich from Svislucz. They are about the entire number who survived from the Volkovysk transport.

My memoir on the life of the Jews in the ghetto and the camp has a very narrow perspective. They are merely isolated lines in the shattering portrait of the Holocaust. It is but one drop out of the oceans of Jewish blood that were spilled during the course of the six years of the war. They are but excerpts from the awesome tragedy of the nation of Israel.[4]

In order to create an accurate picture, in order to know and assess the extent of the sorrow and annihilation, it is perforce necessary to multiply the dialogue many times.

Auschwitz-Birkenau – There was the instrument where almost the entire Jewish population of Europe was

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[4] As it is known, on the occupied territory during the World War II, Jews and Gypsies were the only two nationalities that were condemned by the Nazis to utter extermination. Till recent times 400,000 Jews have been supposed to have perished. The latest investigations give reasons to draw the conclusion that the number of perished Belarusian Jews constituted more than 800,000 people *(E. Ioffe. "But still how many Jews perished on the territory of Belarus in 1941-1945". The Belarusian Historical Magazine. 1997. N 4, p. 49-52)*.

A total of 384,784 people were moved out to Germany for forced labor. Of them 260,000 did not return. How many of them perished? According to some data, more than 100,000 perished "*osterarbeiter*" were from Belarus. Proceeding from all the said, one may conclude that in 1941-45, Nazis and their accomplices exterminated no less than 2.3 million Belarusian civilians.

On the occupied, and bordering on the front-line territory, around 300,000 people died from starvation, air bombings, artillery bombardments, due to living conditions and exhausting work.

intermingled and exterminated. The story of Auschwitz is the story of the eradication of European Jewry.

My memoir is only a story of the life and extermination of a small group of Jews from one city; and how many cities and towns were there like this in Poland alone...?

The chronicle of this great Jewish tragedy are a matter for research and education, because it is on this base that we will educate future generations, how to hate and fight all manner of evil and sin, that they should be stout-hearted, and guard the rights of the Jewish people with honor and pride, that other forms of Auschwitz and Treblinka will never arise again.

The embers of the coals continue to smoke, the stench of the burning bodies is still about us. The cries of suffering mothers and children who had no recourse rings in our ears, and even after the liberation, Jewish martyrs continue to fall.

Alta Shidlevich, a young woman from Svislucz, when she came to Auschwitz with the Volkovysk transport, suffered for two years in Auschwitz, and afterwards, in tens of other camps in Germany, and she was lucky enough to come out free, traveled back to Poland after the liberation to discover, at least, if there were any traces of her family – was killed in Poland only because she was Jewish. And this was not an isolated incident, day by day there is testimony given on acts of murder perpetrated against Jews in various cities and towns of Poland.

And here are the remnant of the refugees, Jews, broken and exhausted, homeless, knocking at the gates of the Land of Israel in order to start here anew, wanting to build a healthy life on strong foundations. They want to be men among men, because their contribution to the development of human culture is not small by any means; they demand their right to live just like other nations – and the gates of their homeland are closed to them seven times over! Warships and His Majesty's crusaders keep watch lest any Jew who had the nerve to survive Hitler, try to enter the Jewish homeland, looking finally for a place of rest. Various committees have been created to "investigate" those refugees that require a home – if they really are serious about starting to live an ordinary life, if the tragedy was really that big. Six million Jewish martyrs are not enough for them! It is therefore incumbent upon us to stand at the watch, it is up to us to protect our rights. Absolutely nothing will stand in our way. The image of the contorted faces our beloved and cherished ones who were exterminated, perforce will always hover before our eyes. This issue will give us strength and resolve to realize our desires and ideals.

Page 35: The Great Synagogue of Volkovysk

Volkovysk In Its Death Throes

By Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

On July 31, 1942 I reached Volkovysk by wandering, in search for "refuge." On February 28, 1945, I left Volkovysk forever, as someone who had been "rescued." The two and a half years are divided into three periods, I was in Volkovysk itself for twelve months; I lived through the entire destruction in the bunkers, and in the end, I saw Volkovysk when it was liberated, when the Germans had been cleared out , but also – rid of all its Jews...

The following lines comprising a bit of memory, will serve as a modest contribution to the handing down of the folio and to establish to facts about the awesome demise and eradication of a total Jewish community, men, women and children.

* * *

As refugees from the Slonim ghetto, which at that very hour had drunk deeply from the cup of Hemlock, almost to its bottom, a group of eight of my relatives reached the outskirts of Volkovysk one Friday afternoon, by way of the Izavelin Road. One by one, or two at a time, we had left White Russia, where Slonim was located, by direct or circuitous means, crossing the border in the night, into the territory of the Third Reich where Volkovysk was located. "We had heard there was sustenance in Egypt[5]" – the spreading rumor said, over the border – or according to the practical designation, "East Prussia, Bialystock District," that Jews were still living somehow; but in any case their lives were not hanging in the balance.

On entering the city, I ran into a Jewish man who recognized that I was not local, and who greeted me with a *Sholom Aleichem:* "Undoubtedly you are from Slonim, so be careful that you don't run into a Polish policeman, who is worse than a German, come, I will take you through side streets." Escorts were immediately found for all of us, and by various ways, we reached our appointed location without disruption.

Volkovysk was already in ruins after the fires that had burned for four days following the German bombing in the first week of the German-Russian War. There were only skeletons of building and gigantic bomb craters in the center of the city. Life went on in the outskirts of the city, The way to get from one part of the city to the other was through alleys overgrown with grass. This was a form of protection against a malevolent eye... and it was along such an alley that I hurried along, immediately after my arrival at the advice of the Jews. There, a committee had already been established to deal with the refugees from the Jewish communities of Slonim and Dereczin, that had been flattened to the ground.

The large yard on the *Neuer Gasse*, and the buildings surrounding it, was bursting with people. The daily life of the Jews of Volkovysk centered at that place. In the small white house to the left (the Jews joked: "The White House") ... was the seat of the *Judenrat*. In the large building to the right were all the services. Further up the yard – the secretariat and the detention house of the '*Ordnung-Dienst*'(the Jewish Police). Nearby, in a large stable, refugees waited to be settled. In the middle of the yard stood a kiosk, where the owner of the café, Spiegelglass, sold lemonade sweetened with saccharin, peculiar tasting juice, hard cookies that were baked from who-knows-what, and rolls with black seeds. This kiosk was the only public gathering place for

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[5] A biblical allusion to the observation of Jacob, during the onset of the seven years of famine, leading to a plan to have his sons travel to Egypt to purchase grain. See Genesis 42:1-3

Jews, the only open business... the only salvation were the seeds, which crackled in everyone's mouth, from the head of the *Judenrat* down to the smallest lad, who stood guard at the side of the gate, who was there to announce that a German 'Limousine' was there to assist in going down to the yard of the *Judenrat*...

I remained in Volkovysk for 28 days. Each day, I spent long hours at the *Judenrat*. This was the period when the lives of the Jews were subjected to a 'structure.' There was no ghetto in the vicinity. Only that Jews and Christians were not permitted to live under one roof. The Jewish houses were marked with a large, round yellow marker, that was hung over the entrance into a Jewish home. Jews worked in accordance with the allocation of the labor office of the *Judenrat*. Jews made their living from retail commerce (in fear and terror of the policeman – a Pole! – that he should not see that something was being carried under the handkerchief), and especially from barter: there were those that traded coins for their daily food, gold jewelry, and others who sold even a dress, a pair of socks, shirts. It was in this manner that the entire worth of the Jews streamed slowly but surely into strange hands. The last year – apart from victims of hunger, different forms of starvation – did not bring any upheavals; the yellow badges were worn, we went in the middle of the road, we worked at forced labor, we complied with the mad and uncivilized demands of the regime (the most peculiar demands at the *Judenrat*), and took comfort in the hope of redemption and liberation. Every 4-6 weeks, the lives of the Jews were imbued with fear by visits from the Gestapo. The news of such a visit spread with lightning speed through the Jewish dwellings that were crowded together. No person had the nerve to show his face in the street at those times. For a few days, life was tense, until these Angels of Destruction left the place, and the Jews would recite a blessing of salvation, that it was possible to get rid of them by buying them off with boots, suits, shades, watches, and like things.

As previously stated – the center of life was the *Judenrat*; it was that organization that presided over the external and internal lives of the Jews. Because of the extreme housing shortage, even this problem was solved also by the *Judenrat*, which allocated the dwellings under its control in proportion to the number of people. It looked after the work, distributed food, arranged for free medical care, inspected the hygienic And sanitary conditions, and in its time, looked after the refugees from White Russia (obtained documents for them, and largely spread them around to outlying cities and towns, especially to Bialystock).

The Head of the *Judenrat* was Dr. Isaac Weinberg, and his closest assistant in this work was – Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky. These two doctors – two opposites – complemented one another in a harmonious way. Weinberg – looking assimilated, with the appearance of a gentile, informal and aristocratic; Sedletsky – a man of the people, a lover of the masses, accessible; the common attribute they shared – integrity, dedication to the public, exacting and focused work, and by neglecting their own personal concerns – they were revered and respected by the entire Jewish populace.

If a rumor got started that someone in the *Judenrat* was being more concerned with himself rather than the general community – even the nerviest person, or a brazen individual, never even thought to question their integrity, or their clean hands, and the absence of any personal interest in these two doctors.

The head of the Secretariat was Noah Fuchs, who in his unique tight-fisted way, centralized all the work of the *Judenrat* in his own hands. The head of the labor office – Sham'keh Daniel; the Head of Supplies – Mulya Cantor; Liaison with the city; Berel Amstibovsky; Treasurer – Moshe Krapivnik. During the sojourn of the people from the Gestapo, Eliyahu Motya Ginsberg and Clara Niemchik would respond to all the demands they made of the *Judenrat*. Pidta dealt with the refugees. Apart from this, Sioma Gallin and Sonya Botvinsky were very active.

A great fright seized the Jews of Volkovysk when the refugees from Slonim and Dereczin began to bring news of the enemy and the terrifying massacres on the other side of the Zelvianka (which was the district

boundary). On the one hand, they wanted to convince themselves that things like this wouldn't happen in the *Third Reich*
("desire is the father of the idea"). And yet, it was difficult to accept the idea that Hitler would make a distinction among on group of Jews to another. We were in the habit of discussing this matter at great length, especially with Dr. Weinberg and Noah Fuchs. I drew a parallel between this and the lines that stood during the time of the Bolsheviks, waiting for sugar: if there is enough sugar, it will be divided among everyone, if the German will only have the time, he will kill all the Jews. However, no person in that area then thought that the Germans would plunder the area where we were for almost two more years, and even less than that, that Volkovysk waits in the line for sugar...

Exactly the opposite (and again:"desire is the father of the idea"), it was easier to believe that Divine Salvation was just An eye blink away, that liberation would come by next winter. Dr. Weinberg was already concerned about that, how will the Bolsheviks think of him, and wh was going to be the head of the Jewish Community.

However fate freed the rest of the members of the *Judenrat* from this concern.

* * *

In summarizing my impression of Volkovysk on the basis of having spent a month there, I do not have the capacity, as a refugee from the massacres on the second side of the Zelvianka, to speak about Volkovysk and its environs in an objective way, without comparison to what had happened 40-50 kilometers further east. In the ranks of the refugees, we were under the impression that there was an enormous difference. True there were depredations, pursuit and decrees; immediately after the German occupation, they "terminated" several tens of people. Among them, Dr. Feinberg, the lawyer Yoskowitz and his wife, Zohn-Mazya, and others. However, just because Volkovysk was annexed into the territory of East Prussia, life took on the appearance of stability. There were instances where Jewish prisoners were released from jail, and apart from punishment by death, there were also monetary fines, whippings, a half year or a full year in jail; it was possible to move around the area, or even to travel by train to Bialystock, even if only by permission of the head of the city, which he would grant for bribes, riding in a single car which was marked, "For Poles Only." All of these privileges were available to those willing to pay a bribe, both on behalf of the Germans and the Polish police. The latter would circulate in the Jewish neighborhoods at every opportunity, on purpose, sticking out their hands. The Jews met the demands for bribery that were most mingled with helping the *Judenrat* meet the tax on the Jews, with the idea that the Jews needed to withstand this by whatever means, until the storm passes them over...

* * *

At the beginning of September 1942, thanks to the Judenrat, I was well-supplied with passes and appropriate documents, and I left Volkovysk and traveled to the nearby town of Mosty', 32 kilometers from Volkovysk. Then, I did not imagine that by leaving Volkovysk at that time, I had managed to avoid a certain death. Because two weeks didn't pass before not only Volkovysk, but the Jews of Bialystock were shaken, by the news of the notorious simultaneous arrest of all the Jewish doctors, dentists, and a number of pharmacists in Volkovysk. I was no longer in Volkovysk at that time, despite this, I would like to dedicate a few words to this depressing chapter of history, at least because the husband of my sister, Dr. Yitzhak Honigstein was among them, and my sister was among them during their imprisonment, and after she was set free, she, together with my second sister, were among those that expended the greatest effort on behalf of the

imprisoned, so much so, that many details became known to me regarding these Ten Royal Martyrs[6] I was well-supplied, about whom I wish to write here.

The news of the multiple arrests made by the Gestapo and the police, spread quickly from mouth to mouth among the Jews at nightfall one evening. It immediately became clear exactly whom they were arresting: all the Jewish doctors and dentists (men and women) and they were the following: the Doctors, Weinberg, Sedletsky, Cantor, Velvelsky, Kaufman, Honigstein and his wife, and the doctor, Mrs. Galand (who came with her elderly mother as a guest from faraway Georgia [sic: Gruzinia]), the dentists: Tropp, Mant, Pshenitska, Einhorn, and Peisik. Afterwards, several radio technicians were added as well. The impact of these arrests was enormous. Hand in hand with them, many rumors and explanations circulated, which acquired wings of their own through the entire Jewish Populace, there were those who explained the occurrence by saying the Germans needed medical resources at the front... others thought they knew enough to tell about a factory for illegal medicines (a thing that simply was without foundation, just like the first explanation). However the real reason came from an unknown quarter. The prisoners were confined to two bunkers (out of the bunkers that later became so well-known as the 'Ruzhany Bunkers,'), men and women separated. Despite this, the men and women were able to come in contact to exchange speech, from time to time, when they stood at the doors of the bunkers. They slept on wretched bunks, and food was permitted to be sent to them once in a few days.

The interrogation and questioning of the prisoners began on the third day. A nearby building was well appointed, and decorated as a command post, in which the Gestapo official conducted the interrogation. They went to the interrogation one at a time, each one of them several times. It was only then that it became known what this was all about.

In different ways, the Gestapo wanted to find out which one of the Jewish medical professionals had provided help to a partisan. The interrogation was conducted in a severe and crass manner. The doctors Cantor and Kaufman suffered especially badly; the former because of his stalwart behavior and tough responses, the second, because... of his athletic appearance (it was generally well-known that the Germans treated such Jews especially severely). In particular, they beat Dr. Cantor several times.

After the initial interrogations, the prisoners were informed that they would be given a week to think the matter over, and if one of them does not confess, they will all be accused of being guilty.

In the meantime, they released the radio technicians and all the women. It was only at that point that the Jews became aware of the situation, and they began to look in all directions for ways to obtain the release of the detainees. Special emissaries traveled to Bialystock on two occasions (Sonya Botvinsky and my sister) in order to enlist the help of the head of the *Judenrat* there, Engineer Ephraim Barash. After all this effort, it was communicated that the fate of the prisoners was under the control of the local Gestapo in Volkovysk. They succeeded in getting in contact with a high Gestapo official (much effort went into achieving this by Clara Niemchik), who promised to get them released. In time, the period of the 'ultimatum' came to an end, and the prisoners denied the charge, one after the other. The prisoners remained in confinement for a week after the final interrogation.

On October 11, the Gestapo officer had promised that all of them would be released on October 13 the latest. On the following day, the wives had a visit with their husbands and conveyed the news of their imminent

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[6] An historical allusion to the Ten Martyrs of the Princes and Scholars of Israel killed by the Romans, whose martyrdom is recollected during the *Musaf* Yom Kippur service.

release.

On the 13th of the month, a transport vehicle arrived at the bunkers with an armed Gestapo detail; they brought out the ten prisoners and ordered them to take off their jackets and leave them in the office. Jewish workers from the barracks were witnesses to the final journey of the ten. In addition to this, among the workers was the daughter of Dr. Sedletsky, Ida, who fell into embrace with her father, and father and daughter were separated forever in a heart-rending manner. They were taken without delay outside of the city to a low hill, and all of them were shot. At ten o'clock, when the wives of the prisoners arrived at the appointed hour to await the "release" of their husbands – not one of them was still alive...
How much truth there was there to the facts on which the accusations were based? What was established in the confessions that the following took place: a number of days prior to the arrest, a Jewish doctor provided medical attention to a partisan in the Zamkova Forest. It was also known that one doctor refused to go into the forest for this purpose. One thing is clear, that Dr. Weinberg did this. Back while I was still in Volkovysk, when I was at his hoe (the last house on the *Vilna Gasse* beside the Piesk Road), he pointed out the adjacent Zamkova Forest and said, that in the end, his goal was to be there, in the forest. During the interrogation, he was, as it happens, treated rather well by the Germans, who did not suspect him of this 'transgression,' because of his important position. This led to him being the most optimistic one during the three weeks of their detention, full of hope for their eventual release, and in that conviction, he attempted to transmit that feeling to his comrades. But others saw the situation differently. Dr. Cantor (from Lodz) was especially pessimistic, as were Dr. Honigstein (from Volotzlavik), and Engineer Hirsch Putchkrenik from Vilna, a refugee from the Slonim ghetto, whom the Germans captured and killed along with the entire group. Dr. Cantor, who was broken and exhausted from the physical torture during the interrogation, decided to take the blame on himself during the time of the 'ultimatum,' but only after a considerable effort, especially Dr. Weinberg, they dissuaded him from doing this. Even Dr. Sedletsky was extremely worn down; in the face of this, it was Dr. Tropp the dentist, who stood out because of his stoic attitude, who would give encouragement to his comrades to hope for life in the last days. It is hard to know the reason why and for what reason Dr. Weinberg did not admit his guilt: possibly because of his apparent optimism, or perhaps he was persuaded that regardless of what he did, the situation would not change, but most importantly, that he did not want to place the *Judenrat* in danger, and thereby endanger the entire Jewish populace.

The Jewish population was as if suffering from a fever for these three weeks. Day by day, the Jews came to the offices of the *Judenrat* and gave money, gold and jewelry to obtain the release of the captives. Many of the Jews from the market sought ways and means to save the prisoners. It must be pointed out even here, that the *Judenrat*, whose two most respected members stood accused – did not involve itself in a direct manner in this issue...

The Jews of Volkovysk took a massive blow. The loss of the two doctors, Weinberg and Sedletsky was especially painful. The Jews felt themselves abandoned and forsaken, as if an iron bridge had crumbled away beneath them, and they refused to be comforted...

* * *

At the dawn of November 2, 1942, a group of Jews (350 people) were taken out of their homes in ancient Mosty', a half town and half village, and gathered together near the bridge over the Neman [River], and arranged them in rows of five. The elderly and the children were loaded onto wagons that had been previously commandeered from the gentiles, and under a heavy SS guard with pointed machine guns, drove them over the bridge to the Volkovysk side. No person knew where the way was taking them. However, in an instinctive way, the Jews of Mosty' felt that while up till now they had lived in an untroubled way, that this was their last journey. And when this "host" moved from that place, amidst the indifferent stares of the

all the local peasants, who were dressed in their finery (what they wore for their holiday), and a Jewish woman called out: "Hey, goodbye to my birthplace" – all the hearts of the Jews that were pounding with fright senses, that not one of them would ever return...

After several hours, we reached Piesk. It was here that we saw that this type of "action" was not confined to Mosty' only. The ghetto was surrounded by Germans and local police, shut and locked, in a condition of overcrowding: they were waiting for a group, for us. We were put into the crowded ghetto and we received notice, that tomorrow morning at 6:00AM, we would travel onwards. That night was a night of vigil. For those who showed some foresight in packing whatever they could for the journey, in the event that they would have to suffer a while; the elderly sat stonily, and smiled, taking stock of their lives in considering their fate; others by contrast – especially the young, paced back and forth like caged animals, and the entire accursed ghetto is surrounded with a heavy guard; and there were those that spoiled their money "at least let the remains for the murderers be decreased": they poured oil on their food; they tore their jackets and clothes and threw them into the toilets.

At 6 o'clock the next morning, they began to organize us – with German thoroughness – men separate and women separate. First in pairs, and then in rows of five, taking the old out from among us (that is to say: those who needed to be conveyed by transport), putting them in lines, counting and enumerating and then repeated the process for long hours without end. Afterwards a long line of hundreds of gentile wagons were drawn up, on which they put the small children and their mothers, and the remainder they put into new rows and counted them again. Then the Germans ordered that the carried packages, that were rolling around in the streets, to be loaded onto the several tens of remaining wagons: walking sticks, pails, platters and pots. With this, the Germans enjoyed toying with us: they chose about ten young people, and forced them to run; beside the gate of the ghetto, stood two bordering rows of SS, that rained murderous blows down on the young Jewish men with rubber truncheons...

The preparations were finally completed at noon, and the procession moved from its place. At the head went the wagons that slithered along like serpents on the narrow road leading to Volkovysk, and after them, the women, five abreast, and to the rear, the men, They were surrounded on all sides by a net of armed SS troops. Tall German officers on bicycles or in cars arrived every minute for the purpose of getting information on the innocent journey of the Jews. They took pictures of us several times (it became known to us, that they subsequently presented these as pictures of captured partisans, or as the Germans were wont to call them – bandits).

Night had fallen by the time we reached Volkovysk after a tiring journey of eight hours. Here we saw that even Volkovysk had been emptied of its Jews. All the houses of the Jews were shut up and locked with locks and bolts. We passed through the entire city, and after passing by the railroad station, we were stopped after the barracks next to a large expanse that was fenced off with a high, double barb-wired fence on all sides – watchtowers, whose searchlights illuminated the entire surrounding (the previous day, they would punish us for every ray of light that shone through a crack in the blinds, a severe punishment for the decree to keep dark; but in the war against the Jews, the situation was different...) And we were again ordered to go back, and we were thrown into the crowded splinter groups of Jews that together with out last contingent, consisted of 20 thousand souls. The entire area was divided into blocks that were individually fenced off. There were from six to eight bunkers in each block, which was still inadequate to hold all the Jews, and so they threw the remaining Jews into large horse stables. The groups from Mosty'-Piesk, like the other final arrivals, got horse stables, of the kind that had three levels in the center. Close to two thousand people were crammed into a stable in the dark, and the screams were awful, the wailing of children looking for their parents, mothers, who with great difficulty, tried to hold onto their children around them, people crawling over each other, looking for a board on which to rest a little, one lost his bundle of food, a second,

his pack of personal belongings – several hours went by before everyone settled down in some manner. From time to time, one hear the whimpering of a child, the cry of a woman, an old Jew praying out loud, and in the middle of the night, the lights illuminated the shrieks of a woman in labor, who gave birth after several hours to a living Jewish boy, in the presence of the nation and congregation, whom together with [the mother] that bore him was brought to the death penalty...

It was only with the coming of the morning, that we were able to look around, and take stock of our new situation. It became clear that all the Jews of the Volkovysk district had been taken from their homes and bought to this area. This fact became clear in several ways. The fate of Ruzhany was the worst of all; apart from the fact that they had to walk fifty kilometers on foot, they were treated in an exceptionally cruel manner. They separated the mothers from their children, and during the course of the two days of this long walk, they permitted the mothers only one opportunity to go to their children to feed them. Along the way, the Jews were beaten horribly, and a hundred of them that gave out along the way, were killed. In Svislucz, the Commissar decided to play a "game:" From among the Jews that stood in rows in that place, he took out 200 Jews and simply shot every tenth one of them.

The Jews of Volkovysk were ordered to report to the bunkers in a matter of two hours, and in addition to this, they stationed police and SS troops at every corner of the city and at its outskirts, to keep an eye on everybody. The Judenrat was given the following order, that had been issued by the regime in Konigsberg: *"It is incumbent on the Jews of Bialystock District to assemble in central bunkers. Every Jew must take sufficient food for 48 hours, and work clothes. Money, jewelry and valuables may be taken without any restriction. The objective is to centralize labor."*

Approximately twenty thousand Jews were divided up according to their place of origin: two blocks (15 bunkers in total) for Volkovysk. However, since each bunker was designated for use by five hundred people, the remaining bunkers were divided up for use by Amstibova and Yalovka. One block (six bunkers) – for Svislucz. Zelva, Piesk and Mosty' – in two large horse stables. A separate block (eight small bunkers with low ceilings) for Ruzhany.

During the first few hours, rumors spread that we had been gathered together to be sent to Bolivia, which was prepared to take us... but that was not the case, Fuchs and Daniel from the Volkovysk *Judenrat* were called to the Commander of the camp, a lieutenant officer named Tsirka, and they received the following notice: this was a temporary concentration camp; from here, the Jews would be sent in transports of 3000 to a larger Jewish *labor camp;* this transfer would go on for six weeks; but for the time being, it is necessary to maintain order. Fuchs was appointed as the head, and Daniel his deputy; each bunker was supposed to have its own head, who would be responsible to provide a list of the 'residents' within, to look after order and to distribute the food. Each person will receive 170 grams of bread a day, and a bowl of soup; health and hygiene conditions in the camp were to be supervised by medical resources independent of the camp.

On the following day, a committee of senior Gestapo officers came to the camp, and among them there was even a district physician, the head of the city of Volkovysk, Winter. Because of the shortage of water, the head of the city promised to supply water to the Jews with the help of the fire truck, and a small supply of potatoes and groats from the cellars of the Jewish homes was also promised.

The Jews shrugged their shoulders. The pessimists once again argued that our fate was sealed: "They are treating us like fowl that is fed before the slaughter." However, those who were seized by every spark of hope, ran off to once again build their blooming castles in the air, that everything will end up with us alive...

Of the things that were promised to us, we received a few canisters of whitewash for the toilets, and a few

boxes with bottles of insecticide for lice. After this, the matter of water was settled. Then the food that the Jews had provided for themselves ran out in a matter of two or three days, and immediately signs of hunger began to appear. In a matter of days, an epidemic of lice started to spread that grew to monumental proportions. It was late in the fall, and the Jews milled about between the bunkers, especially the young people . The elderly and the babies, and the nursing children all lay in exhaustion and hunger on the hard bunks.

The doctors divided the work between themselves, organized a dispensary, and after a fashion, a small 'hospital,' for the severely ill. It was only after a time, that the burden of responsibility of the doctors was heavily increased – but we will yet return to this subject.

A more relaxed air began to blow through the camp on the fourth and fifth day. First, they began to take young men out of the camp to do work, but this was a n illusion for the camp for a number of days, and secondly, this created an opportunity to procure foodstuffs. Yet, the hunger increased. And when only the news of a potato transport delivery reached the camp, starving Jews would fall upon the wagons, and everyone wanted to assure getting a couple of potatoes for himself. Immediately gunfire was heard, these being the shots of the German guards into the mass "disturbing the peace," and the result of this were dead and wounded. Yet the hunger was greater than the fear of the rifle. These wild scenes took place several times a day, when hunger mad it necessary to put one's life in danger for a few frozen potatoes...

* * *

At that time, I was transferred from the Mosty' stables to the Volkovysk bunkers, and I worked in the direction of the health services of the camp.

It was still dark outside, but the day had already started inside the camp. The workers were lining up in the yard at an early hour. The women are looking for ways to warm up a little water for the children. A great deal of movement is taking place near the toilets. The interior toilet in each bunker was set aside for the use of the elderly and the children only, and whoever could go outside, was not taken into account for purposes of bodily functions... outside., the situation was not any better, bit still it was a large facility, with room for twenty people. Two rows, one for men and one for women were created; after each group of men went in, the women went in, and anyone, who, God forbid, had to go back. A young man interjects to the women: "Come in, ladies, together with the men, don't be ashamed, they are going to throw us all into the same grave..."

In the bunkers, everybody develops a routine after the night's sleep. After that, one goes, one to bring water, and another to stand on line for the spoiled bread. In one of the bunkers, several tens of Jews gather for group prayer: the Rabbis have decreed a community-wide fast: the *Selikhot* prayers are recited, everyone prays with fervor, reciting *Avinu Malkeinu,* a line at a time. *"Send us salvation speedily..."* – the leader of the prayers weeps out loud, and the congregants respond. When they reach the phrase, *"Do this for those who suckle at the breast,"* and *"For the sake of the babes of the house of your people,"* – the cries penetrate the very heart of heaven. Jews stand this way, crowded and pressed together, standing in mud, in the half darkness, some in a prayer shawl, some wearing phylacteries – if he had only been concerned enough to take them at the last minute – and some without these, agonizing within himself, and from their very depths, and with their last energies, knock on the Gates of Mercy...

Tsirka visits the bunkers several times a day. A silent murderer, slow, cunning and cynical. He takes an interest as if all are patients, in their care, and promises that in the new camp, conditions will be better...

Towards evening, the workers return. One carries a piece of wood, there will be one who happened to get a hold of some onions or beets, and even someone who managed to obtain a piece of bread from a peasant. Immediately with the darkness, they all enter the bunkers. Everyone lights his lantern according to his capacity to do so; one might have an oil lamp, another got clever, and used one of the jars of insecticide (a petroleum derivative), as a source of fuel. Everyone is crawling over the bunks, and after a period of time, each person arranged themselves for the remainder of the night, by sleeping on their side (there is no room for anything else). A Jew in the corner recited the Psalms by a flickering light, a second person recites the *Shema* out loud. A Jewish woman talked to herself incessantly. A suffering young woman rocks her frail, sick infant in her arms – this is the third straight day without stop – that she wails in a shattering and heart-rending manner: "*...I want to go home...*" Others haven't finished lice removal. A sick person, short of breath, and breathing with difficulty, moans, and cannot find room for his ailing person.

When I wake up in the middle of the night, I have the impression that the picture hasn't changed at all. The sound of the bunker hasn't changed, as if frozen in place: one can still hear the anonymous sound of the Shema; the [other] Jew continues to go through the verses of the Psalms; the groans of the sick Jew still continue, and the shrunken and heroic mother, still rocks the baby and hums the tune to the same song: *"I want to go home..."*

* * *

A new thing happened on November 11: the camp was closed up, and not a person went to work. And once again, one explanation chased after another. There were those who immediately connected this with some major political event (the most favorable assessment of this): they spoke of a German surrender(!), a Polish rebellion, and similar things. On the other side, the fear of a *liquidation* already hung in the air. After several hours, a committee arrived for the purpose of investigating the sanitary conditions in the camp. This was specifically related to the problem of lice. Three senior Gestapo officials, of esteemed rank – very well dressed, well fattened – came into the filthy rotten bunkers, and without hiding their revulsion for the 'filthy Jews,' looked at two or three individuals, and that ended the tour: the camp was infested with lice – was the outcome of the matter – and it was then necessary to put it under quarantine.

Later, it became clear that some of the soldiers in the camp fell sick, and they suspected that it was typhus, and it was a stroke of luck that a number of them got well in a few days, and the suspicion about the camp of the Jews was dropped.

Sioma Gallin was the one who ran the kitchen in the camp, a well-known and popular personality in Volkovysk. Alert, exuding vitality, and never losing his optimistic conviction that '*we will yet bury them*' – his favorite expression. When he got water once from the fire truck, he engaged the driver in conversation (a local Christian), and that person gave him a little bit of kerosene for the oven. However, the men of the Gestapo guard perceived this, they rushed to Gallin, knocked him to the ground, and rained so many blows on him with their rubber truncheons, that he had no more strength left with which to scream. When his was bleeding and swollen, they carried him to the bunker. At nightfall, the cold predator, Tsirka, came to the bunker and asked with warm concern about Gallin's condition, and ordered the doctors not to leave him, "God Forbid."

I visited him at nine in the evening. He lay suffering, breathing heavily, and saying a few words with great difficulty.

At eleven o'clock at night, the bunker was startled by the savage cries of Germans, who were at the entrance to the bunker: *"Gallin, Raus! Gallin, Raus!*" A Jewish policeman from the internal guard ran to Gallin, and

relayed to him that the Germans were demanding that he go outside immediately. Everyone raised themselves from their places, and a deathly silence reigned in the bunker. One could hear how Gallin was struggling to move his beaten body off the bunk. 500 eyes were glued to him. When he was beside the exit, he turned about and in a braking voice, with all his strength he said: "*Peace be unto you, my fellow Jews!*"and he vanished into the darkness. Immediately the sound of blows were heard, mixed with the last cries of the victim. Suddenly three shot cut through the air – and then all was silent. Only a heart-rending scream from Gallin's wife inside the bunker, served as a sign that Gallin was no longer alive; a form of death certificate...

The following morning, on arising, his sanctified body was found beside the entrance, the tortured body of the eternal optimist...

* * *

For almost three weeks we did not know for what purpose we were being kept here. Tsirka spoke about the difficulties of transfer. In the meantime, they once again began to take out small groups of younger people to go to work. The local Christians took advantage of the opportunity to skin the Jews for a piece of bread, and the Jews would barter away gold coins for a little bit of bread, rings, or money. Despite this, there was hunger n the camp. The question of wood to keep warm was also a difficult one, and many were beaten – even shot – for several pieces of board from some fence, somewhere.

Until one of the late afternoon hours, an order arrived that at two o'clock in the morning, all the people from Ruzhany should be prepared to travel. Along with this, it was required to compile a precise list with family name, age and occupation (according to the order).

In comparison to the Volkovysk Jews, the Jews of Ruzhany got the low end. The block of eight small bunkers (one third the height of the Volkovysk bunkers); these were called the "Ruzhany" Bunkers. No doubt that the Jews of Ruzhany had the worst conditions. These two thousand Jews, with this terrible overcrowding, could not cram themselves into these bunks of Sodom, and hundreds of them were forced to live in the street (in the meantime, freezing days had arrived, along with some snowfall). If the death rate in the camp was high, especially among the elderly, it was particularly great among those from Ruzhany. There were days when the number of dead ran to twenty. The number of the sick was even greater there. They were also the first to go...

On the following morning, the Ruzhany block was empty, and the entrance locked. Only by the third day, were some young people taken there for purposes of "cleaning up" the block. Among the bundles, rags, and various utensils, there were also found several tens of coagulated corpses of sick and weak people, who were unable on that [previous] night to partake in the walk, and remained behind on the hands of the Germans in their quiet death throes, and when not one of them remained alive, the Germans ordered the block to be cleaned...

These dead – like all the others – were taken out under German guard to beyond the fence, and buried there.

* * *

The second transport came three days later, and this was the turn of Zelva. This was the only transport that left during the daytime. In the space between the Volkovysk blocks (each one of them was fenced off with barbed wire) rows of four abreast of the Jews of Zelva and the vicinity were formed up. In the midst of mud, snow and rain, they stood there for several hours, covered in mud and exhausted, even *before* they could begin their journey. Almost all the residents of the Volkovysk bunkers gathered at the barbed wire fences.

It is hard to guess what thoughts were going through the minds of the people in these two groups. It is possible that the people of Zelva envied the people of Volkovysk, that they are yet remaining behind, although for a brief time yet; and – who knows – every day is an achievement. It is possible that the people of Volkovysk saw themselves in a mirror of their own very near future. And yet perhaps – since someone is saying *Sholom Aleichem* somewhere – they weren't thinking at all.

In the meantime, the idea occurred to one of the Volkovysk people "the lucky ones," to give something, to those who were going, through the barbed wire. This suddenly became something for everyone to do: in one move, hundreds of people started to give something or another through the barbed wire to the Zelva people, who pressed against the fence by the hundreds, in order to receive a farewell gift. Agonized and shrunken hands by the hundreds, were pushed through the barbed wire, and everyone grabbed whatever came to hand: for one a piece of stale bread, for another a potato, a crumb or an onion. Being driven in to the hands of the prevailing hunger, and the great fear was more for the hunger of the next day, they cut their hands and wounded themselves to the point of bleeding, and because of this, the gifts so given were mixed with blood....

A shout from the Germans put an end to this "farewell party," and the Zelva Jews dragged their tired bodies in the same direction that the Ruzhany Jews had gone a few days earlier...

* * *

A little at a time, the bunkers and the stables of Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Yalovka and Amstibova were emptied out. At intervals of 3-7 days, thousands of Jews were taken out at night, and after several days, those who were left behind, "cleaned out" the vacated places, gathering up rags, broken pots, and coagulated bodies of those who died silently.

By the end of November 1942,[only] the Jews of Volkovysk and Svislucz remained. At the end of the month, another transport of several thousand Jews of Svislucz was driven away, along with two bunkers (approximately 1000 people), of people from Volkovysk. At the beginning of December there were still 5000 Jews in the camp, and 1000 Jews from Svislucz among them.

Towards the end of November, Noah Fuchs fell ill with a serious lung inflammation. The camp commandant Tsirka, came to ask about him a number of times (the members of the *Judenrat* lived in a wooden bunker). After such a visit, Tsirka let the doctors know in his usual cold and serious fashion, that "Fuchs must get well." An important position awaits him, and he had it in mind to appoint him as a camp commandant in the new Jewish camp of 70,000 Jews.

And to where did all these transports go? This question dis not stop nagging everybody. The *Judenrat* made an effort to get in touch with the employees of the Polish railroad. At first it became clarified that the direction of the transport was – to the west, and then afterwards north to the stations of : Bialystock, Malkin, and at the end, *Treblinka.* Our understanding about this extermination camp were not yet clear, but one thing we already understood: "All who arrive there will not return..."

Meanwhile, news arrived at the beginning of December that had the effect of a spark in a can of gunpowder. A group of workers from the bunkers worked in Petroshovitsa (a few kilometers from Volkovysk), and they were building a "Pithom and Rameses.[7]" Fuchs and Daniel had gone several times to the German supervisors

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[7] A biblical allusion to the cities built by the Hebrew slaves for Pharaoh in Egypt, i.e. a major construction project.

of the work in Petroshovitsa, on the hopes that together, they could influence the central command not to liquidate the bunkers according to schedule, but to leave a detail of 1700 able-bodied young people, until the scheduled time of – August 1943. After additional negotiation, they succeeded in convincing them that there should be about 100 women among the 1700. They achieved nothing in connection with children. Immediately afterwards, Svislucz succeeded in securing several hundred places among the 1700 designated ones. However, there was much thought given over to this matter. However, the consideration of cases grew without bounds after people started to pay attention to the matter, when it was determined that the list of the 1700 young people (among them 250 from Svislucz) was to be compiled by the *Judenrat.* That is to say, the selection had to be done by the Jews themselves. There is no need to describe the chaos of those days. A war of life and death broke out (according to the bare and simple meaning of this phrase). On one side was Treblinka, which made it seem – that to stay in this wretched for another six months: the bunkers looked like paradise, six months – like an eternity. For a few days, hundreds and hundreds of people descended on the bunker of the *Judenrat,* each one asking for a favor for themselves, and afterwards, for their wife, a child, brother, sister. Fuchs and Daniel wrote things down, and then erased them. And then they wrote again and erased again: and it seemed they finally completed the list; then, on the morrow, came yet additional modifications, and so forth, without end. Here, an individual would succeed, after a tremendous effort, to be put on the list, and tomorrow he would refuse to go, because no place was allocated for his wife; one would go to bed, satisfied in the knowledge that he was to remain behind, and on the following day, found out that he was erased from the list. Somebody more important that him had ben found. Blood relations, friendship, pleading, carrying on, screaming, crying – all of these were employed in the war to be able to remain in the bunkers. In this maelstrom of hope and fear, Tsirka walked about like an indifferent observer on the side, and from time to time, he would inquire whether the list had been completed.

On the seventh day, we were notified that all those selected were to go over from the Volkovysk bunkers to the Ruzhany bunkers. Along with this, groups at a time would also exit by way of the gate, under the watch of the Gestapo, and the Jewish organizers of the arrangement. Along with this, those going to the Ruzhany bunkers were searched incessantly, and many of the "illegals" were driven back after every search. People ran about, and back and forth as if they were crazy, trying by any means to gain entrance to the Ruzhany bunkers, the place for uplifting of their souls. Those that had children, gave them a quarter dose of Luminal and carried them while they were asleep, in sacks on their shoulders, and while still in the sacks, put them to bed on new bunks. The short December day went, and when evening fell, Tsirka came to the Ruzhany bunkers with two assistants in order to carry out the final count. The children were once again given Luminal powder, and hidden in sacks among the bundles. Several tens of "illegal" adults hid themselves in the mud, under the bottom bunks, and the remainder went outside, stood in front of the bunkers in rows of five abreast, and awaited the investigation. A vehicle immediately reached the place of the bunkers, that stood opposite the Jews, and with two searchlights, they illuminated the two groups of the "selected ones," one who might have been separated form a relative, from a father, mother, brother, and sister, who were not given the privilege of being counted in the 1700. The dark of the night was cut by the lights from the bus, and the compressed snow in its tire tracks, and that didn't stop falling into any opening, small or large.

The Gestapo men with rubber truncheons in their hands passed by the groups, and went to eat their dinner, leaving the designated investigation for afterwards. At this time there were groups of two hundred. The silence of frightened people pervaded the block. There were those who listened with a fluttering heart to determine if the effect of the Luminal might not have stopped working on the children, and there were others whose thoughts were with their relatives who had remained in the Volkovysk bunkers. The snow fell endlessly, and without end, since the objective had been delayed until Tsirka finished his evening meal. Only after two hours did the officials return, one went through the bunkers, and two counted each of the groups, that were then driven with rubber truncheons into the bunkers. After running the totals, and adding in the members of the Jewish police and the *Judenrat,* who had not yet arrived, Tsirka proclaimed that the count

was “in order,” and left to dispatch the others. At tow o’clock in the morning, the members of the Jewish police and the *Judenrat* joined us, and with this, the selection was complete...

On the morning of December 8, a new and final period began in the camp. Out of twenty thousand Jews who had been here only a few months ago, only a little more than 1700 remained, who began to get themselves settled all over again. One of the former Volkovysk blocks was designated for the use of these remaining people, with eight bunkers and one building of wood. The transfer protocol was very slow, and took a week’s time. First, a German exterminator treated the eight bunkers, and afterwards, a few solitary groups were brought over from the Ruzhany bunkers to the bath house, and from the bath house to the bunkers that had been disinfected. This was the way they wanted to get rid of the lice.

I was among the first group to return to the Volkovysk bunkers. An awful sight was revealed to me: upon entry into the block, next to the *Judenrat* building, a pile of corpses had been dumped in a mound, one on top of the other, heads leaking blood, arms and legs sticking out, half naked and contorted – who had been killed in the final liquidation: inside the bunkers – bags, dresses, bedding, utensils – all scattered and mixed together. On many of these things, there were bloodstains; between the bunkers, an elderly woman ran about, gray-haired and exclaiming out loud: why did they not also take me? She ran to each of us and begged us to turn her over to the Germans so they would shoot her; all the bunkers were empty of people. Only in Bunker number 3, were we surprised to find a large number (over 70) old and sick people incapable of being transported. The larger part of them were already frozen; their eyes were fixed on one point, as if they no longer had any minds; others did not stop talking to themselves softly; others of them began to move a lot, upon seeing new people, begging for bread and water. Among the elderly was also a young man, about thirty years old, who was an amputee, who moved himself about with the help of his arms; a solitary, sick young girl, age 16, screamed without stopping, “Water, water,” even when they brought her something. About seventy Jews, who had been brought together from all the bunkers, not even worthy of Treblinka, were tossed into their own filth and that of others at that time.

After a few days, Tsirka summoned two doctors and demanded that they poison the “Third Bunker.” “After all, you do know,” – he said – “it is possible to kill them with machine guns very quickly, but to what end must we create a tumult like that...” the doctors refused to do this. “Well, we have some more time” – the cold, cynical wretch smiled, and let the doctors go.

In the meantime, the exterminator and his assistant processed one bunker after another, and more and more of the people were transferred over to their old-new locations. Before nightfall, they would seal the windows, doors and transoms, and in the corners of the bunker they would place two dishes of burning sulfur, they would burn them until the following morning, and then open up the bunker again, and on this basis, it was supposed to be rid of insects.

They carried out almost exactly the same procedure on Bunker Number 3, late one night, when all of the [other] bunkers were already asleep, and exactly after they had set the dished of sulfur aflame, they closed the doors tightly, leaving the seventy souls inside the bunker. What took place in the bunker on that night, is known only to those unfortunate victims. We were able to get an idea of what had transpired, on the following day, when the bunker was opened once again, and we learned of what had taken place here. The bunker was suffused with the familiar odor of sulfur. The first part of the dead were arrayed about in various postures of grimace and contortion. The terrible suffering was etched on their faces; a few were still hanging on with the last of their energies; the sick girl continued to groan “water, water,” almost inaudibly; the young amputee was head down into the plate, with his legless body up in the air; it was he who tried to stop the flow of the burning gas with his body. In this fashion, seventy Jews were wiped out by excruciating torture, with a gas that could kill lice and bugs only with great difficulty after 12 hours.

Tsirka celebrated his victory: he didn't have to rely on the assistance of a noisy machine gun...

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After several days, the period of the transfer was finished, the Gestapo guard was removed, Tsirka left. The camp was turned over to the *Wehrmacht* and the surveillance over the 1700 Jews who were privileged to be saved from the fate of the prior 18,000 went over to the hands of the [regular army] soldiers.

With each daybreak, the soldiers would come to take the men out to work. The *Judenrat* would remain in the camp, the Jewish police (about twenty people), the group of doctors, the kitchen workers, and the monitors in the bunkers. The food improved from this point forward, but the actual rations remained the same as before, but the members of the *Judenrat* had the privilege of movement about the city, and would buy bread from the Polish bakers, and the guard that accompanied them to bring bread was bribed, and turned a blind eye to the "dealings" of the Jews. The winter was already at its most intense, and the cold left its marks. The worst problem was a lack of shoes. The *Judenrat* arranged for a shoemaking operation, which provided some minimal relief from the shortage of shoes. In general, there was a feeling of improved circumstances, not heretofore found, in the new conditions; Jews installed iron stoves against which they could warm themselves, and cook something or another. The kitchen distributed warm weather twice daily; warm soup was provided at noon. However, without much delay, illness began to spread. First, dysentery; people would lose their strength from this, and could only stand on their legs with great difficulty. Immediately after this came the spotted typhus. The bunkers were infested with lice, and no amount of disinfecting helped, or any other remedy. The epidemic of the lice reached unbearable heights, and the result was not long in coming. It is enough to say that in the middle of January, examinations were held – before the illness or afterwards – of over 800 people. This was a special chapter that needs its own explanation. From 30 to 40 percent of the [allegedly] able-bodied workers were sick with this disease, and since it was forbidden to let the Germans find out, they didn't know. The dedication and commitment of the doctors and nurses is noted, who were infected first because of this (let the enormous work and the dedication of the doctors be recalled here: Yitzhak Resnick, Eliezer Epstein, Marek Kaplan, Joseph Wallach, and others). The organization of three bunkers as hospitals, disinfection processes, the provision of required medication, the concealment over in the second side of the camp, the minimal death rate thanks to all this – a major chapter, in the story of the Volkovysk bunkers, which demands a special record.

In one of the bunkers, there was found a group of 150 young men from the small town of Kamenitz[8]. During the summer season, they had been brought to Volkovysk to work, and ended up here on November 2 in their present condition. Their condition was far worse. They suffered from hunger and frost more than others. Many of them became swollen with hunger and were frozen to death. Only with our involvement did the *Judenrat* begin to give them personal attention. However, they were not helped much by this, and incidents of death were a daily occurrence.

The principal characteristic of that period was taking care of personal needs. The Jews got used to the idea that the camp was something permanent, and because of this, they tried with all their might to last out the winter. The hope was that spring should only arrive. As to what might happen when the spring arrived, not a person gave any thought to. But a spark of hope was thought of in connection with that event...

There were even arbitration sessions conducted by the *Judenrat:* here was a ruling about a young fellow age 16 with an older man concerning a piece of material goods. Both of them present their arguments to Fuchs

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[8] It is not evident if this refers to Krzemienica.

and Daniel. Thought are expressed such as: this was abandoned property, in the public domain – as if this were a Torah ruling. Another couple came to the court over a dispute about a watch. The judgement was supported by the Jewish police.

Six months went by against the count of "The First of August." The doctors estimated that the spotted typhus epidemic (the epidemic was the central concern; in addition to illness, there was the hunger – under the best of circumstances, there was recognizably poor sustenance – the cold, and the hard labor out in the cold, among the minor issues) had reached its peak. According to the prevailing thought, the epidemic was to have run its course by the end of November. Suddenly, an end came to all the hopes and ideas. On January 23, 1943 it appears that our distinguished friend Tsirka had been in the camp. Even before we were told the purpose of his visit, a tumult reigned in the camp. The news of Tsirka's arrival flew with lightning speed from bunker to bunker, and everyone instinctively felt that danger hovered in the air, the Angel of Death had come to the city...

He entered the *Judenrat,* and advised that all the initially transported people were settled. It was now our turn. Nevertheless – he added – it was difficult for them, but for us it would be much easier... He did not know the exact schedule of the trip. At this time, he demanded only two people to assist him in compiling a list of all the people in the camp, and a typewriter (according to the order: family name, age, occupation, as was the usual...)

The tumult increased from minute to minute. On the 25th of the month he notified that the transport will depart of the evening of the 26th. The news reached even the several hundred sick, who were lying in the three hospital bunkers (one bunker, and two wooden buildings). People began to dash about the area of the block, looking for some escape, but in vain. The sick, who obtained a place in the hospital only with great difficulty, summoned strength within themselves as if with a magician's wand. With temperatures of 40ºC [104ºF], almost delirious, they left their mattresses, wandered between the bunkers, as if they wanted to demonstrate that they had the strength, out of fear that as sick people, they would be killed on the spot. The majority, despondent and oppressed, prepared themselves for the journey, attempting to provision themselves with an extra piece of bread or another bundle.

In speaking about the last 24 hours of the bunkers, it is my wish to also dedicate a few words to the question of "Bialystock." From the time of November 23, 1942, when twenty thousand Jews were suddenly dropped, denigrated and suffering, into the most difficult and inhuman conditions, Bialystock, or more appropriately, Ghetto Bialystock, the acme of everyone's dreams, the *Fata Morgana* of everyone, because there still – so to speak – one could seek refuge for oneself. The news that arrived by circuitous routs from there, told of ordinary living in houses, about sleep in beds, about enough to eat one's fill, on organized work, and most importantly – the strong position enjoyed by the Jews of Bialystock that worked in the factories, whose perception led them to believe there was no danger. And indeed, during the first several weeks, it became possible for several tens of people to get to Bialystock; by themselves, by bribing Germans, as was the case of Smazanovich of Volkovysk, Dr. Meisel from Svislucz; Engineer Barash was able to bring a number of families over in a unique fashion, the Head of the Bialystock *Judenrat*, his relatives and Zionist workers: his brothers, Sonya Botvinsky, Messrs. Peisik and Berman, Shipiatsky, the widow of the Lawyer, Eliezer Bliakher and her son, etc. Even during the period of the 1700, there were those who sought means to get to Bialystock. However, in this instance, the *Judenrat* opposed them, who by virtue of their designated Jewish police, found out about these suspicions to leave, about which they were not aware. Prior incidents of attempted escape caused the *Judenrat* to look upon such attempts with severity. The leadership of the *Judenrat* took the position that it was people with money that were most desired to try to escape, and that this money could help to extend the time that the camp would continue to operate.

On the evening of January 25th, when it became known that the camp would be liquidated the following day, a great deal of movement was perceived among the families of the *Judenrat* members in the wooden bunker. The women began to pack bags – they dressed the children warmly. The guards picked up the activity, and they surrounded the wooden bunker, and after an exchange of sharp words, it became clear that the members of the *Judenrat* wanted to send their families to Bialystock, the head of the Jewish police simply advised that not a person was to leave the building, because in any event, nobody will get out of there. They deduced from this, that during all the time that others were being watched in case they attempted to escape, that this weaponry was now being turned back on those that used it.

The *Judenrat* and their family members spent the night under house arrest; "Authority" was transferred to the Jewish police. Characteristic Jewish humor surfaced even here: the fate of the government, the army has taken over the rule (a hint to an illusion that this might be the way it'll end with the Germans).

On January 23rd at three in the afternoon, my friend and companion, Dr. Resnick and I left the camp. Several hours before the liquidation, we managed to flee the camp in the company of a group of workers, and along the way, to run away from the German guard. To this day, I can see the camp as I left it. The wooden bunker of the *Judenrat*, full of people going back and forth, as if by listening 'at the transoms' they would find out something new; the block completely crowded with people, running from one to the other; the sick, wrapped in bandages, eyes fevered from the temperature, walking around like wraiths in an illusory world; slowly, slowly, walking like infants, they seem to try to accustom themselves to moving about; those that have recently recovered, walking around on their coagulated legs, waving their arms in the air as if looking for a point of support; in the hospital lay that part of the sick that cannot move; and others of them – quiet, resigned, as if they were already in another world. Among them, nervous types, angered ones, wailing and crying; In the 'regular bunkers,' – a tapestry of people who feel the sentence of death on their skin; women making the final preparations, packing up their baggage as best they can; all gripped by fear, with no options; an admixture of anger and despair — and outside, a freezing cold of 25°F, with wind and snow enveloping everything...

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Eighteen thousand Jews from Volkovysk were exterminated in Treblinka. From what is known to me, there is nothing comparable to the suffering of Treblinka. The last 1700 were taken to Auschwitz – but on the transport of suffering and the experience of Auschwitz, this will be revealed by those solitary [survivors] that were tried in this Hell and by some stroke of luck, were not incinerated.

* * *

A small addendum at the end: What as been said above doe not constitute a *history* of this period of Volkovysk, and there was no intent to make it so. These are only a few scratches, and portraits of what I underwent, and suffered from everything suffered by the enormous sacrifices that were torn from me, and they were very enormous...

Page 53: The Fire House in Volkovysk

Eighteen Months in the Box
(The Tribulations of one of the Scions of our City, Eliyahu Kushnir)

Transcribed By Eliezer Kalir

I have nothing to be proud of: I didn't do great things, or bring forth creations, no acts of heroism; – this is how our scion of Volkovysk began his story.

My wife and I were saved from death by miracles, because of a variety of circumstances, or more appropriately – we survived because of Providence!

My family is, after all, known to all of you: My father's name was Moshe-Alter Kushnir; in the city, we were nicknamed the 'shinglers' (*kakhelnikehs*), because of the shingle factory that we had. We were a prolific Hassidic family that was quiet and worked hard; but what's the use of dwelling on this; their fate was the same as the fate of all the Jews of Volkovysk, and it is a pity over our unforgettable losses.

I remained one of eight children, now 35 years old, I completed a course of study for pharmacy at the Warsaw University, and I worked in Kurlandsky's Pharmacy on the *Wide Boulevard*. In 1934, I moved to Krinki, and there, I married into the Zelkind family, and I remained there. I was in that city when the war broke out.

Krinki was always a city of hard workers, of leather factories, with a revolutionary spirit. Even back in the days of [Czar] Nicholas, Krinki distinguished itself in its battles with the Cossacks and the Czarist police. They were forced to maintain a detail of Cossacks in Krinki to maintain order. Krinki once made its own holiday, and carried out a 'Krinkist' socialist revolution, taking control of the newspaper, the telegraph, threw the mayor (Пристав) in jail, tied up the village policeman (Урядник) and threw him into a pig sty. The famous revolutionary, Sikarsky who engaged in a life of rebellion, was a tanner from Krinki. And when they heard that the Red Army had crossed the border, the workers of Krinki did not hesitate, and immediately took control of the government, and while the Polish police were still in the city, the Red Flag already flew over the town of Krinki.

When the Soviets came into the city, there was great joy, and the Jews were fortunate, and even the sworn enemies of the communists – the wealthy, and the factory owners were content: to them, the essence of the matter was that a death sentence – the entry of the Germans – had been exchanged for life imprisonment. I worked in Zhokovitsky's pharmacy, a collective appointed me as the head of the pharmacy, and my boss – as my employee. At my effort, permission was granted for him to live in his house, where the pharmacy was located. A Soviet way of life began, and apart from the very wealthy, who were arrested and exiled to Siberia, the Jewish population was treated decently. They lived, worked, and waited for better times to arrive. They hoped – and their hope was realized – when on June 22, German airplanes appeared that began to bomb the city. Handbills were dropped from the planes, telling the population to go out into the fields, and put white handkerchiefs on their heads. The people went out into the fields, and sat there until June 28, six whole days – until a few planes started to fly in low, and as soon as they saw Jews, they gave a sign, and opened with cannon fire. Many Jews were killed, including my boss, along with his two daughters, who were remarkably beautiful.

The Germans had just but arrived in the city, and there was an immediate change to the relations between the Christians and the Jews. In this place, during the period of the Bolsheviks, relations were literally ideal, but now the Christians began to reveal the hatred and wrath they felt towards the Jews. They began to inform

on the Jews and to pursue them, helping with their capture and imprisonment, using the excuse that they were communists, and they were taken out for execution. The well-known decrees were issued, concerning the wearing of a yellow badge, being forbidden to address a Christian, to conduct commerce, to own a horse or a cow; apart from the murder of a Jew, which was necessary to them, the most severe punishment was a fine of five marks. I also put on the yellow badge, and remained at work in the pharmacy; there was no other pharmacist. I stood in my white overcoat, a yellow badge on the front and the back – and I prepared medicines. My profession saved me, and relatively speaking I was not bad off. I even was able to bring a brother and a sister-in-law from Volkovysk, to work with me in the pharmacy, and they stayed with me for about a year.

On December 13, 1941, they created a ghetto. They fenced off a quarter with barbed wire, and drove all the Jews into it. As it happened, the gate of the ghetto went through the yard of my pharmacy. This coincidence had great significance afterwards. Since it was not possible to bring anything in through the ghetto gate, the Jews who were taken to do work, and managed to get a hold of some food outside the ghetto walls – used to drop it off at the pharmacy, and we would throw the food over the fence into the ghetto. Meanwhile a typhus epidemic broke out in the ghetto. The overcrowding was unbearable. In addition, they drove the Jews of Berestovitz into the ghetto, and the overcrowding became even more difficult. I set up a pharmacy inside the ghetto, and upon my arrival there in the evening, I would sit and prepare medicines. But my Commissar did not rest and was not silent; he wanted to get rid of me at all times. And looked for someone to replace me. In the fullness of time, he was able to find a Polish professor of Agronomy, from the University of Vienna, who according to what he said, had an uncle who was a pharmacist, and was acquainted with the preparation of medicaments. The truth was, that this professor knew about as much about preparing medicine as a rooster can pass himself of as a human being. And even he made an effort to get me back to the pharmacy. Up til this point, life in the ghetto went along under the fear of death and nightmares. Rumors circulated about massacres in other cities. They told of 'actions' against children, 'actions' against the elderly in Lithuania and other places. On November 1, 1942, rumors spread throughout the ghetto, that 'something' was going to happen. What a tumult. When I returned home that evening, I found everyone possessed by confusion. The Jewish police of the ghetto had found out from the Polish auxiliary police that something was supposed to take place in the ghetto tomorrow. The members of the family implored me to return to the pharmacy. My mother promised me to watch the little boy – he had a good hiding place. Because I did not want to go alone, my wife was persuaded to accompany me, in the sure knowledge that she was leaving the boy in safe hands (the boy was 2 ½ years old). At night, both of us left the room, we threw a path across the barbed wire, consisting of rags; first I went over the fence, and afterwards, I helped my wife over; I entered the pharmacy, and we went up to the attic. We slept this way for the entire night. At six in the morning, we heard a loud commotion in the ghetto, wild screams, wailing and shooting. Afterwards, the sound of a whole camp of wagons reached our ears. We did not know what was happening. The pharmacy was not opened. Only at ten o'clock did I hear people milling about at the pharmacy. I came down very slowly, and peeked through a crack in the rear door into the pharmacy. The woman Christian assistant who worked in the pharmacy sensed my presence and came over to me. – send me the professor, I asked her; the professor came out, and when he saw me, he spread out his hands – Good sir, what are you doing here? They have taken all of them away, and not one of them remains. – My dear professor – I say to him – relax, we will leave this night, we will not stay here. I asked only one thing of you, that you take pity on me, please go to the ghetto and look around as ee what has happened to our family! – I have no need to go – the professor replied, there isn't even a trace of anyone left. Please try to leave tonight, because I am trembling!

I returned to the attic , and remained there for the entire day, and with nightfall, when the professor left the pharmacy, I went back down there, and took with me doses of poison that would be sufficient for the both of us, and returned back up with the thought , that in the morning, before the arrival of the professor, we would settle the matter... however, upon arising, when dawn broke, we heard a cry and a wail: I had the

thought, could this perhaps be my son?!... We were taken aback; the implication of this fact was, were there still Jews in the town? I came down from the attic, and saw a Jew, named Joseph Holtz – a member of the *Judenrat* – running back and forth, with clenched hands, looking for the members of his family that had vanished. It became evident, that he and 240 people were left behind; 150 men to work in the leather factory, and ninety to clean out the ghetto. As to the rest of the people, they were beaten bloody, killed and driven out in the space of three quarters of an hour. The children were dragged and thrown onto wagons, and sent away. Within an hour, there was not a living soul left inside the ghetto. This was a pogrom conducted at lightning speed, in order that no person have a chance to save himself, since nobody had any idea as to what was happening. I called up to my wife to come down from the attic; the barbed wire was broken in many places from the intensity of upset, and the power of the movement that took place there – and with quick steps we turned and moved, entered the ghetto, and mixed in with the people who were gathered together there. How is it possible to describe the picture of what lay before us in the ghetto? Doors and gates left wide open, electric lights on; here a pot of food, half cooked; there a sewing machine; shirts that had not been completely sewn; the dough for a loaf of bread that had just begun to be kneaded, with three hand prints visible in it; a grater – a potato that had not been completely grated, a prayer book opened to the *Shemoneh Esrei* – at the prayer, *VeTekhezena Eineinu* (May our eyes behold your return to Zion with mercy...) – A *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer interrupted in the middle; A prayer shawl and phylacteries, the one for the head all wrapped up, the one for the arm still unraveled; the beds not made... people were driven out of bed, seized from cribs – this was in the morning – Jews getting ready to go on with their lives, the 'normal' life of the ghetto.

After several days of work in the factory, I approached the manager, and I presented him with a gift of a set sum of money that I had put aside from my work, and he appointed me as the medic for the camp, and my wife as a nurse, and in this manner, we were temporarily spared. Over time, I became more friendly with the manager, and we were in the habit of bringing him gifts frequently. There were no lack of such gifts. The energy and work [sic: property] of the Jews counted for nothing in the ghetto. It was possible to walk into a house, and take whatever you wanted. If a Christian took a serving dish from the ghetto, he was shot, but they did not bother the Jews. The reason, is they knew that sooner or later, it would all become theirs. It was upsetting and shattering to walk into these dad houses; wild cats would jump from under the pillows of the unmade beds...

And that's how I became a medic. Jews would come to me with their ailments, with wounds – oh, help me! – and I would reply, but you know – I can't – and they would say: do something, operate, what will be will be – but do something! And I must add, success was with me, I operated, I bandaged, I healed, and many illnesses persisted for a long time. I never sterilized a needle, because there was no antiseptic, and there was not a single instance of infection.

On one 'bright morning,' one of the auxiliary Polish police came over to me, and said that a peasant wanted to see me. I had no particular will to go out to him, because the peasants were in the habit of coming to buy things from the Jews. They wanted to buy everything that had any value: and overcoat, a jacket, a pair of boots: – for what purpose do you want to hold onto this, since you don't need it anyway. I will pay you, and this will be food for several days; – despite this, I went out, and saw the peasant Pyotr Bigansky before me – the owner of our prior house. – (In the first year of my marriage, I lived in his house). – *Panie* Kushnir, he said to me, I came to you so that you can provide me with copies of the prescriptions you once gave me!.. I looked at him in astonishment: – what medicine did I prepare for you? – I asked in astonishment. When he saw that the policeman was eavesdropping on the conversation, the gentile winked at me – that was the medicine you once gave me for a stomach ache... – oh, I said, *that* prescription? I took out a piece of paper, I turned to the side, and began to write... listen to me, the peasant said – I heard from reliable sources that during the month of March the Germans are going to retreat, and because of this, I want to take you and your

wife to me. I have arranged everything for you... – well, I say, and what if they don't retreat, what will happen then? He says, we shall see, I am not a little boy, he continues to plead with me, and then asks whether I can obtain a black jacket for him, a pair of shades and a pair of women's stockings. I complimented him on his good heart, and I told him, good, let us see...

I always thought of my former landlord as being half-crazy. He loved to babble a great deal, and in addition to this he was a nervous man, and irascible. Because of this, I placed no value on his words, and I continued to remain in the camp. Despite this, I managed to get a hold of a black jacket, a pair of shades and stockings, and at an appropriate opportunity, had them sent to his house.

In the meantime, time did its own work. A month had not gone by since I met my landlord, when 'good news' began once again to get bruited about in the air, and a tumult arose in the camp.

On January 24th, they took away the tools from the Jewish workers, and from the surrounding ambience, it was recognized that the last hours are approaching. I went to the manager and put the question right on the line: will anyone remain in the camp after the liquidation, or not? He answered – if anyone remains, you will be among them!.. from this answer, I understood where we stood in the world. The tumult grew and grew, there were mostly young people in the camp, and they had a strong will to live! Young women, full of life, wanted to live! We want life! How does one change into a mouse and hide in a hole in order to survive!... And there were no forests and partisans in our vicinity.

My wife and I secretly told a number of our acquaintances that we had a hideout, but that we no longer had any faith in the person to whom we had to go, and on top of this, we had no money. The people began to talk to us, and to convince us that we had nothing to lose anyway, and strongly demanded that we should go – perhaps we would stay alive, and perhaps we would be saved and be able to tell the world what happened to the Jews of Krinki. – There was one Jew among them, named Wacht, a factory worker, who took it upon himself to get us out of the camp that was encircled by police. After much thought, we decided to undertake this effort, and that night we gathered in a dark corner of the camp. Wacht came to us, and called to the auxiliary policeman standing at the gate, and said: Listen Stashk, I will show you a bunker where a large amount of gold is hidden, and my share is half – but you move away from the gate for a couple of minutes, so that we can go out. The policeman agreed, made believe that he didn't see anything, and we exited the camp.

It was a dark night, and a driving rain was falling to the ground, and we walked through fields, we forded the little river and somehow or another, reached our venerable acquaintance, our former landlord. We entered the room, and my wife went to the window and quietly knocked on it. – who's there? A woman's voice was heard, who's there, but don't come in just now, because I am taking a bath. We went down into the cellar and sat there, full of fear. A great deal of water leaked into this cellar, and because it was a rainy night, the landlord came down into the cellar to bail the water, in order that the potatoes not get soaked... and when he saw us, he became tongue-tied, but immediately said: – it is good that you have come. However, when he lit a match and saw a third person, he grew pale, and balled up his fists – I said only two people, and what was I supposed to do now?! We felt responsible for him, because when Wacht told us he would take us through the gate, he had not indicated his desire to accompany us. And it was only on the way that he said, in any event, I am going with you, and perhaps stay with you. – We began to plead with the landlord, to kiss his hands: If it will be crowded, it is we who will be crowded. Until he finally agreed, and said: what can we do, what will be, will be. He took us into the house, gave us food, and took us back into the cellar. There, under a huge pile of potatoes, a cabinet had been prepared, about a meter and forty long, a meter wide, and a meter high. We would get into the cabinet through a small rectangular window, which was then covered by boards, and potatoes spread over them, that is to say, space for two people with their legs drawn up.

However, as it happened, we were three, and so we arranged that one of us would have to stand inside the cabinet. He brought is into the cabinet, covered us in potatoes, closed up the cellar. And...for days at a time, we didn't see a living soul. We sat, faint from hunger, not knowing where we were in the world. It was only at night that we heard a scraping sound. The landlord came, and explained that he hadn't brought food because he was very busy, he had a holiday, slaughtering a pig...he brought us into the house, and gave us from the slaughtered pig to eat, and told us about our daily routine: it was our responsibility to follow everything he said, not to ask questions, and not to speak at any length. His words were sacrosanct: there was nothing to worry about, he would take care of our concerns. We are to be careful with noise and movement, because we are surrounded by enemies on all sides. In particular his brothers, mortal enemies, and yet they frequently came to take their foodstuffs from the cellar. Every two weeks he would take us out of the cellar for purposes of taking a bath. He would bring us food each evening. When he would come to get potatoes for the cattle, he would take away the waste...

In this manner, our lives in the grave of the potato cellar began: we could not tell the difference between night and day, and we lost all sense of time; when the landlord came to us, we would ask him – *Panie gospodzha,* what is it now, day or night? In general, he was not in the habit of replying, and did not like to talk to us... every day, at the appointed hour, the window would suddenly open, a pot full of cooked food would be lowered in, and again covered in potatoes. This act was accomplished in the blink of an eye.

It was a big event for us the night we came out to bathe, once in two weeks: at evening time yet, the gentile would run all over the yard, looking in his brothers' windows, neighbors, checking to see that they were all home, or if one or another of them still has to arrive. And when he was finished reconnoitering the area, and was sure that everything was in order, he would give a signal with the word, *Jusz!* (Now!). Then we would speedily come out of the cellar and into the house. The room was already shut and locked, and the windows covered, the doors locked, and then we would bathe. The lady of the house, not a 'corpse,' but an angel, alert and generous in heart without measure, would prepare a meal for us. We would bathe, eat and grab a nap for a few hours in their beds. Oh! How lucky we were to stretch out our legs in a bed meant for a human being. During that time, the landlord sat and whittled, and he would sit with us and discuss ideas: when the war is over, we will all travel far, far away to a new village, and we will live there in each other's company, go to church together, and everything will be good... he was a very religious Catholic, and wanted us to convert, but nevertheless, when he heard a sermon by a priest in church that 'we' should be grateful to the 'Lord Jesus' that we got rid of the Jewish problem, he felt a great wound in his soul, and he stopped going to church. – this was not a priest to him, but some scum of a man, who could go to hell... this was how he expressed himself with the most severe of tongue-lashings, towards his priest. But a long time did not go by, and we were forced to give up our bathing. Once, while we were in the midst of bathing, there suddenly came knocks on the window. We were all like the dead ... to our good fortune, the lady of the house, always full of nerve and courage, did not lose her composure and answered as was her custom: wait, I can't open the door, because I am bathing. As it turned out, it was one of the brothers who had come looking for his horse, and had come to ask if anyone had seen him.

Our lives went on like this until the spring of 1943. At the same time, Wacht fell ill with Tuberculosis and developed a strong cough. His condition grew worse from day to day. The landlord decided to move us into an attic. But there, his condition continued to worsen. This was apparently from catching cold. He coughed so much, that it could be heard all the way into the street. He began to plead with the landlord that he should be taken to Bialystock. The ghetto was still in existence there, and he had friends there. This was fraught with great danger, but despite this, the landlord hitched up his horse, and putting his life on the line, brought him to Bialystock. What a strange thing! without even looking at the fact that the landlord suffered a great deal from Wacht, because we, for example, didn't ask anything of him, and whatever he gave us was fine, but Wacht would always ask for cigarettes, tobacco, and didn't give him any money; and despite this, the peasant

fulfilled his request.. And after all this, when the sick person was being taken by wagon, the sense of pity by the peasant farmer so overwhelmed him, that he asked Wacht to return after he got well. After having invested so much work in him, he was reluctant to see him lost. As we later learned, this is what happened: Wacht indeed got better, and was returning to us, but on the way, the Germans shot him...

After Wacht left, we remained in the attic. For the first time, we were abandoned, and we could be discovered at any time, but after the harvest of the green fodder and its transfer to the attic, the landlord constructed a new cabinet under the fodder, and began to provide us with better food, with a lot of fat, in order to strengthen us. It is necessary to add that some Christians who hid Jews, eventually killed them by themselves over time, because they got disgusted with them; but in our case, the longer our stay continued, the closer the landlord and his wonderful wife became tied to us. Our friendship went so far, that I permitted myself to ask him for something. It was a newspaper... I once crawled out of the cabinet in order to take a peek at a newspaper, and as I was standing there, a Christian came up to the loft, who was about thirty years old or so, and started to look for something... and when he saw me, he was thrown back pale, deathly, like someone who has seen someone from another world... he descended from the loft without uttering a syllable. We were seized with a shuddering, but as you can understand, we couldn't so anything to help the situation. The Gentile was not a bad person by nature, and not stupid, and simply acted ignorant, even in front of the landlord... but ever time he brought him honey from the beehives, he gave him a special portion of honey as a gift. – Why are you giving me this? the landlord would ask – Take it, take it, you need it! When a pig was slaughtered, he would bring meat. – For what purpose? – the landlord would refuse. – Take it, it's coming to you!....

Our situation grew most serious, when a Ukrainian police unit was established in our yard, along with SS troops that had fled from the front when the Russians drove the Germans out of the Ukraine. They immediately revealed their capabilities, finding three Jews in a bunker, and burying them alive... and we fond out later that the landlord didn't even want to tell us about this.

Once, the landlord prepared a surprise for us: he had his own idiosyncrasies. A son was born to him, and he decided to hold the baptism in the loft. The room was very tight, and the loft was wide and spacious. He hung white sheets along the walls of the loft, laid out tables, invited guests, along with the neighbors and his brothers, the police, and they ate and drank all day, got drunk, and sang together, and we lay in the cabinet under the fodder, looking at this gentile equivalent to a circumcision. We listened to prayers offered to the Holy Jesus, the Virgin Mary, we looked into the unclean faces of the Ukrainians, murderers and traitors, wearing green SS insignias and thought: the gentiles are alive, and into their cups, eating, carrying on, and happy – the world goes on according to its way – and we have arrived at an end like this... and I was reminded of our vengeful ancient God, and I asked him: Why is this? Why did we deserve this? I was reminded of a prayer I would say with my father regularly in the synagogue, when I was a boy: *He who answered Daniel in the lion's den, he will answer us! Take pity on us and save us...as you rescued Daniel from the lion's den! Show us your mercy, for we are the last... the last...*we did not believe anything else but that we were the last Jews in the world...

In the evening, when the drunken crowd had dispersed, on wobbly knees, the landlord brought us something to eat: , whiskey, the bacon from the pig, and candies, and we were happy with him, and we offered out best wishes for a lot of *nachas* to our dear lady of the house, because we were certain that if there was a Garden of Eden, that the gentile woman, Nistra Bigansky would be seated at the head, together with the matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.

Again, we went through an period of fear, when the German police carried out a search for bootleg liquor throughout the entire city. Our landlord had several tens of liters of this beverage, which was hidden near

our cabinet. It's the same thing, he said: if they find you, they can find the whiskey already... but even this search passed peaceably: rested on top of the redolent fodder, and left....

In the meantime, the Red Army got closer and closer; the moment finally arrived when the Germans had to pull up stakes. But the snakes didn't want to run off just like that, and they ran from house to house, and threw in incendiary grenades, setting the whole town ablaze. The landlord ran around like he was crazed... what to do? He didn't care about his house, but rather, what would happen to *us*? He had invested so much in us, was he to stand by and watch us go up in flames? One evening, he came up to the loft as usual, and announced: Leave! I will go first, she, five paces behind me, step by step! He took us out into the field, taking us literally through the German artillery, until we came to his field. Here, he told us to lie down between the corn stalks, and he went off. We slept the whole night, and the noise of the German command reached our ears, we literally heard their every word, and thought: what will be our end... we had better get out of here... but in the morning, when I stood up and saw in front of me a sea of corn stalks waving – I understood that the gentile knew what he was doing, and we remained lying under the corn until the following morning, when the gentile arrived with the following news on his lips: – come out, the Soviets have already arrived... the landlord returned in the direction he had come, and in about a quarter of an hour we were back at his house, which had remained intact. When the neighbors saw us, they ran to the four winds. They no longer believed that there were any Jews alive at all, and they ran to tell the landlord: Panie Bigansky! Your former neighbors have returned! Owners of homes came out to us, offered us blessings of friendship, but falsely... they offered us the building where the police were located as a domicile, and we moved in there. We were swollen, blinded by our lack of being accustomed to the light, and our lips were in no condition for speaking...

However, very quickly, the secret of our rescue became known to the gentiles in the city, and they began to pursue the landlord and informed about him to the Soviet regime, telling all manner of lies. No time went by before they came to arrest him. He was forced to go into hiding. We ran to different officers and senior Soviet officials to plead for our landlord, and we told of his commitment, but they were of one voice: he should not hide, let him come, and we will see...but we didn't believe them – until a senior NKVD officer came through town, we went to him, and told him the entire story; our hearts were filled to the brim, and we shed tears a number of times in his presence... and he said, come now, you can be assured that so much of a hair will not fall from his head to the ground; I am Jewish myself, and I want to see this man who saved you, and to thank him! The landlord returned to his house. On the following day, the officer came with an entire troop; they called to the landlord and his wife: the officer gave the command: take off your hats! Took off his hat (among the Soviets, taking off of the hat, is the highest expression of respect that can be offered), and embraced the landlord, kissed the hand of the lady of the house, and thanked them for saving our lives. And this was the arrangement: every officer or high official who came through this town, would ask about this landlord, and pay him a visit, shake his hand, while offering him thanks.

And so, 5 months went by. We brought the eight surviving Jews in the town to our house. It was warmer for us... but after not a long time, we began to sense the air in the town getting close about us...the gentiles simply could not forgive us for remaining alive, nor to our landlord, who had saved us!... at every instance of confiscation from anyone, of an imprisonment, they didn't stop their refrain of blaming us...*Zydy, zydy!*

We decided to leave the town and travel to Bialystock. There were very few Jews left in Bialystock. It was a period of wandering of the greatest sort in the history of the Jewish people, and that the community affection among the people should be so great. If two Jews met in the street, even if they didn't know one another, they would fall into each other's embrace, kiss and cry... everyone thought he was the last Jew in the world...

Our landlord came to visit us a number of times in Bialystock. So long as we were in town, no evil befell him, but as soon as we left, his situation became bad. The gentiles plotted against him without rest, and we received no answer to the last of our letters. Who knows what possessed this gentile, one of the righteous people of the world, with his resourceful wife, the righteous lady, who put her life on the line, not to win any prizes, and not for purposes of personal advancement, but simply because of that sacred human feeling to save another person's life, and what they took from us for 18 months, hurt for us, feared for us, and with us! Who knows!

Page 61: The Jewish Hospital in Volkovysk

The Tribulations and Heroic Deeds of "The Hero of the Soviet Union," The Partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky

Transcribed By Eliezer Kalir
Member, The Committee of the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk

I am 35 years old today, and I was born in Zhetl, in the Slonim District. Sixteen years ago, I was taken into military service, and as a soldier, I entered the third regiment, *Sluzhb Konyikh*[9], that was stationed in Volkovysk. At the end of my military service, I remained in Volkovysk, and I married a daughter of the Kraselnik family, known by the nickname, '*Die Brukirer*[10].' I arranged for independent domicile, and lived all the while on the *Neuer Gasse*. As a first class craftsman[11], I had a good living, and was able to amass a good amount of wealth, and I had the plan of buying Feinstein's house, whose plan was to emigrate to the Land of Israel. I had a good life with my wife, and derived much *nachas* from our wonderful children: from our daughter – who was beautiful – literally like a doll, and from our son, who was already eight years old, and excelled in intellect and appearance. All fathers are proud of their children – but this boy enchanted all the neighbors, acquaintances, and the schoolteachers, who were quick to round out the praise for his many talents.

I was a member of the fire fighters, and on the last day of the Polish regime, we, the fire fighters, with Khantov as our head, received control of the city; – the Polish Army did not stop retreating. The last to leave were a cavalry detachment, who burst into the city at night, with sabers drawn, and for the entire night, "retreated" from the city, amidst plunder and abuse, killing seven Jews – among them – Makov, Itcheh the Dancer, Yos'keh Galiatsky, and other innocent victims. By "fortunate circumstance," the pogrom didn't last long, they were forced to flee quickly for their skins and their lives: – The following morning, there wasn't a trace of them left. The tanks of the Red Army began to roll into the city. The impact made by these tanks was as if they had fallen from heaven, and will never leave me forever. Menaker the Shoemaker (the head of the communists) climbed up on one of them, and rode through the city like a 'conqueror.' On that same day, this seventy year old Jew, with a rifle on his shoulder, went to the notorious anti-Semite – Timinsky – who had organized the pogrom, arrested him, and turned him over to the Soviet regime.

A Soviet way of life was introduced, with all of its virtues and shortcomings; – Jews became used to this new life, assumed positions, worked and lived. There were 'purges,' arrests, the rich were exiled to Siberia (among them Yoss'l Ain, Bogomilsky, Dr. Bebchuk, Meir Seletsky), but in general, you could not say that the Jews were without rights. – It was felt, that we could survive the dark war under these conditions, and we will get to better times. But this was just a dream. On June 24, 1941, the bitter and harsh day arrived: – over Volkovysk, a row of German planes appeared, and they began to bomb the city mercilessly: there were air battles that lasted for six days. Volkovysk was bombed not only as a city that had military targets, but as the fortress of Verdun! Day and night, without surcease, and all of their targets were in the Jewish quarter. Only the Jews. They were killed, buried in cellars by the hundreds. In the cellar of Moshe Margolis, so many people were killed, that it took three consecutive days to bury all the dead, without being able to identify who

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9 This is a cavalry regiment. As a *Rimmer*, this was a logical assignment for Kovensky.

10 Derived from the trade of laying stone bricks to make a roadway.

11 From what we see later, we can deduce that Kovensky was a *Rimmer,* or a fashioner of leather harnesses and reins for horses. It may also account for the fact that he was a capable horseman as well.

was killed. The entire city, the entire Jewish center, the *Wide Boulevard*, the *Schulhof,* the circle of stores, *Kosciuszko Gasse, Grodno Gasse, The Train Station Gasse* – all went up in flames; – Only the *Neuer Gasse* remained, part of the *Novogrudsky Gasse*, part of the *Grodno Gasse*, the part at the 'foot of the hill,' a large part of hub of the city – in particular the Christian – and the Jewish – was completely destroyed; – to the extent that if you stood in Zamoscheh at the soda store of Nye'cheh – you could see the white jail house! ... this entire area, made up of Jewish homes and businesses, synagogues, factories, establishments – a place where Jewish commerce and labor flowered – was transformed into a islands of wreckage. In this manner, the situation was created by which the entire Jewish population concentrated itself on the *Neuer Gasse* and its environs. Every little room – a family, and there really was no need to drive them into a ghetto. The 'ghetto' came about 'naturally.'...

Immediately after the Germans entered the city, a severe hunger set in, and there was nothing to eat. The gentiles plundered the stores abandoned by the Russians, and they had their pick of everything, and the Jews, scarred by fire, missing everything, would go to ask for foodstuffs from the gentiles. Many young people were arrested immediately on the excuse that they were communists – and they were taken outside the city and shot; – if it became possible for one of these young people to get away and flee – the gentiles apprehended him, and turned him over to the Germans. All Jews over the age of six were forced to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on their arm. – afterwards, they were changed to yellow badges; a prohibition to walk on the sidewalks was enacted, only in the middle of the street with the horses, cattle and wagons. Commerce was forbidden, it was forbidden to own a horse, cow, etc. A *Judenrat* was established, which had as members, Dr. Weinberg, Dr. Seletsky, Noah Fuchs, Berel Amstibovsky, Sham'keh Samiel, and Israel Gurevich. The office of the *Judenrat* was also on the *Neuer Gasse*, opposite the house of the rag merchant. Its job was to provide conscripted labor to fill the various filthy orders of the German regime. Beside the Judenrat, there even was an auxiliary Jewish police, initially with Khantov at its head, and afterwards headed by a Galician Jew named Glatt. Clouds of darkness spread over our heads, as they began to abuse the Jewish populace and specific individuals. They used Jews to punish Jews, and with the help of Jews. Only God to take pity on us. But he was far from us – very far!

On my street, on the *Neuer Gasse*, a bomb fell, and the children were covered with shards of glass. I extracted the children, and fled with them in bare feet to a field in Karczyzna. In my haste, I took only the bicycle. The house was on fire. I also had a cow. She was in the pasture. Towards evening I waited for her on return from the meadow, and I took her with me into the field, in the place we had bedded down in Karczyzna. There, one of the employees of the railroad approached me, and proposed that I seel him the bicycle. I did a deal with him. I gave him the bicycle in exchange for a blind horse and wagon. I tied the cow to the wagon, and together with my wife and children, we set out in the direction of Zhetl, where I had a father, four brothers and two sisters. The Germans were there already also, however they hadn't handled people badly. And after the tribulations of Volkovysk – I breathed easier here. In this way, about a week went by. On the eighth day, they ordered all the Jews from age seven to seventy to gather in the marketplace square, to form rows, and they told them to sing and dance. This went on for three hours. The Christians stood beside their houses, on their balconies, holding their hands to their bellies and rolling with laughter. After three hours of this, they chose 120 men (from what we learned later: they were sent to Novogrudok and shot them to death), ordered everyone to put on yellow badges, and to return home. After a short while, another order was issued to turn over gold, jewelry and money: – and when the Jews were brought together on the market square, for purpose of turning over their assets and what they had worked for so hard – a German felt around in the pocket of one woman, and found a gold ring, and he then shot her to death in front of everyone else. At the same time, they organized work details that worked for the Germans, and in this way, 8-9 months went by. We had already heard about the massacres in Slonim, Kozlovshchina, and in the towns of the vicinity, but we thought the evil would pass us by: we worked for the *Wehrmacht,* and our 'Overseer,' was not all bad. In the meantime, a ghetto was put into the town. They assembled the Jews into

two streets, fenced them off with barbed wire – at the height of a man, with a gate, and we would have to pass through it on our way to work, under police guard.

On May 1, 1942, the ghetto was surrounded, and they ordered everyone to go out to the old cemetery for the purpose of receiving new 'papers.' Part of the people hid themselves in 'hideaways,' that everyone had prepared individually in the ghetto. At seven in the morning, when the Germans reached the place, and saw that very few people were coming – they went to the houses and took them out of their hiding places and gathered together three thousand people. My family and I lay in a hideaway, and they didn't find us. On the square they ordered that people form up in rows, and they began a selection: right, left! It became clear that this was a matter involving death – but they didn't know which way was death – to the right side, or the left side!... they gathered 1800 people together, and took them for a distance of a kilometer – to the outskirts of the town – and there they saw huge pits, ready. Gentiles from the two villages had dug them during the night, and machine guns stood not far from them... they started to bring twenty people at a time.. They shot them – into the pit... except for the last 60, there was no room left in the pits – so they sent them back to town, and they told how people tore their hair out, pulled out their teeth, went crazy, how the air was shaken with the screams and wailing, how the elderly Rabbi of Zhetl did not stop praying, reciting verses of the Psalms from memory, the confession of *Avinu Malkeinu*, and of *Ashamnu, Bagadnu;* But when he saw with his own eyes, that they were killing people by shooting them, and tossing them into the pits like slaughtered cattle, he had a change of attitude, and began to rail against the heavens, shouting with his last strength: here, is this the justice of the Law, here, merciful and considerate God, what has my precious and pure congregation done to deserve this?!... he pulled out the hair of his beard, tore the shirt on his back, and with hands outstretched to the heavens – was taken to the slaughter!

My uncle Leizer Kovensky, a jolly and alert Jewish man, one of the people from whom advice was sought in the city, and my uncle Shmuel Kovensky, with his father – had a bottle of whiskey. They drank the whiskey, recited their confession, lay down together, and were shot. The entire process didn't take more than two hours!

The survivors returned to their homes with broken families, without husbands, without wives, without children; those that were in hiding came out, and were forced to go back to work.

Eight weeks had not gone by, when they again surrounded the ghetto, and ordered everyone out onto the market square. My family and I, and 50 other people, were hidden in a bunker, but this time they found us, and took us all out to the marketplace square. When we arrived at the marketplace square, we met five hundred people already there, who lay with their heads on the ground, with boots off, they also made us get down on the ground, telling us to take our shoes off as well, and let us lie there for a half an hour. Afterwards, they ordered us to get up, arranged us into rows, and told us to go in the direction of the pits. Along the way, wives became separated from their husbands, their children, struggling, screaming, insanity... trapped together, we were led along the street to the cemetery... on our way, we ran into those who were already killed – men and women – lying in the gutters. At the corner of the street stood the SS commander – the overseer of the slaughter, with a detachment of Germans, and they chose a quantity of people from the rows. When he saw me – he said snappily: – *Rimmermeister! – Kopf hier!* My wife and children held onto me, and didn't want to let me go... and at that moment, they shot my wife... she fell at my feet like a sheaf of grain... the boy begged – don't shoot me, I am only 8½ years old! A bullet ended his begging. They dragged me and threw me into a stable, a place where there were already several hundred people – and they locked us in for two days. The rest of the people were taken to the pits, and they killed every last one of them. The ground heaved for three straight days, and the blood did not stop from running out of the pits – that's what the peasants told us. In the town, not a single Jewish soul remained alive. I, along with 212 people who had been detained in the stable, were sent to a camp in Novogrudok that had approximately 4000 people in

it, who were divided up int detachments and did a variety of work for the army. After being there for eight days there – and seeing that the whole deal was leading to oblivion – they gave no food, and treated us with cruelty – 14 of us organized ourselves, and we escaped into the Zhetl forest in the middle of the night, from behind the wires.

When we escaped, we had only one pistol among all of us. During the day, we would sleep in the forest, and with the night, we would get up and go to look for bread and anything else in addition to it. – because we knew the area well, we knew which of the peasants had Soviet arms; we would come at night, wake him up from his sleep, and ask him to give us his rifle, – and if not, we told him to grab a shovel and start digging a hole for himself. In regards to food, we didn't run into difficulty, but regarding armaments, we had to deal pretty harshly with them, to the point where the children would start to cry and beg: father, give them the rifle – so that they don't kill you... in this manner, we accumulated arms for 14 men. After being 12 days in the forest, we decided to send 5 men to make contact with the larger groups of partisans, about whom we had heard, and who were partly composed of Jews who had fled the massacres, and Red Army personnel who had stayed behind. I and four others went out on this expedition to a certain village, and asked a peasant who was known to us, whether anyone from the partisans comes there at night; the peasant showed us a path, and according to the tracks, we entered the forest, and after a few hours of wandering around the forest, we ran into the watch – a Jew with a rifle.

When he saw us approaching, he aimed his rifle at me...

Hold on there, my fellow Jew, I rebuked him. After so many slaughtered Jews – you're the first Jew ready to fire a bullet! Blessings upon you, and please tell us, how can we reach your commander? – I related to him who I was, and he gave me a password to the commander. Deeper in the forest, around a campfire, there were several hundred armed men, Jews and soldiers, with the commander in their midst – a Russian Lieutenant. I came up to him, and explained to him where I had come from, and that with me there are fourteen men, all armed. He told us to come, and that we would be together. I sent 2 men and they brought the nine others. Once we were together, we decided what we have to do from now on: we sent people into the forest, and gathered together all the small groups, and in a short time, we had organized about us a complete brigade of 1000 men – all of them armed from head to toe. – The Russian Army had sunk a great deal of weaponry in the Shchara River – so we dragged a great deal of weaponry out of the river, including even a couple of tanks. In our area, another group of Jews from Dereczin were active, headed by the well-known Dr. [Yekhezkiel] Atlas. They did not want to join us; they were beautifully organized, and operated their own forces. The name of the group was: The Atlas Battalion. Once, Dr. Atlas came to us with five men, and proposed that we go blow up the bridge across the Neman River. Our commander agreed, and appointed me to go with another person from Zhetl – Medvetsky – to support Atlas. We fished out underwater shells from the river, dried them out, and from the villages, we obtained from the peasants gunpowder and six bottles of turpentine, and in the middle of the night, we went to the Bilitz Bridge. In our stealthy approach, the first thing we did was roll the German sentry into the river, he should only be known to the wolves living in that river, and then after the blessing of '*Bowray Me-owray HaEsh*,[12]" we blew up the bridge. This sort of work was very pleasing to Dr. Atlas, who came to ask the commander to transfer me to him as a battalion commander. With his consent, I transferred to Atlas, and became head of the battalion. It happens that in that battalion, there were many Jews from the town of Kozlovshchina. When all the commanders got together, we established that we had forces required to launch an attack, and on one clear morning, we fell upon the town, and fought the Germans for four hours. I used a 'Maxim,' the machine gun with 259 cartridges of 13 caliber. The Germans put up a stiff resistance – but we broke into the center of the town, set fire to it on all sides, we

[12] From the Saturday night *Havdalah* Blessing prior to lighting the ritual candle.

killed 30 military police, and we captured the SS commander who had conducted the massacre, and brought him alive into the forest. In the forest, we untied him, and from the same rope, we fashioned a stout noose, and hung him like Haman from the first tree we could find that was suitable... it was in this fashion that the Jews of Kozlovshchina took revenge for the spilling of the blood of the Jews in Kozlovshchina, and the aging Rabbi of Kozlovshchina, whom they dragged behind a wagon, and afterwards was buried alive. This attack was lead by a Russian Lieutenant Bulat, who was missing one hand.

In the meantime, the groups grew daily, and in time, the strength of the partisan forces grew substantial in the forest, and it created earthen bunkers, equipped itself with horses, cattle, a great deal of weaponry and cannons. After a time, an attack on Dereczin was organized. We surrounded it on all sides, and we set the streets on fire, we killed many Germans and took them prisoner, we captured horses and armaments. Towards the end of 1942, the Germans sent a very strong force against us. They surrounded the forest, and we carried on a battle with them for three straight days. We lost many men, among them Dr. Atlas, the Jewish Hero with such a gentle soul, the fearless warrior commander. May he rest in peace! He died beside me, and his last words were: be strong and take courage, my brother, take vengeance for the spilled blood of our brethren, of our unfortunate people! We brought him to final rest on a hillock in the forest, and we honored him as a partisan, ans we surrounded his grave with shell casings – the Jewish partisans knew where the final resting place of their commandant was – and perhaps some day, they will bring him to be buried in Israel. Seeing that the German forces were superior to ours, we set ourselves a course, and retreated back into the forests of Slonim.

During the siege, we sustained ourselves with a few potatoes, or from small handfuls, and the people were ravenously hungry. The Russian officers sent [troops] into the surrounding villages to bring food – however, little was given to the Jews. Then I sent several men from my group to bring food. However, along the way, the Germans rained down a hail of bullets on them, and they returned empty-handed. Out of intense anger, I returned to the forests we came from with my group. The following morning, the commander came to me all heated up: who gave you permission to leave the battalion!? I answered him, that when I saw my group was hungry – therefore, I could not be with him. Meanwhile, he sensed that two of the women partisans did not have their arms. – Where are the rifles? – he turned and asked. They explained to him, that in their escape from the siege, they threw their rifles away. He took down his rifle, and shot the two girls on the spot[13], and pointed his rifle at me. – Shoot, I said to him, if I deserve it! He relented from using the rifle... – True, he said – you don't deserve it, and just remember that this time I forgive you!

We returned again to the brigade.

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13 ***Shelovsky, Feyge*** - (Fanya), Daughter of *Yitzhak & Rachel.* Born in Dereczin. Fled with her family into the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade.

During the sortie, she participated in all battles. When the pressured partisans were surrounded, many hid their weapons, lest they fall into German hands. When her unit returned to its base, she was asked for her weapon, and she explained where she had hidden it. The commander, *Bulak* sentenced her and her companion, *Bella Becker* to death, while other non-Jewish partisans, who had left their weapons behind, were held free from harm.

The Dereczin Memorial Book, p. 317 (see also, p. 310)

The account by Kovensky varies from that found in the DMB. In a conversation with Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky on 27Aug01, she favors the DMB account, which states that the girls were first taken back to camp and then shot. Gutka remembers Kovensky very well as one of her partisan comrades in the Naliboki Forest.

In a short while, a group of paratroopers reached us – 112 men, directors, officers and troops. They took over the leadership of the partisan movement completely. They asked the leadership for four people who know the area very well, the roads and the rail lines. The leader designated me as one of their escort. In this manner, I was transferred tot he paratroop battalion, in which I participated in various partisan actions, I blew up 19 German trains, I destroyed rail lines, and when the Red Army crossed the border into Byelorussia, we delayed the German trains for two straight weeks between Minsk and Baranovich. Under the command of the paratroopers, a standing partisan army of approximately seventy thousand men was organized, in the wastes of [the] Naliboki [Forest], between Baranovich and Stalovičy, that encompassed entire districts, that would regularly receive arms and tools for sabotage from the air, directly from Moscow, and transport the wounded to Moscow, where they could be treated in Russian hospitals.

In 1943, the Germans launches a mighty siege against the Naliboki wastes. Through espionage, they discovered the extent of our forces, and on one bright morning, a full German Division surrounded the forest, with tanks and planes. They went through the entire forest, and we fought them for fifteen days. Being a good fighter, I excelled in many of battles, and I was awarded with the Medal of Honor, First Class of the partisans, and the Red Star, and an Order of Battle for the Fatherland, Second Class. In 1944, I was awarded the Order of Lenin.

On July 19, 1944, during a battle with the German guard near Stalovičy, I was designated with storm troopers to blow up German bunkers of concrete and steel. After exchanging fire for four hours, we could not get the upper hand over the Germans, who dug themselves into their bunkers, and rained heavy fire down on us – we received an order to attack the bunkers frontally with hand grenades. We stormed the bunkers and succeeded in getting two grenades inside, against the tanks that were inside the bunkers, where 18 Germans lay. All of them were blown into the air. In running from this bunker, I was fired upon with a machine gun from a second bunker about five meters away, and the fingers of my right hand were shot off. Because of swiftness, I was able to mount my horse (I was a horseman), forded the Neman, with a boot full of blood – and I swam to the rapid aid provided by the partisans, which was on the second side of the Neman. They bandaged my hand, and brought me 10 kilometers deeper into the forest, where there was a sanitary station. My fingers were supposed to be amputated, and there was no anesthetic to put me to sleep. Out of great pain, I gritted my teeth to the point where they broke slightly. Then, my partisan comrade Boruch Levin came over to me, and with a fist placed near my mouth said: take and bite my hand – and to the doctor – cut!....

When I got a little better – they sent me to our aerodrome station in the forest, and from there, by plane to Moscow. There, I lay in various hospitals for eight months. My hand was operated on twice. As a Hero of the Soviet Union, I enjoyed the best attention and care. After my recuperation, I returned to my home areas, which had by them\n already been liberated. However, I met not a single person, only one grave after another. I came to Zhetl with a cluster of the partisans that remained, and we erected a memorial to our exterminated brothers and sisters, above their common grave. From Zhetl, I walk to the city where I had spent the best of my years, where I had married my wife, and where my beloved children were born, who were so dear to me. The heartwarming city of Volkovysk. But there, I did not even find graves! All the Jews of Volkovysk had been turned into ashes in the crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz... It was in my heart to simply spread myself out, down on the ground, and weep without end... A familiar gentile (Bulyash Sharyika) ran into me, and asked me into his house, to sit down, and asked if I wanted something to eat? No, I said, I am full, you're welcome; but out of our friendship, give me a little ashes!... I took the ashes, and spread them on my head, I went out to the street and sat on a rock. I sat *Shiva* for my wife, my children, and the dear Jews of Volkovysk... The gentiles looked at me in sympathy for my sorrow. Well, I said to them, now you have it good, there are no more Jews – will you now live forever? They attempted to justify themselves: we are not responsible for this thing, we did not get involved... in the place where the hammer and sickle reign – there is still some respect for the Jew, and his life is not entirely forfeit!... I went out to look for the solitary Jewish

partisans, who had remained in the city, I took my leave of them, threw my knapsack over my shoulder, and went out on the road. Through cities and towns that had been destroyed, towns without Jews!...It was like Yom Kippur – as if all the Jews were at synagogue during *Kol Nidre* – east to the Alps, through the Alps is the way to Israel!

Page 68: *The Partisan Eliyahu Kovensky at the Time He Left the Forest*

Memories

By Shayna Lifschitz

Enough has been told about the tragedy of Volkovysk, and there are more important people than I to write about the different details; but I think that what is appropriate beyond the sorrow, is to remember our martyrs, and to memorialize a different set of fact, that the Jews of Volkovysk, wherever they may be found, need to know about the measure of faith and the gentle feelings that their brothers and sisters revealed particularly on the doorstep into oblivion, under the sword of the murderers, the low, bestial Nazis.

The first war objective of the Nazi beasts in Volkovysk was the Jewish population; even before a Nazi foot stepped into the city, they bombed, burned, wiped out and murdered specifically Jews, Jewish houses, the *Schulhof,* and everything that belonged to the Jews.

From the first day of their conquest, they assured that there would be no help from our "good friends," in the non-Jewish populace, and from previously prepared lists, they ordered daily arrests of alleged communists, as it were.

They would incarcerate the arrested people in the white jailhouse, that remained intact after the bombing, and when a set number of people were accumulated, they would take them out to the Mayak groves and kill them by shooting. There were previously dug graves there, prepared by Christian workers, and afterward by conscripted Jewish labor, who were forced to dig graves, and bury our martyrs afterwards.

Among the victims were: Leizer Bliakher, Shaul Markus, Elkeh Gamm, Michael Mazya, Panter, Tzirulnitsky, Khvonyik, Manya Movshovsky and her husband, Berman (who was a bookkeeper in the Kolontai company), Kalir, Novick and others.

By coincidence, I happened to be present when Novick received an order to present himself to the police. Seeing that his first name was not on the order, I suggested that he should send his father, because it was possible that the Germans would send an older man home. The elder Novick also thought this was the case, and he requested that his son give him the "invitation," but he didn't want to hide behind his elderly father's 'apron' and forcibly made his way out of the house and went to the police, and as you can understand, he never returned from there; and not many days went by before the elderly Novick, ע"ה died from sorrow and anger.

Pes'sha Gamm (Galiatsky). After Gamm fled with the Soviets, she remained in Volkovysk with her darling wonderful child. Her sister-in-law Elkeh Gamm lived with her. When the police came to ask for Elkeh Gamm, Pes'sha argued that she didn't know anything about her, and when the murderers threatened her and her child with death, if she doesn't reveal the whereabouts of Elkeh, even then, she did not stop denying any knowledge of her whereabouts... but Elkeh was in the second room, and listened to the entire conversation; she understood the seriousness of the Nazi threats, came out of the room, and turned herself over to the hands of the murderers...

In one of the transports that they were in the custom of taking from the jail for purposes of shooting executions, there were less than a full quota of people. The murderers, it seems, wanted to save themselves some work, in handling prisoners for this purpose. In this connection, they notified the *Judenrat* that by a given hour, they had to provide a specific number of people... after a tragic meeting, the *Judenrat* decided to provide a number of insane and crippled people, and it was in this way that they filled the order...

I must add here, that during the time of the worst of these troubles, when it was sufficient for a Christian to utter the name of a Jew, and that would immediately cause that Jew to be thrown in to Jail to await his fate; after the decree to wear yellow badges, the prohibition to walk on the sidewalks, and all the other perverted

rules that were in full force, and when forced German [house] searches were conducted, despite all of this, Volkovysk was like a "Garden of Eden" compared to other cities in Byelorussia, Lithuania and the Ukraine.

The first death blow that Volkovysk received by the standards of the times, came with the murder of the Jewish doctors. I will not dwell on the details of this murder, which has been covered adequately, but to relate the incident of the tragic end of Fanya Tropp, the wife of the refined and quiet Dr. Tropp ע"ה: After the murder of the doctors, Fanya Tropp was left with two lovely children, twins. She didn't rest or relax in her sole desire to get her children settled, and to end her own life, which had no value to her without her husband.

The murdered Tropp had developed a good relationship with a former municipal official named Falko, a Christian. This Christian had been killed by the Germans even before the murder of the doctors, because he had been informed upon that he was a high official under the Soviets. After Fanya Tropp remained in the same situation as Falko's wife, the Christian woman was willing to take the Tropp children to her, because they had already announced the transfer of the Jews to the bunkers near the barracks. However, it seems that this Christian lady could not stand up to the objections of her Christian neighbors, and she was forced to return the children to their mother. The latter, did not, under any circumstance, want to allow herself to be relegated to the bunkers and simply wait there for death. She then grabbed her children and went up to a German policeman and begged him to shoot them all. However, the German forcefully told her that he would not do so without an order... in the midst of a resolute conviction to put an end to this sort of life, Fanya Tropp hurried home, took three doses of poison from the medicines that belonged to her husband, and took her children to the destroyed Schulhof, where she herself swallowed a does of poison, and quickly wanted to give doses to her children, but the children, aged 6-7 wanted to live, and thought their mother had gone mad... they tore out of her half-dead grasp, and ran to tell the neighbors about the poisoning of their mother, and that she wanted to poison them as well... Mrs. Shalakhovich, the aunt of the children, was forced, to her great sorrow, to take the children, and bring them to the bunkers... how terrifying it was to see how good people, hungry and in a state of exhaustion themselves, nourished the orphans of Dr. Tropp, from their own rancid remnants of bread...

Apart from a few incidents of egotism and selfishness, the Jewish Volkovysk populace conducted itself with dedication and self-sacrifice in the highest degree, in particular during the most terrifying times of the transports, in the compilation of the lists of the 'unnecessary' Jews that were supposed to be loaded up to be taken to Treblinka...and the able-bodied Jews, capable of work, who were to remain behind to do work...

Strong, and healthy young men, like the Gandz brothers, Avreml Yunovich, and many others (because of my own bitter experiences later in Auschwitz, I have forgotten their names) were, according to the rules, able-bodied, and could remain in the camp, but their courageous position from which they could not be dissuades was: we are going together without wives and children, or without parents. Even those who remained behind, did so only because of the intense pleading, the weeping and begging of their families, who out of the great love for their husbands, sons or wives, did not want to drag them along as well to death, so long as the murderers themselves did not demand it.

Yes, there once was a city called Volkovysk, in which lived a variety of people, good, better, bad, etc. But the end was the grave, the crematoria, and despite all other manners of death, fate had demanded of us, the few survivors, to witness their willingness to give, the selfless personal sacrifice of our martyrs from Volkovysk.

May their memory be for a blessing.

Tel-Aviv, Passover Eve 5706 (1946)

Page 71: Lag B'Omer in Volkovysk

The Night of the Seder In Auschwitz

From a Conversation With Joseph Kotliarsky

Today is the first day of *Khol HaMoed* of Passover. One meets with acquaintances, shakes hands, exchanges 'Happy Holiday' blessings, and 'Festivals for Happiness' greetings, and the question immediately arises as to how the *Seder* was conducted, and how was the *Haggadah* recited, did the *knaidlach* turn out well, etc.

And here comes Joseph Kotliarsky, the first one to tell us exactly about the destruction of our city, and its dear Jewish residents. He comes now from *Kfar-Saba*, where he conducted his first *Seder* in Israel together with his family.

Him I do not ask how the *Seder* went this time around. But I am eager to find out how the Seder was conducted beforehand.

Yes, he says, last year I was in Dachau for Passover, but you won't be interested about the Seder in Dachau, because like on all other nights, also on "this night," we looked through the garbage for a potato peel, and if two or three of us saw such a peel, every one of us wanted to have this great find.

Probably not of you thought, that in conducting the *Seder*, and in eating the *knaidlach*, that especially now, as you carry out the *Seder* ritual, and recite the prayer, '*let those who are needy [come and eat]*...' that you preserve the names of the Jews on a piece of potato peel.

Two years ago, during Passover, I was in Auschwitz, and I don't have anything to tell about the *Seder,* because in place of *Matzo, knaidlach*, a *Haggadah*, and related items, we received beatings, hard labor, selections, and the recognition that sooner or later all of us would serve as fuel for the huge crematoria, and this recognition was so deeply instilled in us, that we didn't have the will to think as to whether we had any relationship to life. However, in the Passover of three years ago, the first Passover in Auschwitz, after Volkovysk, I sat at the *Seder* and didn't even eat any leavened food for all the days of Passover...

The first day of Passover at that time fell on a Monday, and on Friday, the eve of *Shabbat HaGadol,* a larger transport of Jews was brought from Greece. As you can understand, the Jews brought *Matzo* with them, raisins, and other Passover things.

On that same *Shabbat HaGadol*, the murderers had already brought the Greek Jews to the crematoria, and among their possessions that the Jews counted, there were those who managed to snatch a little *Matzo*, and some raisins...

There were 8 of us people, who were designated to run a *Seder* in our block....

As usual, everyone was forced to go to bed and to put out all lights by nine o'clock in the evening, and heaven help the individual that the block supervisor, the Pole Leon, found [even] a couple of minutes after nine, and not lying down in his bunk...

And so, at precisely nine, we went to lay down on our bunks, and with an excited heart, we waited for the appointed hour. At ten o'clock, when there was nobody was around that would cause someone to endanger their lives by leaving their bunk, we all came down, and with great care, slipped several sticks into the stove – so that in the worst case, we could justify our presence by claiming we were trying to warm ourselves up near the fire – and we started the *Seder*... We had succeeded in obtaining two *Matzos* and some raisins that we had soaked in water in place of wine, and an old worn out *Haggadah* that we had managed to secure in advance, that we had rescued from amongst the books that used to be thrown about after their owners were incinerated...

When we sat down to the 'Dinner Table...' on the ground.... we looked at on another, and we all burst out into bitter tears... However, even this was a form of luxury for us, because our crying was likely to attract the attention of the brutal Pole, Leon.

We remained sitting silently, and mumbled a blessing over the *Matzo* and wine, quietly to ourselves...

And so we sat until half past midnight, and the subject of our conversation was about life in Auschwitz. One asked the other, what they were willing to pay to get free. One would say he was prepared to let them take a had, or a foot, while others said that they were prepared to give up their lives, so long as they would be allowed to die like human beings, and not to have to die by such macabre means, along with tens of thousands of their brothers and sisters, that are being brought on a daily basis from all corners of the earth...

The transport of the Greek Jews was a large one; and they did not manage to incinerate all of them on *Shabbat HaGadol,* and Sunday was a holiday for the murderers, and literally in those same moments when we were arranging our *Seder*, we saw the bright flames of the furnaces in the distance, where the Jews from Greece were being burned, who because of their *Matzo* and raisins, we were able to perform the *mitzvah* of eating *Matzo...*

Before dawn, at approximately five o'clock, we went out to work as usual, and we tried hard for them not to detect any tiredness in us from the sleepless prior night of the *Seder*.

On that Passover, I conducted a great many transactions in the camp; I traded my bread for potatoes with various people, and with great difficulty, managed to fulfil my decision not to eat leavened food.

Tel-Aviv, 1946
Sh. B.

It Will Not Be Believed If It Is Not Told

By Joseph Kotliarsky
Volkovysk – Auschwitz – Tel-Aviv

Is this all true?... Can it be possible that such a thing happened? – Yes, 10, 20, 50 Jews, but all of Volkovysk without an exception – the *Dayan*, the *Shames*, the *Shokhet u'Bodek* [14], the Rabbi, the Zionist, the communist, the old, the young, grandmothers and grandchildren, and the cream of Volkovysk youth, all of them without exception?... Yes, yes, it did happen, everything and everybody were massacred by the uncivilized accursèd murderers, who trod on them with their bloodstained boots. In an accelerated short time, and with a deliberate speed, starting with November 2, 1942 on Monday morning, when the wild shout reached our ears in Volkovysk: Everyone is going to the bunkers, (special pits dug out of the ground without a window or door), we understood that this was the beginning of our slaughter. Our hearts did not permit us to believe that it would happen in the way it finally did, but we did suspect that something of this nature would occur. I "saw the Slonim Massacre," these are strange words, "to see" a "massacre?" What did you see with your own eyes? – By what means did you get there? The truth of the matter is, that I don't really know how I got there, apparently by mistake, but when I cast a glance at my left arm, and I see the number tattooed there, I begin to understand myself a little, and I begin to recollect what I saw with my own eyes, impossible things, that took place there in a routine manner, they distinguished between the young and the old, between men and women, that is to say, between those who could perform work, and those who could not, the divided up and deceived the congregation, and the congregation deceived itself because the will to live did exist, and life seems to be hateful to you, and is being stripped from those around you and from yourself. It was perceived that the area in the ghetto was better, more secure – and because of this, some fled there. Others [ran] from there to here, thinking it was better here – rushing to get here. Making themselves a source of mockery and derision to the murdering Germans, because they know that there is no escape from them, because wherever they are found you are, *Jude* – his religion is to be put to death, and in order to deceive us, they turn a blind eye, and let us flee, and in exchange for this, they take bribes, several kilograms of gold, jewelry, suits, boots – this is openly; and secretly, they take everything from women's stockings to Singer sewing machines. All of this takes place in the context of an ongoing 'action,' and not the result of isolated incidents, until the energies of the people are sapped from running about and over-exerting themselves – then they approach their final goal, they load all these goods on buses ... and send the Jews to do work... *'In himmel kommando...'* that is how they would express it.

In Volkovysk, which was in the occupied German territory that was part of the Third Reich, they did things differently, that is, they plundered and abused the Jews in a different way, people deluding themselves, because they wanted to live... they tell us that the Jews of Slonim, with the Rabbi at their head, were all communists, and that is why they were sent off to work ... far away... but you, from Volkovysk, are counted in "Our Third Reich," and we need you here, and you are only required to gather into the bunkers adjacent to the barracks, and from there, we see how to get you settled... and people are taken in by this deception...because the will to live is powerful, yes, the reader will find this totally incomprehensible: how could one place any faith in murderers like these, and why could they not see that their intention was not to provide work, but something else entirely? But, the old maxim applies: 'Don't judge your neighbor until you have stood in his place.' Indeed, I was in this condition, and I suffered through all of it, consequently, I am

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[14] The ritual slaughterer (*Shokhet*), who was also the inspector of the resulting animal parts (*bodek*) to assure suitability for consumption under the rules of *Kashrut.*

afforded the privilege of making an assessment; not to pass judgement, but rather to cast some light on the circumstances, and what happened there. People, parents of little children, and the grown children of aged parents, if something bad happens in the family, then everyone gets together, and one participates in the sorrow of the relative, even if not in a large way, then at least with a good word, or advice; if something more serious occurs, then the needed task unifies everyone. Now let us examine what took place there. I am reminded that very morning, the weather was actually quite pleasant, the fall was constantly rainy, but this day was nice, as if to frustrate the sun from breaking through the clouds, in order to watch how they were driving us into the bunkers; she is not ashamed at all the sight of what is being done to "The Chosen People," on the contrary: she is an ally to the Poles, Byelorussians, and those watching the expulsion. All of us are walking, without any purpose of sense, all together, being driven, complete families, elderly and infants, and even the residents of the Old Age Home, if they are only capable of walking; they are walking to the bunkers, hugging each other, and calling out, Oh, how good! At least [we are] together. Look father, give me your hand, and we will go together, where?... for what purpose?... to whom?... no man knows, just everyone together. The grandfather exchanges kisses with his grandson, Ber'eleh, are you here too – and a tear falls from the grandfather's eyes, as he thinks: well, I'm am after all old, I have already lived out the skein of my life, and is not life a struggle on the face of the earth, what to do, my life is pushing on, I saved penny by penny, I raised my sons, I was privileged to see grandchildren, Ber'eleh goes to *Heder* already, and can read Hebrew properly already, and is beginning his study of the Pentateuch, it was perhaps the time to enjoy a little *nachas,* and suddenly, there is a war, the Nazis invade, they tell us to go, and here we are going. The heart of the old man does not foretell of any good to come of this, and his pity is totally for his young daughter with her dear infant, the little pure and unsullied cherub. But there is no time to contemplate the doings of the Almighty, don't probe that which is beyond you, and the grandfather and grandson walk on. The Nazis hit us with their truncheons, but despite this, there is a good feeling for being all together, because, if we are all together, they won't assault us as an entire group... or so we try to tell ourselves, because we yearn to live.

But when we arrive at the rancid bunkers, and encounter approximately 20,000 Jews, that is to say from the entire Volkovysk District, entire towns, with their officials, rich and poor alike, relatives meeting one another, in-laws one has not seen in a while. The pious see a sign from heaven in this, 'the world is like an island,' and if the forced travel requires separation from one's in-laws...The groups of young people look at one another ashamedly, young health and able young people, with no hope, everyone from our city was someone capable of doing anything, but here, they are paralyzed; What had essentially happened. At that moment, nobody took stock of the situation, because we weren't disposed to do so, because all our thoughts were focused on how to obtain some potato peelings and keep the infants alive, or a little bit of water to wash one's hands. A buyer is sought, perhaps a gentile, who would be willing to take a pair of boots for two glasses of milk and an egg, and when the boots are already in his hands, he doesn't give the egg, crying out that he had already given it; the Jew is not as willing to raise his voice, because this 'transaction' requires a bullet in the head. Despite this, the man walks off with the half bottle of milk in his hand, barefoot, but satisfied: – his young wife has a frail young boy, and such an item is nowhere to be found. The milk is looked on as if it were a remedy sent from heaven, and then we think: hey, only together, it is good that we are together. Not like in other places. And this is a sign that they need us. And once again, they allow themselves to be deluded. Until the end of November and the beginning of December, slowly, but surely, we extract this stupidity from our minds, and we begin to change our view, we start to understand that we are fooling ourselves. Nevertheless, entire families are together, with in-laws and relatives, and after all, they tell us we are all traveling together, going to work. And this is a bad sign. All of us going to work? – Eighty year-old women, little children, pregnant women, and women with newborns, to work? This is paradoxical, impossible, there is no more desire for self-delusion, and the depressing future is now perceived with open

eyes. Rumors start spreading through the bunkers that they are first taken to Bialystock and then to *'Treblinka,'* and what was there, nobody knows, except there is a feeling that this is somehow connected to the work, called *'himmel kommando.'* We were lodged in the bunkers for a total of 3-4 weeks, and no one was able to recognize even his own neighbor. And there is no wonder at all in this: Has any one of you tried to live in an earthen cellar for four weeks along with 600 people, that can only hold 80-90 people, without air, water, in hunger and cold, in a constant war with lice and crawling vermin... and it was no wonder that we didn't recognize one another. And with the trip, our gladness increased, because we were making the trip together in one train (even though these train cars were for horses and had no windows). Nobody knows how long the ride is, but despite the travails of the journey, we hoped it would go on forever. There was a perception, that with this trip, we were escaping something bad, and going on to something better. I have to tell you, that the minute that the train stopped, hearts stopped for a moment. We held on, and began to look at one another, as if this were the last time, with the faces of people who did not expect to be alive in another half hour. But everyone was afraid of this idea, afraid to utter a sound. The looks everyone gave each other were communicated suspicion, we look and keep quiet, through the cracks in the train car sides, we see a clear, bright world, and how dark it is for us. How did we sin, what was our transgression, and if we indeed did sin, what did these children do? There is a great desire to scream, to overturn worlds: why are you silent there, why is no one paying any attention to the mother who is kissing the little child, how an elderly grandfather is taking leave of his grandson; but we are afraid to breathe too deeply. We are too afraid to even cry, we believe that if we behave more normally, it will be better for us. The silence lasts only an hour. We hear the footfall of soldiers, and suddenly the train cars are thrown open, and with a marauding wild shout, *'Alles Raus!'*, we see before us an SS camp of young plundering murderers, with machine guns, and in addition to that they are holding truncheons with which to urge the people on to move more quickly, and a rain of blows descends upon us, one does not see family, one does not recognize if we are together or not, the only thing one sees are the truncheons and beaten heads and blood; The SS troops are running through the trains, creating mayhem, searching about to make sure that no Jew remains behind, or an elderly woman, they need everyone, and after they have determine that all the cargo is off the train, empty, they line them up in rows, and indicate with a finger, who shall remain alive and who shall go to death. The person doing this designation was a Gestapo doctor, with senior army officers. This was more important to them that the front at Stalingrad. Because the Jewish Front was top priority... And it served their purposes that 280 people are selected from the Volkovysk District, that is to say, less that 1½ %, and 98½ % can ride on the buses! We do not know which among us are the fortunate ones, and who is not, there is just one thing I recall precisely, that behind the buses came a Red Cross ambulance, which caused a doubt to enter my heart that maybe they are really taking them to work, and the evidence is that first-aid is accompanying them. But to our chagrin, we discovered later that this ambulance was carrying the *'gas'* to poison the Jews. Yes, they deceived us in the most appalling fashion. Our eyes grew dark when we saw the giant flame 200 meters from the camp, and those that had preceded us pointed to the fire and said: There, look, there your dearly beloved and best are being burned. We didn't grasp at all that this was the case. We thought we were on the planet Mars, at the end of the world, that does not belong to this world. It was difficult to believe that in our world, there were to be found people in normal circumstances that were unaware of what was going on here, because if they did know, it didn't seem reasonable that they would remain silent. We cannot demand anything important from others when we are not completely settled within ourselves. Because in order to address the chapter of history that resulted in the extermination of a third of our people, we have to gird our loins, and to read the stories and the facts that have been transcribed. These are not the sort of stores that one reads and then sets aside. The Mandate of the Hour is to 'tell them diligently unto thy children,' the responsibility of those smoking embers rescued from the worldwide conflagration, to pass on the facts, episodes "for a complete accounting," – to learn and understand, as reference tool to help maintain vigil, that what happened here will never be altered in the slightest, forever, in the history of our people.

Volkovysk

By Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky
Johannesburg, South Africa

Page 80: Visit of [Vladimir] Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Volkovysk

I have been asked by my close friends of the Committee for the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk in our Holy Land, to participate in the publication that they are preparing to publish, in memory of the beloved home city in which they were born, that was destroyed, along with the remaining sacred communities in Poland, Lithuania and the other lands of Eastern Europe, that to our awesome misfortune, were lost in the implementation of the extermination plan emanating from the decrees of the cruel Nazis, the *Amalek* of modern times, may their names be forever eradicated. In my capacity as Rabbi of this important city, where I had the honor to occupy the pulpit for a period of nearly ten years, from the time I came there in the year 5685 (1924) to take the place of *Rabbi Gaon [Abba Yaakov] Borukhov* זצ"ל, after he made *aliyah* to Jerusalem (may she be rebuilt and redeemed) in his older years, and until I left at the end of the year 5693 (1932), when I was call to take the leadership of the group of communities in the Transvaal, I thought to myself that this is a responsibility, to dedicate a few words to the memory of that magnificent community, which was full of wise people, and scholars in the full meaning of the word, and to add my tears to that vessel of tears of those of my beloved who come from our city, on the loss of their dear birthplace; and may the Master of all Consolation, blessed be His Name, comfort all of us in the comfort of Zion and Jerusalem, and may He wipe away our tears, as it is said: "And wipe away, O Lord, our God, tears from all faces!"

The community of Volkovysk was renown and distinguished in glory, because of the great Rabbis who were *Gaonim* of great repute throughout Jewry, and from the mouths of the city elders, who were still alive when I came to live there, more than twenty years ago, I heard much about the great Rabbis from the generations that came before me. One who excelled especially in the telling of many stories was my good friends and close confidants, the venerable elder, *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky*, ז"ל, who was called *Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's.* He was a highly respected many, "Of pleasing appearance, with a long beard, sweetened by his knowledge of the world,"[15] and being a neighborly man, quick to be stimulated, with a strong sense of community, he always took a major part in all community endeavors, and with a playful smile on his lips, he loved to tell about all that he had seen or knew from his life. He was a close neighbor to me at the *Bet HaMedrash*, and at frequent intervals, spoke at great length about the great Rabbis of the past, and I learned many details about them from him. I do not remember all of them right now, but this I do know from him, that before Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל, the Gaon Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg זצ"ל, who died prematurely young, was the Rabbi of the city, and his seat remained vacant for seven years, until Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל came to take his place, and to serve in his stead with honor. Apart from being a formidable Torah scholar, Rabbi Jonathan זצ"ל was one of the *Gaonim* of the past generation, wise, a scholar and a man of reason, and all of the wise people of that generation, the exponents of Torah scholarship and the Enlightenment, corresponded with him, and his word was heeded by all of them. Between the pages of one of his books, that came to me from the landlord of the house in which he lived, I found a letter written to him by the *Rashi Fin* of Vilna, one of the very few of the members of the past generation who followed the Enlightenment, and one of the Zionist leaders of that time, who were known by the name, *Hovevei Tzion*, and in that letter, there were some very interesting things in regard to one important meeting that was called prior to the first Zionist Congress in

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15 A quote from a line in the *Hineni* prayer from the prologue to the *Yom Kippur Musaf* service, when the Cantor beseeches the Almighty to look upon him as someone with these virtues.

Katowice, nearly sixty years before. When I received a visit from my colleague and friend, Rabbi Moshe Berlin, שליט"א, the head of the Mizrachi in Israel, I gave him this letter, to be turned over to the care of the international library in Jerusalem. Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg זצ"ל, inspired the people in his city, through his spirit, to cherish the noble idea of a love for Zion among themselves, and Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל maintained this perspective, and thanks to the influence of the two of them, the Volkovysk community was among the ones who stood from the remaining cities in the area for its dedication to this nationalist ideal. This caused a large proportion of the people to make *aliyah* to our Holy Land, and they settled there many years before the great calamity in Europe, and in this manner, were saved from death and destruction. Before Rabbi Jonathan זצ"ל, the Rabbinate of the city was held by the Rabbis and *Gaonim,* Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Diskin, זצ"ל , Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz זצ"ל, Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, and Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Khaver, זצ"ל, the author of *Bet Yitzhak,* which was published in Siedliska in the year 5596 (1836). I do not remember the order in which they served, or the length of their service, and it is possible that I have them out of order, and for this, I beg a thousand pardons from their sanctified remains. It is possible that there were several other Rabbis among them, whose names have escaped me over time, and I ask for those who are familiar with these details to come after me, and fill in what I have omitted, and I will recognize them with my thanks and blessing.

There always was a distinguished Yeshiva in Volkovysk, headed by leading Torah scholars, and many students were drawn there from the cities in the area. The many *Batei Medrashim* in the city were filled with boys and
young married men, who concentrated on their Torah study, and the townsfolk supported them in a respectable fashion, since the love of Torah was deeply rooted in their hearts. Many great exponents of Torah scholarship came from the *Batei Medrashim* of Volkovysk, that became beacons of Jewry, and it is especially worth mentioning the name of the Gaon of Israel and its leader, the Gaon, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, זצ"ל, who went from a bench in a *Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk to rule Jewry, and from Izavelin, the little town near it, to Kovno, to be the Leader of the entire Diaspora and the Leader of his generation, and his glory reflects on Volkovysk!

Many great people in Jewry came from there. Great in Torah scholarship and wisdom, and great in deeds, whose names remain forever in the annals of the Jewish people. It is especially worth recalling the two distinguished families from Volkovysk, the *Einhorn* family and the *Heller* family. The first produced among Jewry, great Torah scholars, and great scientists, and on his mother's side, the last *Gaon* of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky זצ"ל, was related to them, whose great name lives with us even to this day, and his memory will remain forever in the chronicles of our people, as a leader of the Jewish people, and an outstanding Torah scholar. And the second [family] that produced the *Gaon* Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, produced tens of distinguished people, who pursued the giving of charity and goodwill, who gave generously from their wealth to the various charitable institutions of the city, and even after they left her because of their large scale businesses, and went to live the great capitol cities, Warsaw and Berlin, they did not forget her, and continued to support the institutions of their birthplace city with a spirit of charity, venerable institutions in which they took great pride to their glory, until they were destroyed in our suffering at the hands of the *Amalek* of our generation, may their name be forever erased.

A glorious Jewish community existed in Volkovysk, with a sizeable population of great worth, with synagogues, *Batei Medrashim*, and a variety of educational institutions, and its residents were largely important people of precious value. Understandably, I cannot detail everything about each and every scion of this city, but in these few words, I want to present a permanent memorial to a few of those of my friends and relatives there, whom I found there on my arrival to take up residence there, and the memory of them

is permanently etched into my heart, despite the distance in both time and place. From them, there are two from the world of Torah, and two from the practical world, and they are the *Dayan,* Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, and the Rabbi, Reb Yerachmiel Daniel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva; Rabbi Israel Efrat the Lawyer and Reb Eli Abraham Markus, the owner of the leather factory. May all their memories be for a blessing!

The first was a man whose Torah was his faith. A man who occupied himself with Torah with great diligence, and didn't vary from it in the slightest. Being full and brimming with what he learned and saw in different books, and having a prodigious memory as well, literally a container that doesn't lose a drop, he became an accomplished facilitator. He was appointed as *Dayan* of the city by my predecessor, The Gaon Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov זצ"ל; and when I came to occupy the pulpit there, to my great elation, I found in the *Dayan* Rabbi Yaakov זצ"ל, a loyal, dedicated friend, who was literally my right hand for all the days that I lived there. Together, we did all the religious work of our community, and we were bound to one another with bonds of loyal friendship. When I left the city towards the end of 5793 (1933), he remained in residence, to handle the affairs of the city, until his passing a few years later. May his memory be blessed!

The second, Reb Yerachmiel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva, was a prodigious scholar, possessed of a sharp mind, alert and diligent, and apart from being very busy with his Yeshiva, in which he inculcated Torah into many students, he was almost always occupied in matters of dispute between people, that is to say, in matters requiring mediation and in Torah rulings, because he was the one selected by protagonists to adjudicate and mediate their disputes. Apart from this, he was by nature a very community-minded person as well, a person who took part in community affairs; his manner was pleasant, and his words were heeded, because everyone saw in him a man of established and seasoned knowledge, and related to him with the proper respect. These two, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Yerachmiel, the Headmaster, were those left from the prior generation, educated in the great Yeshivas who were raised with Torah, and their work was in Torah, and passed away leaving behind a good name, without leaving anyone behind to take their places, and even before the destruction of the entire Jewish community in Poland and L:ithuania, the centers of Torah learning in Jewry, their loss was irretrievable. It is of them that it is said, "Woe, woe is our loss, and we will not forget them!"

The Lawyer, Reb Israel Efrat ז"ל, was an excellent example of an enlightened Jew of the prior generation, the type of person who has practically vanished from the ranks of the enlightened in our generation. He also was full of and brimming with Torah and wisdom, a man, who although he had never studied at a university, and not even a gymnasium, he nevertheless surpassed all those of his age in his knowledge of the law. He acquired his common sense and comprehensive knowledge through his own energies, working tirelessly and diligently, and thanks to his outstanding intellectual capabilities, attained the position of 'Certified deputy lawyer,' and secured a very important position among the ranks of lawyers and judges of that time. Were it not for the restricting decrees of the malevolent regime of the Czar in Russia, before the First World War, he would have achieve the rank of Certified Lawyer, and could have even obtained an important government post, but he was handicapped by being a Jew. Despite all this, he was a Jew who was loyal to his faith and his people, and would take part in all community affairs, not only in his city, but for Jews throughout Russia in general. He was an ardent and dedicated Zionist, and stood at the head of the Zionist work in his city and that area, and at all major gatherings in which he participated, his words were always accorded the proper respect. Together with this, he took part in all municipal matters, and after the Rabbinate of the city was vacated, with the departure of the Rabbi *Gaon* Borukhov, זצ"ל, when he made *aliyah* to our Holy Land in his old age, and the people of the city appointed a Selection Committee, Reb Israel Efrat was selected to be the head of this committee, and thanks to his influence, and extra patience, the committee carried out its work

smoothly, and to the satisfaction of most of the members, most all who saw in him the right man, suitable to head this community endeavor in their important community!

For all the time I resided in Volkovysk, Mr. Efrat, ז"ל, was a frequent visitor in my home, and I always took great pleasure in his pleasant company, to discuss matters of Torah and wisdom with him. And when it came time for me to leave the city, my parting from him was very difficult, and when I found out two years later, that Mr. Efrat k"z had passed away, (I do not remember the exact day he died, and that is a shame), I was saddened deeply in my heart, and I mourned for him a great deal, because he was truly a man that stood above the common folk, and he was as his name proclaims, Efrat – 'An Efrati, Adorned with good manner,' (*Yalkut*).

I knew Reb Abraham Eli Markus ז"ל, well even before I set foot on the threshold of that city, because he was one of the two distinguished delegates who came to the city in which I was then living (Yagustov), at the beginning of the year 5785 (1924), to offer me the invitation in the name of the committee to come and serve as the Rabbi in their honored community, and I immediately recognized the attribute of this man, imbued with the spirit of Torah, that is not found in ordinary *balebatim*. And after I came to settle in the city, and became familiar with its distinguished residents from up close, I found Reb Abraham Eli Markus ז"ל, to be a man of outstanding good among the distinguished people of that community. His place was not among the wealthy, and he was constantly busy to earn a living for his household, and despite these many busy things, he always set aside time for Torah study, and he had a regular lesson in which he studied seven pages of the *Gemara* each week, in order to complete the entire *Shas* in seven years, and he would have a large holiday feast on the occasion of finishing the cycle of the *Shas*. And whatever was missing due to his business during the middle of the week, he made up for on the seventh day. The Holy Sabbath for him was set aside for Torah, and he would sequester himself at home, and study through the night, and then all day with enormous diligence, without going outside, and without involving himself during that day, in community matters, which he attended to faithfully during the remaining days of the week, being one of the important community leaders, whose word was listened to with the appropriate respect at all public gatherings.

He was gifted with a pleasant voice, and when he would lead the congregation before the Ark (not as a cantor, who makes his living this way, but rather as one of the *balebatim* who volunteer), he would literally capture hearts with his pleasant mode of praying, that would come out of his mouth in a manner that caused wonder. During the *Musaf* service of the High Holy Days, he would lower his prayer shawl over his face, and would pray with enormous conviction, closed eyes streaming tears, when he would read all the prayers and poetry *by heart*, and it was a source of wonderment to everyone who watched him, and listened to him, and they were greatly moved by his prayer. As I recollect the man and his conversation after these many years – and his praying, his great conviction in leading prayer at the Ark, I quickly sense the great loss sustained by our people, after they did away with having lay people lead prayer, and replaced them with professional cantors and their choirs! He was privileged to make aliyah to the Holy Land in his old age, before the war broke out, and he died there at a ripe old age. May his memory be for a blessing!

These are but a few lines from this distinguished congregation, the congregation of Volkovysk, which was a wonderment for all Jewry in its distinguished people and institutions. What an enormous calamity has befallen our people with the loss of these sacred communities, for which there are no replacements. We have been orphaned and turned over in a manner as terrible as death itself, in losing a third of our nation, and of even greater tragedy, in the taking from us of that part of our people that was the strongest in spirit, the settlement in Poland and Lithuania, that was a bulwark and crown of Judaism and Torah, woe is unto us, for we have been plundered! Our misfortune is as great as the sea, and who is to comfort us, and we have no one

to lean on but our Father in Heaven, for it is He would will avenge the spilling of our blood, and say to our oppressors, enough; he will bind up our wounds, and mend our fences, and in comforting all Zion and Jerusalem, he will comfort us all speedily, as it is said, "For the Lord has comforted Zion and all that is destroyed about her!"

About The Volkovysk That Is No Longer

By Yaakov Rabinovich

(From Things That Have Been Said)

The glory days of Volkovysk past, that of great and famous Rabbis, and scholars who later became great Rabbis outside of her, was for me also a thing of the past. I know about this only from word of mouth. Those who were there at my time, were not from the level of the 'originals.' Despite this, Volkovysk was a city full of Torah even in my day.

Volkovysk was also a city that brought up or produced from her Batei Medrashim, enlightened people and writers as well, and famous writers that maintained contact with her from many sides.

She was also full of charity. There were marvelous incidents of this nature. Yeshiva boys that studied there, and Jewish soldiers that worked there – valued its generosity and character.

She was then also a working city. In essence, the entire district was a working area. In my youth, there was not a single craftsman in the city who was not Jewish. There were also Jewish smiths. The maids in Jewish homes were all Jewish. There hardly was a form of work in which the Jews of the area did not engage in. After the great fire of 5646 (1882), Volkovysk was re-built from scratch with brick houses, and all the construction was done by Jews, in which practically no stranger had a hand.

In a transition period, there was still Torah there, even though the attentions and the inclinations of the younger generation had changed. At the beginning, the children from the better families learned to work out of idealism, and those generally went to America afterwards. After that came a time when the city filled with the *Bund* and Yiddish, even while work was declining more and more. A time finally arrived when not only were the gentile stores in the majority, but there were also gentile craftsmen. The emigration to American and to the Land of Israel took workers out [of the city], and even the houses were full of Polish and Russian maids. There practically were no more young Jewish women [for this work].

And yet once again, after the prior war [sic: World War I], there was again a change in mood. Zionism grew strong, together with connections to the Land of Israel, and the education took place mainly in *Hebrew*. A Hebrew Gymnasium, including Polish subjects, a Tarbut High School, and as a result – a generation was raised that knew Hebrew, even though most of the teachers were from Galicia Volhyn.

When I visited in 5785 (1933), after having been absent for 26 years, I found great changes. The community was standing as if on the exit threshold, especially the young people. While the *pioneering spirit* could not be sensed in the city, the inclination to go to the Land of Israel was widespread. There was not a family who didn't have someone in Israel. And the will to emigrate to Israel engulfed Bundists and non-Zionists. I happened on an interesting phenomenon: Bundists, simple ordinary people, were sending their children to *Hebrew* schools, while the intelligentsia preferred a Polish education. I had the impression that even in the *Yavneh* school, there was more Polish than Hebrew.

The use of the Polish language spread among the Jews more so than Russian had in the prior period. In my letter to the newspaper, *Davar*, I dwelt on this phenomenon in connection with the Polonization of the Byelorussian base – Polonization of the entire youth.

In the Jewish section of the city I didn't recognize any buildings or extensions. In this location, the city was built practically as a new Polish city, and parts of it were beautiful indeed.

Despite all the changes that had come that were not good, nevertheless, there was a feeling of a *Jewish settlement.* A city with a Jewish legacy, with Hebrew education, with Zionism, with charity, and in general, like most of Poland, and especially like Polish Lithuania, and Volhyn – Judaism with a clear desire for a Hebrew-based culture and the Land of Israel. The older generation, even if the Rabbis fell under the influence of the *Agudat Israel,* were not jealous of their prerogatives, tolerant, pleasant and inclined to the Land of Israel.

The heart tightens when one remembers both the cemetery with all those dear Jews would found their resting place there. What was its fate? It is difficult to think about all this. I spent some good times in Volkovysk, even in these last hours. It is hard to speak, and it is not easy to write. The pain is very great.

A Letter from Our Townsman Chaim Itzel Tchopper

To: The Committee of the Organization of Emigrants from Volkovysk In Israel
Tel-Aviv

My dear friend, Shlomo'keh!

I received your letter of 4.1.1946, and Mulya's letter of 4.2.1946 together, yesterday, on the same day: also Zapoliansky and Kossowsky both received their packages in good order. I received my package four weeks ago, about which I have already notified you. We thank you very much.

Imagine what our yesterday was like, how great was our celebration. It was like a brightness coming into our dark lives; two letters in one day, and the packages! We read the letters during the whole day, and our pride on that day knew no bounds. Because whoever came in to see us, we told that we had received two letters that day from those who are nearest to us, and who today is closer to us than you? You today serve as our brothers and parents. We do not need to describe our condition, which we have already explained previously. Even the circumstances in which we find ourselves today, without seeing an end to it, at least for whatever years we have left allotted to us, we will live in our own area. We so much want to come to you and to cry without stopping, because here, the heart is like stone, and we only wish that we could speak from the heart, perhaps that will make it easier for us. And there is a great, great deal to talk about. I am perhaps one of the very few, who remembers in chronological order, what happened to our community, and I remember the dates that are significant in the extermination of our beloved ones. I would like to preserve the days of their years, but I think I will do this when I get to my proper location. And any scion of Volkovysk that wishes to know details about his family, let him turn to me, and I will respond to him.

Yes, now the writer is girded with patience, seeing as how we managed to survive those "good times." It is true, but the fact of the matter is different. Originally there was only one concern, and that was, how would we reach the day that we could leave the camp, and there, the need was to fight hunger, and all manner of

other things, such as selections, and like things, stemming from the Nazi hatred in the camps, especially towards the Jews, was of such a nature that there was no time to think; each day brought its fresh decrees; Kotliarsky can tell you about this, he knows exactly where I was in the camp. He was in the habit of saying to me, that I was the only one who mad a stand in the camp in the face of trying conditions, by going all the time to the 'Command.' But, I had much more nerve in those days than now. How did this all happen? However, now that I am 'free' and when I think to myself, all the thoughts float around in my head. I see how I was lost, and to what level we came to. And this caused the most intense suffering. Because in the camp, there was no real opportunity to stop and think about it. But there is a folk saying that man is stronger than steel, and we can overcome anything. I think that now, you will understand our state of mind.

You write to let you know if we have received any added material. To this day, we have received nothing except the packages and the newspapers [that you sent us]. When we receive the balance, we will let you know immediately. We received the packages that contained shirts for everybody, socks, new underwear, razor blades and cigarettes. You are writing to Shipiatsky. I heard that he is in Lodz. Itcheh Botvinsky is new to me, because it is some time since I received a letter from America from his murdered father, that I have written to him. I have heard about the rest.

Shlomo'keh, you ask that I write immediately, and I am doing that. In this connection, I ask that you do the same, because it encourages me. It is then that I see that I am not alone by myself, that I *still* have good friends. Yes, write to me about everything and about everyone. Write to me about the questions that are of greatest interest to you, and I will reply in future letters, and I will give you a specific accounting of the losses to our community. Please send our best regards to our comrades who were with us in Auschwitz. They also can write to us. All those from Volkovysk that reached Israel, especially Lashowitz, he owes me a letter. Please convey regards to my aunt, and tell her that I never received more than one letter. Also, my cousins the Lifschitzes, tell them not to refrain from writing. I thank Mendel Green, and Yehuda'i (I don't know which one) for the newspapers. I have just received the dictionary.

I will write a separate letter to Mulya Schein this week. Altogether, I have received only two letters from him. Kossowsky asks for the address of his cousin, Fruma Kavushatsky. Zapoliansky asks to convey the special letter to Ahar'itchkeh and Shlomo'keh Markus.

A hearty regards to all those from Volkovysk. Write about everything.

In the name of our fellow townsmen Shmuel Zapoliansky, and Joseph Kossowsky
Your townsman and friend,
Itzel Tchopper .

Page 87: *Three survivors from Volkovysk in Italy.*
Left to Right: Chaim-Itzel Tchopper, Shmuel Zapoliansky, Joseph Kossowsky

Letter Received on Completion of the Book

Our dear brothers, much peace be with you,

There are five survivors from Volkovysk here: Benjamin Bashitsky, Daniel Lemkin, Malka Polonsky[16] (granddaughter of Shalakhmones), Zvi Epstein (Chas'sheh-Leah's granddaughter), and Shmuel Rosenbloom. We are recollecting the past, and we are telling details of the great calamity that befell our people in general, and the residents of our city in particular. We are few who have remained, a small number of people to be counted. We are writing this letter from the home of a young woman from our city; she is married already, and her name is Reizl Plotnitsky (a relative of Gurevich) and used to live on the *Svislucz Gasse*.

In the coming days, ***Tcherneh Rusianska-Shereshevsky*** is supposed to reach Poland from Russia.

The following still remain in Volkovysk: ***Mottel Shifran, Malka Rutchik, Zelig Kryer, Eliyahu Bayer, Isser Rosenbloom, Yitzhak Botvinsky,*** one of the ***Perekhodnik*** daughters, ***Mordechai Gamm, Malka Kaplinsky, Raphael Geller, Yitzhak Gallin, Zlata Rubin, Chava Rubin.*** It appears that there are other survivors, but there is as yet, no news of them. Chaya Pisetsky has remained in Moscow. In Otovchik, Dr. Shlackman, Dr. Bebchuk, Izzy Mazya, In Szczucin, can be found: the wife of Berel Kaplan, and her daughters, Sholom Zlotnitsky, Vinogradsky-Lemkin, Chaim Brichbach, Lazarovsky, Sholom Galai, the Reznitsky brothers, Hanokh Pick, Jedediah Katz. Rivka Rothford is found in Belsko.

Malka Polonsky asks if her aunts and relatives can be located: Malka, Rachel, Ronya, Ephraim Polonsky from Kobrin.

You are probably aware of the conditions in Poland, and the desires of our *landsleit* are known to you as well. Very shortly, there will only remain a handful of Jews.

Dear brothers, you realize how difficult it is to write and tell everything; the heart aches, and there are simply no words to convey everything that we think. First we want to offer you our encouragement that you will keep strong, and that you will succeed in your war to free the homeland, and that you will soon see us, the survivors of Volkovysk in your ranks.

In the name of all the people here from Volkovysk, we thank you for the help you have sent for the scions of our city, and we sent you are best regards for all that is good, with the hopes of seeing you in the Holy Land.

In another couple of days, Daniel Lemkin and Zvi Epstein will be leaving for Vienna, and from there with some measure of probability, to Israel.

Signatures

In the letter of Chaim Lemkin of 5.8.46 a list of those from Volkovysk found in Poland is conveyed:

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[16] In this volume, the name seems to be rendered Malka *Polonskit*, which is a Hebrew feminization of the name Polonsky.

Sholom Zolotnitsky, Izzy Zohn-Mazya, Lazarovsky, David Falevado, Rivka Rothford, Eliezer Sukenik, Be'ereh Shalrovich, Hirsch Volsky and his family, Gershon Resnick, Sholom Galai, Riva Rubinovich, the wife of Chaim Rubinovich, Shmuel Kaplan, Meir Melamed, Beileh Kaplan, and the daughters, Nota and Paulia, Eliyahu Lemkin and his family, Herzl Epstein, David Lifschitz, Katz, 'Nioma Bashitsky, Polonsky (Shalakhmones), Bebchuk, Shlackman, Joseph Ain, Tzila and Nechama Schein, Vena Bogomilsky, Volodya, and their sister Genya and her children.

Page 89: The Committee with Two of the Survivors and the guest, Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York
Right to Left:
Standing: *A. Kalir, H. Roitman, A. Broshi, J. Kotliarsky, Sh. Schein*
Sitting: *Sh. Bereshkovsky, Y. Yehuda'i, Dr. M. Einhorn, and the Chairman, A. Shykevich*

Financial Accounting

24.4.1945 – 31.7.1946

	Income	Expense
1. According to the list of contributors #1, published in The Volkovysk "Pamphlet," July 1945	188,000	
2. According to the list of contributors #2, published in The Volkovysk "Pamphlet," August 1945	34,000	
3. According to the list of contributors #3, published in The current edition	145,200	
Donations from Abroad:		
5. Dr. Moses Einhorn, New York ($100)	24,680	
6. Rabbi *Gaon* I. Unterman, Liverpool[17] (STG 8)	7,875	
7. Mr. M. Moorstein, New York	9,820	
8. Rabbi *Gaon* Y. Kossowsky, Johannesburg	5,000	
9. Rabbi *Gaon* M. Kossowsky[18], Johannesburg	2,000	
10. *Volkovysker Verein* of Philadelphia ($300)	73,740	
11. Mrs. Chaya Kass, Elkeh Ogulnick, Mereh Karashinsky, Fanny Birnbaum, and Elkeh Ben-Zvi from Montreal (Canada) through the Bialystock Center ($C300)	66,420	

[17] This is *Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman,* who would become Chief Rabbi of Israel.

[18] This is Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky, the son of Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky. Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky was the last Rabbi of Zelva, and barely escaped from the Nazis (see Yitzhak Shalev's memoir in the *Zelva Memorial Book*, p. 92).

12. The Volkovysk Center, New York, via Saul Barash (Shlomo Bereshkovsky) ($1000)	246,590	
13. Volkovysker Friends, New York, via Mrs. Sima Lev, Zanitz, etc.	18,485	
14. Abraham Ain (of Svislucz), New York	12,179	

[Expenses]:

1. Packages sent to Volkovysk		92,500
Packages sent to Russia, Italy and Belgium		63,953
Monies sent to Poland		20,000
2. Assistance to Volkovysk refugees for Initial Settlement		145,000
Assistance to the above for finding work, domicile, furniture, etc.		249,085
3. Loans for constructive purposes		25,000
4. Telegrams and mail expenses		22,265
5. Expenses for the first meeting of Volkovysk emigrés Tel-Aviv, on 24.4.1945 (Hall, notices, etc)		9,240
Expenses for the second meeting of Volkovysk emigrés Tel-Aviv 30.8.45 (with the participation of Dr. Einhorn)		9,580
6. Expenses for publication of the Volkovysk Pamphlet #1 - July 1945		20,750
Expenses for publication of the Volkovysk Pamphlet #2 - August 1945		4,500
7. Expenses for publishing this folio[Hurban Volkovysk]		30,000
8. Various small expenses		4,566
Bank Account as of 31.7.46		137,860
Totals	834,299	834,299

Yitzhak Yehuda'i
Treasurer

Note: This accounting does not reflect expenses incurred after 31.7; [this includes] transfer of 65 Israeli lira to Poland, in connection with the return of our townsfolk from Russia; the printing of this folio, and its distribution.

Accounting of the Work of the Committee

In our first pamphlet of July 1945, we gave an accounting, in summary form, of the activities we had done to that date, with an outline of our plan for future activities. We provided additional details in our second pamphlet of August 1945.

At the end of August 1945, the second meeting of our townsfolk in Israel took place in Tel-Aviv, with the participation of our distinguished guest, Dr. Moses Einhorn from New York, who arrived by air, in a special way, for the purpose of gathering news about Volkovysk here in the Land [of Israel].

At this meeting, Dr. Einhorn spoke at great length, and conveyed regards from our *landsleit* in America. In the process, he recalled interesting facts about Volkovysk during the period of the First World War, and afterwards, when he got there several times as a representative of American Jewry.

At that meeting, Messrs. Joseph Kotliarsky and Herschel Roitman also spoke, who were in Volkovysk from the beginning of the Nazi conquest, were sent with the last transport to Auschwitz, and were among the first to reach the Holy Land after being saved from the Nazi dragnet. These latter talks are recorded in this document, in the form of eye witness reports.

The principal activities of the Committee centered about the following:

1. Packages. Packages were sent by mail and other means, such as via the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, etc. to Volkovysk, Russia (to addresses of our townsfolk that had reached us), Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Poland. In a like manner, we sent packages to Lisokovo, from where we had received a letter asking for help with a few addresses of Jews that survived there.

The Packages included clothing, foodstuffs, underwear, sewing tools, razors, soap, etc. We received confirmation from every location that the packages were received, but to our sorrow, we have not received such a reply from Volkovysk or Lisokovo as of this time.

2. With the return of the Polish Jews from Russia, lately, several tens of our townsfolk arrived in Lodz, Lower Silesia, and other places in Poland, and according to the information in hand, a committee of Volkovysk townspeople was established in Lodz, due to the efforts of Mr. Chaim Shipiatsky and others.

Because of the bitter experience we had in sending packages to Volkovysk and Lisokovo, and after we researched the matter of sending packages to Poland, we received a reply from the scion of our city, Ch. Shipiatsky, telling us that it was not worth doing this, we did succeed in transferring specific sums of money to our landsleit who had arrived from Russia, and it is understood that given the condition they were in, this required larger sums of money to alleviate the terrible suffering they had endured.

3. Communication by Mail and Telegrams: A very important objective was to arrange contact by mail and telegrams and were necessary by telegrams, with the survivors from Volkovysk and its vicinity. Hundreds of letters and telegrams were sent and received by us, and from this, it became evident as to how important this connection to the unfortunate ones was, who by this, were able to see a ray of light penetrate their terrible suffering, in the receipt of news from their townsfolk who had decided to encourage them and extend them help.

4. Assistance to the Refugees from Volkovysk in Searching for their Relatives: With the initiation of our work, we understood that there would be a need to search for the relatives of our refugees, for most of whom, all they know is that they have a relative either in Israel or in some other country, but they usually do not know an address, and in a number of instances, not even a name, because most of the survivors are from the younger generation who had never even seen their relatives.

To this purpose, we created a complete list of our *landsleit* in Israel, and sent a copy to the Volkovysk Center in New York, and with the help of Dr. Einhorn and Mr. Nakhumovsky, we received a folder with the addresses of our *landsleit* in New York.

Because of this, we have the capacity to frequently convey the address of relatives to one refugee or another, and immediately after receiving any sort of response from him, at the same time to immediately notify the respective relative about his surviving relative.

It is worth saying that our landsleit, who are long-time residents in Israel, are in the habit of frequently assembling our address lists here, and in America, family matters and things of this nature.

5. Aid to Refugees Who Reached Israel: A special responsibility, no less important that other responsibilities, was to assist those survivors who succeeded in reaching the Holy Land, especially at a time when we are able to see more precisely the results of our work in this area. In our first desire, even before they got themselves settled, and on occasion to help them get settled. In the financial accounting, it is necessary to add only that apart from financial assistance, which undoubtedly has its own importance, it was very important to give emotional support, so that they see that they are not abandoned to their own devices, and that they have an address where to go regarding all the issues that burden them, and by this means, to ease their loneliness, and their difficult emotional state at the outset. This approach gives them encouragement, and arouses them to rebuild their lives anew in the homeland.

6. Arranging for Work and Making a Living: A lot of effort and initiatives are undertaken by a number of the Committee Members of the Volkovysk Organization to find work and a living for our survivors, and we can state with confidence, that all the survivors that have arrived in Israel to date – are properly taken care of.

Page 92: Dedication of a Kiosk for the Partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky in Petakh Tikva.
Right to Left: A. Kalir, Abraham Shapiro, one of the founders and defenders of Petakh Tikva, E. Kovensky.

List of Volkovysk Survivors Reaching Israel At This Date

1) Joseph Kotliarsky,	Tel-Aviv,	9 Pines Street
2) Zvi Roitman,	Tel-Aviv,	9 Pines Street
3) Shayna Lifschitz,	Tel-Aviv	9 Nachmani Street
4) Katriel Lashowitz,		9 Arnon Street
5) Eliyahu Kovensky,	Petakh Tikva,	Chafetz Chaim Street
6) Eliyahu Kushnir and his wife,		Holon, a new settlement near Tel-Aviv
7) Dr. Noah Kaplinsky,	Mikve Israel	
8) Esther Yerushalmi,	Tel-Aviv,	Maon Ha'Ishah

List of Volkovysk Survivors Known At This Time

Note: According to hearsay, the brother and sister of Khvonnik are to be found in Pruzhany.

Page 93: *A Maccabi Celebration in Volkovysk in 1933*

A

Joseph Ain
Dr. Eliyahu Amstibovsky
Shlomo Anshi and his family (the Bialystoker Baker)
Shayna (Tcherneh) Applebaum

B

Basia Bayer
Dr. Bebchuk
Yaakov Becker (Zelva)
Pesach Bintovich (Lisokovo)
Grisha Bogomilsky (?)
Itchkeh Botvinsky and his family
Hasia Boyarsky
Jonah Borukhansky (Lisokovo)

E

Shmuel Epstein

F

Elkeh Feitelevich

G

Shlomo Galai
Isaac Gallin (son of Sioma Gallin)
Mottel Gamm
David Geller
Dr. Goldberg

I

Itzkowitz (from Volkovysk, worked in the kitchen)

K

Baylah Kaplan (wife of Berel Kaplan)
Dr. Marek Kaplan
Nionia Kaplan
Nieta and Paulia Kaplan (daughters of Berel Kaplan)
Shmuel Kaplan
Malka Kaplinska
Shaul Karpivnik
Jedediah Katz
Chaim Khvonyik (Lisokovo)
Joseph Kossowsky
Esther Kravchik (Lisokovo)
Zelig Krier

L

Lantzevitzky
David Lazarovsky
Daniel Lemkin
David Lemkin (son of 'Nioma Lemkin)
Eliyahu Lemkin and his family
Miama Levin (Svislucz)

M

Ida Mazover-Rak
Yehoshua Mazya
Meir Melamed
Mordechai Mendelevich (Lisokovo)
Mezheritzky (Lisokovo)
Pesha Mezheritzky and her daughter (Lisokovo)
Natan Minkowitz
Meir Mushatsky
Zalman Mushatsky

O

Yaakov Oyvitz

P

Yaakov Panter
Chaya Pisetsky
Joel Pomerantz and his son (Lisokovo)

R

Rivka Rappaport
Dr. Resnick
Isser Rosenbloom
Shmuel Rosenbloom
Zlata Rubin
Riva Rubinovich (wife of Chaim Rubinovich)
Eliyahu Rutchik,
Malka Rutchik

S

Homa Schein
Tzila Schein (daughters of Herschel Schein)

Natan Sedletsky
Meir Sedletsky and his family
Berel Shevakhovich and his family
Natan Shifran
Chaim Shipiatsky
Ruth Shipiatsky
Yerakhmiel Shipiatsky
Boris Shalakhovich
Dr. Shlackman
Smeizik
Leizer Sukenik

T

Chaim Itzel Tchopper

U

David Uryonovsky

V

Eliyahu Velvelsky
Mina Volsky
Moshe Volsky

W

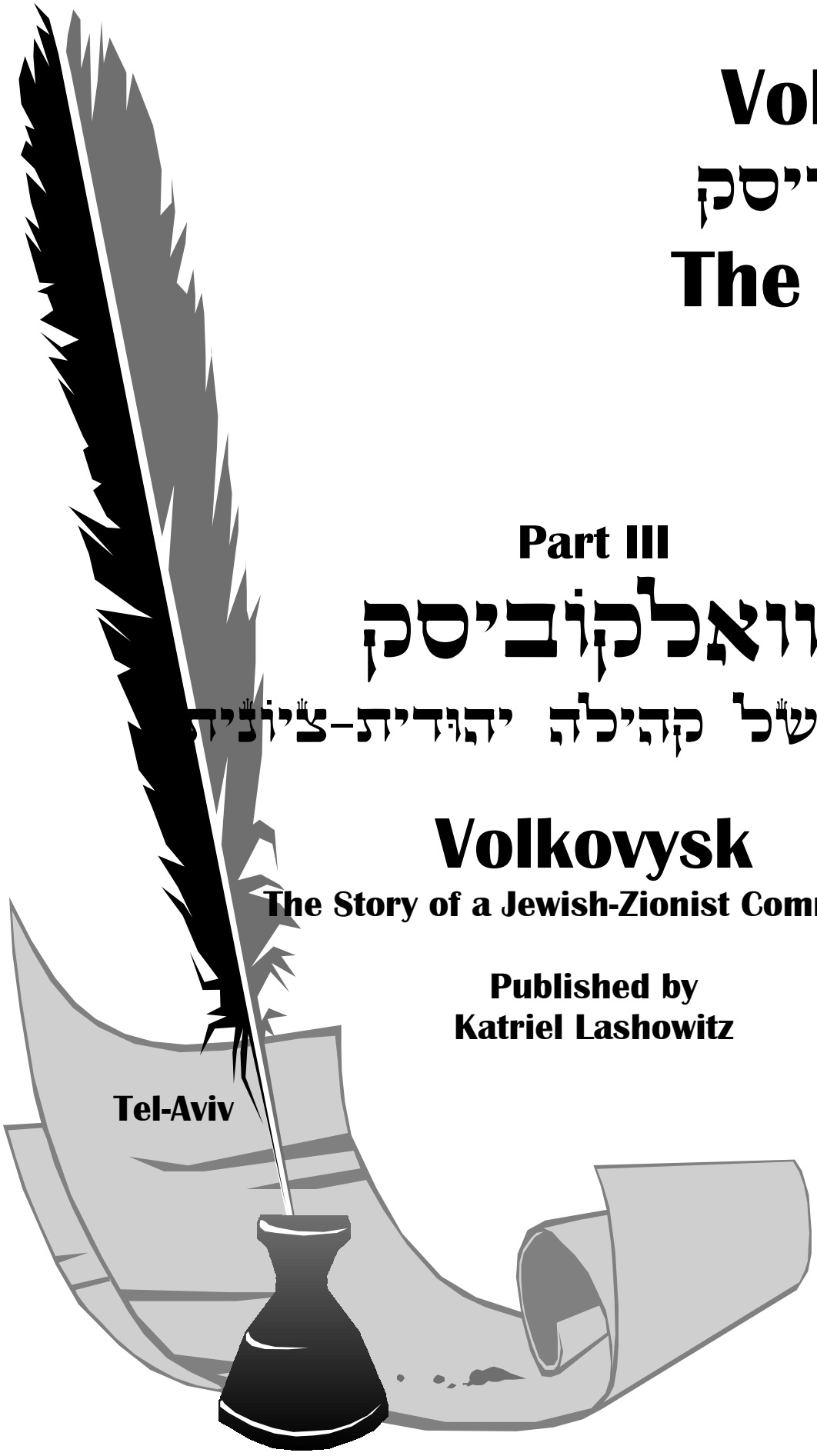
Chaya Weiner
Eliyahu Weiner
Tamara Weiner (daughter of Dr. Weiner)

Z

Eliezer Zamoschansky
Shmuel Zapoliansky
Gita Zeitlin-Slapak (Svislucz)
Aharon Zlotnitsky
Bom Zuckerman (son of Herschel Zuckerman)
Joseph Zuckerman (son of Meitzig Zuckerman)
Mrs. Zuckerman (wife of Meitzig Zuckerman)

DRM Software Review

Volkovysk
וואלקאוויסק
The Trilogy



Part III
וואלקוֹביסק
ספּוּרה שׁל קהילה יהוּדית–ציוֹנית

Volkovysk
The Story of a Jewish-Zionist Community

Published by
Katriel Lashowitz

Tel-Aviv **1988**

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Foreword

By Katriel Lashowitz

Yizkor Books, that sought to preserve the memory of those Jewish communities in the Diaspora that were wiped out by the Nazis, began to appear by the late 1940's. About seven hundred books were published then, because every organization of émigrés from a city or town [living] in Israel saw a need to preserve the memory of the city or town from which his comrades came. Therefore, the appearance of this book may seem surprising – to the memory of the Jewish community of Volkovysk and its environs – forty three years after the Holocaust. It appears to me that some explanation is in order for this surprising work, in view of the fact that two volumes appeared in the United States in 1949, by Dr. Moses Einhorn, entitled *Wolkovisker Yizkor Book,* and many of the scions of Volkovysk were satisfied with that, because the publisher has succeeded in assembling a great deal of informative material in his books, from various sources, and also availed himself of the eye witness accounts of those who survived the Holocaust.

By and large, these books were written in ***Yiddish*** (several tens of pages in English also), and as can be understood, only those who understand this language can access them. In one of his letters to the Organization of Émigrés from Volkovysk in Israel, Dr. Einhorn conveyed his hope and request that one day his books would be translated into Hebrew, however, for a variety of reasons, this never came to pass. Only a folio put out by the Organization of Émigrés from Volkovysk in Israel was published in Hebrew, in the year 1945, with the first news of the fate of the Jews of Volkovysk, but not much else.

When I reached Israel after the war, I heard a great deal from the Volkovysk émigrés, that there was a need to preserve the memory of our Jewish community, in a book written in ***Hebrew***, however, for whatever reason, this never got past the talking stage or the realm of wishful thinking.

I am compelled to admit that never in my life did I believe that I would be the one to realize Dr. Einhorn's hope, and of the older people from Volkovysk, in the creation of a Yizkor Book in Hebrew about our city. When I came to Israel after the Holocaust, like the proverbial smoking ember rescued fro the fire, a remnant of a large family, I was in a state of mental and physical exhaustion, after years of battle in the partisan camps, and activities in the illegal immigration. My disposition during those years was to ***forget*** the past, not to ***preserve*** the past. I wanted to free myself from te terrible trauma that clung to me, and as the case with all survivors of the Holocaust, to normalize my life and raise a family in Israel. Because of this, and for other reasons not relevant here, it never occurred to me to take on this task. In particular, I could be satisfied with Dr. Einhorn's books in Yiddish, a language with which I was facile. And for this reason, I felt an emotional need to read every book about the Holocaust. In the midst of reading these books, I always had a perception of deficiency, in particular as it applied to our city, a city and Mother to Jewry, with a large Jewish population, that it hadn't been worthy of having a Yizkor Book in the same manner as many other smaller cities and towns, but let it be said that the matter did not bother me a great deal. I had hoped, and perhaps was certain, that in the end, the ***elders*** of Volkovysk, who were found in Israel would be aroused, and publish a Yizkor Book in Hebrew, or that they would have Dr. Einhorn's book translated into Hebrew.

Many years went by. The injustice subsided, and the partisan of bygone days, who took his revenge upon the Nazis who sought to leave no trace of Jews, because of this reached his homeland, raised a family, and was privileged to see children and grandchildren. And it was specifically from their interest, that the issue of a Volkovysk [Yizkor] Book was re-kindled with me. They would frequently urge me to tell them about my past and my origins, and that I should research the family genealogy. One time, when my granddaughter, Yael, was watching me read the many Yizkor Books (and I do this frequently) she was forward enough to ask:

"Grandpa, why is there not a Yizkor Book about Volkovysk by you?" She began to pester me even more, after she was given an assignment in school to write about the subject related to the Holocaust.

What could I answer her? I could not refer her to the books of Dr. Einhorn in ***Yiddish,*** because for her, these are books that are out of bounds and sealed off, because of a lack of language facility? I tried to duck these serious questions by virtue of having contributed to tens of Yizkor Books, and I said to her: read these books. The Jews being described in these books are like "two drops of water" when compared to the Jews of Volkovysk. Their way of life does not differ in any way from the way of life of your grandmothers and grandfathers. All the institutions, branches and youth movements that were in these cities and towns, those that are memorialized by these Yizkor Books – were in my Volkovysk as well.

"But why, after all, is there no book about your Volkovysk in ***Hebrew***?" My granddaughter replied stubbornly – "You, after all, have told me, that the young people spoke Hebrew in the city streets, because practically every child spoke Hebrew, because there were many Hebrew schools?"

These surprising questions from my granddaughter moved me a great deal, and when I relayed them several days later to my friend ***Noah Tzemakh*** , he said: your granddaughter is right, and our Sages of Old have said, 'In the place where there is no man – try to be a man.' That is to say – it is your responsibility to take on this work, and I will help you. I reversed his words on him immediately – that he should do the work, and I should help *him*, but at the end of the discussion, we agreed that it would be: ***both of us together.*** Tzemakh, ז"ל began to write down chapters of memories ('Reb Tevel in Volkovysk' in this book), and even I was able to dredge up stories from my very depths about my days in the partisan movement, and I stimulated others of my friends to do the same. To our great sorrow, Tzemakh passed away, and it is certainly given to say of this dear Jewish man as the poet said, "...and the song of his life stopped in its middle..." I was left alone. I had two choices then: to return the handwritten materials to those who had responded to my urging, and cancel the publication of the book, or – to continue in this work by myself. I took the second choice, and in large measure thanks to Aharon Podolinsky.

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I must admit, that in my entire life in Israel, I engaged in many businesses, but I had not once engaged in the job of publishing a book, and I have no experience in this area, and not even the required skills. I knew from the outset that I would need the help and guidance of an accomplished professional in this area. One of the scions of Volkovysk (Rutchik, from Netanya), when I told him about my undertaking, showed me a Yizkor Book from Volhyn in Poland, and after reading this book, I had the feeling that the structure of this book could help me in my undertaking, as also did the structure of *Sefer Ratno*. I succeeded in locating the publisher (Nachman Tamir), and in our first telephone conversation, I told him of my desire to publish a book about Volkovysk, and that I would need his help. I remember his first reaction very well: "Volkovysk, you mean the city of Eliyahu Golomb, the writer Yaakov Rubinovich, of the actor [Raphael] Klatshkin of *HaBima*, of Azriel Broshi, who worked in my section of the operating committee of the *Histadrut*, of Yaakov Einstein from *Ohel*, with whom I lived in one house after I left the *kibbutz*, of Isser Pikarsky and Shoshana Panter, with whom I was together on the *kibbutz*? I no longer deal with publication, but come and let's talk, and we'll see how I can help you."

After this kind of thoughtful reaction, I had no doubt that I had found the right man, and from now on – my path would be a smooth one.

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And that's the way it was. I arranged a meeting with the publisher, and after he went through the material in the folder that I had used to assemble the material in my possession, also including the books of Dr. Einhorn, he consented to assist me and even gave me a couple of good pieces of advice immediately: to rely on the substantial material in Dr. Einhorn's book; not to allocate a lot of space to the pre-history of Volkovysk, because there were very few left in Israel that still remembered Volkovysk, and even they won't have much interest in the various 'Grand Dukes' that ruled the city at various times; to acknowledge some debt to history, but not more than that; not to drown the book in rivers of nostalgia. Three of four chapters of memories will suffice and is permissible. "No matter how they write about the *shtetl* of Volkovysk – they will not write any better than Sholom Asch, Mendele, Sholom Aleichem, and other writers who have already performed this task" – Mr. Tamir told me, but he added, "Ask your Volkovyskers to write what they want to write, but that they should not be seduced into excessive idealizing, and not to create a 'tallis that is all blue.'" To this end, it is worthwhile expanding upon the Jewish education, the youth movement, the Zionist groups, the local support institutions, the contacts and relationships to Israel, etc. Subjects like these will interest children and grandchildren as well."

In accordance with these directions, I began to encourage the scions of our city to produce material of the right kind, pictures, and lists. I distributed an 8 page prospectus on the basis that it would stimulate those with an inclination to write. Few responded, – and 'that's what we've got,"as they say in modern Hebrew, and it can be used to trace family roots – a thing that is now 'fashionable' in Israel.

The largest chapter in the book is the chapter on the ***Holocaust***, and that is only natural, since only people who were survivors participated in the writing, or the Holocaust overtook them. I relied on the eye witness accounts that were provided to me by survivors, after the war (a number of them are included in *Hurban Volkovysk,* which was published in 1946), and the material conveyed in the books of Dr. M. Einhorn and Dr. Y. Goldberg, and also new material, to my knowledge, contained within, reliable testimony on everything that touches upon the last tragic chapter in the lives of the Jews of Volkovysk and its vicinity. It appears to me, that even nearly fifty years after the Nazi aggressor began to exterminate the Jews, the ancient commandment: "Remember What Amalek Did to You," is still in force, and all the more so that there is movement afoot to turn a blind eye, to erase, or distort the deeds of this [modern-day] Amalek.

I must also clarify that various writings, that do not have a signature above or below them, were in general written by the publisher or the undersigned, or on occasion, both of them. In part, they are excerpts or summaries of writings taken from a variety of places.

I owe two people special thanks for the serious assistance they offered: to ***Daniel Lemkin*** and ***Philip Morse*** (Ephraim Mushatsky) in the United States. It is with great personal sadness that I must add the letters ז"ל, after the name of the first, because he passed away unexpectedly, before being able to carry out many of his plans, both in connection with translating this book into English, and also in connection with arranging for a tour to Israel of Volkovysk descendants in the United States. He was able to tell his story to myself and Mr. Tamir – the story of a Jewish boy who long, endless journey, full of traps and pitfalls, until he reached the United States, and began to "do America." He loved Volkovysk greatly, its ambience and people, the good and simple Jewish people among whom he lived, Farber's school where he was a student, his many friends who helped him through those difficult times in the past. He also put together a book that will eventually be published – "A City that is A Legend." Daniel was a dear and beloved man. May his memory be for a blessing.

Philip Morse, set aside for long life, is the Head of the Scions of Volkovysk in the United States. When he last visited Israel, I told him about my plans to publish a book on Volkovysk in Hebrew, and I promised him we would do an English addendum. He promised his help – and he fulfilled his promise. I hope that until an English supplement appears, he will derive spiritual nourishment from the book in Hebrew.

I see a pleasant obligation to convey my sentiments of gratitude to the publishing house of Mala"n, who did not stint on work and attention to detail, provided direction and counsel in everything touching on the printing of the book, and did its best in order that its external appearance would be aligned with the nature of its contents.

Last, but not least, all blessings and thanks to ***Mr. Tamir,*** who did his utmost to see this book published, in accordance with his original direction.

If Dr. M. Einhorn were still alive, I would definitely invite him to Israel with the release of this book, and then convey to him my profound sentiments of gratitude for the assembly of the vast body of material in his books, of which I availed myself, but he too, has gone the way of all flesh, and how sad is our loss.

The City, In Changing Times

Notes on the Origins and Development of Volkovysk

(According to Dr. Einhorn's Books, and Other Sources)

Page 14: The House in Which Napoleon was Quartered in 1812, during his Campaign in Russia

There are different theories on the origin of the name, Volkovysk. There is a theory that says the name was given to the city because it is located on the banks of the Volkova River. But according to another point of view, that is reported in the history of the priest Volkovsky, published in the 17th century, the city was name this way after two leaders of two different groups of bandits who operated in the large surrounding forest, hundreds of years ago: ***Volko Visek***. They instilled fear in all areas and on travelers, and when they died, or were killed, a large stone monument was put up in their memory, and on it were carved the words, Volko Visek. Volkovsky, on whose book many historians rely, also is able to tell that in the year 1000 C. E. a religious leader by the name of Max Kapusta[1] ordered the abandoned and desolate area, which is where the city is now located, to be put under plow. According to his direction, a large pond was also dug on the south side of this area, whose traces can be distinguished even in our times.

The story of Volkovysk is the story of unending wars that stretch out over time. During the centuries of its existence, it would pass from hand to hand, from one regime to another. A number of times it was turned into a heap of rubble, from which it rose anew. In what follows, we will tell only about part of these conflicts that took place in the Volkovysk vicinity, as they appear in the 1893 lexicon, *Slownik Geograficzny Krolewstwa Polskiego*.

In the year 1098, the Jadzving tribe fell upon the residents that dwelled around the previously mentioned pond, and after plundering and abusing them, they put the settlement to the torch. Several years later, a great natural disaster took place, when the when the River Nietufy, overflowed its banks, and inundated the settlement.

Towards the end of the 1200's the city was under Russian hegemony, but it was completely destroyed in 1224, when the Tatars invaded the area. It was rebuilt anew by the Lithuanians, and remained under their control until the Mongols spread all over Russia, after the death of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Ringold[2], and among the rest, they destroyed Volkovysk. In the year 1252, the city was in the territory ruled by the Volhynian Nobleman, Wasil, and in 1258, a treaty was signed between the Russians and the Lithuanians, in which it was agreed that Volkovysk would be under the rul of the Lithuanian Duke, Mendug, who had done a great deal to improve the city, even having put up a beautiful castle there.

After the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gedymin was murdered, in the midst of his battle with the Teutonic Knights, several cities changed hands, among them Volkovysk and Novogrudok, going over into the hands of his youngest son, Koriat, who continued to develop the city, and expand it. In 1365, Alexander, the youngest son of Koriat, attacked a cohort of crusaders, and brought back many prisoners and much booty to the city.

In the year 1385, emissaries arrived prior to an historic visit. The Lithuanian ruler Jagiello sent messengers from Volkovysk to Cracow, the capital of Poland, and they brought the important message

[1] M. Einhorn refers to this individual as *Max Pusto*.

[2] A possible transcription error from the Einhorn book, where the name is given as *Dingold.*

that Jagiello and his court were prepared to accept the Christian religion, under condition that the queen of Poland, Jadwiga would marry him, and the Poles would recognize him as their king. Jagiello received the Polish messengers in his castle in Volkovysk, who brought him a positive response. In accordance with the agreement signed by Poland and Lithuania, Jadwiga married Jagiello in 1386, and the Lithuanians – converted to Christianity, and Jagiello was crowned "King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania, and Ruler of the Rus." The Poles sent priests to Volkovysk to educate the residents in the essentials of the Christian faith, and they also made sure that – any remaining idol worshipers were either driven away or wiped out. From that time on, a great transformation was wrought in the life and development of the city.

About twenty years later, Jagiello ceded Volkovysk to his brother Witold (1392-1430) in return for taking control of a large number of towns near Turkey.

In 1409, the German King Ulrich von Jungingen launched a surprise attack against Volkovysk and on March 16 of that year, put the city to the torch after his soldiers had murdered many of its residents and taken many as prisoners.

The city was rebuilt anew at the beginning of the 16th century during the reign of the Lithuanian Duke Alexander, who granted many privileges to the city and its residents – something that was formalized in 1507. During the rule of Sigmund II, in the 16th century, Volkovysk was considered to be among the most important Lithuanian cities, and the legislative body (the Sejm) held some of its sessions in this city. At that same time there were nine[3] streets in the city: Slonim, Jasikov, Jesuitzka, Vilna, Piekarski, Piesk, Zamovka, and Petroshovsky, and to this day, traced of these streets can be found beside the Ros' River.

In the war between Poland and Sweden, during the reign of Jan Kazimierz, the city was again destroyed, when it was attacked (in 1656) from three sides: from the south by the Swedes, from the north and the east by the army of Poland and Lithuania, and from the North and West by the Tatars. There was heavy fighting for three days around the city, until the Swedes finally prevailed. As a memorial to those days, there remains the *Schlossbarg* (also called the Mount of the Swedes) which rises to a height of 50 meters.

In the year 1662, during the war with Russia, the city was once again razed to the ground from what is told in various histories, to the point where no "stone remained on another stone." A hundred years later, in 1762, there were no more than 112 houses, but as little as thirty years afterwards, there were more than 1,000 houses. In the year 1794, Volkovysk was changed into the District City for the Slonim District. Afterwards, it became a Lithuanian provincial seat, and in 1802, went over into the Grodno Province.

In the year 1812, Volkovysk served as a the principal base for the Second Russian Army, and at the time of Napoleon's retreat, a great battle took place in the Volkovysk area between the Russian Corps of Sacken and the French army of Reiner. In the process of retreating, the French destroyed Volkovysk, and only very few buildings remained there intact. The destruction was so great, that it became necessary to transfer all of the city's municipal institutions to the neighboring town of Izavelin.

Various coins, and remains of armament, that were found beside the hills to the south of the city, which served as fortresses, verify and give support to the name, 'Mount of the Swedes' that was given to these hills.

Five years afterwards, in 1817 – there were 156 houses in the city (only two of which were made of brick), and among its 602 residents there were 216 Jews. By the year 1860, the number of houses had reached 492, all of them built from wood.

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[3] Only eight are given. The *Biskupier* street from M. Einhorn's book is omitted.

Great development took place in the city in the ensuing four decades. And that is what we read briefly about the city that was described in the previously cited lexicon, that in 1862 there were already 492 houses, 58 stores, and the number of residents had reached 3,472, of which: Jews – 1518, Catholics – 1,503, Russian Orthodox – 452.

In 1891, the number of houses in the city was 910, and the number of stores, 334. The number of residents was 8,057, and by religion: Jews – 3332, Russian Orthodox – 1,934, Catholics – 2752, Muslims – 23. By occupation: Peasants – 5,476, Workers – 530, Merchants – 141. The total population in the general district was 129,102, and the number of Jews in the district had reached to 14,571.

In 1897, there were 12, 942 Jews in the district (excluding the city itself), who represented 9% of the population, while in the city proper, 5,528 Jews lived, who represented 53% of the population [there]. Also, in other settlements in the Volkovysk District, Jews were more than half the resident population.

In 1910, the general population of Volkovysk amounted to 14,593 residents, and the Jews represented 55% of them. There were 14 towns in the Volkovysk District, 1.031 villages, and settled estates.

The last census taken of Volkovysk was in 1932, and in accordance with the figures then obtained, the population of the city had reached 15,147, who lived in 2,006 dwellings.

The Jews of Volkovysk and Environs

According tot he formal historical record, Jews lived in Volkovysk as early as 1577. In this report (Regesta y Zapiski) it is stated that in 1577 it was decided that in light of the impending danger of war, a tax would be raised from all residents, including Jews, in the amount of 12 groschen.

The records of the *Vaad Arba Aratzot* [sic: Four-Lands Commission] provide details of the taxes paid by the Jews to the Lithuania Duke in the years 1680 and 1693.

In Volkovysk and its environs, 1,282 Jews resided in the year 1766. And in the entire district – 4,781 Jews.

According to the historical record, there were 5,946 Jews in the entire Volkovysk District, broken down as follows:

Volkovysk	1,429	
Zelivian		856
Izavelin	297	
Lopenitsa	88	
Lisokovo	232	
Amstibova	304	
Novy Dvor	53	
Porozovo	397	
Piesk	662	
Ros'	287	
Svislucz	997	
Yalovka	372	

Thirteen years later, in 1860, the Jewish population in Volkovysk was 1,518 out of a total population of 3,472 residents.

It is possible to learn about the population growth from the summary of the census taken in 1891. According to these totals, the general population in that hear had reached 8,057 residents, of which the Jewish residents were 3,232. It is worth noting that in this year, there were 19 manufacturing facilities in the city (tobacco, candles, bricks, and others), most of them owned by Jews, a Jewish synagogue, six *Batei Medrash,* one pharmacy, three civilian hospitals, and four military hospitals.

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Volkovysk is found in an area that has pine tree forests, on the rail line that connects with the cities of Grodno and Vilna to the west, and Bialystock and

Slonim to the east.[4] It is 85 km from Grodno, 90 km from Bialystock, and 112 km from Baranovich. To the north of the city, rise the hills of Ros', and to the south, rises the *Schlossbarg* – the fortress hill over which various European armies fought each other.

On its east side, the Volkova River flows, which widened and changes into a large lake at the edge of the city, and from there it streams on for the entire length of the city center – the Jewish neighborhood.

The local land is not particularly bountiful agriculturally, and is mostly sand.

There are two train stations in the city. The old one, in the center of the city, which is populated with Jews, where only local train traffic stops, and the new one, which was built in recent times, where the express trains stop as well. The area surrounding the new train station is a Christian neighborhood, and nearby are many places of work and barracks. As previously stated, the center of the city is populated only by Jews, the exception being Zamoscheh, where Christians lived as well.

Despite the fact that the population of the city was mostly Jewish, the Jews were never granted the privilege of representation that was due to them, and the head of the city was always a Christian. In order to redress this blatant imbalance, and give it a "democratic" cast, for purposes of elections, they would append the population of the outlying villages, populated by Christians, to the city municipal districts, and in this way they would attain a non-Jewish majority. The anti-Semitic Polish regime made itself felt in Volkovysk as well. In the late [19]30s, the prohibition against Jews by the Poles was clearly felt. Christian guards stood out in front of Jewish stores in order to chase away Christian shoppers, and to eliminate buying of goods in Jewish stores.

The markets were an important source of income for the Jews, and the row of the Jewish stores (*Rad Krommen*) between *Szeroka* (the center street of the city) and *Kosciuszko*, was teeming with life and activity on market days (Mondays and Thursday), and on the Major Market Day (*Yerid*) which was held on the 22nd of each month.

The principal means of livelihood for the Jews was commerce, but there were no lack of working people and craftsmen in the city, who had the capacity to refute the canard of the parasitic nature of Jewish economic activity, because the majority of such workers were Jews, such as: a factory for casting iron for the agricultural machines of Sholom Barash, a factory for firing bricks, the cement and tile factory of Moshe Tchopkin, the Leather Factories of Bloch and Markus, The Factory for tiles and cement for stoves of Kushnir. The five flour mills were also in Jewish hands (Glembotsky, Khurin, Solomon, Rakhmilevich, Bitvitz) and also the three saw mills (Moshe Shapiro, Smazanovich, and Sholom Barash). Also, factories for soft drinks were owned by Jews (Novogrudsky, Rosenbloom and others). Many of the Jewish establishments did not hire salaried workers. It is necessary to say that in the factory, the labor and the commerce was in the large part in Jewish hands, but there was a small minority that made its living from working the land.

The two huge fires that took place in Volkovysk wrought tremendous destruction. The first – occurred in 1886, when practically all of the wooden houses went up in flames, and the second in 1908, burned up a specific part of the center of the town, most of the central *Szeroka* street, the *Mitzrayim Gasse*, the *Schulhof,* and the beautiful old synagogue, with the *Bet HaMedrash* adjacent to it. The city was rebuilt speedily afterwards, and its external appearance improved greatly.

In 1915, during the First World War, Volkovysk was captured by the Germans. At that time, many fled into the heart of Russia, and they returned to the city when the war ended, when the city was already under the Polish regime. A great fire broke out also during the time of the German occupation, and the *Kholodoisker Gasse* was almost entirely burned down.

[4] The direction of Bialystock is incorrect. It, too, should be to the west.

A great deal of development took place in the years between the two world wars in all walks of life, the city grew and spread out, and many residents were added. Many new houses were put up in the Karczyzna neighborhood, and almost all of them were occupied by Jews. The small wooden houses vanished almost completely. The economic condition of the Jews eased the mind, until the gathering storm approached. The Germans began to press their demands on Poland for an outlet to the sea and for specific Polish territories for their benefit (Danzig, and others). Poland began to arm itself, and in order to cover the large expenses involved with this, they announced a national levy, and compulsory quotas were levied on every city and town.

The ones most affected by the mandated of the Polish government at that time, were, of course, the Jews. Many were sent to the concentration camp at Kartuz-Bereza, because they could not pay the first levy, which was immediately followed by the second levy for defense purposes. The Jews of Volkovysk, like the Jews in other cities in Poland, began to feel the strong arm of the Poles. Anti-Semitism began to grow, and it evidenced itself in all walks of life. The Jews were deprived of their licenses to engage in the tobacco business, sugar, salt, etc. Many Jewish stores were closed, and in their place, Polish stores were opened. Guards placed at the doors of Jewish businesses denied Poles the right to enter within. The heavy taxes impoverished the majority of the merchants, and were it not for the quotas placed by the British Mandate on Jewish immigration during the depression years, the merchants with greater initiative, and many more Jews would have probably made *aliyah.*

At the beginning of 1939, you could already smell the smoke of the fire, but very few thought that the dispute between Poland and Germany would end in a real war. In the city, life went on as usual, and even in the community life of the Jews, there were no serious changes. Moshe Rabinovich, at that time, served as the head of the community, who was also active in the Zionist movement, and in the organization of Hebrew education; Sioma Gallin was head of the Jewish Hospital; Melekh Khantov was the Head of the Jewish Fire-fighters, L. Schlossberg and Markus were the Heads of the *Bund,* which at that time had not altered its anti-Zionist policy; the Zionists began their preparations for the elections at the Zionist Congress; all of the charitable local public institutions continued with their work as usual, including the *Germilut Hasadim*, which had held its annual meeting that year already. Many meetings were held on behalf of *Keren HaYesod*, but donations fell short because of the poor economic conditions. In the elections for the advisory council of the city, six Jews were chosen: 3 from the general Jewish bloc (Khantov, Dr. David Tropp, and S[ioma]. Gallin), and 3 from the side of the *Bund*; large numbers of Jews participated in protesting the "White Paper" of the British Mandate that was distributed that year, in short – everything as it always was. It was only in August that we began to feel a change that is palpable and imminent, and a depressing air pervaded the Jewish street, especially after it was found out that a committee of anti-Semites had been formed, headed by the pharmacist Timinsky, who even went so far as to prepare a list of the Jews, in order to kill them at the first available opportunity. Even before the war broke out, there were incidents of plunder and murder perpetrated against the Jews. The terror grew from day to day.

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The period of Soviet occupation, which is covered in a separate section of this book, was from several vantage points, a period of relative calm, but as is known, it didn't last very long. In the course of seven days, from June 22-29, 1941, the city was bombed by the Germans, and almost 90% of the Jewish homes went up in flames. On November 2, 1942, under Nazi rule, all the Jews of Volkovysk and its environs were concentrated in bunkers that were adjacent to the barracks, and from there, the transports went out [with them] to the death camps in Treblinka. The final transport was sent to Auschwitz on January 26, 1943. The Jewish city of Volkovysk was left without any Jews.

The first ones to return to Volkovysk at the end of the war, were the partisans who during the entire war years were in the neighboring forests, and who fought against the Nazis. Among these were ***Bom Zuckerman, Mot'eleh Shifran, Izzy Gallin, Eliyahu Kovensky, Katriel Lashowitz*** and others. At the same time, those who had managed to escape from the bunkers, and hide out under the protection of Christians, returned, such as ***Dr. Noah Kaplinsky***, and ***Dr. Yitzhak Resnick.*** Even the handful of people who went through all of the cauldrons of the hell in the camps, and remained alive, they too returned, and among them, ***Moshe Shereshevsky***. Among those who returned were also families that had been exiled to Siberia in 1940 by the Russians during the period when they ruled the city, because they were suspected of being capitalists. All of these had hoped to find some remnant of their families in the city. However, they found a destroyed city without any Jews. Only very few of these remained in the city for a variety of personal reasons, but all the rest left the city, because they could not walk about or live amid its ruins. And they took an oath that they would never again return to this heap of destruction. Before they retreated, the Germans managed to burn down the Jewish hospital and its adjacent buildings. Dr. Kaplinsky and Dr. Resnick, who came to Volkovysk after the liberation, found around the bunkers, where they were kept imprisoned from November 2, 1942 - January 26, 1943, all sorts of old an broken utensils and dishes. In Bunker #3, which served as a hospital for the sick among all the prisoners, they found the remains of a disinfection ward. The Russians had ordered Dr. Kaplinsky to run a government hospital, and Dr. Resnick to run a ward in that hospital.

Volkovysk After The First World War

By Eliyahu Shykevich[5]

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Our first impressions after returning to Volkovysk at the end of the war, were more than depressing. The guardians of order from the new regime – the Polish gendarmerie – revealed a chauvinistic attitude towards the residents, and especially towards the Jewish populace. The specter of death haunted the street, and there was no illumination, and it appeared that there was not a living person in the area. The little houses looked abandoned and in bad disrepair, the bent over roofs gave the impression of being in mourning, for they were the silent witnesses to everything that had transpired in the city during the period of the war.

It was hard for us to believe that we had finally arrived home, after a journey filled with danger, and with much blood that was spilled like water. We couldn't quite get used to the idea that we were once again free to do what we want, the many nightmares that had robbed us of any hope and even will to continue living had ended.

Our wagons drew near to the commercial center of the city. Even here – silent and abandoned. All the stores closed. There is no one going in, and no one coming out. The heart began to beat at a more rapid pace, a fear of meeting with relatives and friends from days gone by. Who knows which of them are still alive. We were emotionally overwrought about that dramatic moment, when we would embrace our relatives in our arms, and wash away all the bitterness that had accumulated during the cruel war years in a wave of tears.

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[5] E. Shykevich, who for a long period of time was the Chairman of the Organization of Volkovysk Émigrés in Israel, came to Volkovysk in 1913. He is especially well known for his work on behalf of the orphanage. He left many diaries and writings, and this article is based on them.

We arrived. Our wagons halted at the home of our brother-in-law, Meir Shiff, who had received the news of our anticipated arrival in advance. A pale light breaks through the windows of his house. The rear entrance doorway is opened, and we cross the threshold of the house with our hearts fluttering and full. My beloved brother-in-law and sister-in-law receive us with enormous feeling, and hug us in their embrace. It is hard to hold back the tears. The cried erupt from our throats: "Meir! Fradeleh! Eliyahu! " The enormous change that had taken place in this house is very apparent. The deprivation chirps at us from every corner. There is not a trace of the plenty and wealth of bygone days, before the Deluge. The mark of the wealthy merchant, Meir Shiff has decidedly declined. He looks like a may on whom old age has descended prematurely. Even his good humor – had changed, and is gone. I cast an eye about, and the memories of the good days that we spent here rise up in me and move me deeply. My relatives look at me and stand dumbfounded.

– *Elyeh*, what are you looking for? They ask, and I reply: I am looking for *the past,* but I don't see it....

My first night was a sleepless one. Many thoughts concerning the magnitude of what lay ahead of us intruded on rest. On the following day, after breakfast, I received information from my brother-in-law regarding the condition and of what might be expected. It was revealed to me, that my house had been seized by a local carpenter, and he had been living there for three years. The house was very run down, and whoever was living there doesn't think much about cleaning it up. It is probably imminent that it will be necessary to resort to legal means in this instance. Even temporary housing is hard to come by now. All the merchandise, that I had left in storage before my departure, had been divided up among relatives and friends: a sewing machine, record players, ans assorted other items. The attempts by my brother-in-law to retrieve them, produced junk. When he notified a number of friends, who at my request had received machines on loan, that they need to return that which was lent to them – they laughed. The possibility of replacing my belongings here – even those are few. The government had nationalized the insurance sector. There was a serious doubt as to whether I could renew my dealings in Singer sewing machines. My commercial relationships outside of the country are not in order, and to the extent that there is business, it is erratic. It is still possible to buy some things with dollars, which cannot be bought for other currencies. The markets are full of German Marks, Austrian Krone, and Rubles, and are also replete in the homes of the citizenry, and they aren't worth the peelings off of a clove of garlic.

After hearing this depressing report from my brother-in-law, that this was not the only reason I would not be able to help prop up my brother-in-law's family as I had planned, but rather that I will also have difficulty maintaining myself in the coming days. I has lost my assets, everything that I had accumulated and earned in the past – was lost. From whence would come my deliverance? Without ideas, and because of the thoughts on my mind, tears began to roll down from my eyes. My sister-in-law noticed this, and so she came near to me, and began to offer me encouragement: "What's the matter with you, Eliyahu? Are you the only one to have been disrupted and had all of his assets taken away in the wake of the war? There are tens of thousands just like you. Don't let your spirits fall, and don't lose your hope in a better tomorrow! Conditions will change soon, and the chaos that reigns through all aspects of living will be transformed into an orderly and normal scheme of things. You, with your experience, will establish yourself more quickly than others. Just don't give up!"

Her words were encouraging to me, and we agreed that I should rest for a couple of days, after which I would begin to meet with relatives and friends, in order to take stock of everything that affects the current situation, and the possibilities to set up my businesses once again. After the picture becomes clear, we will decide with what to start in order to build our lives anew.

"Delegates" from America

When I was pepped up a little after hearing the sorrowful report that I received, my brother-in-law told me that aid had begun to arrive from relatives

and friends in the United States. Several emissaries had already arrived in Volkovysk, and they brought sums of money with them to be allocated among [various] necessities. At this time, the "delegates" from the Unite States receive an entreaty for their relatives in America to help them with financial contributions. Precisely at this time, a cousin of ours, Hona Nakhumovsky is expected here, and he is supposed to visit us.

For the sake of truth, the news of this impending visit didn't make me happy at all. I was not inclined to be a solicitor of donations. For my entire life, I avoided doing things of this nature. I never, ever sent letters to America, begging for them to send us a few dollars, as many did, who would pour out their hearts to their relatives, describing their circumstances in the blackest of hues (even if, in fact, that was not the case), especially to arouse the sympathies of their well-heeled relatives. I built myself up solely on the basis of my own work, and even for the future, I thought to rebuild myself on the basis of work, and not on the basis of relatives in America.

This cousin came to visit us on one evening. His first question was – what are my circumstances. I told him plainly that the war had ruined me, I had gone through tribulations in Russia, and a communist court had sentenced me to death, which forced me to flee the place with every possible speed. My escape lasted three months. When I reached Minsk, I saw large trials of tens of people who were taken out for execution because they had hidden Czarist currency. I had 42,000 rubles in my possession, which I succeeded in bringing back to Volkovysk, in the hopes that this money would help me support my dear brother-in-law from an economic standpoint. I put my life in danger in order to take this money along, but to my great chagrin, I discovered upon my arrival, that this money no longer had any value. Despite this, I am not despondent. I expect that the Good Lord who has helped me up till now – will also help me in the future.

In short, we spent several hours with this cousin, from whom we asked for no assistance, and on the following day, he returned to the United States.

Even my sister-in-law, who was a witness within earshot of the dialogue, summarized that I didn't really behave correctly, and that it would have been appropriate to hint to our relative, or even to explicitly ask for assistance needed to help the family, yet I stood my ground, because it is no plan to try and rebuild oneself on the basis of handouts, and I even reminded her of her own words of encouragement, that there is reason to hope for better times and not to let one's spirits fall.

In the City Streets

I want to take the measure of the city's morale, and I go for a walk in the streets. At the precise time that the stores open. I enter the few stores that are open. There is little merchandise, and as you can understand, there is little business. One does not see the type of merchant with the generous hand of the bygone days before the war. The lively and loud banter among the butchers, during the time they are cutting and dressing the fresh meats for their regular customers, is not to be heard, and the intensity of the fishmongers is faded and gone, and one no longer hears their fawning cries of: "Shayn'dehleh, Breindeh'leh, Pes'sheleh..." Here and there one sees the worried countenances of several sorrowful walking by the wagons of merchandise with lightning speed, because the have nothing with which to buy, on their way to the bakers, in order to buy a piece of simple coarse bread to satisfy the hunger of their children. Very few people are seen in the streets. I think to myself that perhaps the Jews are occupied reciting the *Selikhot* prayers. After all, at what time did the Jews have greater need for the mercy of the Holy One, Blessed Be He? ... What a transformation had taken place on the street of the Jews! Everything had been destroyed and laid waste, and who knows when we would see the fulfilment of the prayer "renew our days as of old?"

Amidst such sorrowful thoughts, I reach the *Schulhof.* The Great Synagogue stand out it its full glory. It appears that its *Gabbaim* and regular worshipers have been spread throughout the length and breadth of Russia. They fled to wherever the wind would blow them, running to get beyond the occupation, to escape siege and destruction, from confiscation decrees... from impoverishment, etc.

Only a few succeeded in this respect. Most of them are streaming back to their former dwelling places, tired, worn out, poor and downtrodden. On all the roads, Jews are streaming back to their destroyed homes, to the synagogues where at least they will be able to offer up their prayers, to pour out their hearts about all that had occurred to them in their sojourn in the Vale of Tears, and in front of other Jews, whose fate was not particularly better. Even I am attracted to the Great Synagogue. Even I have a desire to pour out my heart to the Creator of the Universe, my heart also aches, but to my great sadness, the Synagogue is closed. Beside the smaller synagogues, I see small clutches of Jews standing, trying to recruit the coming and going Jews for a *minyan.*

The words of *Lamentations* burst forth from my heart. Oh, how can this city be so desolate? The familiar *Schulhof* with the seven large synagogues that were full of worshipers at all hours of the morning – How far have they fallen that they must recruit people for a *minyan*? In standing by the steps of the Great Synagogue, my ears picked up the sound of groans, and weeping that came from the Old Age Home, that was nearby. The miserable residents of this place had completed their praying and beseeching for some time now, and they are waiting for their meal after prayers, But the Gabbai of this institution, Eliezer Shaliota has just arrived. He is the director in the institution, and he does not depend on anyone but himself. He is quietly sitting in his office right now. His meal is set in front of him. The pleading of the elderly men and women does not reach him here. I strike up a conversation with the old folks, who complain bitterly about their fate, on the stingy portions of their food. They too, long for the bygone days, when their entreaties of "Cast us not into old age," fell upon cocked ears.

Experiences and Memories

Page 17: *Top:* *Noah Tzemakh*
Bottom: *The Market Street*

Page 19: *Kosciuszko Street*

Page 20: *Right:* *The Wide Boulevard*
Left: *Volkovysk Girls Having fun and smiling (1938). From Left to Right: Manya Uryonsky, Leah Cantor, Hannah Berman, Rachel Movshovksy, Esther Schwartzbuch, Tanya Movshovsky, Mira Epstein*

A "Tour" of Volkovysk

By Noah Tzemakh

I have stopped the sands of time, and turned the clock back fifty years, and I find myself in Volkovysk as it was then, under the Polish regime. Changes pass before my eyes, different transformations, that reflect the experience and the way of life of thousands of Jews that comprised the majority of the city's population. A variegated kaleidoscope knit together.

Let us begin with the Hanukkah holiday, which was my favorite above all. The winter is at its most intense. A coating of snow is on the h\roofs and houses, the yards, streets and trees. The temperature is 10ºF below zero. Hanukkah candles are visible in most homes in the neighborhoods, beginning from "under the hill," in the Northwest, and on to Karczyzna in the East, and Zamoscheh in the

Southwest. A pleasant warmth suffuses the houses, the children are playing *draydel,* and the older folks are playing cards, and the ladies of the house are serving warm, pancakes with sweets or tasty little jars of fat. The sound of Hanukkah songs can be heard breaking out of many homes, and their melodies rise up, and the most popular is, *Oy Hanukkah, oy Hanukkah, a Yom Tov a Shayner, a fraylikher, a lustiger, nit doh nokh azoy einer.* (Oh Hanukkah, oh Hanukkah, what a beautiful holiday – a happy and lusty one, there is no other like it).

The sun shines in the bright of day, and the snow glitters like jewels throwing off colors. The Titov pond is frozen over. Children and teenagers are skating on the ice, showing off their skills and tricks. On the Wide Boulevard, opposite the commercial center, Jewish wagons with sled rails are parked, with the horses in their harnesses, decorated with lively bells. On the second side of the street – the Jewish butcher shops that provide kosher meat to the homemakers. The smell of the meat attracts many dogs to the area, who wait for scraps. A Christian beggar routinely makes the rounds here, who falls to his knees and begs for charity in a pitiful voice. The cold blows through the many stores, and the pot of hot coals is insufficient to temper it. Mostly, the women sit around it, warming their frozen hands near it.

Groups of young people, renting sleigh rides for touring (*Kulik*), go by in the city streets, with their occupants in song, to the accompaniment of the bells on the horses' heads. Children play in the yards of the houses, putting up a snowman, joyful and happy, they have a snowball fight. The water carriers are walking through the streets, and on their neck is the yoke from which two pails of water hang. This was the normal way water was supplied at the time the city was not yet connected to a water supply system. The water pumps, that were set up in various neighborhoods, were hand-operated, and were a source of income to those working as water carriers. The outhouses were in the yards of the houses. On the bitterly cold winter nights, going outside for large or small necessities was fraught with immense danger... the garbage collectors, who would pick up trash from boxes, that were especially set up in the yards of houses, did their work at night, and haul the trash outside the city. Chimneys the roofs would discharge the smoke from the houses, that curled up from the stove which was inside the houses. The soot that collected in the chimneys and prevented the smoke from getting out, was the cause of many a terrible fire. Removal of this soot was the work of the chimney sweeps, familiar figures in the city, whose faces and clothes were perpetually covered in soot, and a rope was tied to their shoulders with a broom and the tools of their trade.

Here, I have arrived at the courtyard of the Great Synagogue, and the *Batei Medrashim* that are adjacent to it – the religious center in the city. At the heart, the Great Synagogue looms over everything, and along its breadth nearby, is the *Bet HaMedrash* called 'the new building,' and opposite it is the *Bet HaMedrash* called 'the old building,' beside which is the *Ein Yaakov Bet HaMedrash*. Further south is the *Takhkemoni* School – the Talmud Torah and Yeshiva. In my mind's eye, I see the Yeshiva Headmaster – Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel. A dominant personality and respected by the Jewish community.

The school day stretches from morning until evening. Most of the students came from poor families, who did not have the means to pay tuition. The obligations of the school were specifically covered by donations on the part of contributors in the city, and Volkovysk émigrés in the United States. Near the school: a slaughterhouse for fowl. The bathhouse, and various charitable institutions, such as: hosting visitors, the old age home, a home for the indigent, etc.. Paupers down on their luck, people maimed in body and spirit, mill around in the synagogue courtyard, seeking some shelter from the winter beside the stove in the *Bet HaMedrash* Before me stands Moshe *'Bulkeh,'* crippled from the time of the First World War. Many children surround him, and he shows off his 'knife' to them, because he is capable of eating fifty cookies at once, and wash them down with sixty glasses of tea. And you can also run into Yoss'l, 'the Village Idiot,' here. He is constantly smiling, but the songs that he sings are sad, soulful songs.

Beginning on Thursday, one can begin to feel the special preparations beginning for the Sabbath.

There is a substantial surge in buyers in the stores of the commercial center. The women are early in arranging for their purchases, because a lot of work waits for them in the preparation of the various dishes and baked goods. The scent of gefilte fish and *cholent* is carried along in the air on Friday. Many go to the bathhouse to wash in honor of the Sabbath. Close to the onset of the Sabbath, the women hurry along with their pots to the bakeries, so that the *cholent* can cook overnight. The 'Sabbath Queen' has arrived – and the women, men, children, and infants, washed and radiant, wearing their Sabbath finery, fill the *Batei Medrashim*, from which rise the sounds of the Sabbath prayers. After services, sitting at the set tables, one can hear the special Sabbath songs (*zemirot Shabbat*). It is a city of Jews. The following day, on the Sabbath, with the conclusion of services, the worshipers coming out of the *Batei Medrashim* stream back to their homes, and on the other side of the street – the women and children come out of the bakeries, carrying the pots of *cholent* in their hands. It was not unusual for the pots to get mixed up. Always, one party got the better and the other party – lost out.

– – – The holiday seasons move ahead. Purim is getting ready to arrive. The snow has melted, and the worst of the cold is behind us. On the edges of the roofs of the houses, once can still see icicles hanging – the heat of the sun is warming up the snow, which melts. In the *Batei Medrashim*, the children greet the name of Haman with all the 'armament' in their hands, every time the reader mentions his name. During the afternoon of Purim, young boys walk about the streets carrying the plates with *Shalakh Manot*, in order to fulfil the mitzvah, 'you shall send gifts, one to another.'

Preparations for Passover begin the day after Purim. The people who work for *Maot Khittim*, important *balebatim,* and distinguished members of the Jewish community, begin their task of providing the necessities of the holiday, that is demanded of every Jew for is festival, for the needy, and their operating principle is – 'give or take,' that is to say, no man is free of meeting this obligation, either he gives his donation, or he himself must receive a donation. A special committee draws up a list of the needy, taking into account the second principle, 'giving charity in secret.' There are well-to-do Jews who have lost their assets in the past year, and were ruined, but they have no interest in having the 'community' know about it because their circumstance is so embarrassing. For these too, it is required to provide matzos, wine, meat, etc., but discreetly, so that no one will know.

Preparations for the holiday can be felt in the houses, where the homemakers are bent under the yoke of all the things that await them in the house. The double windows are taken out, that protect against the winter cold, there is whitewashing, cleaning, the special Passover dishes are brought down from their storage place, and other dishes are made kosher by heating them to white heat, or passing them through boiling water. The season of matzo baking begins, and matzo needs to be prepared. Clothes and shoes for all members of the household, practicing the Four Questions, performed as usual by the youngest member of the family, and all sorts of other tasks connected with the imminent holiday.

I continue to wander about, as it were, in the city streets, and first of all, it is necessary to see what is going on in the market. Yes, it is a market day today. The wagons of the peasants from the villages near to Volkovysk and far, fill the commercial center, and the adjacent streets, testify to that. The horses are pulling at their harnesses, but they are lashed very well to the wagons, and their snouts are buried in feeding bags. There is a pandemonium in the city. The peasants are bringing the crops from their fields, and present them for review by all on special stands. Cattle and Sheep are brought for slaughter to the municipal slaughterhouse, and the businesses that work in coordination with the butchers. Also, horse traders from the entire district meet at the great fair in the adjacent town – *Zelva.* This is a good opportunity for the peasants to grab a good shot of whiskey, after they have filled their pockets with money, and after they have provisioned themselves with a variety of needs and items that are

found in the city. The market day is a day of continuous business in every story and factory. Along the width of the commercial center, all manner of entertainers appear, and clowns who entertain the large crowd, who show their appreciation not with clapping, but with the 'ringing' of coins thrown into their hats. There are fire and sword swallowers too, monkey acts, bear acts, and fire acts.

I leave the market, and continue along the Wide Boulevard (*Szeroka*) towards the train station. On the way, I stop at Blond Kalman's kiosk who sells soft drinks, newspapers and stationery items. By morning, all the Yiddish newspapers printed in the capital of Warsaw have arrived at his kiosk: *Heint, Moment, Unser Express,* and also weekly and monthly publications, each according to its schedule. The Hebrew weekly, *BaDerekh,* which I was in the custom of buying each week, could also be found here, as well as the Hebrew daily, *Hatzefira,* while *Hatzefira* was still being published. From the kiosk, I continue to walk, and I pass the rows of the stores (*Rad Krommen*). Here one can fined merchandise of every kind in all sizes, shapes to satisfy any whim: linens, trifles, ironware, carpentry tools, shoemaking, dyeing; baked goods and candies; watches, etc. In a word – everything. It isn't necessary to say that all of these stores were Jewish. Now I reach the Polonia Cinema, whose owner is also Jewish. In the hall of the cinema, Yiddish and Polish plays are also put on, productions appear from Vilna, Warsaw, and other Polish cities. Opposite the cinema are the offices of the local weekly Yiddish newspaper, *Volkovysker Leben,* most of whose columns are taken up with obituaries, notices of happy occasions, and commercial ads. But it is also peppered throughout with articles on various local happenings that have taken place, or are due to take place in the future in the life of the Jewish community, and even distributed short essays on issues of the day, with a very obvious bias favorable to Zionism.

Along the Wide Boulevard, one can see many wooden houses whose roofs are covered with shingles, also made of wood, most of which are crying out for repair. The white edifice of the Catholic church pierces the sky here. On Sundays and Christian holidays, the soldiers of the third brigade of mounted lancers, based in the barracks on the southwest side of the city, stream over to here. The church is surrounded by a stone fence, with new houses close by, built out of stone, and occupied by Christians.

And I have now reached the street that will take me to the south side railroad station. Here once crosses the bridge over the river that flows out of the city. Near this station – the municipal park, the Ugniski Cinema. South and west, on the other side of the railroad tracks, is the pine forest, "*Burkehs*" which gives great pleasure to walkers, and fresh air enthusiasts. Since I am arranging this "tour" of mine so as not to be at the height of summer, I pass on the opportunity this time, and I turn to the north – to the street that brings me to the *Tatarski Gasse.* The government run Polish gymnasium looms ahead on the hill above us, which also has a small number of Jews among its many students, who are ready to burst for the privilege of being accepted to a Polish university after they finish their gymnasium studies.

The smithy of an elderly Jew is located at the foot of this hill, who works at this business with his son. Jewish wagon drivers, and Christian peasants come here to have their horses shod. I snatch a brief conversation with the smith and his son, after which I turn to the right and stop at the most important institutions in Volkovysk and its vicinity – *Linat Kholim* – an institution that provides medical assistance to the Jewish populace of all ages and means. A visit to the dispensary is for a nominal charge only, and next to the dispensary, there is a pharmacy that is open 8 hours a day, child support in the form of 'the drop of milk,' and it is here that this important institution looks after the health and well being of sick children who need to be nursed back to health. *Linat Kholim* also runs the Jewish hospital which became seriously run down during the period of the First World War, but in recent times was renovated and put back in suitable condition.

From the *Tatarski Gasse*, I turn Left onto the *Grodno Gasse*, and my 'first stop' on this street is the building of the *Tarbut* School. It is worth stopping to spend some time here. Voices singing in Hebrew burst forth from the building, harmonious and soul-restoring, along with the sounds of the Hora being danced, that reach my ear. Here it is possible to breathe the air of the Holy Land. Blessings should be accorded to those who concerned themselves with establishing a network of institutions for Hebrew education. The beginnings of this network was with a Hebrew kindergarten, and afterwards a Hebrew grade school, and the last link in the chain – the Hebrew Gymnasium, *Hertzeliya*. I doubt I will be able to get to the other schools today, such as *Yavneh, Kadima*, and the *Yiddish School*, but in my visit to the *Tarbut School*, I am also recalling the others as well.

Further up the street, I am stopped by a crowd around the Fire Wagon. Vigorous young men wearing insignias, with copper helmets on their heads, are carrying out a fire-fighting exercise. They bring the ladders close up to the wall of a nearby building in a sprightly fashion, two firemen with large hoses in their hands, climb up the wall and go up on the roof, two others have already arrived , also with a hose in hand, to the top floor in the middle of the building, and are facilitating the drawing of water. The organization of the fire department, most of whose members were Jewish, and only few were Poles, had an excellent reputation, and the entire city was very proud of them. The leadership was entirely in Jewish hands. The members of the organization were vigorous young men, dedicated to their positions, equipped with the latest gear. The fire department orchestra also filled an important place in the community and cultural life of the city. An unforgettable scene was – a Christian funeral, led by the members of the Jewish orchestra, playing mournful music... A thing we learned was that the members of the local Polish government found it difficult to reconcile themselves with the existence of this organization, which was all made up of Jews, but not having any alternative, they were forced to reward it frequently with recognition for its excellence in carrying out its blessed work.

– – – The seasons continue to move on. *Lag B'Omer*, the traditional holiday of national Jewish youth is approaching. It is easy to recognize the signs of preparation for this holiday in the Jewish community, but most obviously in the ranks of the Zionist youth movements. On the morning of that day, a large assembly is held in the Great Synagogue. After services, the teacher Shkarlat gives a talk in Hebrew on issues of the day, and the choir, accompanied by the Fire Department orchestra, sing Israeli songs. Among these is always, *Se'u Tziona ness gadol* and *Tekhezakna yedei kol akheinu hamkhonenim.*[6] With the conclusion of the assembly, a lineup of the different Zionist youth groups takes place in the courtyard of the Great Synagogue, who appear in their insignias and with their flags: *HaShomer HaTza'ir, Gordonia, Betar, HeHalutz*, the students of the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium, the Hebrew schools, the students of the Talmud Torah, the children of the orphanage, the pupils from the regular *Heders,* and of course all of the teachers, men and women alike. When the lineup is completed, this large symbolic group marches through the streets of the city, as the orchestra accompanies it with music, in the direction of the forest of the *Burkes,* where a large picnic had been set up that will continue all day. Crowds of Jewish people would crowd the outskirts of the city in order to see this large encampment, on its way out, and upon its return, to the point of escorting it with clapping hands and good wishes. The 'extra soul' of all the Jews of Volkovysk was especially gladdened on that very day.

– – – I am drawing near to the river's edge, the location of many strolls during spring and summer, and these are the seasons in which river bathing begins, literally from the onset of summer. During summer, sporting activities start up anew. Soccer games on Saturday and Sunday. The city is plastered with notices about these games, with the

6 Two of the classic Zionist rallying songs: *Raise a great standard towards Zion*, and *May the hands of all our pioneering brethren be strengthened.*

participation of Polish teams (Pszisz lucz, V.K.S) and the Jewish team, *Morgenstern* from the Bund, and others. The games are held on a field near the barracks, on the southwest side of the city, and also on a field that had been set aside for such games on the east side of the city. The *Maccabi* team is thought to be not only one of the strongest teams in Volkovysk, but also in the entire district. It received a subsidy for the Jewish community,. And thanks to that, succeeded in meeting its budget.

Maccabi also participated in other branches of sport other than soccer, such as: tennis, ping-pong, basketball, hockey, bicycle racing, swimming, field sports and boxing. Apart form the *Maccabi* team, there was a team – Nordia, from the ranks of the revisionists, which was active in the city, but it didn't measure up to the same standard as *Maccabi*..

In continuing my walk, I reached the *Kholodoisker Gasse,* and it was impossible not to stop at the orphanage. A great deal of work and effort was expended to put up this three-story building, and in particular, it was Eliyahu Shykevich, who put in so much of his heart, with caring effort and dedication without bounds to establish this institution. Orphaned children, whose numbers were large in the years immediately after the First World War, who were abandoned and left on their own, found a warm home here, where it became possible for them to forget their troubles, and to get an education and learn a trade. Who knows what their fate would have been without this house.

And it is not possible to finish a "tour" like this, without spending some time at the financial institutions, and cooperatives, thanks to whom, Jews got access to work and commerce, and many were saved from bankruptcy, and certain ruin. To this end, two Free Loan Societies operated in the city, two Jewish banks (a Merchant's Bank, and a Real Estate Bank). Various branches of the economy were established thanks to these institutions, new sawmills were added, leather factories were expanded, brick kilns, a branch of a hotel, etc., etc. The burden of the taxes levied by the Polish regime on the Jews to pressure them from parts of the economy and transfer it to Polish hands, did not succeed in diminishing the means of livelihood for the Jews, thanks to the honesty of the Jews, and in their ability to organize themselves and provide timely help in which many activists participated in a committed and loyal fashion. It is impossible not to remember one of them – Engineer Ephraim Barash, who established many such institutions. Headed the Zionist movement, was active on behalf of all national funds and institutions, and for the Hebrew educational network. It was a great loss for the Jews of Volkovysk, when the Bialystock community "stole" him from us, and made him the head of the large Jewish community of Bialystock, but even in assuming his new position, he did not forget Volkovysk, and his heart was open to every call for help, advice and direction.

"I'm a bit tired" from my lengthy "tour" through the streets of Volkovysk, but I will admit that I had serious doubts and loss of spirit during the "tour." The heart is pained that the *Abrogator* descended on all this during the period of the Holocaust, and there is practically no trace left of work of this lively, vibrant, dynamic and animated Jewish community.

A Home in Volkovysk

By Eliyahu Rutchik

Our home town was a Jewish city, and the impact of the few Christians that lived their was negligible. Our house stood on the main street, the Wide Boulevard (*Szeroka*). My grandfather's house was in the middle, and our family of five people lived in the courtyard, and in the very center, was the carpentry shop. A large part of the yard "belonged" to my grandmother, Leah. Within the boundaries of her "realm" was a beautiful blooming garden, in which you could find all manner of vegetables and fruits, and flowers that were pleasing to the eye. I remember as a child, that I helped my grandmother Leah water her plants, and I was not the only child who participated in this. All the children ran around among the plants, and there were times when our grandmother found it difficult to rid herself of our assistance... the children of our neighbors would

also come into our yard, and among them also were Christian children, and there is no doubt that this was because of our grandfather, who used to make all manner of toys for the children, such as rocking chairs, balls, and similar things. The children of the Christian family Shevshevicz were very frequent guests in our yard, and it appears that they did not feel any anti-Christian sentiment in our neighborhood in the way we did feel anti-Semitism in theirs...

When you entered grandfather's house from the street – you would first enter a large room, sort of a salon, whose furniture I recall very well: an old oak buffet, a big table and chairs, a sofa, a bookcase, and a library. The regular guests in this room were craftsmen, friends and acquaintances of grandfather. I would see them side by side, sitting at the table, sipping tea from the samovar, playing dominoes or *damka,* and in the process, telling each other what's new in the city, peccadilloes, large and small... and when I close my eyes and transport myself there – I see grandfather's guests one-by-one, their appearance, or more correctly – their appearance as it then was.

Here sits Abraham Shpak. When he would put down his large, bony, veined hands – there was no more space left on the table for anything else. Mordetsky the builder sits at his side, telling stories about his business dealings and their present status, that landowners from near and far would send their coaches to bring him to work on their property, and they also would bring him back home for the Sabbath. Mordetsky had a little beard, and he was always spotless, and wore a short jacket.

Now we get to Chaim Polonsky, whom everyone nicknamed 'the Tailor from Odessa,' because he was in the habit of talking a great deal about 'the good old days,' when they used to take the clothes that he made to an exhibition in Odessa. I have no basis on which to challenge these representations, just as, if the truth be known, I have no basis on which to verify them either... this tailor was often the butt of jokes, and subject to imitation, because of his unique Yiddish accent, not a Litvak accent [7], which was the rule in our area. Also, the locksmith Kaganovich, who also made and repaired scales and balances, was one of the regular guests to grandfather's house, however, as opposed to the others, he would always come with his wife, either because she was afraid to stay at home alone, or he was afraid to come alone. The one who was closest to grandfather, was Podolinsky the carpenter. He had an 'ear for a tune,' understood music, especially cantorial liturgy, and in his youth, was a member of a choir, whose name I have totally forgotten, and perhaps him as well... I recall that he loved to tell a lot of jokes and dispense advice. A frequent guest of ours was also our neighbor, a shoemaker by trade, who was called Meir the Menaker. I did not know his real name, and neither did others. He was one of those energetic early risers. Upon his arrival, he would go sit in a corner and read the daily Jewish paper *Der Moment*, to which grandfather subscribed. It was whispered about that he was 'a pinko,' that is to say, a communist, and this because he would extol, praise, and shower good words on the Soviet Union, and would quote Lenin and Trotsky and other communist leaders, and was as thoroughly conversant in their writings as a pious Jew might be with the *Ashrei* prayer.

These guests were the intelligentsia of the group. The were others who were less intelligent, who discharged their obligation to participate by listening only. The old proverb, 'The boundary to wisdom – is silence' was apparently accepted by them, or quite simply, they may not have had anything to say.

As a child, I would lend an ear to the stories of this intelligentsia, which centered about pogroms against the Jews, about experiences in self-defense, about Jews who emigrated to America, and 'made America' for themselves there, on so-and-so, who 'passed up America,' and specifically chose to go to the Holy Land, and like subjects. For the sake of the truth, it is important to note that they did not

[7] Perish the thought, but he might have been – a *Galitzianer!*

only talk. If, God forbid, someone brought bad tidings about someone who fell seriously ill, or another person, a wagon driver, whose horse had stumbled, was injured and had to be put down, thereby losing his means of livelihood, – grandfather's guests would fulfil the mitzvah of 'pick yourself up and go,' organizes themselves in pairs, and go throughout the city to take up a collection on behalf of the needy or unfortunate individual. I didn't always pick up the names of those who received help, because in most instances, they also fulfilled the precept of giving charity in a clandestine manner, and would speak among themselves only in a whisper, so that the name of the person being helped not become public, and especially not a budding youngster like myself.

A Student at Farber's School – At A Good Time

Page 22: Farber's School in 1932

Without any introduction, one morning a Jewish man entered our home, with a big smile on his face. He exchanged a few words with my brother Berel and I, and also with mt father and mother, and after a brief stay, he left the way he had come.

After he left, our mother notified us with a festive air, that both of us, Berel and I, had been accepted as students in Farber's school, and the man who had just previously asked us a few questions (this apparently was the entrance examination) – was none other than Farber himself, and not every child was privileged enough to be accepted as a student in this school, which was one of the most distinguished in the city. From that day on, we impatiently waited for that special, lucky day.

That day was not long in coming. I remember it like it was today, that morning when my brother Berel and I were dresses in our holiday best, and our mother took us to Farber's *Heder*. Neighbors and acquaintances stopped us along the way, and showered us with good wishes aplenty. There were those who didn't stop with good wishes, and also pinched our cheeks, and our closest neighbors even honored us with their kisses. All of this made our hearts beat even faster. We knew with certainty: the city now knows, that Berel and I are going to 'Farber.'

And so – we went. We passed by the cinema, and across the *Mitzrayim Gasse,* past the pharmacy beside the drainage canal. From there, we turned right, and we reached the *Heder*, or school. This school was on the *Schulhof,* and there were no less than five synagogues on this parcel of land, and they were:

1. The *'Hayyatim'* Synagogue (on whose premises, our school was also located).

2. *Der Alter Mauer Schul*, where the famous Cantor Markus led prayer.

3. The New *Mauer Schul*

4. The *Ein Yaakov* Synagogue where our family worshiped, and finally,

5. The Great Synagogue, that was larger and more splendid than the others.

Apart from all of these, there were other institutions on this square, such as the *Talmud Torah* under the direction of Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel, the Headmaster, the Old Age Home, the bathhouse and *mikva*, a hostel for lodging the poor, a kosher slaughtering facility, and luckily I did not forget 'Heller's House,' that first served as a support facility that distributed food to the needy, in which were located the offices of the *Keren Kayemet*, a chapter of *Gordonia*, the center of *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, and the Hebrew Library.

As mentioned, Farber's school was a school with a reputation. Classes, which were conducted in Ashkenazic Hebrew, began at 8AM, and continued until 3PM. Farber himself taught us *Tanakh*, literature, arithmetic and geography. His daughter gave us music lessons, and his son, David, led open discussions with us about Israel, Zionism, and other subjects, according to our desires. This entire 'enterprise' was run by the family. Farber himself

had not graduated from a university or seminary, and had never received pedagogical training, but to the best of my knowledge he was a great teacher, and famous for giving special attention and instruction to each pupil. Frequently, he would come to the student's home in order to assist in the preparation of lessons. During vacation, he would invite his students to his home, and read them the poetry of Bialik, the stories of Zhul Varan and others. In general, we enjoyed his readings, and our impression that even more than we enjoyed it – he himself did as well...

I previously told about my maternal grandparents, but I will not skip over my paternal grandparents, who lived in Zamoscheh (that is what we called that part of the city that was over the bridge in the direction of the railroad station). They lived in this outlying area, in a low, wooden house, whose windows practically touched the ground, my grandmother Chaya-Rachel, next to which there was a brick building in which my grandfather Shmuel Chaim had his meat store; there were six partners in this business, and a bookkeeper worked for them to keep track of all the transactions. Apart from this, my father assisted them in the purchase of calves or sheep, transporting them to the kosher slaughterhouse, which was actually forbidden at that time in Poland, in accordance with a decision passed by the Polish Sejm. My father would deliver the goods to the merchants by means of a large wagon hitched to one horse, but in the passage of time, they bought two autos for the business, which made scheduled trips between Volkovysk and Bialystock, for purposes of buying and selling. Mulya Schein, who was the coach of the *Maccabi* soccer team, would frequently come to father, and ask my father to take the team to play in inter-city games, because the income of the group was insufficient to allow them to pay for transportation...

Father did not have set working hours, and he would work from the early morning until late into the night. He never complained about it. The important thing [to him] was that his sons receive a good education, and 'become men...'

It appeared to me that in my grandparents' butcher shop, they gave away more than they sold. Grandfather would prepare packages for his needy, and grandmother would look after her needy, and it is not necessary to say that these distributions took place free of charge, but, in order not to, God forbid, embarrass the needy recipient, grandfather was in the habit of saying to people who entered his tore: "there is the package that you forgot to take." From time to time, each would catch the other "pilfering" on behalf of the needy, and the refrain that was frequently heard in those instances was: "if you can do it – so can I ," and similar excuses. Grandmother would say at every opportunity: May God help me to always give, and Heaven forbid, never to have to take....

The HaShomer HaTza'ir Organization

Page 23: *Rabbi Abba-Yaakov Borukhov, and the city Elders, with the emissaries of the Aid Committee from New York, after the First World War.* [8]

And a day came, during the major recess at school, two older boys approached my brother and I , and introduced themselves as members of *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, and invited us to their chapter meeting place that evening. We were elated at this invitation, and responded to it, and that very evening we became members of HaShomer HaTza'ir. In accordance with our age, we were put into the *Tzofim* group, and it is worth saying that from then on, a new chapter began in my life.

From this time on, I spent all my spare time, that was not dedicated to school and study, at the *HaShomer* offices. My luck was such that ***Hillel Epstein*** was my director, who took to his responsibilities with complete seriousness, and his led initiatives and ran meetings in a wondrous

[8] Taken from Dr. Einhorn's Book, page 77. A translation of those sitting in this portrait is given in the first part of this Trilogy, on page 29.

manner. He oversaw the training of the *Tzofim,* and stressed open field sports, night study, and character development. The discussions and conversations that were arranged in my group, enriched my spiritual world, and one can say, without fear of contradiction, that Hillel opened a window onto questions and issues that we were not even aware of, and tried very hard to achieve a world view in his educating process. The group also would put on public theater productions of our favorites, and ***Yaakov Einstein*** (a performer for *Ohel* for some years), especially was outstanding in this regard, and for a while was the head of the chapter.

In remember especially our Lag B'Omer parades, through the city streets in the direction of the *Burkehs*, where we would spend the whole day in song, sport, competition, etc. When we would return to the city towards evening, after leaving the camp in the *Burkehs,* there were hordes of Jews, who stood on both sides of the street, receiving us with shouts of praise, and there was a real sens of pride and satisfaction in marching with one's comrades in the movement. During the summer months, we would participate in camps that were set up in various villages of the surrounding area, and we lived either in barns and tents.

We had a special relationship to the orphanage headed by ***Mr. Shykevich.*** This institution was supported by the local community to the highest standard, and in order to assure that level, it was necessary to generate additional income. To that end, the children of that institution would present special plays on Hanukkah, and Purim, and we, the members of the movement, would help them with the sale of tickets, and looking after a variety of details, costumes, stage props, and there were some of our members who actually participated in the play itself. This relationship between us, and these children who had lost their parents, and were robbed their childhood, was a blessing to us and to them.

Upon completion of studies at the Farber School, students would then enter the *Tarbut* School. This was a fundamental change in every sense. Every subject at *Tarbut* was taught by a different teacher, and studies were conducted in Sephardic Hebrew, with each lesson lasting 45 minutes, and the curriculum had a different objective from that at Farber's school. It is important to note, that both in the chapter and in school, we spoke Hebrew among ourselves. My brother Berel truly excelled in his studies, and great things were predicted for him, by contrast, I showed great capability in manual trades, and after graduation, I began to study carpentry in Lidovsky's shop on the *Tatarski Gasse*, which had received commendation thanks to its owner, Meir Lidovsky, who was a master carpenter, a true artisan. At the same time, I started my first 'romance,' and instead of going to the chapter meetings – I spent time with my girlfriend.

The Porters and Wagon Drivers of Our City

By Eliezer Kalir

In approach the recollection of these people with emotion and respect, simple, good people, who always knew how to protect the Jewish populace of the city against attacks of anti-Semites, especially in the days when Volkovysk was under Polish hegemony.

After the First World War, when Volkovysk returned again to Polish control, free trade began to develop again, but the issue of communication was a difficult one, because the trains at that time were for military use only. Various goods began to reach the starving and destitute population after the war. And the transportation of these goods was tied up in many difficulties. In the face of the great need, the porters and wagon drivers came together in one organization, and I was given the responsibility to set the price of transporting a variety of goods, such as iron, coal, cement, petroleum, flour, etc. A special group of wood porters was organized at that time, whose sole work was in the loading and distribution of wood only. Every Thursday, the porters and wagon drivers would com into Eliezer Kossowsky's coffee shop, and along with a piece of fish and a glass of beer, they would set the prices. The men of this group were: Herschel, Leibeh and

Itcheh Munchik, the men of the large Bayer family, among them Abraham, who loved to tell lots of stories full of humor. All of these were observant Jews who would rush to the *Ein Yaakov Bet HaMedrash*, in order not to, God forbid, miss the *Mincha* service. They would park their wagons on some side street, and they would leave the whips that they carried near the fountain in the foyer of the *Bet HaMedrash.* What would these Jews not give to hear a cantor, or a sermon by a visiting itinerant preacher (*Maggid*)? Every time they left the Bet HaMedrash, they would slip a few kopecks out of their clothing, and cast them into a plate set by the exit. These Jews that I mentioned, and many others, whose names I cannot remember, that studied with me together with the teacher, Reb Leib-Ahareleh, saved the Jewish population of Volkovysk repeatedly from acts of plunder and killing. When the savage elements of the 'Haller' group reached our city, and they began to cut off the beards of Jews, and plunder their stores, they ran into a strong and organized resistance by these wagon drivers and porters, who zealously and heroically guarded the Jews and their honor. There were actually incidents when the Polish police requested their assistance in order to rein in such savage elements.

There was a special skirmish that took place between these heroes and the Poles who settled in the Volkovysk district (Усадебнйкй). The local gentiles, hated these settlers, and in order to sublimate this hatred, these settlers would incite them against the Jews, and call on them to organize a pogrom. In particular, they would plan their pogroms for market days, when thousands of Christians streamed into the city, and it was easy to organize a pogrom.

In those days, the Jewish wagon drivers and porters manned the watch, did not go to their regular work, and stood at the ready, in the face of the imminent danger. The pogromists knew already with whom they would have to deal, because they had tasted the strong arm of this 'gang' more than once on their flesh. Even before the Polish police arrived to restore order, many of the rioters were rolling in the gutters bleeding profusely, with wounds all over their bodies. This was no secret, and everyone knew who 'the boys' were who inflicted their blows on these aroused pogromists: Jewish porters and wagon drivers, "the folks."

Where are you, you bony Jews, with those heavy boots, with your square soles, with
Your broad tanned noses, like those of lions?
You – wagon drivers, cooks, porters, builders...
That was your soft voices that emanated as if from an empty hollow
And in your childlike eyes, it was the flashes of life danced about.
The scent of the forest wafts from your parkas; an odor surrounds you,
Of leather, the smell of mushrooms and grain husks.
– But the bright prayer books that you borrowed from the Shames, you clutched like one holds
Newly-hatched yellow chicks. You held them with the pleasure and tenderness of heroes,
To pray, and nod your heads in song over their chaptered pages. And with the paws of an old bear
Themselves scarred, you would carry awesome loads, sacks of flour to bend the body, boxes full of iron, piles of wood, and containers full of stones; from the warehouse to the wagon, and from the wagon
To the warehouse; bales of wool and sheaves of grain, you carried them. And in the grip of one hand,
To the teeming marketplace, you would subdue unruly horses, who reared back to break out of their reins.
– A disturbance between Jews and gentiles, should it fall on a market day, should a quarrel break out
Between thieving villagers and haggling women – you are always in the middle of the outbreak, standing
And turning your broad shoulders to protect the weaker storekeepers, destitute widows, fishmongers
And their orphans. And after everything, you accepted the sentence to go sit in jail, for those whom
You protected.

(From the Song of Praise to the Common Man, of Zalman Schneur)

Mutual Aid and Support

The network of charitable and support institutions had been spread across the face of Jewish Volkovysk for hundreds of years already. Chapters of *Gemilut Hasadim*, and various other support institutions existed already in the 19th century, but they operated on a voluntary basis, and did not leave behind them any records from which it would be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. The institutions that stood out especially, were those that were active before Passover and during the month of *Elul,* preceding the High Holy Days and Festivals. We are aware of the *Maot Khittim* collection that was organized by donors to provide for [Passover] holiday needs for the poor, as early as 1870, and there is reason to believe that this activity existed earlier in this connection. Because a great deal of emphasis was made on discreet giving, in order not to embarrass those in need of help, there was no record kept of the donations, but the general principle seemed to be: "either give, or receive," meaning that no Jew was released from this obligation, either having to help others, or he himself received help. There was no middle ground.

It is proper to recognize Dr. M. Einhorn who gathered togther inputs on the these various institutions of aid that existed in our city, on which this summary is based. In a similar fashion, we found descriptive material in the pages of the Volkovysker Leben, notices about Loan Societies, the orphanage, etc. The diaries of E. Shykevich contain much material on the orphanage , for which he was one of the core supporters.

"Linat and Linat Kholim"

The *Linat* organization is one of the oldest of the Jewish institutions. It was active towards the end of the 19th century, but began branched activity at the beginning of the 20th century. Its role was manifested in sending volunteers to the house of the sick, particularly those without means. The custom was – to send two ***men*** to the home of a male who was ill, or two ***women*** to the home of a female who was ill. These volunteers would spend the night at the bedside of the sick person, and in this way, relieve the members of the immediate family, if there were any, and permit them to get some rest, or grab a light nap. In the course of time, *Linat* assumed an additional obligation, which in this period was exceptionally important – providing ice to those who needed it. For this purpose, they rented a storage facility on the *Mitzrayim Gasse*, not far from the Wide Boulevard (*Szeroka*), and in addition to ice, they also stocked other medical supplies, *bonkes*[9], thermometers, hot water bottles, and the like.

Hona the Teacher was apparently the central personality in the *Linat*. He was a good man, and a helpful person, who dedicated all his time and energy [to this]. He kept the list of the volunteers and he would recruit them as needed, however in the case of 'no-show,' he personally would take the place of the volunteer. There were times when weeks would go by and Hona would not spend the night in his own home, and one could only locate him at the bedside of someone who was sick. Hona also kept control of the list of loaned medical supplies. Those that had a need for these instruments needed to provide security: a silver spoon, a gold cup, or a set sum of money – all according to the value of the loaned instrument.

Benjamin ('Nioma) Schwartzbuch, known by his nickname, '*Tal U'Mottor*,[10]' assisted Hona in this work, and took over for him when he passed away. He too, dedicated his time to *Linat*, and during the night hours, approaching midnight, he would make the rounds of the homes of the sick, in order to verify that the volunteers that had been designated to watch the sick were indeed at their posts. Is one of them had not arrived at their designated place – Benjamin would go to his house, wake him up, and insist that he fulfill his responsibility or redeem his place with money, that could be used to hire

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9 The cups affixed to various body parts believed to extract 'evil humours,' but of dubious medical value.

10 This is from the prayer for *Dew and Rain*, although the reason for this nickname is not clear.

someone to take his place. Zvi Leibowitz, one of the people from Volkovysk who was also active in *Linat,* and who made *aliyah* to Israel (he lives in Rishon LeZion) told, that *Tal U'Mottor* was the one who acquired the parcel on the *Mitzrayim Gasse*, for the construction of a large ice house, and he personally used to ride around the city in a wagon and collect stones and boards, that served as building materials for the creation of the cellar, in which five hundred wagon loads of ice were stored. In time, 'Nioma began to provide the sick with various medicaments and foodstuffs, which the poor could not afford: butter, sugar, milk, and the like. It should not come as a surprise that 'Nioma's name was on everyone's lips, and everyone praised the goodness of his heart and his dedication to *Linat.*

When the First World War broke out, the [bitter] cup was also passed to this institution, which disintegrated along with other charitable institutions. Illness and various epidemics that broke out amidst the populace, placed the bedridden in deteriorating conditions, in imminent danger of dying, because there was no one to come to their aid in the time of their illness. A number of activists assumed this responsibility themselves, headed, as described in Dr. Einhorn's book, by Rabbi Zalman Kurtz, Joseph Rudy, and Shepsel Gordon, and in the year 1918 the *Linat Kholim* organization began to function, which succeeded in attracting young people to join in the work of the group. The expansion of the activities of the group drew praise from the Jewish community, and especially, as you can understand, among the ranks of the needy. Among these, the group opened a *dispensary,* and for a nominal charge, it was possible to obtain medical assistance from one of the local doctors. It didn't take much time, and a pharmacy was opened adjacent to the dispensary, which also served the populace without means. Many received prescriptions free of charge. With the help of the 'Joint' and various support institutions in the United States, the group initiated other lines of activity. The effectiveness of the work of the dispensary can be assessed from the 1927 record, when 6,441 patients were assisted, and this is not a trivial number relative to the population of the city. In that same year, the pharmacy, which was open 8 hours a day, dispensed 24,183 prescriptions. The institution did not content itself with providing medical attention to those that came to it, but also looked after sending doctors to call on the sick who were unable to leave their homes because they were bedridden. Nurses and doctors were sent to them, and in instances where it was necessary to send them to see a specialist in Warsaw, or Vilna, the institution would budget a on-time stipend to make it possible for the patient to see a medical specialist. It is also worth noting the laboratory that was opened beside the hospital, which also served the needy sick, sent by *Linat Kholim*, This laboratory eliminated trips to Bialystock or Warsaw, which took a great deal of time and money.

In a much later time period, *Linat Kholim* opened a pediatric clinic. The 'Drops of Milk' organization was also established, which was of great assistance to mothers in providing suitable nourishment to children, and prevention of childhood diseases. The organization also initiated activities in the area of disease prevention, especially in the days when various epidemics spread throughout the city. Children that required convalescence were sent to various sanatoriums during the summer months, and this also was accomplished with the assistance of the *TO"Z* organization, which had, after a while, initiated a branch of activities in Volkovysk and its vicinity.

In summary, it is possible to say that *Linat Kholim* was one of the most important institutions in the city, and was held out to praise by various settlements in the vicinity who also required help.

The Jewish Hospital

It is interesting that until the last years of the 19th century, there was not a Jewish hospital in our city, and there only existed a mobile military field hospital to which the Jews were practically never taken. The custom in those days was, for Jewish person who was sick, to be taken to Dr. Mintz, who was very popular in the city, and if his illness was more serious – he would be taken from Volkovysk

to another city. It was only in 1898 that the well-known Jewish philanthropist, Nachman Heller, donate a sum of between 20-25 thousand rubles for purposed of constructing a Jewish hospital – the institution was put up, and equipped with all the required equipment. Heller also provided ongoing support to the institution with set annual contributions. Oversight of the hospital was in the hands of two of the philanthropist's brothers, Schraga-Feivel and Leib, and Shmuel David Yunovich. Along with them, Shmuel Feinzilber served on the committee, who was then the only Jewish elected official in the municipal government, and the lawyer, Israel Efrat. The women of Volkovysk came to the assistance of the hospital and all those who had need of its services, who formed a *Bikur Kholim* Society, whose purpose was to assist the sick person without means in entering the hospital, to arrange visitations to the sick, and to provide them with candies or other necessities. The division of labor among the women was as follows: one group would visit the various stores and wealthy Jewish homes and solicit chocolate, bottles of wine, baked goods, fruits, etc. A second group would go to the hospital every Friday and Saturday, and distribute the things that the first group had solicited among the sick. The important thing to gather, is that the hospital principally served the needy Jews. To this end, the well-to-do Jews would avoid the use of the hospital, and receive their medical attention at home. In general, this was the situation up to the First World War. Because there was no Jewish hospital in the surrounding towns, the Volkovysk hospital also served the Jewish populace of the vicinity.

After the outbreak of the First World War, this hospital passed from one hand to the other, from one authority to another, according to the changes of the regime in the city, and mostly was under military control, who would billet their wounded in this institution.

And it happened, that this institution, which originally was owned by the Jewish community, was literally stolen by the Polish regime. The Poles never succeeded in establishing an institution of this kind themselves, and consequently, they extended their interest and control to the institution that was established by the Jews, for the needs of the Jewish community. The demands of the Jewish activists, that the institution originally founded by Jews be returned to Jewish hands – were to no avail, and for a long time, there were many trials on this subject in the municipal court, and only after a great deal of pressure and the involvement of different influential people, they agreed to return it to the Jewish community, although in a much worse condition than before. There was a need for a fundamental renovation before it could serve the Jewish sick, whose numbers had recognizably grown during this time.

Large sums of money were needed for this purpose, and with all the good will and donations of the Jews of the city, who gave with a willing heart to this important purpose – their resources were not sufficient to meet the required budget. It was open to question whether the goal was attainable, and would have been unlikely without the financial support of the Volkovysk émigrés in the United States, who were enlisted in this cause, and the help of central Jewish institutions, like TO"Z, the Joint, and others. The renovation was completed in 1924. The institution was recognizably expanded, and it now had separate departments for surgery, internal medicine pediatrics, etc.

The required resources to provide for the institution were obtained through set monthly fees of the Jewish residents in the city, and also support from the local institutions: the municipality, the community, and in particular, the donations of the Volkovysk émigrés in America. Beginning in the month of July 1925, the institution began operation, and it is possible to say, without fear of contradiction, that thanks to its efforts alone, hundreds of sick people were restored to health, and especially among the needy people of Volkovysk. Dr. Einhorn, and other sources, especially note the role played by tow of the city's local activists in the establishment and ongoing operation , and they are: Sioma Gallin and Archil Markus. Two tireless workers, that took every opportunity to assemble

resources for the institution, and that there would be no cessation in its normal operations. At the same time, the more well of members of the community began to use the hospital, after it became known that even the best possible attention that a sick person could receive at home was not as good as that in the hospital. This fact lightened the budgetary issue for the hospital in a significant way, and indeed the better off Jews were taken in to the hospital for a set fee.

Dr. Galai served as the head physician of the hospital until the First World War, assisted by Lovich, a *feldscher* from Grodno, who also served as a pharmacist. After the First World War, Dr. Weiner served as the head physician, who had previously served as a *Rabbiner.* After a time, the direction of the hospital passed to Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky, who held this post until 1932, after which Dr. Menashe Niemchik assumed this distinguishe3d position.

TO"Z

Page 27: The Jewish Hospital, a memento of its opening on Lag B'Omer 5685 (1925)

With the arrival of Dr. Niemchik in Volkovysk, a new page was opened in the activities of socialized medicine in the city. This was in the year 1932, when on the basis of a search, Dr. Niemchik accepted the position of the director of the Jewish hospital. The hopes that the public servants of the city pinned on him were realized, because he initiated various services, and during his tenure, the operations of TO"Z also grew stronger. Thanks to the support of the local community and the central TO"Z headquarters, the Jewish hospital was transformed not only into a center and nursing facility for the Jewish populace of the city, but also for the surrounding vicinity, and the Christian population of the area also took advantage of its services in substantial measure. From 15-20% of the patients in this Jewish facility were Christians, who paid for the services they received. With the assistance of the TO"Z central office in Warsaw, an X-ray facility was installed, and a bacteriological and chemical laboratory was built. Young doctors, who had finished their course of study outside of the country, would come to the Volkovysk hospital to complete their training [sic: internship] at the Jewish hospital. Nursing courses were given within the walls of the hospital under the direction of Mrs. Lipiak, who herself had been a student in these courses.

At the same time, the appointed leadership, headed by [Engineer] Ephraim Barash, Lawyer Bliakher, Engineer Shipiatsky, and Sioma Gallin, branches of TO"Z activity, led by the establishment of a pediatric clinic for kindergarten and school-age children, 'Drops of Milk,' convalescence of poor children during the summer months in the *Burkehs,* and at sanatoriums in Chekhotchinek, Druzgenik, and other places. For this purpose a separate free kitchen was constructed for needy children, and more than one hundred children received meals there at no charge. It is worth also noting the efforts of the TO"Z in connection with monitoring community hygiene, and municipal sanitation.

In the weekly newspaper, *Volkovysker Leben* of 16.6.1939, an article by Sioma Gallin was published that summarizes the details of the TO"Z activities as follows:

- ★ TO"Z rented a substantial home in the center of the city, and all of its equipment that had been stored at the hospital was transferred to these premises.
- ★ In the last few months, 342 people received attention in this new dispensary.
- ★ Establishment of an office to offer advice to pregnant women.
- ★ There were 76 children under pediatric care, and in the past three months 422 cases were seen. Approximately ten thousand portions of special milk was distributed for nursing infants.
- ★ TO"Z purchased a large house in the

Burkehs with a perimeter of 1700 meters for the establishment of a sanatorium for frail needy children (the organization dis not succeed in putting the sanatorium into operation because of a variety of difficulties).[11]

★ During the prior budget year, the hospital provided care to 998 patients, offering 7,444 days of confinement; 210 children were sent for convalescence during the summer to the Burkehs, not counting the children sent for recuperation to Otvotsk and other sanatoriums.

These activities were done to put us on solid ground, and covers the work of TO"Z during period during in which Dr. Niemchik supervised the Jewish hospital up to the point where the war broke out, and he was drafted into the Polish Army. After many trials and tribulations, he arrived in Israel in 1945, and resumed his community medical service in Ramat-Gan. At one of the memorial meetings that was held in Tel Aviv, Dr. Niemchik advised us that he had changed his name to ***Ashkenazi***, because he was the head doctor of *LeHi.*

The Old Age Home

Page 28: *Residents of the Old Age Home before the Second World War*[12]

This institution was established in 1908 thanks to the effort of Schraga Feivel Heller, and he gathered in the elderly and the feeble from the towns in the vicinity. Meir Shiff, who was the first Chairman of the leadership of this institution, worked relentlessly and without letup for the sake of developing this institution and its expansion, and after his passing, the second Chairman, Yaakov Winetzky, supported by a number of activists, continued this work in a vigorous manner on behalf of older people, and people left alone in old age. The budget of the institution was covered by donations from the Jews of Volkovysk and the vicinity, support from the municipal administration, and various contributions, but a specific part of the annual budget was covered by the Volkovysk émigrés in the United States.

In the period when Meir Shiff was the Chairman, the quality of nutrition and clothing for the elderly residents was significantly upgraded. Even the building was renovated, and the rooms got 'a different look,' according what our town seniors tell, to the point that even wealthy families turned to the institution with requests that they accept their elderly at the institution. After the institution became crowded from accommodating everyone that needed it, Meir Shiff decided to put up another building beside the old building in order to be able to respond to the many requests. Thanks to his good connections with the people in the government, he was able to obtain a set amount of building materials free of charge, and not many months went by before the new building was on its site, with a sign above it reading, '*Cast Us Not Into Old Age*.'

In a piece of writing by Eliezer Kalir, that was published in *Volkovysker Leben* in September 1938, the author tells about a visit to the new building of the Old Age Home. We will reproduce only the introduction here:

"A clean, neat yard with the old building of the Old Age Home on one side, and on the second side – a spanking new, just-completed wooden building, with an attractive porch, a regal facade, which brings to mind an inn or a pension in Otvotsk or Schvieder.

We go inside. Through a corridor, we come into a wide, open and well lit eating room: three large, long tables are arranged in a "U." An eight branched candelabra hangs over them – on the wall is a large circular clock. A large coal stove spreads an inviting warmth [throughout the room]. A spigot juts out of the stove that dispenses tea all day long. At a side – in a wall, is a square little window, through which food is served from the kitchen."

The large article concludes with the details of the

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[11] The Second World War broke out on September 1, 1939.

[12] This picture also appears in Dr. Einhorn's Book, however even there, it has no further details on the people in the picture.

sources of funds that made the construction and ongoing maintenance of the new building possible:

"...the foundation was donated by the recently deceased *Reb Sholom Barash*; 500 dollars – *Horaczy Heller* (the House is named for him); Volkovysk Ladies Auxiliary of Chicago -- 100 dollars; the *Grafina Bronitska* – nine square meters of lumber; the well-known alderman *Shirayev* – the fence; The Rozher Cement Factory – 15 'rounds' of cement, A Warsaw Company, *Degenschein* – a case of glass; Mrs. *Fradl Shiff* – the Candelabra; A Warsaw Company, *Applebaum* – the clock...

Everything was acquired through the efforts of President Shiff, according to the secretary [Offenberg] who traveled everywhere personally, and at his own expense, until he got everything he needed to put up the building."

During the time of the Soviet occupation, the institution continued its normal operation, but it went up in flames during the initial German bombardment. The infirm residents of the institution were then transferred to various locations, and part of them were sent to the homes of their relatives. With the expulsion of the residents of the city into the bunkers, on November 2, 1942, the Germans rounded up the infirm who were unable to go under their own power with the rest of those expelled, put them in the Talmud Torah building, and then took them out and shot them.

The Orphanage

(According to the Diary of Eliyahu Shykevich)

Page 29: *The Children of the Orphanage and the Leadership of the Institution (1929)*

Page 30: *Right: At a Movie Fund-raiser for the benefit of the Orphanage.*

Left: E. Shykevich with residents of the Orphanage.

When I returned to Volkovysk with my family after the First World War, after an absence of several years from this city, I immediately noticed the large number of widows and orphans found in the city, that were victims of the war. Despite the fact that my own economic circumstances were difficult, I decided to dedicate my time and energy to the establishment of an orphanage for the abandoned Jewish orphans. I communicated my decision to Rabbi Borukhov, and he grabbed my hand and wished me good luck in bringing this plan to fruition. I discussed the matter with a number of the distinguished members of the community, and they too promised to provide assistance me to the best of their ability. I was greatly helped during the initial steps by Dr. Rosa Einhorn, who I knew as far back as a student in the gymnasium in Grodno. From her early youth, she revealed an inclination to do public service, especially for needy families. I received similar assistance from Mrs. Hannah-Sarah Yudzhik, Mrs. Pearl Lev, and Rabbi Abraham-Zalman Kurtz.

The first general meeting took place on April 6, 1921, with the participation of may activists, and at this meeting, the first order of business was the issue of the orphanage. After presenting the issue to the gathering, a committee was selected consisting of: Eliyahu Schlossberg, (Chairman), Eliyahu Shykevich, (Vice Chairman), Dr. Rosa Einhorn (Treasurer), Anshel Bliakher (Honorary Secretary), Rabbi A. Z. Kurtz, Eliezer Kapelyushnik, Chaya-Sarah Yudzhik, Pearl Lev, Boruch Yunovich, Mordechai Giller.

At that time, there were emissaries in Volkovysk representing the Volkovysk Organization in the United States (Abraham Berg, Avigdor Perlmutter, Hannan Nakhumovsky, and Berel Domovsky), who took an interest in the issue of the welfare of the orphans, and allocated a sum of four thousand marks toward the construction of an orphanage. They assured us that they would take up this issue in earnest with the Volkovysk *landsmanschaft* in America. This sum of money was barely enough to renovate the *Guest House* that had been wrecked during the war, that consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. We immediately admitted 25 destitute orphans. It is difficult to communicate what we first went through upon opening this orphanage, so urgently needed at this time. The children were

brought in singly, dressed in rags, and in horrifying sanitary condition. I immediately traveled to Bialystock, where I obtained a bit of goods, and light clothing from the "Joint," for the children, and a certain amount of foodstuffs. We also distributed a request to our *landsleit* in America and asked for their help in erecting an orphanage worthy of its name, that would be able to admit the many children that were left without father and mother, and no walls and a roof [over their heads].

After a great deal of searching, we found a place in the city, on which there stood a destroyed, burned out building that had belonged to *Noah Lev*, who lived in America at that time. We decided to write to Noah Lev in America, and approach him with the proposition to donate this piece of unused property to us, on which stood a burned out house, and we would build the first orphanage in Volkovysk. His positive response to our proposal overwhelmed us all. In addition, Noah Lev underscored his great satisfaction in his reply to us, that he had been accorded the privilege of providing this parcel and the burned out house, for such an important purpose as constructing an orphanage in the very home town, where he himself grew up as an orphan. As a supplement to his great gift, he also sent along a substantial sum of money. With the arrival of this answer, we knew that the goal was attainable, and in September 1921, the cornerstone for the new building was laid.

This was the first day of *Selikhot*, when in response to our invitation, many Jews assembled at the parcel, for the ceremony of laying the cornerstone. Rabbi Borukhov welcomed the guests, and afterwards, members of the committee spoke to the assembly, and made an emotional appeal to the invited assembly to make donations. The assembly responded to this appeal very effusively, if measured by the degree to which the donors, *en masse*, streamed to the table.

After a full year of very strenuous work we reached the point of celebrating the dedication of the newly constructed building for the newly established institution of the orphanage, on the donated parcel provided by *Noah & Bayl'keh Lev*. The beds And furniture in the rooms, the equipment and materiel for the house, all were donated by the Jews of the city and *landsleit* from Volkovysk in other countries. In a word – this was a huge collective effort for a noble cause. For hundreds of abandoned and solitary children this was relief – they were rescued from the danger that they would flounder in the streets and become a burden to the public.

In addition to the donors and contributors, the dedicated and loyal workers, who carried out their roles superbly, literally with total commitment, also deserve recognition, especially the head of the orphanage, Shabtai Gordon, and the teacher, Sarah Bibergalik.

For the occasion of the dedication of the new building, many guests attended from the surrounding towns, from the 'Tzentas' central committee in Warsaw, and many community organizations. It was a wonderful sight to behold, when the orphans themselves stood on the steps of the three-story building, dressed in holiday finery, welcoming all the guests with a singing of "*Let Us Sing a Song of Dedication*.[10]" It is proper to note that there were also ***Christians*** among the donors, and even the government officials were not stingy with their praise, and promises to come to the support of this important institution.

In time, it was no longer possible to distinguish between the orphans and the other children in the city. In their dress, their nutrition, and their general demeanor, it was not possible to distinguish one from the other. The children of the orphanage studied at the *Tarbut* School, and the *Tarbut* gymnasium. These institutions released the orphans from any obligations to pay tuition, thereby making it possible for the committee to enable the intellectual development of the orphans, many of whom excelled in their studies, and returned back to the community what they had received from it, and then some. The same was true in the area of the trades. Every boy that exhibited skills that implied

[10] Psalms 30

potential in a craft was sent to an appropriate craftsman, and the committee maintained oversight to assure that the young person was not exploited by the craftsman. The committee members would visit the workplaces, review the agreements with the owners, protect the right of the orphans, etc.

The wage of the orphans at the factories amounted to between 6-10 rubles a week, and these wages were set aside in special accounts. When the orphan reached the age of 18, a significant amount of money was already in the account, which was a help to get him started in life. Before leaving the institution, the leadership would provide the orphan with suits of clothing, bedding, and white goods. A special festive party was arranged for every young person that left the orphanage on attaining the age of 18, and occasionally, an orphan would receive assistance with procurement of furniture, or a suitable place to live.

There is insufficient place to describe all that the leadership dis for its residents, but we would not exaggerate by saying that every Jew in Volkovysk took pride in this institution, that earned the recognition of all segments of the population, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

A Voice Calling To Aid The Orphans

In an attachment to issue Number 64 of the *Volkovysker Leben*, an announcement was made public by the leadership of the Volkovysk chapter on behalf of the orphans in Bialystock (Chairman – A. Schlossberg, Vice Chairman – E. Shykevich, Honorary Secretary – Sh. Feinstein, Treasurer, E. Eliyovich). This proclamation was directed at the Volkovysk landsleit out of the country, and said among other things:

"The Second[11] World War has bequeathed a bitter and difficult legacy to us – thousands of orphans, abandoned and hapless, that were left without a father and mother, and no care. The Jewish people, who have always been sensitive to the needs of the stricken and oppressed, and especially that of the orphan, have not succumbed to the mood of resignation, and has come to the aid of these unfortunate children. Committees have been organized in all the cities and towns of Poland, to Assist orphans, which have set themselves the goal together with the assistance of The Joint, to establish houses of refuge for orphans. Our Volkovysk has not shrunken from this demand as well. People were found, whose hearts were touched by the fate of the orphans, and after many strenuous efforts, and with the help of our Volkovysk brethren in America, an orphanage was built in our city, in which many of the orphans found refuge and a home. Even those who could not be taken into the orphanage because of a lack of space, were settled in ordinary homes, and the activists took care to assure that they would not become a burden to the community, and that their future would be spoken for.

It is eight years that we are working without respite, and to this date we have succeeded in overcoming all the difficulties in collecting the support for the orphans that we need to arrange annually, but now we have reached a crisis, because the Joint, on whose assistance we had depended, has decided to terminate its support, and the burden has fallen solely on us. Despite this, the situation of the children taken into the orphanage is more or less assured, what we have not covered are – those orphans who are being held in ordinary homes, which expense had been born by the Joint up until this time. They are now left without any protection and support.

Is it conceivable that we would discriminate among children united by the tragedy – of being an orphan?"

The proclamation ends with an emotional appeal to all the Jews of Volkovysk, to the Jews of surrounding towns, and to Volkovysk *landsleit* out of the country, that they should help with attaining the goal of enlarging the present orphanage, creating an added institution, and also a trade school in which the orphans can be trained and learn a skill that will assure them of a livelihood in the future.

Support for the Orphanage from Youth

Shmuel Fuchs of Rehovot tells about youth volunteers for the benefit of the local orphanage:

The youth of Volkovysk had a strong disposition in favor of participating in parties and dances that were mostly organized and held in the hall of the firehouse on *Kosciuszko Gasse.* These parties were

[11] Perhaps a Freudian slip: The context of the writing, clearly indicates that this refers to the period after the First World War.

referred to as "Five O'clock," implying by this name that it was not necessary to get dressed up in party clothes. The group of young people that were graduates of the high school took an interest in participating in one of these parties, and we were certain that our graduation diplomas would be sufficient qualification for us to attend a party of this nature. We appeared as an organized group at the entrance to the hall, and we asked to buy tickets to one such party, organized by a Ladies Auxiliary, and the proceeds would be for the benefit of one of the city institutions, but we were told, that we were too young to participate in such a party, and they refused to sell us tickets. This angered us considerably, and we decided to demonstrate our maturity by organizing our own dance gala. We turned to the secretary of the orphanage, Mr. Gordon, and we proposed a schedule of parties in the hall of the orphanage, all of whose proceeds would be dedicated to the orphanage.

Our proposal was accepted, and the success was beyond our expectations. We, ourselves, were surprised by the hordes of people that came to participate in our parties. The leadership of the orphanage (Shykevich, Zelitsky, Schlossberg, and others) were understandably pleased with the additional income that the orphanage earned, and encouraged us to continue and enlarge on our efforts. We attempted to put on a theater production at Botvinsky's Cinema, and this too was a great success. I cannot recall the name of the play any longer, but I remember the names of those of my comrades who gave special effort to this undertaking, and they are no longer alive: Brunk, Einstein, Leibl Kalonsky, and Yitzhak Goldrei.

"The Offering of Wood, and Secret Charity"

E. Shykevich covers two other forms of mutual assistance in his diaries, several chapters of which are covered in Dr. Einhorn's book, one – ***"The Offering of Wood,"*** called this because of its objective of providing wood for the winter to those families that did not have the means to buy firewood to heat their homes. Several activist took this responsibility on themselves, and saw the fulfilment of a mitzvah in it. Just as the cold became more severe – so did the intensity of effort by these activists grow, who went from house to house to collect donations. Yaakov Winetsky was the living spirit behind this initiative, and also behind "Secret Charity," which , as its name indicates – was discreet charity to people who had lost their station in life, *balebatim* who had been financially ruined, and whose source of income had vanished. It is natural that these people were embarrassed to turn to a charitable institution to ask for help or support, but they knew they could turn to the pocketbook maker from the *Szeroka Gasse*, Yaakov Winetsky, and ask for help, because he would not reveal their secret to any man, and their straitened conditions would not become known. Winetsky himself was not a man of means, but he dedicated many hours of the day on behalf of women who were in distressed circumstances.

Shykevich tells, that after Rabbi Borukhov asked him to assist Winetsky, he offered him his help, and he was literally astonished by the list that Winetsky showed him of the people receiving "Secret Charity," since on the list were included Jews who were thought to be wealthy people, and no on would have even thought that they were in need of economic assistance.

Yaakov Winetsky was killed in the Holocaust.

Child Welfare

Page 32: The Child Welfare Organization with Dr. Sedletsky and A. Novick in the center.

The Child Welfare and Protection Organization, called *Kinder Schutz* in Yiddish, was one of the links in the chain of support institutions of mutual aid in our city. Many families without means derived significant benefits from the work of this organization, and it was only because of its effort that sick and frail children from poor families were sent for convalescence in summer bungalows, and enjoyed the sun, ambience, good care, fresh air, and the good environment that prevailed in these facilities.

In the house of Yerakhmiel Daniel on the *Kosciuszko Gasse*, the Kinder Schutz had a small premises in which the organization carried on its business. The Chairman of the organization in the '30s was ***Dr. Sedletsky,*** who was killed by the Nazis along with the other Jewish doctors [in Volkovysk], and his deputy was ***Abraham Novick***, whom we hold apart with blessings for long life, who is active to this day in community affairs where he lives, in Hadera. Also, ***Sioma Gallin***, the dynamic and dedicated public servant, who was the Chairman of TO"Z, supported this group before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Fire Fighters

Page 33: A Course in Fire-fighting Skills

Fires were an integral part of the experience of city life and the Jewish town. They were etched into the collective memory of the Jewish populace and in the personal memories of all of its members, to the extent that the chronology of events were marked by reference to the fires. Time was counted in the following way: '5 years after the Great Fire,' 'two years before the Little Fire,' etc. There were fires that consumed more than half the houses, that were largely constructed from wood, and turned wealthy Jews into paupers overnight. Insurance was not common in the towns in those days, and the fear of fire stalked every Jewish domicile. Volkovysk also experiences two great fires: the first in 1886, and the second in 1908. Both left a profound mark [on the city] for many years.

The proposal to establish a fire fighting brigade in Volkovysk went up on the Jewish community agenda the day after the first fire, and according to the telling by one of the city elders, this proposal was put forth at a meeting in the garden of Jesierski's home, in the presence of the authorities of the place, and public servants. The tone of this organization was set from the beginning, with practically all its members being Jewish. However, two Christians stood at the top rank, who had some competence in this area, but they were followed by Jewish officers in the order of: Abraham Neiman, Abraham Galiatsky, Mottel Kilikovsky, and Melekh Khantov.

Mottel Kilikovsky was the first Jewish young man to sign up after the announcement was posted by the municipal administration calling for citizen volunteers, and at the first meeting of the organization, 45 men showed up, almost all of them Jews. An officer of the 16th Brigade (Infantry) was invited in order to train the volunteers that were divided up into the following groups for different missions: drivers, water handlers, rope and roof climbers, etc. Support was initially ver poor, but in a short time, pumping machines were brought in from Warsaw, and the number of tanks went up to 15, and in a similar fashion, wagon drivers were recruited along with vehicles, that were required to place their conveyances and horses at the disposal of the organization at the sounding of an alarm.

There is no doubt that the citizens of the city breathed a little easier with the knowledge of the founding of this organization. The first fire station was in a small building, but after a while, a large building was constructed with a tower, and a large

storage area, where the large fire wagon was garages, along with a hose that could point in all directions. Eight people, four to a side, operated this machine, which was able to spray water from a reservoir of four to five barrels.

Naturally, there is no fire department without an orchestra, and this was also the case in Volkovysk. It was the previously identified Mottel Kilikovsky, who organized the orchestra, and for this purpose, he recruited musically talented young people from Volkovysk and all the way to the town of Volp, in order to get a cornet player. The first bandleader was Israel Nakdimon, and he was the one who marched in the front of the ranks of the fire-fighters after the short training season. 'The whole city,' came out to see and listen to this orchestra. For a time, the orchestra would rend the garden beside the Jesierski home, and during the summer months would give performances twice a week. Hordes of young people would come to hear these concerts. At a later period, the orchestra performances were given in the municipal park, on the way to Piesk, in the direction of the Zamkova Forest. Entertainment from out of town would also stage their performances in this park, such as the circus, etc.

The first three heads of the fire brigade were Christians, and afterwards, the heads were Jews: Abraham Neiman, Abraham Galiatsky, and Mordechai (Mottel) Kilikovsky. During the tenure of the latter, intensive training was conducted , and when the fire fighters would clamber up Poliachek's three story building for training purposes, crowds of people would come to observe these exercises. Them membership of the fire fighters reached and then exceeded two hundred, and this was one of the organizations most favored by the Jewish community. In the weekly *Volkovysker Leben* of 21.6.1929, a notice was published that the General Fire Fighters Association in Warsaw had awarded a Certificate of Honor to the Volkovysk Organization, in honor of the 30th Anniversary of its founding, and in the instance of this opportunity, it awarded 15 Awards of Distinction to the people who had done significant work for the organization. At that time, the head of the organization was ***Melekh Khantov***, he, who was the one who raised the organization to a high level in every respect. The popularity of Khantov, and the recognition of his good qualities reached the point where he was awarded a gold medal from the Mayor of Volkovysk, who underscored at this occasion, that the citizens of Volkovysk needed to consider themselves fortunate in having been afforded the privilege of having a man with the talent and energy of Melekh Khantov in his capacity of head of the fire department, and who guards the city from all danger of fire.

The orchestra of the organization also developed significantly under Khantov's tenure, appearing under the leadership of ***M. Zilberman*** at festivities, parades, and various celebrations. On Saturday nights, events were organized that attracted many local young people, and the income so derived was earmarked for the fire department. The orchestra was frequently invited to perform in surrounding cities and towns, and these appearances also increased the income of the organization significantly.

It is proper to note that the fire fighters also performed important security duty at the time of changing regimes, and when the city was abandoned and the danger of anarchy hovered overhead – it was the fire department that stood watch in order to prevent pogroms and disruption of public order. More than once, the Polish authorities attempted to undermine this organization, which was composed entirely of Jews, and there were attempts to disband it, but the Jewish fire fighters, among whom there were many 'common folk,' (porters, butchers, carpenters, etc.), nullified these attempts, and protect both the prerogatives and continuity of the organization.

Even in September 1939, when the Poles retreated from Volkovysk before the Soviet Army entered the city, the security of the Jewish populace in the city was placed in the hands of the fire fighters, and they discharged this duty faithfully.

(After the sketches from Dr. Einhorn's Book)

Education, Culture and Journalism

Jewish Education

By David Niv

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish education in Volkovysk was traditional almost in its entirety. However, even in that time, there were young boys and girls who were educated in Russian schools, but this was a small minority. There were very few local teachers who gave lessons in general and Hebrew studies. Basic education was given in a *Heder* and a Talmud Torah, as was the case with all of the cities and towns in the Pale of Settlement, and education was then continued in a Yeshiva. Among the teachers who stood out during this period were: Moshe-Meir, Hona Jesierski, Eli Bultvar, and Aryeh-Leib Friedenberg (Leib-Ahareh), and they were supported by 'Assistants.'

With the passage of time, more modern *Heders* were established, in which Hebrew grammar and literature and Hebrew poetry were taught in addition to Pentateuch with *Rashi* and *Gemara.* With the development of the modern *Heder*, and their expansion, local language, arithmetic, physics and other general studies were added. Among the schoolmaster and teachers were: Israel-Meir Rubinstein, Skop, Nakhum Halpern, Farber, Shlomo Sukenik, Zvi Levinsky, Boruch Zusmanovich and Reuven Rutchik. In a number of these 'modernized' schools, studies were conducted entirely in Hebrew (*Ivrit Be'Ivrit*). Apart from the *Heder* system, a *Talmud Torah (Takhkemoni)* also existed in Volkovysk up to the Second World War, in which the students were mostly from the poorer levels of the community, and only 20% of them paid tuition. It is known that in 1929, there were approximately 250 students in the Talmud Torah. In addition to learning prayers, Torah and Prophets, Tosafot commentaries and Torah cantillating, the curriculum included Hebrew grammar, Jewish history, and also secular subjects such as: geography, nature, local language, and arithmetic. On average, nine teachers taught in this institution.

The yeshiva was founded in Volkovysk in 1887 by the Rabbi of the city, Boruch-Yaakov Lifschitz, author of the book, *Brit Yaakov,* [12] and it was significantly expanded and developed by Rabbi Abba-Yaakov Borukhov, the author of *Hevel Yaakov.*[13] Rabbi Yerakhmiel Daniel, the headmaster during one of its later periods, had a reputation for being a thoroughly versed scholar in the *Shas* and its Commentaries, and was held in esteem by all the Jews of the city. In the final years of the twenties, the Jewish community of Volkovysk established something of a 'kibbutz,' that is to say, a Yeshiva where students came from the outside, and 'ate days[14]' at the home of the *balebatim* of the city.

In the area of general education, a grade school was opened in the city back even in the days of Czarist Russia, consisting of four grades, and most of whose students were Jewish. The language of instruction, naturally, was Russia. This school didn't last long, and was closed in 1909. In time, a Byelorussian government gymnasium was opened in the same building, which operated until the outbreak of the First World War. During the war years, many Jewish students studied at a compulsory German school.

The *Yiddisher Volksschule,* a public school, was opened in 1919, and the curriculum was taught in Yiddish, and several hours a week were set aside for instruction in Hebrew language. There were four grades in this school, and also a kindergarten. It is also worth noting that after hours, there were evening classes conducted in Yiddish.

Most of the Jewish children studied at Hebrew schools, which after the First World War, came under the direction of a committee. While still under

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12 Literally, 'The Covenant of Jacob.'

13 Literally, 'The Halyard of Jacob.'

14 This was a form of meal subsidy provided by the more well-to-do families for out-of-town Yeshiva students.

German occupation, after the outbreak of the First World War, due to the efforts of Yehuda Novogrudsky and Moshe Rubinovich, a Hebrew kindergarten was established, followed by a grade school established by the *Tarbut* group, and in 1926, gymnasium studies were launched with the arrival of the Hebrew gymnasium, *Hertzeliya*, known in its formative years as *Progymnasia*.

Graduates of the modern *Heder* system were among the gymnasium students, but the majority of the students were graduates of the grade school. Tuition free education was made available, in the gymnasium as well, for the children of needy families, and also to residents of the local orphanage.
In the 1928-9 school year, the gymnasium received the endorsement of the *Tarbut* organization. Originally, there were only 6 grades, and those who were interested in continuing their education, were forced to transfer to other cities (like Bialystock, Grodno, Vilna) to complete their education in seminaries or the upper grades of high schools, but in 1932, the seventh and eighth grades were added. This is the manner in which studies were conducted up to the outbreak of the Second World War, and the entry of the Soviets into the city, which led to the closure of the school as a Jewish institution. The last principal was Dr. Mordechai Sakhar, and among the teachers of Hebrew literature – one of the most important subjects of that era – Yitzhak Shkarlat and Dr. Israel Scheib (Adler) stood out. Dr. Scheib came to Volkovysk to teach Hebrew literature in the high school with a career purpose in mind, because other Hebrew subjects were being taught there according to the gymnasium curriculum, and from there he went over to the Hebrew gymnasium.

In the early thirties, a grade school from the religious *Yavneh* movement was established in Volkovysk, and in 1931, a *Kadima* grade school was established, under the supervision of Yaakov Neiman, in which the language of instruction was *Polish.* He used curriculum of the government school system in Poland, and in addition to the general studies, they also studies Hebrew, *Tanakh,* and Jewish history.

Hebrew education in Volkovysk bore important fruit for Hebrew culture and the Zionist movement. Many students and teachers emerged afterwards with their contributions to Hebrew culture and the Zionist movement in many countries, especially in Israel, to which many of the teachers and graduates of these institutions came.

The First Rungs

by Yehuda Novogrudsky

Page 36: Top – A Group of Teachers from the Tarbut Schul in the Year 1932

Right to Left, First Row, Bottom: Miss Zilberman, Fishl Weinstein, Miss [Batya] Landsberg
Second Row, Seated: Eliezer Kapelyushnik, Rothfeld, Luvoshitsky, Moshe Rubinovich (the Founder), Yud'l Novogrudsky (the Co-Founder), Miss Berliner[15]
Third Row, Standing: Zilber, Hannah Turbovich, Y(itzhak) Itzkowitz, Hedva

Middle – The Sixth Grade of the Tarbut Gymnasium prior to the aliyah of the teacher, Namlin.

Bottom: Fifth Grade Picture of the Hertzeliya Gymnasium.

Page 37: The First Graduating Class of the Tarbut Gymnasium.

In Dr. Einhorn's Book, *Wolkovisker Yizkor Book*, Yehuda Novogrudsky, one of the pioneers of Hebrew education, tells how the Hebrew educational institutions were established, and by whom.

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15 Seemingly erroneous, since the picture shows a man sitting in this position. In place of the given text, this caption is taken directly from Dr. Einhorn's book on page 113 in the original volume.

The first tier was the establishment of a Hebrew library with minimal effort, and the development over time to the point that it became the center for "Lovers of the Hebrew Tongue" (one of them was the gymnasium student Raphael Lemkin, who later became prominent in time as Professor Lemkin, an expert in international law in the United States) and all those dedicated to national rebirth. The first national educational institution was a kindergarten. Y. Novogrudsky writes:

"I remember that Moshe Rubinovich and I would go from door-to-door, in order to convince the parents of children to send their children to this kindergarten, which in the view of many was a strange institution and superfluous, because all the children seemed to learn there was how to play, sing and dance. It didn't take long, however, before this kindergarten earned the affection of parents, who became convinced of the great value that it provided, in that it served as an antechamber for entry into the Hebrew grade school. Moshe Rubinovich, who can be seen as one of the pioneers of Hebrew education in all of Poland, would argue before me: "God forbid that we be deterred by difficulties. The establishment of a Hebrew school is an imperative, and it cannot be delayed. Our public servants and elders, Ephraim Barash and David Hubar have looked after the establishment of a Russian school on the Lazaret Hill, and it is left to us to concern ourselves with the need to educate the young generation in Hebrew language, and with the spirit of national rebirth, and that they absorb, from early childhood, the spirit of the Prophets and Hasmoneans. Only in this way will a generation grow up in possession of national identity, paving the way for a bright Jewish future and national liberation."

Novogrudsky continues:

"Hundreds of children studied at the school that we established. Poor parents did not pay tuition, and many were taken for nominal fees. The teachers were accomplished pedagogues, among them highly enlightened people. Among the teachers, whose contribution was especially important, it is worth recalling Zvi Carmeli (Weinstein), who then emigrated to the United States, and Azriel Broshi (Berestovitsky) who made *aliyah* to Israel and earned recognition as an employee of the Histadrut who was outstanding as a tourist guide. It is appropriate to take note of Aharon Luvoshitsky, among the principals of the school, who was a Hebrew poet, wrote many textbooks, and edited a Hebrew newspaper for the youth, Dr. Shafel, a master teacher, following the ideas of Gottesfeld."

Novogrudsky elevates the extensive work done by Moshe Rubinovich, who neglected all of his business obligations and gave himself over heart and soul, with all his energy to the opening of the school and its expansion, and here are his words: "Images of those days come to mind, when we would receive a parent coming to register a child with a joyous, full and trembling heart. We would sit in the unused rooms in Pappa's house on the *Grodno Gasse,* on the long winter nights, shivering from the cold, engaged in disputed with the array of teachers over the curriculum. — our school served as a model for the surrounding cities and towns, who also established Hebrew schools, that inculcated the concept of national rebirth in the hearts of their pupils and their families. By means of these schools, not only were the students transformed into ardent Zionists, but also their parents. It is proper to emphasize that the central Zionist institutions in Warsaw viewed Volkovysk as a bulwark of Zionism, also on account of the substantial contributions to *Keren Kayemet, Keren HaYesod*, and other national funds.

After a grade school was founded, Moshe Rubinovich began to the establish a Hebrew High School – a Gymnasium. He was not only one to have good ideas, but also capable of getting things done. We rented an appropriate premises in the former tobacco factory owned by Yanovsky on the Wide Boulevard, which was renovated to the specifications of a school, and qualified teaching personnel were retained. And on one fine morning, placards were pasted all over the city which informed the public about the birth of the new *Hebrew Gymnasium, "Hertzeliya."* The success of

the Gymnasium exceeded all expectations. The Gymnasium was one of 16 Gymnasiums in Poland, and quickly was transformed into a "spiritual center" for the surrounding province. Students were attracted even from bigger cities, such as Slonim and Baranovich, to the Volkovysk Gymnasium, whose reputation reached afar (it happens that one of the students was *Yitzhak Yazhernitsky*, today *Yitzhak Shamir*, a Prime Minister of Israel, who came from Ruzhany to study at this gymnasium).

From the outset, the gymnasium had no government certification, but in the school year 1928-9, when the school was absorbed into the network of the *Tarbut* movement, specific government permits were granted , which however, did not have much value under the circumstances of the times.

It appears that the nationalist inclination of the gymnasium was not satisfactory in the eyes of some of the activists, who apparently leaned towards assimilation, and their desire was to get full government accreditation for the high school, in order that subsequent to graduation, the graduates would be eligible to be accepted at Polish universities. By 1937, the matter reached the breaking point, when these activists announced their objective – to close the Hebrew gymnasium and to replace it with a gymnasium where the language of instruction would be Polish, and the curriculum would we the same as in Polish schools. They joined forces with the government and the authorities in Vilna, and had planned to transfer all its assets, equipment and facilities of the Hebrew gymnasium to this new institution. By an large, the majority of the Hertzeliya Board, which controlled the Hebrew gymnasium, together with the Principal, Mordechai Halevi Sakhar, strongly opposed the initiative of these activists, who were prepared to do away with the core purpose of the school, and on this matter, very sharp conflicts took place.

Fortunately, the various officials, who came from Vilna to mediate this dispute, established that there is reason to continue the operations of a Hebrew gymnasium, and to undertake the desired expansion. Nevertheless, rumors spread through the city, that the Hebrew curriculum was going to be cut back, in order to permit the expansion of Polish studies, but the Principal denied all of these rumors, and issued a call to the entire Jewish population to continue its support for the Hebrew gymnasium, whose name was then changed to the *Chaim Nachman Bialik Hebrew Gymnasium.* Descriptions of this entire controversy can also be found in the pages of the local weekly paper, *Volkovysker Leben.*

Between Belz and Volkovysk

by Israel Scheib (Adler)

Page 39: Fourth Grade Class Picture of the Hertzeliya Gymnasium in Volkovysk, 1927-8.

At the bottom left is Yitzhak Yazhernitsky, Today – Yitzhak Shamir, an Israeli Prime Minister. Second from the Right is David Niv.

To My Soul Mate, Nechama Schein

- I.S.

Why suddenly Belz? What do I have to do with Belz? I am a *Galitzianer* from the womb and birth, but not to this degree...but why? When I began to think about this subject, about which I was asked to write, that is to say, about Volkovysk, the song, *Mein Shteteleh Belz* rose and floated in my mind, that is sung and beloved not only by the Hassidim and people from Belz. It was my privilege – that Volkovysk was my first *shteteleh* and also last, in which I lived for about two years.

My first teaching position was in Volkovysk. This was in 5695, or 1935 by the count of the Christians, and not of the people of Volkovysk. The average person from Volkovysk was, naturally, Jewish. Apparently, the Jews of Volkovysk did not have a need for many *Shabbos Goyim,* and accordingly, there were rather few gentiles in the city (I am assuming the usual joke about *Shabbos Goyim* is known to the readers). And so, as I said, this was my first position, which I got through an ad in the newspaper that caught my eye. The tone of the ad was something like this: " The Hebrew Gymnasium

of Volkovysk is looking for a teacher of Hebrew subjects." Since I had that very year graduated from the University of Vienna and teachers' seminary, I saw myself as having the qualifications to meet the needs of Volkovysk, whose name I had never even heard of until that point, and I presented myself to the distinguished office. The response was positive. I was accepted.

My mother, ז"ל packed my few belongings, and I set out on my way. At that time, there were about six thousand Jews in Volkovysk, by my estimate, most of them Zionists. (Confidentially, my desire is to emphasize that for the information of historians, and plain Jews, especially Israelis, that the majority of the Jewish people in Poland, by all aspects of their activity – were *Zionists*. The people studies Hebrew, understood Hebrew, and in every way, was more interested in what was taking place in the Holy Land, and involved themselves in it. than what was going on in Poland).

I quickly learned to know that the gymnasium and the youth movements were the center of Jewish life. As was the case in Volkovysk – so it was in the other cities of Poland. There was no obligation to study at the gymnasium, and it did not have government certification. It was a Jewish Zionist education for its own sake. It was a "Hebrew" gymnasium, but that does not mean that everything was taught in Hebrew. That was practically impossible, but the atmosphere was one of Hebrew. The language spoken by the students, as I recollect was a 'Litvak Yiddish,' from what I recall of its sound. In Galicia, Polish was more dominant among Jewish youth, but in Lithuania there was a zeal for Yiddish. I never had to wring my hands, ss many Zionist leaders in Galicia and Russia did, who understood the sense of a conversation in Russian or Hebrew, or Polish and Hebrew, but had no knowledge of Yiddish....

The heart and mind of the Hebrew gymnasium was directed to the Land of Israel, even if all the teachers were not active Zionists. The general atmosphere was Zionist, and that's what was important. It was a branch of the larger central educational organization of *Tarbut*, and many hours were put into the study of Hebrew subjects. And that is where the weight of my work was. There was only one other teacher for Hebrew subjects, and I remember him more than the other teachers, and this is Shimon Gottesfeld, the senior of the group, who was literally a living example of the transition from the generation of the Enlightenment to the Zionist generation. And it seems to me, that he wrote a number of plays based on *Tanakh* themes that dealt with this subject. For the sake of truth, the greatest and best of my relationships was with the students. In no small measure because of the subject matter of the studies: Judaism, Zionism, Song, Hebrew, Israel, etc.

The youth of Volkovysk was outstanding, and there were no small number among the students who came from the surrounding towns. I loved my work at the gymnasium because of the heartfelt emotions and open and disciplined minds, but I also had other centers of experience in this marvelous town (forgive me, but I think this is my pen running off or the typewriter. I simply forgot that I promised not call Volkovysk a 'town'), because not only is my first teaching experience bound up with Volkovysk, but also the path of my political life, first there – *Betar.* I believe it was David Linevsky, today David Niv, who after ascertaining that my disposition was *Betar*-like, or revisionist (as if I had never been a member of Tzahar), turned to me with the offer that I take over the *Betar* chapter from him, and he himself made aliyah to the Land of Israel.

It was in this manner, that for the first time in my life, I put on the *Betar* insignias, and in this manner the direction of my life was largely determined. In terms of basic outlook, my orientation to this direction of Zionism manifested itself as a result of two events. The first event – the Hebron Massacre of 5684 (1924), when I participated with great emotion in a mass protest rally, in which tens of thousands shouted: *"Jabotinsky Is Right!"* (I heard Jabotinsky himself in the prior year in a rousing speech, and I was at that time in the seventh grade of the Lodz gymnasium, and I remember that speech to this day, but at that time I did not harbor political ideas).

The second event, that influenced me in the direction of *Betar* and beyond, was hearing the poem of Uri Zvi Ginsberg: I will tell into the ears of a child about the Messiah that didn't come. The moving poem tells of a Messiah that comes as far as the foot of the Temple Mount, and there he was found and sold by [slave] ***merchants***. The inference here is also to the issue of the expansion of the Jewish Agency...and especially the pessimistic outcome that the Messiah was thwarted and left, and perhaps for millennia to come, he set the direction: to avoid calamity. The poem was published in *Mozna'im* in 5691(1931), and I was a student in Vienna. I was involved, at that time, in a variety of activities, and even got beaten during the murder accusations surrounding Arlozorov[16], but as to organized activities, and especially *Betar*, I began in Volkovysk.

The truth of the matter is, that despite all the comprehension and responsible interest in military discipline and studies, and despite my training in military protocol[17], I did not feel a personal intimacy with being a 'natural' for this, but I did not tarry, and I responded to the offer and that is how I became the leader of *Betar* in Volkovysk, since the majority of the organizational and 'military' work fell on the shoulders of my deputy, whose name I believe was Sukenik, who is now in Israel, in Beersheba. My core duty continued to be – presentations, speeches, and written expositions. From the post in Volkovysk, I went on to work in the Vilna valley in 1937, and from there – to the *Betar* office in Poland at the invitation of Menachem Begin, but it is a strong possibility that were it not Volkovysk, I would have found a different path into *right wing* politics.

In Volkovysk, I had yet a third 'primary' experience after teaching and *Betar* – a cabinet full of books. This was Uryonovsky's legacy, who was a teacher there, and his cabinet full of books was left behind and sold to me, and it contained a long shelf of 'heavy' reading material : all of the volumes of *HaTekufah*. Naturally, I took it with me, when I went to the seminary in Vilna, but I could not take it with me on my various travels. It remained behind. Well. There were many replacements for it, but there are no replacements for the precious personalities that I left behind in Volkovysk, that we left behind to the fire in all those dear people of Volkovysk.

In one of the first editions of the monthly, "A Ladder to the Ideas Regarding a Jewish State" (*Sulam*), that I published after emerging from the underground, I published a thought piece of mine as a 'Memorial,' to my students, and accordingly, I will finish my writing by copying these words of remembrance here:

A Memorial to the Souls of My Students

...I will remember you too, when I stand this *Yom Kippur* to recite the *Yizkor* prayers. Because this year, suddenly I was moved to memorialize all of my students this year, whom I will never see again, and whom I loved so much, all of them. Perhaps this came to me because I could not fulfil my longing to stand, once again, before living students, boys and girls, and teach, and my class is my legs, and my class is my heart, and going from one principal to the next I pleaded: let me stand in front of students. Because I miss them so much. Give me an opportunity, again, to put the spark of my mind in contact with those open hearts to convey portions of poetry and prose, verses from the Psalms and Job. I was taken to prison in the midst of a lesson on Job. And my students in heaven are my witnesses that I taught them to love all of this, but I was eliminated from being a teacher among the Jews. And when I

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[16] Born in the Ukraine, *Chaim Arlozorov* was taken in 1905 by his parents to Germany, following a pogrom there. He went on to become a noted leader of the Labor Zionist movement in Palestine. He was murdered in June, 1933, while walking on the Tel Aviv beach with his wife *Sima.* The identity of his attackers is the subject of much controversy, remains unsolved to this day.

[17] The use of the phrase, '*Dom-Noakh*' is explained by David Niv in his memoir. See page 53.

would leave the presence of Principals and administrators, shamefacedly with my heart contracted, I suddenly saw the souls of all my students that I will never see again, because they died, and they surround me and accompany me, with my embarrassed face and contracted heart. And it was then that I had the idea to memorialize all of them in a *Memorial,* since the Yizkor prayer itself is short, short, and the Cantor rushed to interpret the *El Moleh Rakhamim* so it is pleasing to each person in his own way, so that there is no doubt in a person's heart to feel at one with the multitude, the many. And so I said: I will unite myself only with my students this time, my students of the Volkovysk gymnasium, that town left so in sorrow, those studying to be kindergarten teachers at the teachers seminary in Vilna. You have no parents to mourn for you, or children that you might have born, to remember you. So I will remember you.

I loved you all. The good and the bad. The involved and the indifferent, those that warmed my heart with their eyes riveted on me and my every move, full of emotion and humor at times, and they do not laugh, because they move with the movement of my hands on the waves of the movement of my thoughts, and those that said, "enough," and those that said "not enough," teacher, "keep going." And the special girl students in each and every class, who when they left the classroom, I was saddened, and there was less intensity in my lectures, and those whom I loved to challenge with analysis in order to be able to appease them afterwards with humor, and give only goods grades. I didn't like the teachers' meetings, but I loved you my students, and my joy was literally like that of a child, when my ear would pick up your whisperings during recess: "What a terrific lesson," even when I knew that those whispers were being said especially for me to hear, but I didn't need it, because in speaking in front of you, I could feel your hearts beating in rhythm with my own, if at all. Because this is what I loved: to join our hearts to all that is beautiful in the literature of our ancestors, so that you could see in Abraham, Isaiah, and Job as people who are living with us today, and that they are great and magnificent, and not as 'just literature.' And you helped me greatly. It was your enthusiasm that was fuel for my own soul, and together we flew in the world that was beautiful, good and strong,

My students, my students, I will remember, and my heart years for you.

Sulam, Tishri, 5710 (1948)

A Jewish Girl Student In a Polish Government School

by Shifra Hakla'i (Langer)

Page 40: *The Stefan Batory Polish Gymnasium in Volkovysk*[18]

When the publisher of this book discovered hat I was from Volkovysk, he proposed that I write down my recollections of this city. I said to him: it is more than sixty years since I left Volkovysk, I am an old Jewish lady now, and my memory has faded, what can I remember? He answered: Close your eyes for a few seconds, leap back sixty years, and remember your father, grandfather, mother and grandmother, and the memories of Volkovysk will come to you.

I did as I was told, and here I see a river flowing past the edge of this city, and I even see the place where I lived. It was a dwelling consisting of two rooms in a small house that contained three domiciles. This house was not far from the river, and a garden stood between the house and the river. On the other side – a small lake that froze over during the winter and was used by the residents as a place to ice skate. I can see the cherry tree that grew near our house and also lilac bushes.

Have I discharged my obligation in describing the ambience?

As my eyes are still fixed on this picture of this ambience, when an esoteric melody reaches my ears which is the refrain of a prayer that plays within me.

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[18] Taken from p. 122 of M. Einhorn's book, which names the street as the *Lazarovner Gasse,* and also note the smithy at the foot of the hill.

I recognize it. It is the strain of the *Kol Nidre* prayer on *Yom Kippur* Eve, but it isn't the traditional melody, but something entirely different. For many years I attempted to locate this esoteric melody on Yom Kippur Eve in various synagogues in Jerusalem, but I could not find it. I found all manner of *Nigunim*, but not this one. It existed only in Volkovysk. I do not remember the Cantor, or who it was that led the prayers, but I do recall that in a thousand dreams, I was drawn to this melody that reached me from the *Schulhof* in Volkovysk.

We left Volkovysk in 1926 and made *aliyah* to Israel. In preparation for our transition, we, the children, were afforded the opportunity to be taught by a local teacher, Reuven Rutchik, who taught us Hebrew and instilled in us a foundation about the history of Israel. I did not get this in the Polish government gymnasium, where I was a student. If my faded memory doesn't lead me astray, this gymnasium was a long, one-story wooden building, that stood on a hill at the edge of the city, surrounded by a large yard. Each pupil had a small notebook with a black cover, in which all the rules of behavior expected of the boy and girl students. It was forbidden to deviate from these. The required dress for the girls was – a black apron over normal clothing. I don't remember what the boys were supposed to wear, but I do remember that both the boys and girls wore a special hat with a crease. The Jews were a small minority among the students, and understandably, they felt like a minority. We endeavored, out of a suspicion of being unwanted, not to stand out any more than was necessary... among the teachers, I recall the geography teacher favorably, who had a pleasant manner and was courteous. Also, our history teacher was a gentle and pleasant woman. I cannot say this regarding the priest, who was dressed in a long black cassock, which was enough to upset the Jews. He taught religious studies to the Christian students (the Jewish students were excused from these classes), and he was also the Latin teacher for all the students in the upper grades. Every time we saw him, we were reminded of the fact that we were a superfluous and ineffective minority at the government school.

There were Christian girls among the friends that my sister and I had at the gymnasium. My sister had really good friends among the Christian girls, and I recall that one of them stayed in touch with her even in the years after we made *aliyah* to Israel. However, this didn't prevent her from asking my sister before the Passover holiday where the Jews hide the blood of the Christian children... my sister was shaken of course, to hear a question of this nature from this 'buddy,' but she emphasized that her friend asked this as a question, and not with the intent to either anger or incite.

Teachers and The *Heder*

By Ben-Israel

Page 41: *Rabbi Jonathan [Eliasberg] and the Dayan, Reb Mendele [Volk], Testing the Students*

One of the many portraits done by Shmuel Rothbart, who was known in Volkovysk by the nickname 'Shmuel Khudozhnik' (Russian for an artist). He was born in Volkovysk, and already by the time he was a Heder student, his artistic skill became evident. Under his Pentateuch, he would hold pieces of paper, and secretly draw his teacher, portraits of students, and people in Volkovysk. In 1904, he emigrated to the United States, drew decorative pieces for synagogues, and theater halls as a way to earn a living, but at the same time, he also devoted a lot of time to drawing pictures about his home town, and specific details that he recalled from his days in Volkovysk. In 1917, he had the first showing of his work in New York, which received very favorable reviews and much praise. Many of his paintings can be found in many museums in the United States.

There were many types of teachers in Volkovysk, and it was they who set the various tones of the different *Heders*. By and large, the teachers had no [formal] qualifications in the field of education, and they saw their role, not to educate the children, but rather to inculcate Torah. An outstanding *Heder* student was one who could expound on a verse of the Torah in accordance with accepted tradition, knew verses of the Torah by heart, and could review

a weekly Torah portion while cantillating. The course of study in these Heders was very antiquated, 'Once through in Hebrew, and once in Aramaic[19],' as authors like Mendele [Mokher Sforim] Sholom Aleichem and others have described in their stories: "*Vayomer – hott gezogt; Adonai – Gott; El Moshe – Tzu Moishe'n, Leymor – Azoy tzu zogn...*" Many teachers focused on one 'subject' – review of the weekly Torah portion. (According to custom, a teacher was forbidden to take remuneration for teaching, but only for *inactivity and reviewing the weekly portion...*) On Friday morning, the voices of children intoning the cantillation notes would burst forth from all the *Heder* rooms and the Talmud Torah: "*Mercha Tipkha, Munakh Esnakhta*," and the Rebbe himself would blend in with each '*Pazeyr*' and '*Shalshelet*,' that his pupils knew how to intone properly.

After the 'modernized *Heders*' were established, different winds began to blow through Jewish education. The curriculum began to include other subjects, such as: Polish, Mathematics, and even Geography. The Heder discarded its old façade, and put on a new face. ***Chaim Milkov*** from Jerusalem knew how to tell about the Heder where he studied, and about the teacher, Linevsky. The wealthy and important *balebatim* sent their children to this *Heder.* This was literally a school, and apart from Pentateuch and *Tanakh*, German and Polish was taught there, arithmetic and other secular subjects. There were two classes in this *Heder,* and tuition was five dollars a month.

The teacher Linevsky (father of David Niv) followed modern precepts and did not place stock in rote memorization of passages from the Torah, but rather, he pays attention to the degree to which the student understood what was taught. He also knew how to make issues and subjects clear to his students when they experienced difficulty. And it was thus, that when they studied in the Pentateuch about the raiments of the High Priest, about the priest and the Tabernacle, Linevsky would utilizes paper cutouts and drawings that he used to prepare before class, and it was in this way that students got a clear picture of things like the breastplate and caftan of the High Priest, the architecture of the temple, etc. The introduction of this method of teaching was something of a 'revolution,' in that era. Also, Farber's school followed these modern practices, and as described elsewhere in this book, that school was considered the most prestigious of all.

Grammar received special attention in all of the modernized *Heder* schools, and the students of such *Heders* who then transferred to the gymnasium, excelled in grammar more than other students who didn't attend such *Heders*. Hebrew, as you can understand was taught with an Ashkenazic accent, and the students did not find the transition to Sephardic easy, during their course of study at the gymnasium. Even the Hebrew was noticeably different from the Hebrew were used to in our day. There was no *sabon* to be found, but rather, ***borit***, (soap); ***Ani Chafetz*** in place of *Ani Rotzeh*, of our day, etc.,etc. It is necessary to note that many students who studied at Polish or Russian schools in the morning, studied Hebrew and *Tanakh* in the afternoon, because their parents would not resign themselves to not having their children be able to know Hebrew.

According to Einhorn, ***David Hubar*** founded the first 'Modern *Heder'* in Volkovysk, and it was he who made the effort to establish the Russian grade school. According to the same source, David Hubar and Henoch Neiman were the ***first ones*** that sent their children to study at the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium in Israel.

Activities in Theater Arts

Page 43: Mordechai (Mottel) Kilikovsky

Dr. Einhorn describes the beginnings of Theater Arts in Volkovysk in his book. According to his words, these activities began with the efforts of an ordinary man of the people, Mottel Kilikovsky

[19] Referring to the Aramaic translation of Onkelos, always found in a traditional printing of the Pentateuch.

(Cohen). This Mottel, who lost both of his parents while still a child, was educated in the home of his grandfather, Sholom Potshter, and while still a child, demonstrated an inclination towards acting. He was in the habit of gathering up the children of the neighbors, and organize 'military parades,' with their participation. A Polish doctor, named Yeletz, who lived nearby, perceived his talents, and would occasionally slip Mottel small sums of money for the purpose of buying small drums and horns to accompany the marchers who participated, and in this way a children's military band was formed.

When Mottel reached the age of ten, he began to serve as an assistant to the teacher, Moshe-Meir, and he would organize presentations with the children of the 'Binding of Isaac,' and 'The Selling of Joseph,' and others. Mottel was 13 years old when he went out into the big world, to Grodno and Kovno. In Grodno, he worked as a barber in a barbershop near a theater, and in this way, he came in contact with the actors at the theater, who brought him in on occasion as a player in their productions, or in some other capacity.

Mottel was 16 years old when he returned to Volkovysk towards the end of the 19th century. The *Linat Tzedek* organization was established at that time, which was in need of money to buy medical equipment. Someone raised the idea, and maybe it was Mottel himself, to organize a Purim celebration, all of whose proceeds would go to the new organization. The decision was made to put on Goldfaden's operetta, *Shulamit,* and the director, naturally – was Mottel. It was difficult getting young women for the female roles, and there was no alternative but to have boys play female roles. And it was this way, that the first dramatic production was put on in Volkovysk, in which 16 young people participated. A large crowd came to the first performance, and among others – even a policeman from the authorities, who came to review the play from the viewpoint of censorship...
Even during the First World War, the activities of the drama group did not come to a complete halt. At the beginning of 1916, during the German occupation, Mottel Kilikovsky organized a drama group named *HaZamir*, and the work of this group continued until the end of the war. The Jewish populace of the city received the work of this group with great enthusiasm, because they longed for Jewish theater. And again, the works of the Father of Yiddish Theater, Goldfaden, appeared on the stage: *Shulamit, Bar Kochba, The Sorceress*, [20] etc. Most of these performances were put on in Botvinsky's cinema house, and the principal players were: Leizer Sokolsky, Mottel Kilikovsky, Leizer Shiff, and Joseph Pikarsky. The musical director was Israel Schein. The success of the performance of *Shulamit* exceeded all expectations, and it was necessary to run several repeat performances. The play, *Bar Kochba*, also achieved recognizable success. The ranks of the Jewish intelligentsia which originally showed no interest in this theater, changed its attitude once it saw that the Jewish public was attending presentation in droves, and even they drew closer to *HaZamir*. In time, Mr. Galai, a professional Russian actor, took over the direction of *HaZamir,* and a famous professional Russian actress, Marian, played many lead roles. In time, these theater lovers began to put on the plays of Scholem Asch, Nomberg, Peretz Hirshbein, Yaakov Gordon, and others.

Young people from the surrounding towns would frequently come to Volkovysk in order to enjoy these productions, and in time, the drama group began to receive invitations to tour the various towns.

Personal conflicts that broke out among the actors (on division of the work, etc. – as is common in many theater groups) led to the creation of a new group (*die Harpeh*), headed by M. Kilikovsky, and Motteh-Leib Kaplan, and this one too, began to present the plays of Goldfaden. The competition was great, and the arguments got more intense, until the actors realized that it would not reflect well on them, and they united anew. The question was: would the united theater group be called *HaZamir*, or *Die Harpeh*? Even for this question, an answer was found – they drew lots, and the name *HaZamir*,

[20] Called *'Koldunya'* in Russian.

came up in the pick...

An additional step in advancement of the theater took place with the invitation of accomplished actors from Volkovysk, which enabled the presentation of operas. Einhorn describes in his book, that a young Jewish girl from Bialystock, Zavinka, a daughter of poor parents, literally created a storm among the Jews of Volkovysk with her successful performances, with her beauty and sweet voice., An actor named Greenhaus was especially outstanding in the plays of Gordon and Peretz Hirshbein. Despite the difficult condition of the war years (forced labor, hunger, and other constraints), the Jewish theater succeeded in overcoming all its difficulties and it continued to function for a number of years and gave encouragement to the Jewish populace that drew the fullest measures of satisfaction and inspiration from the Jewish theater.

After a while, under the Polish regime, M. Kilikovsky was asked by the Zionist activists to organize a presentation for the benefit of the Zionist Histadrut of the city. He responded to the request, gathered together about thirty young men, and put on the play, *Zerubabel.* The play was put on in Botvinsky's cinema, and among the cast was ***Raphael Klatshkin.***

After a pause in activity of several years, *HaZamir* renewed its activities in the late twenties. The director was ***Yaakov Fisher*** and productions were presented for: *Uriel Acosta, King Lear* and various Russian plays that were translated into Yiddish. Presentations were given twice a month, and the revenues were earmarked for various of the city institutions, such as: *The Orphanage, Old Age Home, Linat Kholim*, etc. Joseph Pikarsky (*'Poliak'*) was apparently one of the stars of these performances, and we can see this from the reporting in the *Volkovysker Leben* in June 27, 1930 prior to his emigration to Cuba..

A Drama Club also existed as part of the *HaShomer HaTza'ir* chapter, also under the direction of Y. Fisher. Yaakov Einstein was also one of the participants in this group.

It is worth noting that the spark of loyalty shown by the Jews of Volkovysk for drama and theater caused many serious theater groups outside of Volkovysk to include our city in the agenda of their tours, and every artistic presentation was always well received.

Jewish Newspapers in Our City

Page 45: The Board of the Volkovysker Leben, with the renown Jewish writer, Z. Segalowitz (1928)

Right to Left: Reuven Rutchik, Z. Segalowitz, Mordechai-Leib Kaplan
Standing: Eliezer Kalir, Mordechai Giller

Two weekly papers appeared in Volkovysk: *Volkovysker Leben*, and *Volkovysker Vochenblatt.* By content and appearance, they were not different from many other periodicals of the same kind that appeared in Poland during the twenties and thirties. The standard format was four large pages. The first page was generally dedicated to personal announcements, such as farewell greetings, obituaries and weddings. Theses announcement, naturally, were the principal source of income. The last page was taken up with the calendar of the local community, and commercial notices, and in the inside two pages, one could find articles and writings that reacted to things that took place in the city and in the community, and articles about Jewish subjects in general.

It is worth noting the *Volkovysker Leben,* in particular, which began to appear in 1925, was in operation for 14 years, and was composed by ***M.L. Kaplan and Reuven Rutchik. Eliezer Kalir*** was one of the regular contributors to this weekly, and after he made *aliyah* to Israel, and settled in Petakh Tikva, he served as a regular correspondent to the paper, and published articles about what was transpiring there. The circulation of the paper was quite limited, and certainly did not exceed 600 copies per edition. In order to meet the budget, the printing shop that produced the paper, also took on other practical jobs, but even this was not a sufficient base on which to predicate its continuity, and various donors from Volkovysk and the United States used to provide support, either large or small through their contributions.

Reuven Rutchik, one of the editors of the paper, was a truly enlightened individual, having a good command of Hebrew and other languages, serving as a Hebrew teacher in Volkovysk and Bialystock. N. Tzemakh, founder of *HaBima,* told that Rutchik was his very first Hebrew teacher, who planted the love of Hebrew language in him, and thanks to him, the idea of creating a Hebrew theater troupe occurred to him. Rutchik published his first poetry in the children's periodical, *Ben Shakhar,* and also published poems and articles in the paper, *Der Jude,* and other newspapers. The section on humor and satire was the fruit of his pen as well, and to this end, he had a regular column, called *Heimishe Inyonim*, which was dedicated to jokes, and humorous commentary on the different events in the life of the Volkovysk Jewish community.[21] David Niv told, that members of the Jewish intelligentsia used to meet in the basement of the *Volkovysker Leben* offices, and they would spend time there doing declamatory readings and interpretations of the works of Virgil, Pushkin, and others, in which each individual attempted to prove his knowledge and familiarity with the classics. The living spirit behind these kind of meeting, of course, was Rutchik. He was killed during the Holocaust, and this was also the fate of M.L. Kaplan, the second editor, and of other participants in the newspaper, such as, Alter Giller (a storekeeper, who while weighing out and selling merchandise, would write poetry, and wonderful songs), Shakhna Dworetsky, A. Tz. Schwartz (a teacher at the Hebrew Gymnasium, who would publish his Yiddish poems in the newspaper columns). Many editions of the local Volkovysk newspapers have been preserved at the national library in Jerusalem, Among them are *Volkovysker Vochenblatt*, published by M. Ein and R. Shklavin, *Volkovysker Stimme*, published by Y. Novogrudsky (1927).

[21] Excerpts that appear at the end of Dr. Einhorn's book have been translated into English, and can be found in the first part of this Trilogy.

Volkovysk

In Encyclopedias and Various Historical Sources

Page 46: The Executive Committee of HaShomer HaTza'ir in Volkovysk 26Sivan5688 (1926), with A. Moskowitz at the Center.

We find the heading, "Volkovysk" portrayed differently in various encyclopedias and histories. We reproduce two of these here:

The Hebrew Encyclopedia: Volkovysk – a city of the Byelorussian SSR; capital city of the Volkovysk area in the Grodno District; sits on the Rus River (left tributary of the Neman River), approximately 90km east of Bialystock, on the rail line from that city to Minsk. Population 16,500 in 1958.

Volkovysk is found in an area that derives its sustenance mainly from agriculture, raising cattle, and forestry. Most of the production of the area comes from here, and therefore, factories for building materials and metal are found here. Volkovysk already existed in the 11th century. At that time, it served as a fortress to protect the western frontier of the Kievan Rus. After the disintegration of the kingdom of the Kievan Rus in the second half of the 12th century, Volkovysk was captured by the rulers of Volhynia and Lithuania. By the middle of the 13th century, it already belonged to Lithuania, in whose hands – and in the hands of Poland (which united with Lithuania in 1569) – it remained until 1795. In that year, it was annexed into Russia. In 1920, Volkovysk reverted to Poland, but in 1939, it was annexed by Russian yet again.

Jews are first identified in the records of Volkovysk in the report of 1577. In 1766, they were counted in with the community of Volkovysk, which also included the Jews of the surrounding area, amounting to 1,282 people. In 1847, there were 1,429 Jews. In 1897, their number increased to 5,528 people, which represented 532.5% of the population. In the Volkovysk district, there were 18,470 Jews in that year. In 1920, the community numbered 5,130 people (out of a population of

11,000). The community was destroyed by the Nazis in the period December 1942-January 1943, with the expulsion of the Jews of Volkovysk to the extermination camps.

Encyclopedia Judaica: Volkovysk – A city in the Grodno District (*'oblast'*) in the Byelorussian SSR. Jews are first recorded as residents in the environs of Volkovysk in 1577. There were 1,282 Jews that paid the head tax in 1766 in Volkovysk and its vicinity. Volkovysk became part of Russia in 1795, and in 1797 the population of Jewish and Karaite residents reached 1,477, constituting 64% of the general population.

There were 1,429 Jews in Volkovysk in 1847, 5.455 in 1897 (64% of the population), and 5,310 in 1921(46%). The principal means of livelihood of the Jews in the 19th century were – light manufacturing, crafts, and selling of agricultural produce. Many Jews earned their living by providing various services to the Russian army camp that was based in the area. The Jewish working classes began to organize themselves in 1897, under the influence of the *Bund*, after a labor strike broke out.

Organizations and Youth Movements

General Zionism

Page 47: Preparations for a Movie Night for the Benefit of Keren Kayemet Le'Yisrael.

The favorable reaction to the establishment of *Hibat Tzion* in Volkovysk in the 1880's was immediate with its appearance. Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky, who occupied the pulpit as Chief Rabbi of the city, after Rabbi Abba-Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov made *aliyah* to Israel, tells of finding a letter among the books of Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg, that was sent to him by the scholar, Sh. Y. Fein of Vilna, who was also an ardent lover of Zion, in connection with the famous Katowice Congress of *Hovevei Tzion*, that took place in 1884.

It is worth noting, that by contrast to other cities in Poland, the affection for Zionism was most pronounced among the more religious ranks, and there were many discoveries of this fact. Without a doubt, this is one of the reasons for the dominance of Zionism in the life of the Volkovysk community.

With the first steps of the national Zionist movement, many *balebatim* and distinguished people in the city organized themselves into a group that took the name *B'nai Zion*. Dr. M. Einhorn records the names of a number of these members in his book, from the year 1902: Aharon Shifmanovich, Jekuthiel Roiman, Jekuthiel Novick, Aryeh-Leib Arcade, Moshe-Mordechai Zelitsky, Shmuel-Jonah Novogrudsky, and Aharon Lifschitz. The following belonged the committee of this organization: Koppel-Asher Volkovysky, Chairman, Shmuel Shapiro – Treasurer, Nakhum Halpern (The Teacher) – Secretary, Israel Efrat, Moshe-Leib Khmelnitsky, Moshe Galai, Eliezer Yudzhik, and Shmuel David Yunovich. At the organizing meeting of ths group, that took place in the summer of 1902, Aharon Lifschitz was selected as a representative of its membership to the Zionist Congress that was to be held in Minsk that same year. Dr. Einhorn does not reveal his source for his information for this, but we can expect that these facts have been investigated and are accurate. We have no verifiable facts regarding the concrete activities of the *B'nai Zion*, but we can assume that, like in many other cities (Grodno, Bialystock, and others), *B'nai Zion* undertook the preaching of Zionism, collection donations for various funds, the study of Hebrew, etc.

Before the First World War, general Zionist activities took on more substantive forms. Some of the Zionists from Volkovysk made *aliyah* to Israel in order to settle there, others began to acquire parcels of land, shares in the 'Colonial Bank,' and the most important step – sending their sons to be educated in the first Hebrew gymnasium in Israel,

Hertzeliya, which is discussed elsewhere.

After the First World War, especially in the twenties, the work of the general Zionists intensified, and they acquired many members, especially from the ranks of the merchants, and small businessmen. They became the backbone of Zionism and brought to fruition the works of the national funds: *Keren HaYesod, Keren Kayemet.* The central activists of these groups were: Sholom Barash, Engineer Ephraim Barash, Israel Efrat, Moshe Shapiro, Moshe Rubinovich, Yehuda Novogrudsky, Ben-Zion Lifschitz, Eliyahu Shykevich, and others. After the general Zionists divided themselves into the initiatives of *Al HaMishmar* (founded by Yitzhak Greenbaum) and *Eyt Livnot*, (founded by Dr. Yehoshua Gottleib) the results of this division became recognized in Volkovysk as well, but the radical Zionists (*Al HaMishmar*) dominated in Volkovysk. It is worth noting that not few of the workers of the group joined other Zionist groups, in the course of time.

The Revisionist Movement

The core and central strength of this movement was *Betar* (acronym for '*Brit Trumpeldor'*), which is described in greater detail in this book by David Niv, but the revisionist movement had many members and adherents in the city, and in the final years before the World War, it was represented in the city in a significant way. The spirit behind the movement was Dr. Yaakov Shipiatsky. The local weekly newspaper frequently presents news about meetings of the workers for this group from all around Volkovysk. The fact that the work of this group was included in the agenda of the visits of Jabotinsky to the chapters in Poland, testifies to the special importance of this chapter. It is worth telling that Menachem Begin made a trip to Volkovysk that was unique in its kind, as a special emissary: he came especially to receive a certificate from the *Dayan,* [Rabbi Yaakov] Berestovitsky, because Abraham Schein, a member of *Betar* that had been sentenced to death by the British during the period of the Mandate, that he was accused as a minor, and should not receive such a severe sentence. Someone subsequently informed on the *Dayan* that he had forged the certificate, and spent a day in jail (Begin told this to David Niv).

Apart from Betar, there were other revisionist missions, such as: *Veref* – the Histadrut of Women Revisionists, *Nordia, Masada* (students), *Brit HaKhayal*, whose members were primarily from the Polish Army. It is interesting that most of the doctors in the city belonged specifically to this organization, which at the end, was headed by Engineer Shipiatsky and Mezheritzky.

The segmentation in the revisionist movement that occurred with the establishment of the group by Meir Grossman was practically unfelt in Volkovysk, and Chaim Milkov (now in Jerusalem) was one of the few workers who joined the Grossman camp.

Mizrachi and HaPoel HaMizrachi

Page 48, Bottom: The HaShomer HaDati Chapter

Like in the rest of the cities in Poland, this movement was the religious wing of the Zionist movement. The work of this group was especially felt in the synagogue, where they clashed with the anti-Zionist efforts of the members of *Agudat Israel*. The workers in this group according to Dr. Einhorn, were: Zvi Inker, Joseph Yerusalimsky (the Shokhet), and Hona Kavushatsky. Out of concern for the draft into the movement, *HaShomer HaDati* was formed in 1935 headed by Zelig Kagan.

Various Zionist Organizations

Page 48, Top: Tiferet Bakhurim . In the Center — Rabbi Kossowsky and his two sons [22]

Two groups that apparently were not in the list of

[22] Presumably, one of these must be *Rabbi Mikhl Kossowsky*, the last Rabbi of Zelva.

organizations mentioned by Dr. Einhorn.[23] One of them, ***Herut U'Tekhiya*** , among whose members were: Joseph Galai, Chaim Khmelnitsky, Yitzhak Yudzhik, Raphael Ditkovsky and Raphael Klatshkin. It is worth noting that this group had a drama troupe that put on various plays, and whose proceeds went to the *Keren Kayemet*. The organization also staged many cultural events, and a large number of its membership made *aliyah* to Israel.

During the twenties, a group existed in Volkovysk called ***Kadima***, that set itself the goal of educating Jewish youth in the spirit of total Jewish nationalism. This organization was particularly active in the arenas of enlightenment and culture, and organized sessions among the remaining groups for purposes of teaching Jewish history, the origins of Zionism, Hebrew and Yiddish literature, *Tanakh,* and other subjects. Members of *Kadima* were: Yaakov Shipiatsky, Mordechai Lev, Pinchas Steinwax, Eliezer Bliakher, and Shlomo Shipiatsky.

Women's Zionist Organization, WIZO

The Women's Zionist Organization was founded in 1934, and until the outbreak of the World War, it initiated activities in culture and community work that was headed by ***Dr. Jocheved Barash***,.the wife of Engineer Ephraim Barash. A special activity of WIZO was to conduct bazaars for the benefit of *Keren Kayemet*, which were held annually. The activities of this group were centered about soliciting merchandise from various business locations in the city, and then selling them at the bazaar. Also, the celebrations sponsored by WIZO at Hanukkah and Purim, and held in the firehouse auditorium, generated a great deal of interest in the city. At a number of them, contests were held to select a 'Jewish Miss Volkovysk.' – that is to say, the most beautiful Jewish girl in Volkovysk. Apart from this, WIZO also arranged for courses to be given, and lectures in the public hall.

Non-Zionist Organizations

Among these were: the Jewish Communist Party (Nechama Schein gives a brief summary of their activities in the Jewish sector), *Agudat Israel,* whose activities were centered about the Yeshiva and the *Batei Medrashim*. *Tiferet Bakhurim*, the youth arm of the *Agudah*, also had its own synagogue, however, among the worshipers at this synagogue were those without any affiliation to this organization. Rabbi Kossowsky, was close to the *Agudah* movement, and during the days of his tenure, the *Agudah* benefitted from his visible support.

The Left Wing Zionist Camp

Page 49: Tze'irei Tzion at the second anniversary of the Balfour Declaration

Page 50: Central Committee of HeHalutz in Volkovysk, 26Aug1928.

Seated (RtoL): V. Novick, Isaac Paveh, Ephraim Barash, Y. Novogrudsky, M. Shakhnovich
Standing (RtoL): Y. Taran, Rasha Siegal, Joseph Gandz, Chaim Mordetsky

The *Tze'irei Tzion* group began its activity after the First World War. Its ranks were filled primarily by the working intelligentsia, and the focus of their effort was in the area of Hebrew education and spreading Zionism. Among its more active members it is worth noting: Mordechai-Leib Kaplan (who afterwards became an editor of *Volkovysker Leben*), Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), Hannah Novick, and others.

Poalei Tzion (Tz. S.), to which the *Tze'irei Tzion* group belonged, was the head organization of the left wing Zionist camp, and its central workers were: Lawyer Eliezer (Leizer) Bliakher, M.A. Kushnirovsky, Eisenstein, and others. The youth movement of this group was *Freiheit*. Prior to the

[23] Dr. Einhorn does mention them, however briefly. See pp. 129-131 in the original text, and pp, 61, 148 in the translation at the beginning of this Trilogy.

unification of *Hapoel HaTza'ir* and *Akhdut HaAvodah* in Israel, under *Mapai*, there was also a *Hitakhdut* group in Volkovysk, but after the unification, they joined the ranks of the *Poalei Tzion (Tz. S.),* even though the youth group of *Hitakhdut*, (*Gordonia*) continued to function independently (special note). The group was represented in the community committee and the advisory council of the city.

The left wing *Poalei Tzion* was not among the outstanding groups of the left wing camp, and it appears that they had rather few members. In all, we could find no evidence of support for its activities, and apparently this group had no particular standing in the city.

The ***Labor League of Israel*** was the umbrella group for the Zionist Left Wing camp. There were two groups of *Poalei Tzion* that worked for the *Kapai* (Office of the Labor League of Israel). *HeHalutz,* and *HaShomer HaTza'ir, Freiheit* and *Gordonia.* The core workers in the league were: Yaakov Itzkowitz, Eliezer Bliakher, Shishatsky, Mordechai (Mottel) Sakhar, Yitzhak Shkarlat, and others.

The HeHalutz Chapter itself served as an umbrella for the joint activities of different groups in the left wing Zionist camp. The *HeHalutz* chapter in Volkovysk was established after the First World War, and its central goal was to prepare its members to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land. The Volkovysk chapter also served as an address for the chapters in the surrounding towns, because the district chapter operated out of its quarters. At the beginning of the twenties, members of *HeHalutz* were already working in planting tobacco on specific plots in the vicinity of the Jewish hospital. *Bet HeHalutz* was established in 1925, in a building on the *Neuer Gasse.* Members of HeHalutz were also trained in carpentry and flour milling in the city. Various farms in the area, both Jewish and Christian, served as training sites for the [future] pioneers, and one of them, Mikholovka was among the better known ones. Among the various workers in the ranks of HeHalutz, in several periods, it is worth noting: Abraham Novick, The Saroka Brothers, Moshe Shakhnovich, Ditkovsky, The Paveh Brothers, The Pick Brothers, Yerusalimsky, Mendel Solomiansky, Rasheh Siegal, Yitzhak Shkarlat, and others. Dr. Einhorn records the description given by Azriel Broshi about the aliyah of the first of the HeHalutz Members, of which he was one, that begins with these lines:

"On a bright, sunny summer day in 1920, a group of several tens of young men from Volkovysk and Lisokovo left their homes, accompanied by the blessings of their relatives and friends, with their faces set in the direction of the Land of Israel. We gathered at the *Zamoscher* and *Brisker Gasse*, and we went in wagons that took us to Bialystock. A festive reception had been arranged for us in the public hall of that city. When we arrived in Warsaw, we joined up with other groups, and we proceeded to the Austrian border. This is how the *Third Aliyah* actually began..."

From there, Azriel Broshi describes the harsh circumstances that awaited the *halutzim* in the Holy Land, their work on the Jeddah – Haifa highway, the victims of fever, etc.

Apart from *HeHalutz,* there was also a chapter of ***Central HeHalutz*** in Volkovysk, supported by the general Zionists, whose honorary Chairman was [Engineer] Ephraim Barash. The working Chairman was Ze'ev (Velvel) Novick. Before the Second World War, a special training location for the members of *Central HeHalutz* was set up in the Volkovysk vicinity.

HaOved, was also a mission of the Labor camp of Israel, aimed specifically at people between the ages of 30-45, who were interested in making *aliyah* to Israel. The members of *HaOved*, were largely workers, of the lower middle-class, who were interested in getting certificates, but did not choose the direction of the kibbutz in their future life in the Holy Land.

Sixty Years with the HaShomer HaTza 'ir Movement

by Gedaliah Pick

Page 51: The HaShomer HaTza'ir Chapter

A Night of Terror

My first memory from my distant childhood – is literally a shattering and traumatic memory. It appears to me that this recollection left its imprint on me for the rest of my life, and in many ways set the direction that I followed during my life.

It was in the year 1920, during the time of the war between the Poles and the Soviet Union, even before the establishment of the Polish republic and its government. I was a boy of four years age, when the soldiers of a Polish brigade burst into our city, drunk from the partial successes that they had achieved in battle at the front. The Polish chauvinism that convulsed deep in the hearts of some of the army, led the soldiers first – to launch a pogrom against the Jews. Manifestations of anti-Semitism connected with the Polish war had not been among the rarities in Volkovysk. Cutting off of side locks and beards of Jews, beatings of the old and feeble Jews on conveyances, and in the outskirts of the city – all of this was withing the bounds of a vision that burst upon us. We knew this from acquaintances and neighbors, we read about it in newspapers, but up till now, we had not had the opportunity to see it up close, to taste it on our own hides.

I recall awakening on one of the nights to the sound of a noise that grew in volume. There was an unusual arrangement in the house: the furniture was moved, boards were hammered over the doors and windows, and an attempt was made to seal up all the entries to prevent people from the outside breaking in, etc. My ears caught the rising shouts of our neighbors, and quickly we heard loud pounding on the doors to our house, and the eyes of the household members radiated terrible fear. All the barriers put up by our parents were of no avail, and they had no means to deny entry to the soldiers. They burst in like a storm, with murder in their eyes. They began to pick on the members of the household, in order to compel them to abandon all means of self-protection, they stepped on and ground everything they found under their heel, with one purpose in mind – to uncover caches of gold and silver. When they did not succeed in finding what they were looking for – they grabbed my mother, and hit her with their rifle butts on all parts of her body. Much blood flowed from her open wounds. My father who was strong and healthy, together with my oldest brother, who was 12, tried to protect my mother, but their strength was insufficient to withstand these beasts of prey. One of the soldiers approached me and began to search my shirt pockets, on the assumption that these pockets could be a place to hide gold... after a number of destructive searches, they managed to uncover the various hiding places. All that the family had managed to accumulate and save over many years – was despoiled and turned into plunder.

This was the night of terror that was etched into my memory. Shivers would pass over my body, even many days afterwards, when I would walk in the street and see a Polish soldier. These were wounds to the soul, but the wounds to my mother's body were that much more severe. For the rest of her life, she suffered from headaches that resulted from the blows she took to the head. When I walked through the street at the time of the victory parades of the brigade of soldiers stationed in the city – in my mind's eye, I would see the soldiers that hit my mother.

Hebrew Education and the Young Pioneer Movement

When I reached the age of five, my parents sent me to kindergarten. I remember the kindergarten teacher and her assistant very well, who opened a portal to a different world for me. Spellbinding stories, moving and dancing games, children's songs, etc, softened up the scarring that had remained on the heart of a five-year-old. In the garden, adjacent to the kindergarten, there were several sliding ponds and seesaws. The kindergarten was conducted in Hebrew, and in those days, that was a major

innovation in Volkovysk. The Hebrew children's songs that we would bring home to our family homes were of the nature of 'big news.' After kindergarten, I was registered in Sukenik's *Heder* – and even this was an advanced step, since there were also the *Heders* of Linevsky and Farber, who left pleasant memories in the hearts of their graduates. The fear of an elderly teacher who stood over us and wandered back and forth was not on us, and when we continued our education in grade school, or gymnasium, we had been liberated from courses of study that were out of date, which was no way to endear a student to his studies.

In the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium, the Hebrew language was dominant. The teachers of humanities subjects were largely from the area, but most of the teachers of practical subjects came from Galicia, and there were accomplished academics among them. Our classroom teacher, who also was the mathematics teacher, stood out from the others in sports, and looked after assuring that the development of the body would get a significant measure of time. He told us, that in his youth, he belonged to *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, and as can be seen, with his recommendation and introduction, I joined this movement when I was eleven. Many other students did the same.

To tell the truth, my connection to *HaShomer HaTza'ir* actually began several years earlier. When I was only seven, I was attracted to this movement as if by magic. This happened unintentionally on one morning, when I was playing with a group of children on the *Neuer Gasse*, where we lived. To our surprise, sounds of singing, horns, and trumpets reached us from the *Neuer Gasse*. I ran together with my older brother to the place where the procession was passing by. This was an exalted parade of *HaShomer HaTza'ir,* and that day was *Lag B'Omer*. This was my first encounter with *HaShomer HaTza'ir* – a very pleasant encounter. A large crowd, standing on the sidewalks, received the marchers with joyful exclamations – who were all dressed in the same uniform, blue shirts, short pants, and broad creased, greenish hats, with colored ribbons waving in the wind, and walking sticks held in their hands. They all marched in the direction of the woods, where they had erected their tent camp. My older brother told me, that even he was ready to join the *HaShomer HaTza'ir* movement, and I envied him greatly – until I qualified to join this group – and my connections to it continue to this day, for more than sixty years.

Chapter Heads and Section Leaders

The *HaShomer HaTza'ir* movement was well perceived by the community from its inception. It is necessary to say, that it earned this reputation because of the good leaders, who demonstrated leadership skills, dedication to the mission and also familiar with the techniques of education. People, like Yaakov Einstein, Moses Mandelbaum, Mirsky, and others, who, at various times, led the local chapter, were accepted not only by the recruits, but also by the entire community. Their powers of persuasion, when it came to the parents of the recruits, was great, and it would appear that thanks to that alone, it became possible for many youngsters, myself included, to leave home for the summer months, and go to the settlement, which did not have parental supervision.

I remember the day of my first trip to the summer camp like it was yesterday and the day before. My friend Simcha Gandz and I went to camp a day late because of illness. We traveled by train, and we reached to designated station as the day was already growing dark. The distance from the train station to the place where the camp was set up was not small. We were forced to stop between the villages, when the heavy bags, containing all the necessities each of us was required to bring, simply became too heavy for us. The village residents showed a great amount of curiosity towards the strange visitors passing through, and it was neither easy nor simple to explain to these curious onlookers, why we were there. We breathed easier, once we finally arrived at the camp.

Today, these things seem much simpler and more straightforward, but in those days, they had the attribute of being extremely new. By our own hands, we set up camp, pitched tents, and did everything that was necessary. The *HaShomer HaTza'ir* movement strongly emphasized scout training after the style of Boded Paul: Organized assemblies,

marches, parades, scout sports, agriculture, etc.,etc. In my mind's eye, I can see before me now, the leader of the chapter, reading off the events of the first day in camp, praising those groups whose performance was outstanding, who pitched their tents properly, and then carried out their other requirements. Life and all activities in camp, were carried out using purely the Hebrew language. We would rise at dawn top see the sunrise, we were literally in the bosom of nature, song and dance were our accompaniment for all hours of the day, and most importantly – we established an intimate familiarity with life in the Land of Israel, with the *Shomer* kibbutz, with the way of life on a kibbutz, wit the fundamentals of a cooperative, etc., etc. We came back from camp different from the individuals we were when we arrived there. Everything that our directors instilled in us – brought forth fruits of praise. As for me, to all intents and purposes, I changed from being a little boy into a 'creature' of the summer camp, and without any need to wrap myself in modesty, I can say that because of me, doubtlessly, that thanks to my conversations with other members and their parents, many others went to camp the following year.

After camp I felt all the changes roiling within me intensely. I felt a need to deepen my knowledge in the foundation of the ideals of the movement, and began to read serious literature that had been completely foreign to me up to that point, following the journalism of the movement with alertness, and I still can recall the influence of one essay by Meir Yaari, 'Defunct Symbols,' that resonated greatly within the movement, and was the subject of many discussions within its ranks.

Contacts with the Land of Israel

In the passage of time, the youth movement changed from one that was based on nationalism and scouting, to a socialist movement. Scouting, which had been the core in the initial years of the movement, became a stagnant pool, something peripheral. The establishment of the first kibbutzim in the Holy Land, and the many difficulties that they encountered, was a disillusionment to the leaders of the movement outside of the Holy Land. Personal preparation became the central theme. In this connection, and in what was said during the early thirties, there was much trial and error, and mistakes made in the direction of the movement, that were seized upon as reasons for flaws in our socialist approach, or that they didn't want to assume the responsibility for personal preparation – to take training as a pre-condition to making *aliyah.* All of the quarrels, difficulties, disputes on the essentials of the movement and its direction, naturally had an influence and effect on the Volkovysk chapter, which had developed a reputation as one of the good chapters.

I myself was raised in a home where there was a sympathetic atmosphere towards the Zionist ideal. Added to this, we had established a strong bond through correspondence with Mordechai Lavi, over a period of many years, who was a relative of ours that had made *aliyah* as a pioneer in 1905. Every letter of his, especially the colored postcards with scenes of the Holy Land, were received in our home with great feeling, and were passed around from hand-to-hand, and from eye-to-eye. I recall that for the holiday greetings, Lavi would express himself with humor in a beautiful, flowing Hebrew. When my oldest brother Abraham reached the age of 18, Lavi told my parents, that he is prepared to make every effort in order to make it possible for Abraham to make *aliyah* to Israel. This proposal of his was received enthusiastically, and in the house, a conversation began, saying that after Abraham will succeed in settling himself – the entire family would follow in his wake. Lavi fulfilled his promise, Abraham received a certificate on the basis of a 'request' by Lavi, and he made *aliyah* in 1927, together with many groups of *halutzim*, who had prepared themselves in the various points of training prior to *aliyah*.

My brother's progress in Israel was not a path strewn with roses. The general depression, in the wake of unemployment, caused a major outflow of people from the Holy Land, and among them was Abraham. He had managed to stay in the Holy Land for only one year, as if it were a catalyst to his bitter fate (In Volkovysk, he was drafted into the Polish Army, and after he completed his service, he married and had a son, but with the outbreak of the Second World War, he was drafted again, sent to

the front, was captured by the Germans, and we have never heard anything about him since).

The period of the economic depression in the Holy Land caused a crisis within the *Halutz* movement, and in all youth movements in the diaspora. Jewish youth saw no future for themselves in Poland, and in the face of growing anti-Semitism, began to seek political solutions. A communist movement started ion several chapters, and also in ours. Only thanks to the special effort on the part of the central supervision, who sent its representatives to Volkovysk, and on the part of the central leadership, were these dangers overcome, and those that were persuaded by cosmopolitan concepts and blind faith in communism, that it would solve the Jewish question – found themselves outside the bounds of the movement.

The years 1928-1932 were years of pride in the chapter. Activities in all branches grew stronger, many young people joined up, and Yaakov Einstein and his partner, Moshe Mandelbaum, who were the chapter leaders at this time, demonstrated a great deal fo capability in organizing the groups and units, and breathed life into the chapter that had within it, the majority of the local young people. They succeeded in putting good leaders in charge of each group, and gave them the means to carry out their missions. Perhaps as a result of Einstein's influence, whose artistic spark sought an outlet, a dramatic club and brass band were formed, who frequently demonstrated their abilities at celebrations held in the local cinema house. These presentation aroused considerable interest among the local young people, and they came to the chapter as a result of these artistic endeavors that also received much praise and recognition.

When admission to the Holy Land was opened during the thirties, among the early ones who went were members of the leadership of the chapter, including, Yaakov and Moshe. However, they did not leave chaos and disorganization behind them. ***Isser Pikarsky*** and ***Shoshana Panter*** (Etrogi) – a member of kibbutz *Mesilot,* loyally took their places, with commitment, ***Davidovsky, Natan Kaminetsky*** (Tzur), ***Hannah Gafner*** (kibbutz Ein HaShofet), ***Hillel Epstein*** (today in kibbutz Negbah), ***Sonka*** (Ramat HaShofet), ***Paula Malkin*** (kibbutz Evron), ***Gedalyahu Pick-Peleg*** (kibbutz Amir), ***Gedalyahu Kaplan*** and ***Zvi Dworetsky*** (both killed in the Holocaust), ***Mula Tzemakh*** (He ended up in Russia during the Second World War, reached Israel with the Andres army, and joined kibbutz Gal-On), ***Aharon Zlotnitsky*** (came to Israel via Cyprus, and joined kibbutz Nir-David).

During the first days of the Second World War, activities of the chapter were led as best as could be done under the conditions of those days, by ***Meir Marotchnik*** ז"ל (killed on the way to the forests of Volkovysk on his way to join the partisans who operated there), and ***Zaydl Yunovich*** (fled Volkovysk in 1942 from Volkovysk to Bialystock, and was active in the ghetto there, but there is no trace of him after that).

To the extent that I can give an accounting of myself as the chapter head, I can say only this: 'I obtained my wisdom from my teachers,' and especially from those who preceded me as chapter leaders, and these were none other that ***Hillel Epstein*** and ***Natan Kaminetsky*** (Tzur). They passed me the 'scepter,' in the most appropriate and meaningful way, and I owe them both a vote of thanks if I succeeded in my position. It was explained to me that the organization of the youth – was a skill, requiring training. It is doubtful that I would have been prepared to overcome all the difficulties that I encountered were it not for the direction and attention that I received from them in connection with this position.

Training and Aliyah

The requirement to prepare oneself personally that each chapter leader assumed in that era, demanded that I also go for training, first in Ludomir and then Rovno. I was in Ludomir for two years, and this period was especially difficult. I worked in a saw mill, cutting up trees, and all manner of hard labor. In this respect, conditions improved when we transferred to Rovno. Here, most of us had specific assignments that were even professional, and these offered the possibility of a better economic,

community and cultural standard of living, We knew that the government of the Mandate was continuing, that had placed a limit on immigration – and we had no choice, but to institute community life in the place where we were being trained, and that's what we did. It was only in July 1938, after four years of training, that I left from Warsaw with a number of my friends to make an 'illegal' *aliyah.* We passed through different European countries, until we succeeded in reaching Greece. After many trials and tribulations, which this is not the place to describe, we were taken to a small vessel called the 'Osarta Panama.' We were 160 people from various youth movements, forced and crowded into sub-human conditions, but our joy was boundless when we succeeded in getting to the coast off of Netanya, after terrible conditions on the ship, despite the fact that the British police and soldiers detected us. Members of the Haganah were in the area, ready and waiting, and they 'Carried their people on their backs,' as the poet Alterman has written, with commitment and enthusiasm. We spent our first day in Israel at kibbutz *Ma'abarot,* which welcomed us with open arms. We were like dreamers in the Homeland on our first day, and for days afterwards.

I will not pause here over the many stops I passed through – and there were many of them – until I reached kibbutz *Amir*, where I live to this day, but I would like to tell about a 'meeting with a Jew from Volkovysk,' very briefly.

It was during the first week when we arrived at the territory of *Amir*. ***Eliyahu Golomb,*** a scion of Volkovysk, whose name was a legend in our home city and in Israel, as the first leader of the Haganah, arrived as part of his agenda of visiting new settlements in the Galilee. When he found out that there were people from Volkovysk and Zelva in our kibbutz – he asked to see us. I was working the fields with a plow at the time, but I was called in to meet with Eliyahu.

The meeting was very moving. Eliyahu took an interest in the welfare of my family outside of Israel, shared his memories of Volkovysk, told about his days as a student at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium in Tel-Aviv, together with other young people from Volkovysk, and about the extensive community work he had begun once he had completed his studies. I recall, that before we parted, Eliyahu told me about a cousin of his, Naphtali Golomb, also a member of *HaShomer Ha Tza'ir,* and he emphasized that he saw a great deal of symbolism in this, because Naphtali was one of the founders of the ***first*** kibbutz in the area of *Khoma Umigdal*, and this, in fact, was kibbutz *Nir-David,* and here I was, also from Volkovysk, a member of kibbutz *Amir,* ***last*** of the kibbutzim in the *Khoma Umigdal* area.

And if we are involved in recording meetings with people from Volkovysk – I can be permitted to recollect several other such meetings. I had a number of opportunities to meet with ***Yaakov Einstein***, a past head of our chapter. He was at that time an actor with the *Ohel* troupe, but in the conversations between us, more than once, he emphasized, because of his acting career, how sad he was that he did not bring to fruition that which he preached in Volkovysk – the establishment of a kibbutz in the Holy Land, but he was very proud that so many of his former disciples are found in a variety of the kibbutzim of *HaShomer HaTza'ir,* continuing along the path in which they had been educated.

I had many meetings also with ***Azriel Broshi***, one of the first leaders in the history of the Holy Land. Every time he visited the Galilee, he would stop off at my kibbutz to see the *olim* from Volkovysk. At every meeting with Broshi, it was possible to sense the warmth and the heartiness that flowed from his personality. He and his wife became connected to the Galilee at the time that their son, Magen Broshi, was one of the founders of kibbutz *Ma'ayan Boruch.*

The Meeting with My Brother

And one other meeting: When the War of Independence broke out, when the Syrian Army stood ready to invade our land, A couple of friends and I dug ourselves in on a hilltop *Giveat Ha'Em* near *Kfar Sulad*, literally on the Syrian border, in order to be prepared to repel the ranks of the Syrian soldiers. The nearby hill, *Tel-Azizat,* fell into Syrian hands after heavy fighting. They rained heavy fire

down on us, but we held our ground, and the hill remained in our hands. During the first lull in battle, the following day, I stood up and looked around. Suddenly, I saw two people coming towards us. I thought I was having a summer dream. One of them was my brother ***Hanokh***, who after all of the tribulations of the War years, had managed to get to Israel by way of Cyprus, and went right from the ship into the IDF. It is beyond my capabilities to describe the emotions we both experienced when we met at that place, especially after so many years of separation. I received a comprehensive report from my brother concerning everything that happened to the survivors of our family during the war years – literally in the enemy's camp.

And a couple of words on meetings with scions of Volkovysk in the United States. It was in 1965, when my wife and I traveled to the United States to visit the members of my family that had survived the Holocaust. It was ***Daniel Lemkin*** , whose family and mine were especially friendly and close in Volkovysk, who saw to it, that every one of our needs for this visit was taken care of. He and Moshe Shereshevsky, organized a party of the U.S. Volkovysk émigrés in our honor, among whom, Dr. Resnick and Simcha Goldrei participated, who were relatives to us. We continued this party until four in the morning, with stories from the hosts and guests, that were replete with nostalgic memories of the city we came from, that the *Abrogator* fell upon.

Betar

By David Niv

Page 55, Top: David Niv

Bottom: Jabotinsky on a visit to Volkovysk. Beside him – Ephraim Barash.

When I was a sixth grade student at the Hebrew gymnasium in Volkovysk, I joined *Betar*. I remember the date well: it was May 5, 1930. Almost all the members of my class belonged to Gordonia, and I also belonged to this movement, and I was active in it for nearly two years. After the incidents of 5689 (1927),[24] we sensed the change in mood in the Zionist camp. I still remember an emotional outburst by one of the older Gordonia members: 'Jabotinsky was right, if we don't strike back, they will slaughter us all." At the same time, our camp began to seethe, and it grew more intense with the passage of time.

We, the young people, didn't know much about Jabotinsky. I remember a speech that he gave in Tel-Aviv reached us, called 'Greetings to you Tel-Aviv of Blue and White,' and he made an impression on us, but in those days, we were impressed with any Hebrew nationalist piece that reached us from the Holy Land. In this regard, an essay by Abraham Shevdran-Sharon made a great impression on us, that was published in *Mozna'im ('Not Like the Other Nations?')*. This was a response to an essay by J. L. Magnes. We read the essay with compulsion, a great thirst, and with all senses attuned. I am of the opinion that of all the things that were published, this essay was singly responsible for setting the ideological cast of out thinking. An additional factor in setting this outlook was out Hebrew teacher, Yitzhak Shkarlat, who was also our classroom teacher. He was admired by us as both a teacher and an educator. Even though he was an employee of the *Al HaMishmar* group, led by Yitzhak Greenbaum, and would go off on pleasure trips during the summer on behalf of his group, nevertheless, he would imbue us with an ardent sense of nationalism. In the sixth grade of the gymnasium, he taught us the work of Uri Zvi Greenberg, ' Girded with a Shield, and the Oration of a Son of the Blood,' and required us to memorize passages from this work, and even to write compositions about it's themes. He also would select for us to learn the zealous poems of Yaakov Cohen, and I remember memorizing 'Lutsha, Lutsha, my Fortress.' When we later joined *Betar* (perhaps as a result of the influence of these poems), it was not with his consent. At the end of the school year, the entire class went out into the forest for a walk led by him, and he was shaken when he heard

[24] Reference to the Hebron Massacre perpetrated by the Arabs.

us singing, among other things,

Araber maygen shissen
Fiel blut mayg zikh gissen[25]

from the song, *Betar, Betar, Urah!*[26] He chastised us, saying that it was later than he thought...

After the events of 5689 (1927), almost the entire class left *Gordonia* and joined *Betar,* that began organizing itself in Volkovysk at that time, under the leadership of Shlomo Zohn-Mazya, a student of the Polish gymnasium, actually. I was among the last to join, because I was very wrapped up in socialist ideology, despite the fact that the socialism of *Gordonia*, as manifested in the '13 Tenets' of the movement written by A. D. Gordon, was rather lukewarm. I remember length conversations on this subject, with my friend Benjamin Berg, who was already a member of *Betar.* He assured me that *Betar* does not detract from a global perspective, and therefore has no fundamental differences with socialism, but all this needs to be postponed, seeing as there was no Jewish state in the Holy Land. Incidentally, I maintained my position for all the years I belonged to Betar, and when the Chairman of Betar, after the Danzig Conference, in expressing his thoughts on '*Betar's* world view,' based on the socialist philosophy of the *Tanakh*, I rose against this, to the point that I sent in an essay of rebuttal to the *Betar* leadership in Warsaw, and the Editor of the '*Betar Leader*,' Isaac Rembah, who published this essay along with another essay on the same subject, which was also published by Rembah in *Masada.*

As previously noted, I joined *Betar* in Volkovysk after it had been in existence for nearly a year. In this regard, the following of my classmates joined before me: ***Chaim Milkov***, who in this time had contributed from his writing to the *Betar* newspapers of Poland, and was one of the workers in the chapter, and afterwards became a member of the Vilna chapter; ***Yitzhak Yazhernitsky*** (later changed to ***Shamir)***. He was a member of the chapters in Volkovysk, Ruzhany, Bialystock, Warsaw, and in the Holy Land – a member of the *Irgun*, and afterwards as an officer of *Lehi.* From the younger grades of the local Hebrew gymnasium, the following were already members: ***Michael Ben-Joseph*** (Damashevitsky), who later became a member of *Lehi*, and who was arrested for carrying weapons and sentenced to five years in prison, which he served in the central prison in Jerusalem; ***Abraham Schein*** (Emikam), a colleague of Shlomo Ben-Joseph, who was sentenced to death and was spared because of his tender age, and served eight years in the prison at Acre; ***Yitzhak Barash***, a member of the *Irgun*, and the first graduate of the *Irgun's* flight school in 1939 (he was an outstanding student, and received a pilot's license, first class, in the Israel of the British Mandate). He died in 1944 from cancer at the age of 25, while he was still serving in the ranks of the British Army.

At the same time, we engaged in close-order drilling, first according to the methods of the Polish Army, but afterwards – when an instructor arrived who was a graduate sergeant of Yirmiyahu Halpern's organization – we switched to the *Betar* system used in Israel, that is, the British Army system. This was a means by which innovation was introduced into the midst of the youth movements of the city. A second innovation was the introduction of combat with poles, a skill that only we acquired, and because of it, we attracted accusations of 'militarism.' I also recall that 'militarism' also came from the way we issued the orders '*dom*' and '*noakh*' as opposed to the HaShomer HaTza'ir, which used the terminology '*hakshev.*'[27] The expression '*dom*,' in particular, was used to command silence from individuals, and all manner of comments were heaped on it. When I subsequently came to the Holy Land, it became clear to me, expressions like '*dom*' had become standard means of address in the *Haganah* and *Maccabi,* and all youth movements that engaged in drilling exercises, but that their counterparts outside

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[25] Arabs are allowed to shoot
Much blood may be spilled

[26] Betar, Betar, arise!

[27] Various alternatives for expressing military commands, such as 'quiet,' 'at ease,' and 'attention.'

of the Holy Land were not aware of this. As a sign of the 'dictatorial' nature of *Betar,* leaders were not selected by his comrades or disciples, but was appointed from the top down. After a number of years, it also became clear to me that pole fencing was one of the skills especially developed by members of the *Palmach,* but they referred to it as KPA"A.[28]

Because we did not have trained instructors in the arts of self-defense, we sent our people to the local Maccabi [chapter] for specific skill training, and there we would develop skills in self-defense: boxing, and fencing. Much later, the chapter organized, as was the case in other chapters throughout Poland, a military defense unit, and the unit received training in the style of the Polish Army, rifles, grenades, and theoretical lessons in defense against gas, camping, and the like.

I do not recollect the summer camping of the chapter, or the central office, but I do recall the participation of a number of our members in a national *Betar* meeting of Poland, that took place in Warsaw, and entailed putting up a large tent camp (its leaders were: Moshe Gold, David Stern, Yehuda Zhulkovitz/Alra'i, and perhaps also Nachman Soloveitchik).

Units, large and small, would participate in central meetings, and in this respect, I do remember our specific participation in a central meeting in Bialystock (summer of 1933), with the participation of the head of *Betar*. This was at the height of the atmosphere of great sadness that existed after the murder of Arlozorov, and to protect us, the *Brit HaHayal* of Bialystock was recruited to watch over us, under the leadership of Markus.

From the Volkovysk chapter, we would send nominees to the Halpern Foundation's course for sergeant training (the central course in Zhilunka, and the central course in Bialystock). To accomplish this, we used indirect methods, not sending our members directly to the training camps, because of the bad aura surrounding *Betar* training. By contrast to *HaShomer HaTza'ir, Betar* did not run it s training camps for education and leadership purposes, but solely for acquiring possession of emigration certificates for entry into the Holy Land. Because of this approach, most of the *olim* from our chapter were students, who received permission to make *aliyah* outside of the certificate process – but rather through permission to study at the Hebrew University.

In the area of spiritual and cultural activity, we engaged especially in the following subjects: The Origins of Zionism (first according to ***Yitzhak Greenbaum's*** book – and afterwards according to the book of ***Dr. Yaakov Tzinman***, in Yiddish). We would translation sections into Hebrew ourselves, more for the younger echelons. We did this because all the work was conducted in ***Hebrew***, and those who joined us who did not come from Hebrew schools, were required to study Hebrew and be tested during their initiation period. We also took great care, that in the regular course of business, that Hebrew was always spoken, and in this connection, I remember a contribution box for the benefit of *Keren Tel-Chai* was set near the ping-pong table, and everyone who uttered a word in Yiddish was required to drop a 'fine,' into the box. In order not to compromise the players, we devised Hebrew expressions for ping-pong. The second most important subject was ***Jewish Demography***, and I seem to remember we learned this out of special pamphlets provided by the *Betar* command in Poland. In our 'class,' we learned the basics from two books by ***Yitzhak Ben Zvi***: *"Our People in the Holy Land*" – about the different elements in the Jewish settlement there, and "*Peoples Of the Holy Land*," – About the Arabs, the Druze, Circassians, etc. All of us prepared ourselves at home, and then presented an entire chapter.

After the period of 1930-1933, there came a period of great contraction in the permissions to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land. Seeing as our chapter did

[28] The Hebrew acronym for *krav panim el panim,* which is literally, 'face to face combat.'

not sent its members for 'training,' only two basic ways were left for us to enter the Holy Land: ***Illegal immigration*** ,whose initial organizers came from the ranks of the revisionist movement, and *aliyah* via the ***Hebrew University***, which was outside of the certificate process from the perspective of the [Mandate] regime in Israel. And a number of us went via illegal immigration, after various adventures. Gymnasium graduates among us, naturally, prepared themselves to get in by way of the university. But for members of *Betar,* this path was also filled with obstacles. This was the period when the Jewish *Sokhnut* stripped *Betar* of its certificates, and even though the student certificates did not come under the aegis of the *Sokhnut*, it found the means to extend its oversight to this means of entry. It did this through the mechanism of the 'Israeli Offices,' that every arrival had to go through. Its staff would receive every applicant, and through secret correspondence with the members of the Zionist Histadrut in the applicant's home town, they would ask for 'clarifications,' and also details with regard to affiliations. In the last year before I went – in 1935 – I worked in the local Volkovysk chapter, and worked in the central office, before making *aliyah* in November of that same year. That same year***, Dr. Israel Scheib*** cam to the city as a Hebrew teacher in the gymnasium. I made his acquaintance immediately upon his arrival, because my home was a meeting place for the Hebrew teachers (my late father taught Hebrew) of the city. In my first conversation with him, I saw that he was sympathetic to our movement, and was even willing to be active. He immediately stood out as a much beloved teacher, who enthralled his students both in and out of the classroom. I would carry on many ideological conversations with him, and I was greatly impressed by the depth of his thought processes, and the ardor of his feelings. I decided to direct his interests specifically towards *Betar* and not *Tzahar,* and I spoke to him about it at great length. And, with my departure for the Holy Land, Scheib received the position to lead the chapter, ion which he served until 1937, and if I am not mistaken, that was the time he went to Vilna to take a position as an instructor at the Hebrew Teacher's Seminary. We corresponded with one another until the outbreak of the Second World War. From his *Betar* correspondence, I learned of his successes in leading the chapter. He would appear in Betar regalia, lead discussions, and would round out his educational contribution to the chapter - by giving lessons in the gymnasium (most of whose students were members of Betar at the time).

Along with *Betar*, the following organizations were active in Volkovysk at that time: ***Brit HaTzahar***, which had a very nicely organized branch, and even had two of its officers in the municipal governing committee; ***Brit HaHayal***, who on one side, organized all the 'strong-arms' of the town: porters, train workers, wagon drivers, and the like, and on the other side – a well-defined part of the intelligentsia of the city: teachers, doctors, lawyers, and the like; ***Gordonia*** – a sports organization affiliated with the athletic branch of the national revisionists of the same name. In the last year before I made *aliyah*, a branch of ***Veref*** was organized, the organization of revisionist women. Relationships among the Jabotinsky-affiliated organizations were proper, and there were only a few points of contention between *Gordonia* and *Betar*. In Volkovysk, it was not a chore to organize the revisionist students into *Masada*, as was the case in the rest of Poland, and this was because of the majority of the students in the local chapter as recruits, and teachers – as leaders and directors. The chapter members received direction also from the principal of the *Tarbut* School in the city, ***Shimon Gottesfeld***, a scholar and educator from Galicia, ands a venerable member of the revisionist movement (he published a volume with vowels for young people called, 'The Power of Youth, sponsored by *Keren Tel-Chai*). He was killed in the Holocaust.

Page 57: The Betar Chapter (1938)

The Gordonia Youth Movement

by A. Novick

Page 58, Top: A Group of Gordonia Members
Bottom: The Gordonia Chapter

Page 59: New Gordonia Disciples
LtoR: Rosa Cantor, Genya Lashowitz, Fanya Greenberg

Young people from all segments of the population joined the *Gordonia* youth movement, pupils of the various educational institutions, members of the magnificent orphanage in our city, youth that worked and studied, from all colors of the rainbow. All of these found a warm reception in Gordonia, which instructed in Zionism, pioneering, and the recognition of the principles enunciated by A. D. Gordon.

Life in the chapter was always busy. The place hummed like a beehive: *Oneg Shabbat* parties, *melaveh malke* parties toward nightfall on Saturdays, celebrations, book debates, and the like. All this was in addition to the basic training done according to the direction of the movement leadership, aimed at inculcating the new recruits with the ideals of the movement, and implanting the disciplines of Zionist-pioneers, on which the movement had been founded in the first place. There were many instances when the parents of the members were attracted to the work of the movement, and thereby were stimulated into participating as well, and it was in this way that the *Gordonia* leadership was able to infuse a Zionist-pioneering spirit into the homes of its members, and in that process, converted many parents into participants in the summer settlements and camps of the movement, which was an inseparable part of the standard educational activities.

The disciples of the movement and its graduates participated in Zionist community activities in all areas, but the Gordonia members stood out especially in presentations and national holidays: Balfour Declaration Day 20 *Tammuz,* Lag B'Omer, etc. What can be gathered from our interests, is that the disciples of Gordonia joined up with all nationalist fund-raising, and manifested a great deal of work on behalf of the Zionist funds, and *Kapai* (*Kupat Poalei Eretz Yisrael*). It is worth noting, that *Gordonia* supported activities to help those who were distressed or in need, and the organizers of such events knew that they could always count on being helped by the members of the movement, and that they would put their shoulder to the wheel for every humanistic, philanthropic initiative.

The Volkovysk branch of *Gordonia* was considered to be one of the outstanding branches in our vicinity, and the disciples were tasked to fulfil the thirteen 'Tenets' that were set down by the central leadership, and publicized in the membership handbook of the movement. A number of these 'Tenets,' are worth recording now, because their bear witness to the spirit of the *Gordonia* movement in those days:

★ Draw close to nature and become attached to it.

★

★ Bring the harmony and simplicity of the working man into your life and surroundings.

★ Look opportunity in the face to understand it without turning aside.

★ Guard your own independence, but be open to the ideas of others.

★ Feel yourself to be in solidarity with those who suffer and are the less fortunate in your midst.

★ Resist evil and injustice, and fight for community justice, and human decency.

★ Direct your thinking and your daily deeds towards the purpose of community tradition, to your people, and humankind, even when the means have not been made available.

I have reproduced only some of the 'Tenets,' but I must underscore that to us, the educators in *Gordonia*, it was not that simple to instill these 'Tenets' in our disciples, and it was even harder – to turn concept into reality. I am certain that the youth of today, even if they are in various youth movements, will smile, and even laugh, when they read the thirteen 'Tenets,' but we abided by these 'Tenets,' which was expressed in the idiomatic Hebrew of that day, with the full seriousness that we undertook our many efforts, in order that our disciples would abide by them with equal seriousness, and conduct their daily lives by their precepts.

The graduates of the movement were active in the *HeHalutz* movement, and in preparation for aliyah, they engaged in training at all the training locations of the *Halutz* movement in Poland. The first of the *Gordonia* disciples to make *aliyah,* was ***Daniel Kaganovich***, ז"ל, who after a number of years of work in the Holy Land, joined the settlement of *Beit-Shearim*. He married Bayl'keh Pikarsky, also a graduate of the movement, who was also from Volkovysk, and they established a household that was the pride of the settlement. Among the early *Gordonia olim*, it is worth recalling ***Chaim Kaplan,*** who became a member of kibbutz *Ma'aleh HaKhamisha,* but there also were other members who realize the ideals towards which they had been indoctrinated in different areas, in activities of the Labor *Histadrut,* management, and various positions that they were asked to assume in the kibbutz movement.

Before the Second World War broke out, a group of *Gordonia* graduates left for naval training in the Polish city of Gdynia, for the purpose of establishing a naval unit in the Holy Land after they completed their training. At the same time, there were other seeds in Gdynia for the establishment of a naval unit, by other movements, and there were young people from Volkovysk in those units as well.

It is worth noting, that there was another group operating in Gdynia that carried on a clandestine operation to get Jewish people into the Holy Land as pickers of the orange crops. One of the daring operatives in this area was Katriel Lashowitz from Volkovysk.

After the Russians invaded Volkovysk at the beginning of the Second World War, when it became clear that all Zionist activity would be silenced, and that *aliyah* to the Holy Land would be forbidden, a group of *Gordonia* members succeeded, on the basis of a briefing from the center of the movement, to reach Vilna, then still under the Lithuanian regime, by a circuitous route, where a group organized itself to prepare to reach the Holy Land. After the Russians captured Vilna again, many of the graduates of the movement were exiled to Siberia, and only few succeeded despite this, to get into the Holy Land by unspecified means, and among these were, ***Eliezer Bliakher*** and ***Yitzhak Shalkovich*** from our city. With the end of the Second World War, the survivors that remained in Russia returned to Poland, among them, ***Hanokh Pick, Jedediah Katz, Nakhum and Shimon Roznitsky***, who did as best as they could to re-establish the movement anew, and worked towards escape, and the daring crossings of the Austrian and German borders. There were also members of the movements among the partisan units , and also in the various concentration camps. To our great sorrow, only very few succeeded to run the gamut of tribulation and withstand all the trials, and those that reached Israel, began their lives all over again.

Maccabi

Page 60: A Group of Maccabi Athletes

Page 61, Top:
Left: Maccabi Soccer Team Before WW II
Right: Facsimile of Maccabi Membership Card in Hebrew and Polish

Bottom:
Left: Maccabi Soccer Team
Right: Maccabi Bicycle Club

Sports activities among Jewish youth began in the

'20s of the current [sic: 20th] century. On the basis of Dr. Einhorn's book, and on news reports from the *Volkovysker Leben*, it was Monya Goldberg who mad the initial effort to get this started. He came to Volkovysk from another city, where he had worked diligently on initiatives of this nature, and seeing that his connection in Volkovysk was with a specific youth group (*Kruzhok*), he attempted to draw that group closer to sports and physical education. The most popular sport appears to have been soccer, and accordingly, he organized a soccer team among the members of the group, and after a short training period, he organized matches between the team that he had established, and the soccer team of Polish youth that already existed in the city.

After a short time, Dr. David Tropp (the dentist), Dr. F. Bebchuk, and Mulya Schein founded the *Maccabi* organization in Volkovysk, which was transformed into the anchor for all sporting activities. Thanks to Sioma Gallin, who was able to obtain the support of The 'Joint,' the necessary sports equipment was procured, but the subsidy was not sufficient to cover the cost of premises, and the *Maccabi* membership would meet in homes, although training was done on the large field that was behind the public school.

In stepwise fashion, *Maccabi* began to branch out into other sports, such as: gymnastics, basketball, ping-pong, ice-skating, bicycle riding, Swedish gymnastics, light athletics, swimming, etc. In the later thirties, special groups were established in *Maccabi* for 11-12 year-olds, a separate section for boxing, and a separate group for women.

Malka Rutchik relates:

"I was a student all my years in a Polish school, and it was forbidden for students of this school to belong to a Zionist organization. I excelled in sports, especially in the high jump and running. Despite the prohibition, I decided to join *Maccabi* in 1934.

In 1937, *Maccabi* sent me to complete a special course in physical education at a government camp in Grodno, during the major vacation period. I succeeded in getting a certificate as an instructor of physical education at this camp, and from that time on, until the Russians entered Volkovysk in 1939, I was very active in *Maccabi.* I organized coursed in gymnastics for the young people, who practiced in the hall and out on the field, we facilitated all sorts of light athletic exercises and various sports. A Polish officer, Shivak, of the rank *Khoronzhy,* used to come and give us fencing lessons. From time to time, we would organize sports festivals at Botvinsky's *Sharon* Cinema, and we would put on demonstrations of gymnastics, wrestling, fencing, etc. Periodically, our group would travel to Slonim, Grodno and Bialystock to compete in various appearances in those cities. On weekends, we would organize evening dances with the participation of an orchestra, and many people came to participate in the pleasantry. The revenues from admissions and food were, naturally, earmarked for *Maccabi*."

Over time, the core activists left Volkovysk and made *aliyah* to the Holy Land, among them Mulya Schein and Chaim Khvonyik. One of our outstanding athletes, Aharon Podolinsky, also left the city, as did the *Maccabi* soccer star, Moteleh Shifran.

It is worth noting, that in addition to sports activities, Maccabi also had an interest in cultural and spiritual pursuits. Discussions and presentations were organized on Jewish and Zionist topics, and public readings were held, in order to fulfil the well-known *Maccabi motto* – '*A healthy mind in a healthy body*.' At its peak, *Maccabi* had over two hundred active members in all of its different sections, from all strata of the Jewish population in the city. The budget was covered by membership dues, and mostly by the income from the festive dances and sporting exhibitions that were put on for this purpose.

Even the Polish government organizations should proper respect for *Maccabi* in their relationship, thanks to its many connections, and they were invited many times to participate in public celebrations, and festive exhibitions and parades. At the tenth anniversary of the founding of *Maccabi*, a parade through the city streets was organized, accompanied by an orchestra and with the participation of emissaries from many and various sports organizations from the vicinity.

In addition to *Maccabi,* various other movements established sporting activities. The Bund accomplished this through the establishment of the *Morgenstern* Club, the Revisionists – through the *Gordonia* Club, as recorded in the JKS organization newspapers.

A nationalist spirit coursed through *Maccabi*, and the uniform dress was in the colors of white and blue, its hymn was *HaTikva,* but despite this, there were also non-Zionist youth that also belonged, and it had adherents from all shades of opinion. Yiddish and Polish were spoken during training exercises.

The *Bund*

Page 62: *Youth Group of the Bund with the Chapter Leader, Yaakov Rubinstein.*

Page 63: *The Mikhalevich Group of Zukunft*

The Bundist movement began to develop in our city at the same time, and in the same way, as it did in all the cities and towns of the Pale of Settlement in those days. This was in the final years of the 19th century, after the *Bund* was established in Vilna, and the news of this reached unorganized Jewish workers in Volkovysk. With the assistance of teachers, students and plain intelligentsia, who came to Volkovysk in the summer, the hour of the proletarian revolution reached our city. These were the ones who planted the first seeds that took hold and bore fruit. The themes for the struggle to achieve decent working conditions, higher salaries, an 8-hour day, etc., went from mouth-to-mouth, and the recognition of the need to make a stand, penetrated into all the working places, factories and plants where there were Jewish laborers. According to what is told in Dr. Einhorn's book, the first strike in Volkovysk took place over the *'discontinuance of Saturday night work*,' – which was the usual practice in those days, because the rank and file would start their work week already on Saturday night. Employers did not yield, and in fact hired scabs to replace the strikers, but in the end, the strikers won, and Saturday night work was discontinued.

This first victory encouraged the Jewish workers, and it was then that organization began on a larger scale, especially in those groups (*Kruzhok*) in which the guiding spirit was Chaim Nemzer, a student who had come from Vilna, and taught Russian. He and the other activists yearned not only to improve the economic condition of the workers, but also to raise their cultural level, to instill enlightenment in them, and eradicate ignorance. The public library established by these workers was transformed into a center for study and explication. One could obtain reading materials from different political persuasions, popular scientific periodicals, and also illegal publications. The heads of the *Kruzhok* knew how to attract workers to their ranks. Initially, they would provide their readers with cheap novels, books that attracted them, and after they became inured in their borrowing, they were made aware of their requirement to 'ingest' more serious books – they would be lent books with a socialist, revolutionary theme, and in this way attracted them into *Kruzhok*, secret meetings, learning revolutionary songs, etc.

Towards the end of the 19th century, there were already several hundred workers in Volkovysk, who worked primarily in Yanovsky's tobacco factory, and in a sewing factory, a beer brewery, and a defined part of them who worked for carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, etc. These workplaces, where the owners knew how to take advantage of their employees by exploiting them, provided the human capital for the groups that afterwards established the *Bund.* Every one of the committee members of *Kruzhok* (and there were 10-12 of them) oversaw a group of 10 members. The meetings were conducted in ordinary houses, and occasionally in the *Tiferet Bakhurim* Synagogue... during the summer months they would enter the *Zamovka* Forest, and occasionally, '*Mayak*,' out of concern for the unsympathetic oversight of the police, who stood guard, overlooking the entire area, and would issue a warning when necessary, because all of these get-togethers were illegal. And so, in this way, the

members could spread out ands relax on the grass, to listen to revolutionary speeches, inflammatory representations of their leadership, and be certain that the long arm of the regime would not reach them.

By and large, they did not only listed to speeches. In the secret meetings, they also ruled on various proposals, among which were expropriations in order to raise money for revolutionary actions. The local constabulary, scrutinized these suspects of revolutionary activities with 'seven eyes,' but this did not deter the active members of *Kruzhok*. When Berel Dzhik was arrested for his political activities, the members of *Kruzhok* succeeded in prying the bars of the jail apart and freed him. He was hidden in the house of Baylah-Rivka, and when the police began to search about, and reached his hideout – he sneaked out the back door, disguised as an old woman.

In time, the members of *Kruzhok* and their supporters transformed themselves into a powerful bloc, that used to frequently display its might in the Jewish neighborhood. A funeral for one of its members would be transformed into a display of power, as well as visits from members of the central *Bund* office, who frequently visited Volkovysk. It is because of this, that the Bund old-timers tell about a visit by Wladek from the central office in Warsaw (who was nicknamed the 'Young LaSalle'), which was turned into a display of force, and dealt a serious blow to the development of the *Bund.* It is interesting that the big speech that Wladek gave was in the *Bet-HaMedrash* of Folkov-Lev....

Frequently, central congresses and get-togethers would be organized in Volkovysk by the *Bund*, and undertaking anti-Zionist endeavors was, as you can understand, one of their central agenda items. With the establishment of additional manufacturing facilities in the city, and with the growth in the number of Jewish workers – the *Bund* also grew, and it seems, that in the late twenties and thirties, its development peaked. In the election for the city government in 1939, the Bund succeeded in attracting three thousand votes, and three of its members were elected to the municipal council: Sh. Ravitzky, Yitzhak Merkin (a teacher), and L. Schlossberg . The officers of the committee of the movement in this period were: Sh. Lev, Shakhnovich and Lifschitz.

There were intensive cultural activities carried out during the thirties in the offices of the movement: evening classes, celebrations, public discussions, presentations on science, popular matters, etc.

Preparing its young for regular membership was accomplished through the youth movement, *Zukunft*, a children's organization, (*Sakif)*, and a sports club (*Morgenstern*).

There is no doubt, that the *Bund* chapter in our city, which had its ups and downs, raised the standing of the Jewish workers, awakened their self-awareness, but along with this, also propagated an anti-Zionist ideology that caused its members to prefer to remain in the diaspora, rather than make *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

Jewish Activity In the Communist Party

by Nechama Schein-Weissman

The majority of the young people in our city belonged to Zionist organizations.

I first belonged to *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, but I was among the minority who took the extra step that turned *HaShomer HaTza'ir* over to the communists. While I was still a student at the *Tarbut* gymnasium, I engaged in ideological conversations with my teachers, My instructor in the gymnasium said to me: 'This is a real *goyeh*.' What he was trying to say, is that I was no Zionist, but he did not want to sully his tongue with the word,'communist.' Even now, as I recollect those days, I am convinced that I came to communism purely on humanitarian grounds. Camaraderie, straightness, social justice, etc., were noble ideals in my view, and I believed that these were to be found among the ranks of the communists. I learned dialectical materialism after

a while with the man who would become my husband, Shlomo Markus. Everything that took place, or was done in the Soviet Union was, from our perspective, sacrosanct. We could tolerate no criticism of the communist regime. When we read André Gide's story (translated into Yiddish), in which he rains down criticism on the Soviet Union, and heated critique of various steps taken by the Soviet regime, we made the immediate decision: he has sold himself to the imperialists. My friend Shlomo (Markus) and the members of his family, were known in the city as being sympathetic to 'the other way,' – meaning communism.

When I graduated from the gymnasium in 1935, I was hired as a secretary at the gymnasium. At this opportunity, it is worth correcting a number of inaccuracies, concerning the gymnasium, that are found in Dr. Einhorn's book abut Volkovysk. On page 123 of his book, it says that the name of the gymnasium was changed from *Hertzeliya*, to '*The Chaim Nachman Bialik Hebrew Gymnasium*.' This never happened. On page 124 in the same book, it states that before the outbreak of the Second World War, there was a second gymnasium called *Tarbut*, whose principal was Wolfstahl. Actually, this was the very same *Hertzeliya* school, whose name had been changed to *Tarbut*, in the same location at Number 120 *Kosciuszko Gasse* next to the jail in Amstibovsky's building. It is true that there was a dispute in 1937 regarding the establishment of another gymnasium. It was Shereshevsky who was behind this idea, who had decided to establish a commercial gymnasium, and he had M. Sakhar on his side, who was the principal of that gymnasium, and was opposed by Dr. Weinberg, who supported our gymnasium. All the arguments over this issue were held at Dr. Weinberg's house, and I participated in them. There were two aspects against the establishment of this gymnasium in the debate. One – a serious one, that if a second such gymnasium were established, it would cause financial damage to our gymnasium through the loss of students, and the second reason was a conceptual and ideological one, because in a commercial gymnasium all of the instruction would be conducted in the Polish language, at the time when the principal language of instruction at our gymnasium was Hebrew. Despite the opposition to the commercial gymnasium, it was established, and in this way, the city acquired another institution of learning.

And it is worth correcting yet another inaccuracy regarding the work of Dr. Scheib. On page 118, it says that Dr. Scheib was the principal who was responsible for the Yavneh School, but the truth is that Dr. Scheib began his pedagogical career in Volkovysk in 1935 as a teacher at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium – in the same year that I began to work for that institution as a secretary. I felt it necessary to set the record straight here, and now I will return to the main theme of the thoughts I wished to clarify in my writing: my connection with Dr. Markus and our work in the communist party. My acquaintance with Shlomo Markus began in 1936, when he was still a student at the University of Bologna in Italy. He graduated in July 1937, and returned to Volkovysk. And from that time on, our paths did not diverge until the outbreak of the Russian-German War.

The Polish government did not recognize Shlomo's Doctorate from an Italian University, and also did not permit him to stand for examinations in Poland. It was in this fashion that they blocked his way to the practice of medicine, as they block the way of many of his comrades that also graduated from that university. As previously mentioned, the entire Markus family were communists, and served sentences in Polish prisons at various times. Their house was dominated by a high cultural level, and it is worth noting that it also served as a place for communist activity. Shlomo's father owned a small tannery, but on ideological grounds, he did not hire salaried workers, and only his younger son helped him out a little. The father raised vegetables in the yard of the house for the use of the family only. He gave his children a Spartan upbringing. Shlomo would wash himself by the well in the yard even in the winter.

The house was a house opened to all left-wing people. Shlomo imbibed communist ideology from his father, as well as the inclination to dedicate his life to these ideals. Even in the time when there were no opportunities to work as a physician – Shlomo volunteered at the Jewish hospital in

Volkovysk. He established the '*Drops of Milk*' initiative alongside *TO"Z* (The Jewish Health Organization) – the organization that was headed by Sioma Gallin at that time, and the support to do this, he received from Vilna in the course of some time. Apart from this, Shlomo would sever people who needed medical help, without pay. But not only that, he would, at times, pay for their medicines out of his own pocket.

With the outbreak of the war on September 1, 1939, a fundamental change took place in all aspects of our life. The Poles held their ground against the Germans for only for a few days. I remember the very night , when the Poles abandoned the city, and the Russians had not yet arrived, I was at the home of the Markuses. That was a night of predation. Anti-Semitic Poles killed a number of Jews in the city. I, and Leah Rubin, also a known communist, found a hiding place in Jonah Trunsky's warehouse, neighbors of the Markus family. When dawn broke, Shlomo, Leah and I came out of the warehouse, in order to start our community work, and how happy we were to see the appearance of the first Soviet tanks. It is hard to find the words to express what we felt in our hearts at that moment. We leapt up on the tanks out of joy, and the hope for a new life that would now begin, a good life that would be elevated by the ideals to which we has oriented and dedicated ourselves. We had the feeling then as if we had conquered the world and everything in it, and everything from now on would take on a different appearance.

As great as our joy was – that's how great was the disappointment on our part after only a very short time. Yet, not all of our ideals were shattered into bits, but regarding freedom, justice, truth, that we could forget about already....

In the first instance, our situation underwent significant improvement. Thanks to his political activity and his work in the Communist Party, Shlomo was appointed to important positions. He was appointed head of the Jewish Hospital, and Head of the Community Sanitation Station. Seeing as many epidemics were raging in the area at that time, Shlomo would travel from village to village on a horse reserved for his use, and oversee the health of the village residents. My sister Tzirel and I worked with dedication and diligence at the bank after we were prepared for these positions by taking special courses in this connection. It is necessary to say that the life of the Jews under Soviet occupation proceeded in an undisturbed manner. It was possible to study, to get ahead on one's job, there were no signs of anti-Semitism, but there were clear and sharp signs of 'anti-capitalism.' And we cannot forget, in this connection, the transports that used cattle cars, which were sent to Siberia. This was the way capitalist elements were driven out. In the course of time, it became evident that only thanks to this exile, did many remain alive.

We did not complain about all the shortcomings and omissions that were revealed under the new regime. We lived in the hope that in the passage of time, as the new regime would establish itself, these shortcomings would disappear. We continued doing our work under the 'new order,' hoping for the best. This was the way things continued until June 22, 1941 – the day Germany invaded Russia.

The Germans bombed the city on the first day, and there were many wounded. Shlomo spent the entire day in the hospital at his post, and only got home for a few hours late in the night. We were sensitive to the fact that if the Germans entered the city, we would be the very first victims. Shlomo said to me then: "I cannot leave the hospital. Such a thing would be seen as if it were desertion from the front, but you and your family must leave as soon as possible. I have a horse, and when things settle down – we'll meet at the Heath Office in Minsk." (What naïveté to even think such a thing at that time!).

I left the city with my two sisters, with Shlomo's Doctor's diploma in my hands. My mother stayed behind with the family of her sister, who had arrived in Volkovysk from Bialystock. She did not want to join us, because she was very religious, and she argued: "*If I travel with you – I will die of hunger, because I will not eat non-kosher food*." Her fate was that of all the other Jews of Volkovysk.

When we reached Minsk, the entire city was in flames. We continued to travel into the heart of the

Soviet Union, and we reached Uzbekistan. I found out about everything that Shlomo Markus went through afterwards, from various eye witnesses, and from writings that were published in books about the partisans, the Yizkor Book of the town of *Zhetl,* and the book of Dr. Isaac Goldberg.

And here is what we read in the Book of the Partisans from one witness:

"In Nakrishok, about fourteen kilometers from *Zhetl,* Germans came to get food supplies. There were four partisans in the village. Two escaped to their brigade, and two were surrounded by the Germans. One of those taken, was the Jewish doctor, Markus. His non-Jewish comrade was killed in the battle. Dr. Markus was wounded, and shot himself, so as not to fall into the hands of the Germans."

In the Book, 'A Hand for the Fighters, it is said of Dr. Markus:

"A doctor, born in 1910 in Volkovysk. He was in the Zhetl ghetto. He established strong ties to the underground in the ghetto. Prepared medicines for the hospital set up for the partisans. Went into the forest in 10.4.1942, equipped with medical supplies. Served in the Lenin Brigade of the Vorova *Otryad*[29] in the Lipiczany Forest. Provided medical aid to the partisans in the entire area, and to the local population. Fell in September 1942, while providing assistance in the village of Nakrishok. Surrounded by Germans, and deliberately committed suicide."

[29] A larger Russian military unit, comprised of many brigades.

Religious Life

Rabbis and Dayans

There is no doubt, that by the 17th century, when there were hundreds of Jews already living in Volkovysk, and the Jewish congregations were beginning to develop, that there were Rabbis in the city, however, sadly, we have been unable to find evidence and support for this assumption in the various writings and diaries we have. We are depending, for our views here, on the material assembled by Dr. M. Einhorn, and published in his book, and on a number of other sources that deal with this subject.

The First Rabbis

Rabbi Avigdor occupied the city pulpit in the mid 18th century. At that time, *Rabbi Gaon Eliyahu ben Shlomo-Zalman* was Chief Rabbi of Vilna, nicknamed the *Gaon of Vilna* (*HaGer"A*), and there is no doubt that he cast his aura over all the Jewish communities of the districts of Grodno, Bialystock, including Volkovysk. It is almost certain, that because of the influence of the Gaon of Vilna, who fought the Hasidic movement, that the Jewish congregations of Volkovysk were almost entirely '*Mitnagdim*.[30]'

After Rabbi Avigdor's death, ***Rabbi Benjamin Diskin*** took the rabbinical seat of the city, who was a son-in-law of a distinguished and wealthy man of the city. Two of the sons of Rabbi Benjamin, Rabbi Yehoshua-Leib, and Rabbi Abraham-Shmuel became known as great Torah scholars of their day, and their reputations spread throughout the diaspora.

[30] Literally 'opponents.' Used as a sobriquet for the Jews, largely Lithuanians, who opposed the Hasidic movement, established by *Rabbi Israel Baal-Shem Tov* (the *Besht*).

The first, Rabbi Moshe Yehoshua Yehuda Leib, born in 1817, became famous even as a child as an exceptional intellect, and served as a Rabbi in the cities of Lomza, Mezritch, Kovno and Shklov, and beginning in the year 5633 (1872) became the Rabbi of Brisk in Lithuania. In the summer of 5736 (1875), he made *aliyah* to the Holy Land and settled in Jerusalem. One of the reasons for his leaving Brisk, was a judgement brought against him by the local authorities who entangled even the Rabbi, for which he served a short time in jail. He was the Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazic community in Jerusalem, and was enthusiastically received by the old *Yishuv*. Nevertheless, he lived in a world of Torah, and yet at the same time, he was active in several community institutions. The crowning piece of his community work was – the establishment of an orphanage (in the year 5640/1879), named for him. By establishing this institution, he thought to 'save' children from the orphanage of Dr. Hertzberg, where foreign languages were also taught. Rabbi Diskin directed Yeshiva *Ohel Moshe,* that later was called *Tiferet Jerusalem*, and even taught there. Among the books that he wrote, it is worth noting: '*Torat Ohel Moshe*'; Questions & Answers; '*Pnei Moshe*.'

The second son of Rabbi Benjamin, ***Rabbi Abraham-Shmuel***, worked mostly on the dissemination of Torah in Volkovysk. During his time, and thanks to him,. The Yeshiva in Volkovysk grew and developed, and many young men were attracted to it from all nearby communities. Different sources testify, that Rabbi Abraham-Shmuel was particularly outstanding as a Torah reader on the Sabbath, and the *Alter Mauer Bet HaMedrash* was filled from one end to the other with Jews who came expressly to enjoy his reading.

It is worth taking note, that in the same year that [Moshe Yehoshua] Yehuda Leib Diskin was born (5677-1817), ***Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor*** was born in the nearby town of Ros', who in the fullness of time became the dominant figure, and leading personality in the rabbinical world. In his youth,

Isaac Elchanan was a pupil of Rabbi Benjamin Diskin, and even received his rabbinical ordination from him, and already at the age of 20, had been designated as the Rabbi of Izavelin, in the Volkovysk vicinity, and many years later, his reputation went out to all of Jewry, as the Chief Rabbi of Kovno. It is told that every time Rabbi Isaac Elchanan would travel to pay his respects at the cemetery where his parents were interred, in his home town of Ros', that he would pass through Volkovysk, and all the Jews would come out to receive him.

Rabbi Boruch-Mordechai Lifschitz, a pupil of Rabbi Benjamin Diskin, ascended to the Rabbinate of Volkovysk after the death of Rabbi Abraham-Shmuel. He established the Volkovysk Yeshiva in 5747 (1887), published the book, '*Brit Yaakov*,' and achieve a reputation as a great Torah scholar.

With the passing of Rabbi Boruch-Mordechai, two rabbis served as spiritual leaders in Volkovysk: ***Rabbi Yitzhak-Isaac Khaver***, who left after a time to go to Tictin, and he is also the author of '*Questions & Answers Regarding World Development*,' lectures on the *Shas*, and '*Bet Yitzhak*,' and ***Rabbi Yekhiel Heller***, a scion form the family tree of the well-known Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman Heller, the author of '*Tosafot Yom-Tov*.' He was born in 1814, and in addition to Volkovysk, also served in Glusk, Suwalk, and Plungian. Apart from his book, '*Amudei HaOr*,'
he wrote an essay in German on the '*Eight Chapters*' of the *Rambam*.

Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg who took the Rabbinical seat of Volkovysk afterwards, became famous as one of the great *Gaonim* of Torah in his day. He was a scholar and a man of ideas, and was in correspondence with the leading minds of Torah scholarship of his day, who gave him both respect and recognition. He smoothed the way for the concept of '*Hibat Tzion*' among the Jews of Volkovysk (see Rabbi Kossowsky's memoir in this book). Among his books : '*Kesset Yonatan*,' and '*Sefer HaMidot*.' There are those who say, that because of his influence, the Jews of Volkovysk began to manifest an interest in the Holy Land, and in settling there, and a few of them made *aliyah* to the Holy Land.

Rabbi Abba-Yaakov Borukhov

With the death of Rabbi Eliasberg, at too early an age, the pulpit in Volkovysk remained vacant for four years, and there was no Rabbi in the city, until the position was filled by ***Rabbi Abba-Yaakov Borukhov***, who received his rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor.

He began his tenure as Rabbi of Volkovysk in 5663 (1903), and during his entire tenure, and earned the affection and enthusiasm of the entire Jewish population. Even the members of the *Bund* would come to hear his sermons in synagogue. Thanks to his work and great influence, quantitatively and qualitatively, the local Yeshiva and the number of its students reached three hundred. In the well-known book by Shmuel Noah Gottleib, '*Tents of Peace*,' it is told that the students of the Yeshiva were divided into five classes, and in the final class they studied Gemara and the Tosafot, several pages a week with great interest. The costs of running the Yeshiva on an annual basis came to only four thousand rubles, excluding the costs of food and clothing for needy students. The sons of the Rabbi: the oldest, Rabbi Yekhiel-Mikhl, was a great Torah scholar, with advanced ordination, and the second, Rabbi Dov-Ber, was the Head Rabbi of the city of Malden (near Boston) in the United States.

In this connection, three of his sons are described in Dr. Einhorn's book: one is a well-known Jewish writer, the second is the director of a Hygiene Unit in the Hadassah Hospital (both in Jerusalem) – and the third – a Rabbi in Malden.

It is especially worth emphasizing the great amount of work done by Rabbi Borukhov to instill the Zionist ideal, and to strengthen Zionist activity among the Jews of Volkovysk. He was one of the first donors to the various national funds, and he would solicit a great deal from those who came to his home on behalf of these funds. He also set aside

some of his time for special community institutions, helping the poor and the sick to the best of his abilities. His name attracted praise even in the non-Jewish community, and he was frequently asked by Christians to adjudicate their disputes with Jews, and his ruling would be accepted by them.

Rabbi Borukhov's book, '*Questions & Answers, Hevel Yaakov*,' was published in two volumes. This book also includes an exchange of correspondence with Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor.

When he reached the fiftieth anniversary of being a Rabbi, in the year 5683(1923), he decided to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land, and settle in Jerusalem. Even in Jerusalem, he worked a great deal toward the elevation of Torah and strengthening it, and he was greatly beloved by all members of the community. He passed away in 1936, and his death elicited great sorrow from the Jewish community. An extensive article by K. G. Harkavy appeared in the May 8, 1936 edition of *Volkovysker Leben* on the personality and outlook of Rabbi Borukhov, and among everything else, it said:

"We have lost one of the spiritual giants of our generation, the clearest expositor of Jewish lore, a formidable Torah scholar, and a unique figure in the annals of the Rabbinate, a great man and leader in Jewry – he was the icon of a patriarchal leader to the city, and a matriarchal figure to all Israel – his book, *Hevel Yaakov*, is one of the best books on Halakha, in which both thoroughness and analysis are blended, depth and casuistry – he was an inspiration, and everyone who came in contact with him enjoyed his fatherly touch, the light of his face, and his readiness to help anyone in need of any form of assistance."

Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky

After Rabbi Borukhov made aliyah to the Holy Land, ***Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky*** assumed the pulpit in Volkovysk. His tenure lasted from the beginning of 5685 (1925) until the end of 5693 (1933), when he left for South Africa, and served as the Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg and the territories of the Transvaal. Rabbi Kossowsky was not only the Rabbi of Volkovysk, but also a leader of Orthodox Jewry in all of Poland, who attended all Rabbinical congresses, and had obtained a respected place among the religious Jewish leadership of Poland's Jews. In Vilna, he married the daughter[31] of the famous scholar Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky After the death of his father-in-law, in 5664 (1902), he took his place as the Rabbi of the town of Ivie[32], and in 1916 was forced to leave Ivie for political reasons, and then served in the city of Mariupol until 1922, when he then left the Soviet Union. Rabbi Kossowsky received his Rabbinical ordination from many leading Rabbis and Scholars of the day, among them Rabbi David Friedman (Kaoline) from Pinsk, Rabbi Chaim [Soloveitchik] from Brisk. In 1946, he published his book, '*Sabbath and the Festivals*' that was received with acclaim. This book contains a majority of the Rabbi's sermons (see the remarks by Rabbi Kossowsky regarding Volkovysk and its Rabbis, in a chapter of this book). Two of the Rabbi's sons settled in Israel, and one of them is the lawyer, David-Shlomo Shakhor-Kossowsky. The second son, Mikhl, served as the Rabbi of Zelva, and went to South Africa afterwards, returning to Israel, and he too, is a lawyer.

After Rabbi Kossowsky went to South Africa, ***Rabbi Yitzhak Rabinovich***, born in Moteleh (near Pinsk), served as Rabbi of Volkovysk..With the entry of the Germans into the city, he and his family went to Szczucin, where his parents lived, and he was killed together with the Jews of that city.[33]

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31 This is incorrect. It was the *sister* of *Rabbi Chaim Ozer*, and when she died, later the *niece* of *Rabbi Chaim Ozer*. Both were named *Feyge*, and Rabbi Yitzhak had issue from both marriages.

32 This correctly refers to his father-in-law, *Rabbi Gaon David Shlomo Grodzhensky*, the Rabbi of Ivie.

33 Reference is made to this in the *Szczucin Yizkor Book.*

A Visit With Rabbi Borukhov

From the Diary of Eliyahu Shykevich

When I found out that the *Rebbetzin* had died, the wife of Rabbi Borukhov, I felt a need to pay him a visit, since he was one of my most loyal friends. I also wanted to discharge the *mitzvah* of comforting the bereaved, and at the same time, I thought I would engage the Rabbi's advice regarding the area of public life to which I had best devote my time and energy. It gnawed on me, that the difficult economic circumstances in the Rabbi's home, during the war years, hastened the premature death of the *Rebbetzin.* Despite this, the Rabbi did not pass over many Jewish houses in those years, and only those that dealt in smuggling and speculation, especially with foodstuffs, came out intact. Many Jews wrote letters asking for help from relatives in America and faraway places, but there were also those who saw a loss of dignity in doing so, and among these was also Rabbi Borukhov. He did not reveal his economic distress to anyone, and there is no doubt that the economic circumstances affected the *Rebbetzin's* health.

The Rabbi said as much tome openly, during my visit in his home, when I asked him: where were those who represented the Jewish community in the city and other institutions? Is it possible that they should not look after the welfare of the Rabbi's residence? – the Rabbi voiced some acerbic comments about a number of businessmen who primarily looked out for themselves, but absented themselves from considering the distress of the many.

The Rabbi's daughter, Sarah Freedman, who did not leave her parents during this entire period, Listened to this conversation I was having with the Rabbi from the sideline, and without uttering a syllable, but just from the look on her face, I could see that the Rabbi had revealed only a drop of what a variety of these businessmen had done. During the time that I spent at the Rabbi's house, various people came in, which interrupted our conversation. I asked Sarah to arrange a spot in a second room, where I could speak with the Rabbi without interruption. She acceded to my request, gave me a glass of tea, and even accompanied me to the room where I was with the Rabbi alone. I told him a great deal of what had happened to me during the time from when I left Volkovysk in 1915 and all the tribulations that dogged me from the time of the outbreak of the revolution in 1917, and how all the money that I had earned in Kharkov and other places had turned into worthless paper. I briefed him also on the condition of the Jewish in the cities of Russia, where all the warring factions saw the Jews as their principal enemy, and applied their bruising force against them.

The Rabbi listened to my tales with intense attention, took an interest in my plans for the future, and advised me to dedicate my public work to the care of the many orphans, so that they should have a home in place of the father and mother that the accursèd war had robbed from them. At this time, he told me that the émigrés from Volkovysk that had gone to the United States in his time, and who had visited the city, and after seeing so many orphans whose parents had been killed in the war, without any care or supervision, left a sum of 4,000 marks in his hands, and promised that if a committee were formed to establish an orphanage, they would send additional sums of money.

The Dayans

Page 69, Left: Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky
Right: The Dayan, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky

Dayans

One of the important Dayans, going back to the days of Rabbi Boruch-Mordechai Lifschitz, was Rabbi ***Yaakov-Abraham Stein***. He continued his tenure as Dayan and Judge, into the days of Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg. It was told in Volkovysk, that when the *Gaon* Rabbi Jonathan sat with the leading thinker of the times, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, to discuss details relating to his new post [as Rabbi]. Rabbi Isaac Elchanan told him the following: "Be aware of whom you have at your disposal as a *Dayan* in this

city – the *Gaon* Rabbi Yaakov Abraham!

In his younger years, Rabbi Yaakov Abraham did not want to take a pulpit position as a Rabbi, and therefore, he became a merchant. Later, when he finally agreed to assume the position of Dayan in Volkovysk, he was already famous throughout the area as an outstanding *Gaon* and Torah scholar.

Another Dayan, ***Rabbi Joseph Volk***, was beloved by all the citizens of the city, and was known by his nickname, '*Reb Mendele.'* In 1907, his book, '*Ner Mitzvah*' was published. The Dayan, ***Rabbi Tuvia Ravitzky*** was known in the city by the name *'Reb Teveleh'* who served as the head of the Volkovysk Yeshiva before he was appointed as Dayan. One of his sons, Herschel was a man in public life in our city, and did much work for the city.

The last Dayan of Volkovysk was Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, and it is appropriate to expand our description of him.

He was born in Lisokovo to poor parents, excelled in his studies as a superior intellect, and was given Rabbinical ordination while still quite young. After he married, he opened a linen store. On the table which served as a place for measuring out fabric, he always had the [Rambam tractates] *Yoreh Deyah* and *Hoshen Mishpat* opened, along with other books of Holy Writ, in order that he fulfil the commandment 'thou shalt study in them day and night.'

Rabbi Yaakov was a prodigious scholar, thoroughly grounded in *Shas*, commentaries, and the rabbinic literature, and was at one with the people, listening to their conversations and repartee, giving them good advice at every hour of their need. And everyone knew that Rabbi Yaakov was not unmindful of law. More than once, he could be found in Lisokovo, sitting at the bench of the local government courthouse, following the course of a proceeding in which he took a particular interest. He would also lead the congregation in prayer during the High Holy Days with sincerity and a great outpouring of the soul.

After the First World War, he went from Lisokovo to Volkovysk together with his family, and responded to the offer to serve as Dayan. The partnership between him and Rabbi Borukhov was a remarkable one, since the Rabbi treasured and valued the integrity of the Dayan greatly, as well as his good deeds, and extensive knowledge, to the point that on many occasions, he would invite him to participate with him in testing the young men studying at the Yeshiva in the city.

Rabbi Yaakov served as Dayan even during the time of Rabbi Kossowsky's tenure, and Rabbi Kossowsky's relationship to the Dayan can best be judged from his words about Rabbi Yaakov that are reproduced in this book. His relationship to the Zionist movement was distinctly positive, and it is no coincidence that his two sons, Azriel Broshi, and Moshe Berestovitsky made aliyah to Israel.

He died in 1939, a few days before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Synagogues

At our request, M. Novick has created a list of the synagogues and *Batei Medrashim* that existed in Volkovysk, and they are:

1. The Great Synagogue
2. The *Neuer Mauer* Synagogue
3. The *Alter Mauer* Synagogue
4. The *Hayyatim* Synagogue
5. The *Ein Yaakov* Synagogue
6. The *Talmud Torah* Synagogue
7. The Synagogue of the Old Age Home
8. The *Szeroka Gasse* Synagogue
9. The *Hasidic* Synagogue
10. The Synagogue on the Street near Kaplan's House
11. Poliakov's *Bet-HaMedrash* on the *Grodzhensky Gasse*
12. The *Tiferet Bakhurim* Synagogue
13. The *Bet-HaMedrash* on the *Kholodoisker Gasse*
14. The Synagogue at the Orphanage
15. The Synagogue on *Kosciuszko Gasse*

16. The Karczyzna *Bet-HaMedrash*
17. The *Bet-HaMedrash* in Zamoscheh

This list does not include various [informal] prayer quorums that met in different places, especially on holidays and festivals. The first seven synagogues on the list were in the Schulhof in the center of the city.

The Volkovysk Community Its Rabbis and Personalities

by Rabbi Yitzhak Kossowsky

Page 70, Top: Rabbi Abba Yaakov Borukhov
Bottom: The Old Synagogue

Rabbi Kossowsky occupied the pulpit in Volkovysk for nine years: from the beginning of 5685 (1925) to the end of 5693(1933), at which time he left to serve as the Rabbi of South Africa. His words printed below are taken from the folios of *Hurban Volkovysk*, published in Israel in 1946.

The community of Volkovysk was renown and distinguished in glory, because of the great Rabbis who were *Gaonim* of great repute throughout Jewry, and from the mouths of the city elders, who were still alive when I came to live there, more than twenty years ago, I heard much about the great Rabbis from the generations that came before me. One who excelled especially in the telling of many stories was my good friends and close confidants, the venerable elder, *Reb Yitzhak Novogrudsky*, ז"ל, who was called *Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's*. He was a highly respected many, "Of pleasing appearance, with a long beard, sweetened by his knowledge of the world,"[34] and being a neighborly man, quick to be stimulated, with a strong sense of community, he always took a major part in all community endeavors, and with a playful smile on his lips, he loved to tell about all that he had seen or knew from his life. He was a close neighbor to me at the *Bet HaMedrash*, and at frequent intervals, spoke at great length about the great Rabbis of the past, and I learned many details about them from him. I do not remember all of them right now, but this I do know from him, that before Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל, the Gaon Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg זצ"ל, who died prematurely young, was the Rabbi of the city, and his seat remained vacant for seven years, until Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל came to take his place, and to serve in his stead with honor.

Apart from being a formidable Torah scholar, Rabbi Jonathan זצ"ל was one of the *Gaonim* of the past generation, wise, a scholar and a man of reason, and all of the wise people of that generation, the exponents of Torah scholarship and the Enlightenment, corresponded with him, and his word was heeded by all of them. Between the pages of one of his books, that came to me from the landlord of the house in which he lived, I found a letter written to him by the *Rashi Fin* of Vilna, one of the very few of the members of the past generation who followed the Enlightenment, and one of the Zionist leaders of that time, who were known by the name, *Hovevei Tzion*, and in that letter, there were some very interesting things in regard to one important meeting that was called prior to the first Zionist Congress in Katowice, nearly sixty years before. When I received a visit from my colleague and friend, Rabbi Moshe Berlin, שליט"א, the head of the Mizrachi in Israel, I gave him this letter, to be turned over to the care of the international library in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Jonathan Eliasberg זצ"ל, inspired the people in his city, through his spirit, to cherish the noble idea of a love for Zion among themselves, and Rabbi Borukhov זצ"ל maintained this perspective,

[34] A quote from a line in the *Hineni* prayer from the prologue to the *Yom Kippur Musaf* service, when the Cantor beseeches the Almighty to look upon him as someone with these virtues.

and thanks to the influence of the two of them, the Volkovysk community was among the ones who stood from the remaining cities in the area for its dedication to this nationalist ideal. This caused a large proportion of the people to make *aliyah* to our Holy Land, and they settled there many years before the great calamity in Europe, and in this manner, were saved from death and destruction.

Before Rabbi Jonathan זצ"ל, the Rabbinate of the city was held by the Rabbis and *Gaonim,* Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Diskin, זצ"ל , Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Lifschitz זצ"ל, Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, and Rabbi Yitzhak Isaac Hubar, זצ"ל, the author of *Bet Yitzhak,* which was published in Siedliska in the year 5596 (1836). I do not remember the order in which they served, or the length of their service, and it is possible that I have them out of order, and for this, I beg a thousand pardons from their sanctified remains. It is possible that there were several other Rabbis among them, whose names have escaped me over time, and I ask for those who are familiar with these details to come after me, and fill in what I have omitted, and I will recognize them with my thanks and blessing.

Synagogues, Personalities and Institutions

There always was a distinguished Yeshiva in Volkovysk, headed by leading Torah scholars, and many students were drawn there from the cities in the area. The many *Batei Medrashim* in the city were filled with boys and young married men, who concentrated on their Torah study, and the townsfolk supported them in a respectable fashion, since the love of Torah was deeply rooted in their hearts. Many great exponents of Torah scholarship came from the *Batei Medrashim* of Volkovysk, that became beacons of Jewry, and it is especially worth mentioning the name of the Gaon of Israel and its leader, the Gaon, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, זצ"ל, who went from a bench in a *Bet HaMedrash* in Volkovysk to rule Jewry, and from Izavelin, the little town near it, to Kovno, to be the Leader of the entire Diaspora and the Leader of his generation, and his glory reflects on Volkovysk!

Many great people in Jewry came from there. Great in Torah scholarship and wisdom, and great in deeds, whose names remain forever in the annals of the Jewish people. It is especially worth recalling the two distinguished families from Volkovysk, the *Einhorn* family and the *Heller* family. The first produced among Jewry, great Torah scholars, and great scientists, and on his mother's side, the last *Gaon* of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky זצ"ל, was related to them, whose great name lives with us even to this day, and his memory will remain forever in the chronicles of our people, as a leader of the Jewish people, and an outstanding Torah scholar. And the second [family] that produced the *Gaon* Rabbi Yekhiel Heller, זצ"ל, produced tens of distinguished people, who pursued the giving of charity and goodwill, who gave generously from their wealth to the various charitable institutions of the city, and even after they left her because of their large scale businesses, and went to live the great capitol cities, Warsaw and Berlin, they did not forget her, and continued to support the institutions of their birthplace city with a spirit of charity, venerable institutions in which they took great pride to their glory, until they were destroyed in our suffering at the hands of the *Amalek* of our generation, may their name be forever erased.

in these few words, I want to present a permanent memorial to a few of those of my friends and relatives there, whom I found there on my arrival to take up residence there, and the memory of them is permanently etched into my heart, despite the distance in both time and place. From them, there are two from the world of Torah, and two from the practical world, and they are the *Dayan,* Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, and the Rabbi, Reb Yerakhmiel Daniel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva; Rabbi Israel Efrat the Lawyer and Reb Eli Abraham Markus, the owner of the leather factory. May all their memories be for a blessing!

The first was a man whose Torah was his faith. A man who occupied himself with Torah with great diligence, and didn't vary from it in the slightest. Being full and brimming with what he learned and

saw in different books, and having a prodigious memory as well, literally a container that doesn't lose a drop, he became an accomplished facilitator. He was appointed as *Dayan* of the city by my predecessor, The Gaon Rabbi Abba Yaakov HaKohen Borukhov זצ"ל; and when I came to occupy the pulpit there, to my great elation, I found in the *Dayan* Rabbi Yaakov זצ"ל, a loyal, dedicated friend, who was literally my right hand for all the days that I lived there. Together, we did all the religious work of our community, and we were bound to one another with bonds of loyal friendship. When I left the city towards the end of 5793 (1933), he remained in residence, to handle the affairs of the city, until his passing a few years later. May his memory be blessed!

The second, Reb Yerakhmiel, the Headmaster of the Yeshiva, was a prodigious scholar, possessed of a sharp mind, alert and diligent, and apart from being very busy with his Yeshiva, in which he inculcated Torah into many students, he was almost always occupied in matters of dispute between people, that is to say, in matters requiring mediation and in Torah rulings, because he was the one selected by protagonists to adjudicate and mediate their disputes. Apart from this, he was by nature a very community-minded person as well, a person who took part in community affairs; his manner was pleasant, and his words were heeded, because everyone saw in him a man of established and seasoned knowledge, and related to him with the proper respect. These two, Rabbi Yaakov and Rabbi Yerakhmiel, the Headmaster, were those left from the prior generation, educated in the great Yeshivas who were raised with Torah, and their work was in Torah, and passed away leaving behind a good name, without leaving anyone behind to take their places, and even before the destruction of the entire Jewish community in Poland and L:ithuania, the centers of Torah learning in Jewry, their loss was irretrievable. It is of them that it is said, "Woe, woe is our loss, and we will not forget them!"

The Lawyer, Reb Israel Efrat זצ"ל, was an excellent example of an enlightened Jew of the prior generation, the type of person who has practically vanished from the ranks of the enlightened in our generation. He also was full of and brimming with Torah and wisdom, a man, who although he had never studied at a university, and not even a gymnasium, he nevertheless surpassed all those of his age in his knowledge of the law. He acquired his common sense and comprehensive knowledge through his own energies, working tirelessly and diligently, and thanks to his outstanding intellectual capabilities, attained the position of 'Certified deputy lawyer,' and secured a very important position among the ranks of lawyers and judges of that time. Were it not for the restricting decrees of the malevolent regime of the Czar in Russia, before the First World War, he would have achieve the rank of Certified Lawyer, and could have even obtained an important government post, but he was handicapped by being a Jew. Despite all this, he was a Jew who was loyal to his faith and his people, and would take part in all community affairs, not only in his city, but for Jews throughout Russia in general. He was an ardent and dedicated Zionist, and stood at the head of the Zionist work in his city and that area, and at all major gatherings in which he participated, his words were always accorded the proper respect. Together with this, he took part in all municipal matters, and after the Rabbinate of the city was vacated, with the departure of the Rabbi *Gaon* Borukhov, זצ"ל, when he made *aliyah* to our Holy Land in his old age, and the people of the city appointed a Selection Committee, Reb Israel Efrat was selected to be the head of this committee, and thanks to his influence, and extra patience, the committee carried out its work smoothly, and to the satisfaction of most of the members, most all who saw in him the right man, suitable to head this community endeavor in their important community!

For all the time I resided in Volkovysk, Mr. Efrat, ז"ל, was a frequent visitor in my home, and I always took great pleasure in his pleasant company, to discuss matters of Torah and wisdom with him. And when it came time for me to leave the city, my parting from him was very difficult, and when I found out two years later, that Mr. Efrat k"z had passed away, (I do not remember the exact day he died, and that is a shame), I was saddened deeply in

my heart, and I mourned for him a great deal, because he was truly a man that stood above the common folk, and he was as his name proclaims, Efrat – 'An Efrati, Adorned with good manner,' (*Yalkut*).

I knew Reb Abraham Eli Markus ז"ל, well even before I set foot on the threshold of that city, because he was one of the two distinguished delegates who came to the city in which I was then living (Yagustov), at the beginning of the year 5785 (1924), to offer me the invitation in the name of the committee to come and serve as the Rabbi in their honored community, and I immediately recognized the attribute of this man, imbued with the spirit of Torah, that is not found in ordinary *balebatim*. And after I came to settle in the city, and became familiar with its distinguished residents from up close, I found Reb Abraham Eli Markus ז"ל, to be a man of outstanding good among the distinguished people of that community. His place was not among the wealthy, and he was constantly busy to earn a living for his household, and despite these many busy things, he always set aside time for Torah study, and he had a regular lesson in which he studied seven pages of the *Gemara* each week, in order to complete the entire *Shas* in seven years, and he would have a large holiday feast on the occasion of finishing the cycle of the *Shas*. And whatever was missing due to his business during the middle of the week, he made up for on the seventh day. The Holy Sabbath for him was set aside for Torah, and he would sequester himself at home, and study through the night, and then all day with enormous diligence, without going outside, and without involving himself during that day, in community matters, which he attended to faithfully during the remaining days of the week, being one of the important community leaders, whose word was listened to with the appropriate respect at all public gatherings.

He was gifted with a pleasant voice, and when he would lead the congregation before the Ark (not as a cantor, who makes his living this way, but rather as one of the *balebatim* who volunteer), he would literally capture hearts with his pleasant mode of praying, that would come out of his mouth in a manner that caused wonder. During the *Musaf* service of the High Holy Days, he would lower his prayer shawl over his face, and would pray with enormous conviction, closed eyes streaming tears, when he would read all the prayers and poetry *by heart*, and it was a source of wonderment to everyone who watched him, and listened to him, and they were greatly moved by his prayer. As I recollect the man and his conversation after these many years – and his praying, his great conviction in leading prayer at the Ark, I quickly sense the great loss sustained by our people, after they did away with having lay people lead prayer, and replaced them with professional cantors and their choirs! He was privileged to make aliyah to the Holy Land in his old age, before the war broke out, and he died there at a ripe old age. May his memory be for a blessing!

These are but a few lines from this distinguished congregation, the congregation of Volkovysk, which was a wonderment for all Jewry in its distinguished people and institutions. What an enormous calamity has befallen our people with the loss of these sacred communities, for which there are no replacements.

Yeshivas and their Headmasters

The Yeshiva of Volkovysk was known in a praiseworthy fashion not only within the narrow confines of Volkovysk, but in many cities and towns in its vicinity. Witness to this fact is that among its students, were many who came from the outside. Before the war, the number of students reached nearly 800.

One of the Headmasters of the Yeshiva was ***Rabbi Yehoshua Epstein,*** who made *aliyah* to the Holy Land and settled in the Old City of Jerusalem. Members of his family live there to this day in Jerusalem. After he left Volkovysk, ***Rabbi Shlomo Bereshkovsky*** served as the headmaster. During his tenure, young men studied there, who went on in time to become famous as intellectual greats and *Gaonim*. Rabbi Shlomo himself was an outstanding Torah scholar, both thorough in breadth of knowledge and of a sharp analytical mind, and his

teaching style was unique of its kind. His grandson, Yitzhak Bereshkovsky, told an interesting episode connected with the death of Rabbi Shlomo, and this is the story in summary:

One of his students, who came from a small town and was himself intellectually superior, once put a question to Rabbi Shlomo which he could not answer. This was during Hanukkah, at the height of a particularly severe winter, and Rabbi Shlomo sat for hours upon hours, searching for the answer to this difficult question. He was so immersed in his own mental gymnastics, that he didn't feel that he was getting frozen from the cold. He was brought to the hospital in Warsaw, in extremely serious condition. On his last night, before he died, he asked his son, Yehuda to spend the night with him in his hospital room. That very night he related the question, posed to him by the bright student at the Yeshiva, to his son, and along with it, he communicated the correct response that he had finally been able to find. Rabbi Shlomo died the next morning.

This was in the year 1895. Before the Second World War, ***Rabbi Yerakhmiel [Daniel]*** served as the Headmaster of the Talmud Torah. According to the account of Yitzhak Bereshkovsky, the Talmud Torah took on a different face during the time of Rabbi Borukhov. At that time, secular subjects were also taught in the Talmud Torah, and the Zionist ideal that stood out in the full heart of the Rabbi, was instilled in the hearts of the students. The ***Dayan Rabbi Joseph Berestovitsky***[35] also contributed to this, who was also a staunch Zionist.

[35] This seems to be a propagated error, since the reference almost certainly is to *Rabbi Yaakov Brestovitsky*.

A Wellspring of Zionism and *Halutzim*

Volkovysk Jews and The Holy Land

Page 73: The First Group of Volkovyskers in the Holy Land in 1911

Bottom Row (RtoL): Mordechai Epstein, Eliezer Golomb, Shmuel Golomb
Second Row: Yaakov Neiman, Jekuthiel Zusmanovich, Moshe Einhorn, David Golomb
Third Row: Eliyahu Golomb, Zus'keh Berman, Abraham Sukhovolsky, Sholom Bialsky, Jekuthiel Neiman, Moshe Kaplinsky

Page 74: The Volkovyskers in 1913, with the author, Yaakov Rabinovich.
Sitting below: Eliezer Golomb, Lipa and Joseph Zusmanovich (Jekuthieli).
Second Row (RtoL): A. Wolfowitz, Y. Neiman, D. Golomb, Y. Kaminer, Eliyahu Golomb, Shereshevsky, Z. Berman.
Third Row: Wolfowitz, M. Kaplinsky, Y. Jekuthieli, M. Einhorn, M. Epstein, the author, Yaakov Rabinovich, A. Sukhovolsky.

Volkovysk earned a reputation in Poland as being a very ardent Zionist city, but it is worth noting that the ties between the Jews of Volkovysk and the Holy Land began a long time before the actual Zionist movement was established as an institution. Jews from Volkovysk went to the Holy Land as much as ***two hundred years*** ago, when their purpose was to die there and be buried on the Mount of Olives. The first one to go to the Holy Land for the purpose of creating a life for himself, was ***Rabbi Yehoshua-Leib Diskin***, the son of Rabbi Benjamin Diskin, who made *aliyah* in the middle of the 19th century, and was very active in the community life of Jerusalem (see the special note in the history of the Rabbis).

According to the record in Dr. Einhorn's book, towards the end of the 19th century, ***Chaikel Shiff*** and his wife ***Sarah-Taiba*** made *aliyah* from Volkovysk. What moved this young couple to go to the Holy Land – we don't know from the available evidence, but it is safe to assume that the reasons were religious in nature, since Chaikel was a student at the Volkovysk Yeshiva for a number of years. His wife was the daughter of Moshe-Shimon Lev, one of the distinguished *balebatim* of Piesk, near our city. Chaikel was a watchmaker by trade, and during the first years of his residence in the Land of Israel, he continued to ply this trade, but after a while he began to deal in real estate, buying vineyards, and orchard, and land in the Montefiore district in particular. He always remembered his home town, and he would host people from Volkovysk in his home, who made *aliyah* at the beginning of the 20th century. Also, his wife Sarah-Taiba always graciously received young people from Volkovysk in her home, who were invited there, and she also established a Free Loan Society on behalf of the gymnasium students who arrived in 1909. They knew, that if their allowance from their parents was late in coming from Volkovysk – they could always get a loan 'to tide them over,' from Chaikel and Taiba, until the money arrived. The atmosphere in their home was always pleasant, to the point that the young people from Volkovysk felt they were in their own home. Sarah-Taiba served as an intermediary for many needs, including 'charity given in secret,' as it was practiced in her former home town.

The really strong ties, between Volkovysk and the Land of Israel, began in the year 1909 with the *aliyah* of a group of young people to Israel to study in the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium that had been established in Tel Aviv. This undoubtedly came on the heels of what must have been the true pressure in this direction, that was provided by Dr. Ben-Zion Mosensohn, who came especially form Poland to encourage the better off parents to send their sons to study at the first Hebrew gymnasium. Eliyahu Golomb, the son of Naphtali Golomb, if not the first, certainly paved the way. The letters that he sent back to Volkovysk were full of enthusiasm, and were passed around in Volkovysk from hand-to-hand, and there is no doubt that these moved his friends and members of his family to follow his example (see the memoir about E. Golomb by Azriel

Broshi). Dr. M. Einhorn, who was one of these young people, recalls Eliyahu's brother, Eliezer, in his book, Zus'keh Berman and Yaakov Neiman, as those following in this path. Towards the end of 1910, the members of Eliyahu Golomb's family made *aliyah*, as did the families of Benjamin Kalir, Boruch Zusmanovich (a Teacher), and three of his sons (who changed their name to Jekuthieli), and Eliezer-Lieber Shereshevsky. During the summer of 1911, a number of the gymnasium students arrived from Tel Aviv in Volkovysk for vacation, and there is no doubt that their enthusiastic tales about their new lives that were beginning to take shape in the Land of Israel, about the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium, and the ambience of life in the Holy Land, caused many young people of their age group to begin manifesting serious interest in the possibility of making *aliyah* to Israel.

The Volkovysk "Colony" in th Holy Land grew significantly in 1911-1912, when apart from the previously mentioned people, the following also settled in there: Moshe Kaplinsky, Mottel Epstein, Jekuthiel Neiman, Israel Hubar, Mordechai Chafetz, Zvi Weinstein (Carmeli), the Wolfowitz brothers, Yitzhak Kaminer, Abraham Sukhovolsky, Sholom Bialsky, David Epstein, and others. In Dr. Einhorn's book, we find a characteristic description of the Volkovysk colony in the Holy Land:

Every Shabbos afternoon, Tel Aviv was visited by many guests. The Sephardim from the Jaffa ghetto, the Ashkenazim from *Neve Shalom* and *Neve Tzedek*. Also, colonists from nearby settlements would gather together in Tel Aviv to observe the great miracle, how the first one hundred percent Jewish city was being built. Herzl Street was full of people. At the same time, the young people from Volkovysk would gather on the sands near Tel Aviv. We would spend a few hours together, sing Hebrew songs, and then we would form ranks and march off to Herzl Street. Near the gymnasium, we would regroup anew into a single line, hand-in-hand, singing, and all at once, broke into couples.

– Make way, here come the Volkovyskers! – could be heard from our comrades.

The onlookers were not opposed [to what we were doing]. On the contrary. People stopped and watched, making the way clear for us. All of Tel Aviv knew about us and wondered, how did such a comparatively small city like Volkovysk send such a large number of students [to the Land of Israel].

Einhorn continues:

When a Festival holiday arrived – *Simchat Torah, Purim, Khol HaMoed Passover* – many from Volkovysk would get together to keep company at Eliezer Shereshevsky's house. Ever person would contribute a set amount, and Mrs. Shereshevsky would prepare, with the help of several other women, a really fine meal with good dishes, and delicious drinks – and the Volkovyskers made merry. It was sort of a "get-together party" of *landsleit* from Volkovysk. The author, *Yaakov Rabinovich*, ז"ל, who was a *landsman* from Volkovysk, would come to these gatherings from *Petakh Tikva.*

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the stream of *olim* from Volkovysk to the Holy Land came to a halt, but it started up again after the war, especially in the early twenties, when the pioneering movements that were established in the city proved their success by facilitating the *aliyah* of their members. The events of 1921 in the Holy Land along with an economic downturn and depression, did not deter the members of this movement from making *aliyah* to the Holy Land, and it is worth noting that the veteran *olim* from our city provided assistance to the relative newcomers. On the eve of the Second World War in 1939, there were already close to four hundred families that had made *aliyah* from Volkovysk.

It can be said without fear of exaggeration, that the Jewish population of Volkovysk lived and breathed the Holy Land, and felt itself close to the Jewish *Yishuv* there without any reservation. Every event in the Holy Land would elicit many reactions, and every decree by the Mandate Government called forth a unified response. Thus, we read in the local newspaper about the reaction of the Jews of Volkovysk on the incidents in the Holy Land during the late summer of 1929:

"The dark mood of the Jewish community because of the news of hostilities from the Holy Land was ameliorated slightly by the good news published in the newspapers from Warsaw, but by the end of the

week, when the radio bulletins communicated the bloodbath that Arab rioters had inflicted on the Jews of Safed, the pain was exacerbated. The assembly that was organized in the hall of the orphanage on Saturday night, as a result of the efforts of the various Zionist groups, the community and the Rabbinate, was held under the pall of the saddening news that arrived from the Holy Land. At this meeting, it was decided to set up a committee of thirty appointed members of the community to collect funds on behalf of the victims."

During the week, members of the committee visited the homes of Jews in order to collect donations, and they were all positively received, with each person giving according to his means. On Monday, a large rally was organized in the synagogue. The stores and factories in the town were closed, beginning at four in the afternoon. After Cantor Stashevsky from Baranovich read several suitable chapters from the Psalms, the Rabbi eulogized the martyrs who fell in the Holy Land. The eulogy continued for about two hours, and the attending audience of three thousand people burst into bitter tears. Many fainted, especially among the women in the Women's Gallery. After the memorial was read, the Rabbi once again turned to the assembly, and asked everyone to respond to these events, with deeds that will contribute to the building of the land, indicating that this would be the most appropriate response to the Arab rioters."

Even in 1939, when the infamous 'White Paper' was published, that included a variety of decrees against the Jews in the Holy Land, the Volkovysk Jewish community reacted with anger against the government of the Mandate. The participation of the Volkovysk Jews in all Zionist activities and the national funds was especially prominent. In 1939, the sum of 9,545 zlotys was collected for *Keren HaYesod* – double the amount of the prior year.

The same was true about *Keren Kayemet*, in which the various chapters of Zionist youth movements participated. In 1925 the sum of 8,700 zlotys was assembles, and in 1930, 9,231 zlotys.

Meetings and presentations by *Keren Kayemet* took place frequently in Volkovysk. The 'Blue Box' could be found in most Jewish homes, and the motto, 'Give to us to redeem the Land' resonated in the heats of Jews in all walks of life. Emissaries from Warsaw would come to the opening of every Zionist initiative, and they were received with great respect by all ranks of the Jewish populace.

We have been unable to provide summaries of the contributions of people from Volkovysk in the past in all areas of the creation of the Holy Land and then the State of Israel, because in any attempt to be comprehensive in this matter, we ran the risk of making errors and omissions. We can adapt the words of the folk song, *A Dudeleh*, by saying, 'Where can I find thee, and where can I not find thee, sons of Volkovysk?' – in a variety of the kibbutzim and settlements along the entire length and breadth of the Land; in all branches of industry; in the *Haganah*, the guard units and ranks of the *Palmach*, the armies of the State of Israel; among the prisoners of the prior Mandate government; in detention camps both in the Holy Land and in the diaspora; in the Jewish Brigade during the War; in all units that were recruited in the War of Independence; in all the wars that Israel has had to fight in the past 40 years to preserve the State; in institutions and centers of the state, and the Histadrut offices of all parties in Israel, that is where you are to be found.

In the fullness of time, we hope that perhaps some researcher, a scion of Volkovysk naturally, may try to assemble a definitive set of summaries on this subject, but until then – we cannot but remain satisfied with the following assumption: the Zionist city of Volkovysk has demonstrated its Zionism, proving that there is no one stands

above her in the great contribution made by those born there to the creation, security aan protection of Israel, of which only a glimpse can be brought to this book.

In the coming pages, the stories of those Volkovysk scions, who have earned the praise of their countrymen for their work and achievements in many walks of life, will be told. It is doubtful that we have succeeded in doing this for everyone who deserve this, both because of the deadline to publish, and also the limited information at our disposal. We have not expanded in writing about famous people, like Eliyahu Golomb, the author, Yaakov Rabinovich, and others, about whose lives and work it is possible to read in various encyclopedias and lexicons. We haven't attempted to get stratospheric, nor have we attempted to 'co-opt' personalities such as Yitzhak Shamir, the Prime Minister of Israel, who spent only a [small] number of years in Volkovysk, and who himself was born in Ruzhany, near our city. This is also true of the Knesset member and Leader of MFD"L[36], Zerakh Wahrhaftig, and others. For this, we did see a need to include Giora Even, the son of Hillel Epstein, not because of his father, but because of the 17 enemy jet fighters he has shot down.

Eliyahu Golomb

Page 76: Eliyahu Golomb

Born in Volkovysk in 1893 to his father Naphtali, who was an ardent lover of Zion, and was concerned with giving his sons a national education.

Eliyahu was 16 years old when he made *aliyah* to the Holy Land to study at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium. Dr. M. Einhorn, who himself was a student at *Hertzeliya* at that time bears witness to the fact that Eliyahu was an excellent student, and 'remembered things by heart.' In his student days, he became friends with Moshe Shertok and Dov Hoz, and these friendships lasted a lifetime. While still in the gymnasium, he organized a group of students to do agricultural work in Bet-Shemen, but after a short while they returned to Tel Aviv. He completed his studies in the first semester of 1913, and set up a 'limited corporation,' to which the members of the first class belonged, whose mission was to 'serve the *Yishuv*.'

In 5674(1913) he went for training in Degania, with the groups, and during his stay there, very strong bonds of fellowship were developed between him and the pioneers of the working settlements, and the image of Joseph Trumpeldor was especially influential on him. With the death of his father, Eliyahu returned to Tel Aviv, and with the outbreak of the First World War, he began to fill positions in the area of security and defense. He established strong relationships with *HaShomer* and opposed the efforts of *Nili.* When the front moved the south of the Holy Land, Golomb took advantage of his relationship with Jewish officers in the Turkish army to obtain weapons and put them in the hands of the Jews. The concern of providing arms for the defense forces dogged him for his entire life.

Golomb was one of the principal workers and activists of the voluntary Jewish brigades. He was selected for the 'Volunteers Committee,' and afterwards to the brigade committee, where he served as a Corporal. During his service in the brigade, he grew close with Berel Katznelson, and joined the *Ahudat HaAvodah*. After they were discharged from the brigade at the end of 5680 (1919), he worked for a while in the Kineret group,

[36] Hebrew Abbreviation for *Miflaga Datit L'Umit*, or the Religious Zionist Party.

and at that time he was also a member of "The Committee for Organization of the Haganah," and was active in rendering assistance to Tel-Chai.

From 1921 on, he was a member of the *Haganah* Committee of the Labor Histadrut, and served as the head officer of the labor movement of the *Haganah* and its institutions. From that day on, his entire life was dedicated to defense and security, and worked on sourcing weapons and enlisting youth both in Israel and without to serve in the ranks of the *Haganah*. Beginning in 1931, he was one of the three officers of the 'Left,' in the national command of the *Haganah,* and the lines of establishment of its development. He had a great personal influence on everyone who came under his purview, many of them who went on to the senior ranks of the *Haganah*.

During the events of 1936-1939, he was among the activists in the *Plugot HaSadeh* and among the founders of the *Palmach,* and of the *Hagbalah*. During the Second World War he was among the ones who were in the paratroopers who served out of the Holy Land, and the establishment of the Jewish Brigade.

It is worth noting his warmth and relationship to the Volkovyskers in Israel (see the memoirs of A. Broshi and Gedaliah Pick in this book).

Eliyahu, A Son of My Hometown

By Azriel Broshi

(Davar, 8 Tammuz 5705)
On the Seventh Anniversary of His Death

The voyage of Eliyahu with another few young people from Volkovysk to the Holy Land, in order to study at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium in Tel Aviv, a few years before the First World War, was in its day, an event that made a great impression on all the Jews of the city. The letters that arrived fro them, suffused with enthusiasm for the Land, and the visits of the Israeli gymnasium students to Volkovysk during vacation – all these served like a life-giving dew to the Zionist movement in Volkovysk, and stimulated more strong Zionist activity. In those days, there were established the "Club for Hebrew Language Lovers," the Hebrew library, and *Heders* in which Hebrew was taught in Hebrew, all received a great boost. Young people began to dream about the Holy Land, and orient themselves to going there. The visit of Joseph Shprinzak[37] to Volkovysk, and his illegal meeting with us in the days of the Czar, in the *Tiferet Bakhurim* Synagogue, brought the youth closer to the Labor Movement in the Holy Land.

After the [First] World War, the first group of *halutzim* arrived from our town (Volkovysk). We found our *landsman*, Eliyahu, in the front ranks of those who were realizing the ideal of Socialist-Zionism – and we were very proud of him. And how happy he was, when he saw that his very own *landsleit* were paving the Haifa-Jeddah highway, smashing rocks in *Beit She'An*, and building the *Sarafand-Lod* railroad line.

During he frequent trips abroad, Eliyahu would from time-to-time drop in and visit Volkovysk, and meet with the friends of his youth. He helped a number of them – when they came to the Land of Israel.

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37 One of the founders of HaPoel Hatza'ir, and the first Chairman of the Knesset of the State of Israel.

A few days before he died a message was given to the secretariat of the organization of his *landsleit*, that he wished to meet with one of them. I met him at the *Vaad HaPoel* building of the *Histadrut*. As was his habit, he placed his good hand on my shoulder, carefully reviewed the list of those *landsleit* who escaped [the Holocaust], remembering a goodly portion of the names recorded on the list, and in the end, let out a bitter sigh: "Of my friends, not even one remains: where is Tevel Smazanovich, where are you, all my landsleit?"

So I said to him: I remember when you made *aliyah* to the Land of Israel, Eliyahu! Now we are here by the hundreds – spread out in cities and villages, we have organized ourselves to provide help to those survivors from our town. We chose not to invite you to the initial meeting of our *landsleit* in Tel Aviv, because we know the burden of work, meetings, and assemblies that you must attend to, but from time-to-time, we want to keep you advised of our activity. He stopped and thought for a short while, and then said: "It is indeed good that you have the list of the survivors in your pocket. Do you really believe that Lev (the Bialystoker baker) is still alive – he must be an incredibly old man by now?" What a good Jew he is! Joseph Ein is on the list – he was called Yoss'eleh Ein in town. I remember every street and every byway of my town. The fate of the Volkovysk community is no better than that of other Jewish communities in Poland. I beseech you, let me know if added news becomes available about survivors."

Our great loss is that he was taken from us at a critical time, when we were so much in need of him relative to the building of our homeland that had just been resuscitated. May his soul be bound up in the bond of life with the lives of other heroes of our people.

Yaakov Rabinovich

Yaakov Rabinovich, the renown Hebrew author, was born in Volkovysk in the year 1875. His father, *Rabbi Abraham Aaron,* who was a prominent scholar, and compiled a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud Seder, *Zera'im*, died at a young age. His grandfather, *Rabbi Meir Jonah* – who published the book, *HaItur*, *Har HaMoriah*, with *"Corrections of Errors"* and *"Thoughts on the Rambam"* – was, for a short time (less than a half year) the Rabbi of Brisk, and for most of his years – in the shtetl of Svislucz (Grodno Province). His mother, *Chaya Hadassah*, was from the *Vinogradsky* family.

Yaakov Rabinovich received a traditional Jewish upbringing in his home town, in *Heder* and Yeshiva, and afterwards began to study general subjects. He left the country, and studied at the University of Bern (in Switzerland). Before leaving the country, he spent two years living in Vitebsk, where he was involved with teaching. He began his Zionist activity there. He studied in Switzerland for four years (1900-1904) and lived in Bern and Geneva. His literary activity began in those years. In the year 1904, he moved to the city of Odessa, which at that time was the center of the *Hibat Tzion* movement, and in 1907 he was elected to the committee of the *Hovevei Tzion*, and he worked in the information bureau of the committee. He visited the Land of Israel twice, and a short time after 1910, he settled there permanently.

In 1905 he visited the Holy Land, and his impressions were published in '*HaSholeakh*.' In the course of three years, until 1910, anticipating his own *aliyah* to the Holy Land, he was active on behalf of the Odessa committee and, in fact, was the loyal assistant to [Menachem] Usishkin. When he made *aliyah,* he settled in Petakh Tikva, and lived there until 1923. In Petakh Tikva, he acquired a parcel of land and planted a vineyard, but his large ambitions were not in agriculture, but in ***literature***. His works were published in *Hapoel HaTza'ir*, and for a number of years he was one of the premier reporters of the second *aliyah*, and fought for the use of Hebrew in all sectors of activity, especially in agriculture. In his book, *'The Wanderings and Burdens of the Watchman*,' Rabinovich describes the life of the second *aliyah* in the Holy Land.

After the war, together with his friend Asher Barash, he founded a literary-publicizing drama troupe, that brought together the old and new guard in Hebrew literature, and looked after the literary ambience

from the time of the third *aliyah*. In this literary establishment, Rabinovich published the work of Hebrew authors, and essays and opinions on issues of the day. In addition to his participation in the periodicals of those times, Yaakov Rabinovich had a regular column in [the newspaper] *Davar*, and he provided reactions to events in the Holy Land and the rest of the world in a fundamental and insightful manner. Apart from articles, essays and publishing books, he also published poems, signed [with the pseudonym] *M. Zutri*. He also was heavily involved with translations into Hebrew in those languages that he had a command: Russian, German, and French. He wrote mainly in Yiddish during the time of his Zionist activity in Odessa.

Among his many books, it is worth noting in addition *'The Wanderings and Burdens of the Watchman*,' that we had previously mentioned: '*Stories & Portraits*,' '*When there is no Root*,' '*Light & Ember*,''*The Summer Ambience*,' '*Aims*,' and others.

Yaakov Rabinovich maintained ties to the first of the *olim* from Volkovysk, and appeared at memorial services for the Volkovysk martyrs (see his writings on this subject, which do not appear in this book).

Moshe Saroka

by Ben-Yisrael

Page 78: Untitled Picture of Subject

Moshe's parents, Yitzhak and Ethel, came to Volkovysk in 1906 after they left nearby Ros' approximately 12 kilometers from the city. Their son Moshe was three years old at the time. His father supplied firewood to the Jews of Volkovysk for the winter, for which he was paid by instalments throughout the year. Moshe first was a *Heder* pupil, and afterwards at the Yeshiva under Rabbi Daniel, whom Moshe recalls frequently with affection. There is no doubt that the winds blowing among the ranks of the young, especially the *aliyah* of Eliyahu Golomb, M. Einhorn and others, had a great influence on the young boy. Moshe was 10 years old when ***Joseph Shprinzak*** reached Volkovysk clandestinely, and the young people who were members of the '*Lovers of Hebrew Language*' gathered in the Great Synagogue to hear Shprinzak's stories of the Holy Land, and about the settlements of the first pioneers. It is safe to assume that this meeting also influenced the young boy. Regardless, when he was still only 15 years old, he began to organize his friends for purposes of preparing themselves for *aliyah* to the Holy Land. He stopped his training, and went to a village to work with farmers in order to prepare himself to do manual labor. It was in this way, he found his way to *HeHalutz*, when his decision crystallized – to make *aliyah* to the Holy Land. According to what is told in the book of Adit Zartal ('*Days & Deeds*'), Moshe's father tried to prevent his son's *aliyah*, and Moshe reacted as follows: "You will be able to prevent my trip only by standing in my way." To which his father replied: "I will not deter you forcibly. If you have decided to go – go in peace, and success, and may God be with you."

This was in the month of June 1920, when a group of 24 pioneers from Volkovysk set out on the way to the Holy Land. They loaded their bags on wagons, and the young men walked behind the wagons, singing Zionist songs. All the Jews of the city came out to watch the young men and escort them. They covered the distance to Bialystock on foot, and from there they continued to Warsaw by train. On August 9, 1920 they reached the Holy Land on the ship *Halna*. The oldest in the group was Moshe Metchik, for whom the group was named, and the youngest in the group was Moshe Saroka –age 17. A member of the *Hapoel HaTza'Ir* who dealt with receiving *olim,* took them directly to a tent encampment, on a sand hill near modern-day Allenby Street, and after a number of weeks of idleness, the entire Volkovysk contingent, which belonged to *Hapoel HaTza'Ir* to work on the Haifa-Jeddah highway. Moshe Metchik and Moshe Saroka were responsible for the economic affairs of the group. After about two years, the Volkovysk group transferred to Hadera, and there Moshe met Perelson, one of the founders of the hospital system. This meeting, perhaps, set the course of Moshe's life, and when Perelson sought a suitable person to head the hospital system in the *Emek* – he didn't find anyone better than Moshe.

Balfuria was Moshe's first stop in his mission for the hospital system, and Moshe Saroka established a facility for the sick. Not a clinic, not a hospital, but a ***room for the sick***, as simple as those words. In the summer of 1922, the hospital system promoted him to a more important position, and he was called upon to organize the Tuberculosis hospital in Safed, and to run it. After that, he was sent by the central authority of the system to establish sick rooms in *Nahalat-Yehuda,.*and from there he went to the workers of *Khevrat HaMelakh* in Atlit. From that time on, Saroka continues to prosper and grow, along with the hospital system, and he transformed this institution into a large and powerful empire that extends its services and physicians to almost 90% of the population of the State of Israel. Even those that argued against the beauty and luxury of the hospital buildings that Saroka erected, came to admit later on, that Saroka's approach was the right one, and his concepts justified themselves from every angle.

And this is what Golda Meir wrote after Saroka died:

"Saroka was an unusual man in many respects, and it is no coincidence that he grew with his position – from the head of the hospital system in the *Emek* to the management of one of the largest and most important institutions established in the State. This growth, foremost, needs to be attributed to his credit. He had an unusual modesty, and abandoned all concern for personal visibility. Or thoughts, or desires for personal publicity. What we today call publicity, or public relations – was totally foreign to his character. His behavior, and modest smile carry within them an interesting contrast to the concepts, vision, and large-scale deeds that characterized his works. Saroka was the man who, for many years, was the driving force and prime mover for the expansion and strengthening of the hospital system. Even with his great vision, Saroka did not overlook small details, about people, the need for a picture on the wall of a clinic, for garden space surrounding the hospitals. He was concerned about every patient. He was always afraid that in some obscure point, that medical help was not reaching those who needed it. He was a man of pleasant disposition and has a good esthetic sense. He dressed simply, but always tastefully. I was always of the opinion that his external appearance reflected the inner man: clean, orderly, bright. His esthetic sense was primarily evident in the hospitals and clinics he built. He did not stint on any detail. He always wanted the very best. He wanted the sick person to be surrounded with a pleasant environment. Not everything came easily. He had great disputes both within the hospital system and outside of it, but he knew how to take the battle to his protagonists, and he always remained loyal to himself and his values."

Saroka left a huge legacy – an ***empire***. This empire, as is known, is now in crisis. It is now possible to hear, that if the great builder, Moshe Saroka were alive – the hospital system would not have come to a crisis, and even if it dis – Moshe Saroka would have saved it from the crisis.

He died on August 12, 1972, and was interred in the Petakh Tikva cemetery beside his mother.

Hanokh Saroka

Hanokh was two years old when his parents came to Volkovysk together with his brother Moshe, older than him by a year. As was the way of other Jewish boys of that era, he too was schooled in a *Heder*, and after he grew up – in the public high school, and in the afternoon at the Hebrew School. In 1919, he joined *HeHalutz*, and quickly became one of the pillars of the Volkovysk chapter.

He followed in the footsteps of his older brother, and made *aliyah* to the Holy Land. His first stop was at Afula. He worked on creating the road system, and excelled especially in laying water pipe from Kfar Hassidim to Afula. Hanokh was among the workers of *HaPoel HaTza'Ir*, and in 1932 he was among the first of the settlers in Tzofit in the camp of the *'The Settlement of the Thousand*.'

Like his brother, Moshe, he had a good sense of organization, and he invested the best of his energy and skill in all his endeavors, but there is no doubt that his crowning achievement was – the establishment of ***Bet Berel in Tzofit***, that was transformed into a wellspring university of the Labor Party. Zalman Shazar, the President of the State of Israel, wrote as follows, regarding his work

and achievements on the occasion of the death of Hanokh:

"Hanokh, my loyal friend, you knew how to put flesh and skin on the dreams that hovered before the eyes of our spirit, and we didn't know how to make them real. You were from a family of doers. I see the houses about me (Bet Berel) and I remember how they grew because of your energy, under the aegis of your guidance and faithfulness. We knew that everything that you wanted to get built – would get built. You took upon yourself the burden on yourself to build them: a library, classrooms, dormitories, houses for teachers and hostels. You conceived of them and built them. And you were not only a man of deeds, but also a man of ideas, of an educator, and a man of deeds capable to live the lives of others, and to draw them near until they are made to feel important in this place."

Hanokh was a member of the central Labor Party, and a member of its secretariat, and a representative to Zionist Congresses. He dreamt of an institution that would be a university of enlightenment for the members of the Labor Party, but he did not live to see its completion. In 1945, he was called to build Bet Berel, and until the day of his sudden death, he stood at the head of this institution, and invested his entire energy and strength in it.

In a letter dated 12.10.1970, Ben-Gurion writes, after visiting Bet Berel, that he feels much joy from what he saw:

"I was saddened to learn after my visit, that the creator of Bet Berel is no longer with us. While it is appropriate that this work is named for Berel, unwittingly, Saroka erected a permanent monument to himself. Indeed, there are miracle workers among us."

In 1971, in a publication '*Bet Berel*,' a piece in his memory appeared, called '*Haskalah & Community*,' that includes things about Hanokh, and also things written by Hanokh himself.

Raphael Klatshkin

Page 80: Untitled Picture of Subject

The mother of Raphael Klatshkin was a dentist in Volkovysk, and active in community affairs. As a youngster, Raphael was a pupil in the *Heder* of the teacher Skop, and other *Heders*. He was nine years old when he traveled to Israel with his brother Natan, in the company of his aunt, Khien'eh Avromsky to study at the *Hertzeliya* gymnasium, but when the First World War broke out, they returned to Volkovysk. In 1915, when the Germans captured the city, Rapahel began to study at the local Hebrew school that was established then, and began to reveal many talents, in the area of writing and acting. Together with his friend Joseph Galai, he published, *Der Yingl* (see the special writeup on this), and also a newspaper called *HaTekhiya*.

His creative spark, that first revealed itself in Volkovysk, did not fade, and his interest in art, especially the theater, did not stop increasing the entire way. He was accepted into the *Hebrew Theater* under the direction of David Diovdov, and after a while into the *Art Theater* under the direction of Y. M. Daniel. When the *KumKum Theater* was established under the direction of the writer, Avigdor HaMe'iri in 1927, Klatshkin traveled to Europe, completed his training in Berlin and Paris, and also appeared in plays. When he returned to Israel in 1929, he was accepted into the *HaBima Theater*, and during 60 years, he played many roles with great success, and was one of the outstanding actors. He earned the Israel Prize for his life's work in the arts. He passed away in 1987.

Raphael Klatshkin As A Young Man In Volkovysk

Page 81: Sample of the front page of Der Yingl

There is no need to introduce Rapahel Klatshkin, the man of *HaBima,* winner of the Israel Prize, who played tens of leading roles in various plays, to the citizens of Israel, but people from Volkovysk will undoubtedly be happy to read of the 'discovery' that

has fallen into our midst thanks to Katriel Lashowitz and Yehuda Gabbai, the director of the Theater Archive in Tel Aviv. We are looking at five pages of a periodical that appeared bi-weekly under the name of *Der Yingl*, that appeared in Volkovysk under the editorship of Raphael Klatshkin. The pages spread out in front of us are dates from the months of April-June 1920, and to the best of our knowledge there was no comparable periodical in any city or town in Poland. The living spirit of this bi-weekly periodical was Raphael Klatshkin. The banner of this periodical reveals its mission, and this is how it describes itself: '*An illustrated literary-humorous twice-weekly youth journal*.' The newspaper was printed in hectograph, and even the drawings were Klatshkin's. The language of the paper was Yiddish, except for page 4 of 15 from the issue of May 1920 and was appended to them as a 'Hebrew Addition.'

There was no party or institution behind this paper, but one could find all manner of things inside: gossip, poems, small messages, short essays on current events, jokes, epigrams, drawings and much more. Klatshkin filled about 80 to 90 percent of the paper in which a lively spirit can be sensed in all of its pages. In his quips, epigrams and jokes, ***Raphael'keh*** (as he signed his work) would provide reactions to the issues of the day, on the condition of the Jews in Poland, on anti-Semitic incidents, etc.

Let us bring an example of one of the jokes signed, '*Raphael'keh,*' about the trains in Poland, and here is what it says:

– Are you aware that the extensive delays in the movement of the trains in Poland are actually very useful?

– Useful? In what way?

– Very simple. If someone is thinking about committing suicide by laying down on the railroad tracks, it can be very many hours before the train will come and kill him, and the victim can become disgusted with waiting, and will return home without committing suicide.

– Do you think that the Poles did this intentionally in the first place?

– Certainly. After all, the Poles knew that conditions in the country would cause many people to become disgusted with their lives, and want to commit suicide.

This is just one example among many of Klatshkin's sharp sense of satire, and he was 15-16. A special edition of *Der Yingl,* (No. 5, Second Year, June 1, 1920) was dedicated to the 'trip of our editor Raphael Klatshkin to Palestine.' From this newspaper we are told on the neighborly and friendly and deep ties between Klatshkin and his friends. The banner of this paper carries a picture of Klatshkin, as well as a big headline as follows: Raphael'keh! Your *Yingl* is lonesome for you. That is to say – before he has even left Volkovysk, Klatshkin's friends and newspaper partners are already pining for him. Many blessings for Raphael and his brother Natan appear in this paper, on the occasion of their travels to Palestine. Klatshkin himself expresses his feelings prior to his voyage, with jokes and writings. We will reproduce a few lines from his poem, *Meine Gefiln* (My Feelings).

I travel away from my *shtetl*
Very far
Like a leaf that has been torn off
Before its time.

I travel to the Jordan, with its clear waters
Into the valley
I travel to the beautiful mount of Lebanon
Now and then

I travel to work hard there
With sweat
My face will become wet
At least I know

All the writers of *Der Yingl* accompany Klatshkin on his journey with words laden with deep kinship. One of them, a regular writer who signs with the name '*Dorf's Jung*' published a letter of departure that ends with these words, which bear witness to the valued relationship felt for Klatshkin by his associates: 'Live well in the land where you will

find yourself, and spread your shining brightness wherever you go.'

A moving poem that touches the heart, from Rapahel Klatshkin is dedicated to his mother, to whom he is bound with bonds of love. The opening lines of the poem are:

Who has loved me so strongly
Who thought only of me?
And who in the night
Made my bed wet with hot tears?

Who kissed me and cherished me
Who is ready to die for me
Who, with fervent, sweet words
Love me unto death?

Klatshkin's literary, humorist and satiric talents that budded in childhood, matured, as is known, in the course of years, in his appearances in plays he would also permit himself to read from his own works. In what Klatshkin left behind, there are also found poems that were written in a later period, more when he was already in Israel. A number of them appeared in the youth newspaper *BaMa'alah* and many of them simply lay in his drawer until they were found.

Yaakov Einstein

Page 82: *Meeting of Volkovyskers with the actor, Yaakov Einstein on his return from a tour of Argentina.*

Page 83: *Yaakov, Dvora and Arik Einstein*

The artistic talents of Yaakov Weinberg were revealed while he was still a student at the Hebrew gymnasium in Volkovysk. He didn't inherit them from his father, who was a storekeeper on the *Szeroka Gasse,* and not his mother either (from the Zilberman family), and yet, Yaakov succeeded in passing along these talents to his son (Arik). Yaakov also knew how, and loved to sing, and his comrades at *HaShomer HaTza'ir* testify that even in his work as the head of the chapter, he introduced song and poetry and song, dramatic reading and acting. The plays staged by *HaShomer HaTza'ir* received notable publicity because of Yaakov's talents.

After finishing his gymnasium studies, and coming to the Holy Land, he had great struggles within himself, but in the end, the call of the theater prevailed over the call of the kibbutz, and Yaakov was accepted into the Labor Theater, *Ohel,* and in time, he came to play leading roles in the theater group. His role in I. J. Singer's *Yosh'eh Kalb* was especially memorable. Yaakov continued his artistic career with this theater group, until the last curtain call of the Labor Theater.

Apart from his theater roles, Yaakov covered the country doing dramatic readings and acting, and met with great success. The repertoire of these presentations was drawn largely from Hebrew literature, by which Yaakov cared for the elevation of his programs, and did not satisfy himself with trivial presentations, or *schund,* as many did in those days.

Apart from the plays that he organized in Israel, he also toured outside the country as well, the most recent being a tour of Argentina. His appearance there, at various Hebrew schools, organized through a variety of groups, met with success, however, because of the onset of a serious illness, to our sadness, he was forced to return to Israel.

Einstein had recorded part of his repertoire, and in the last days of his life, when public appearances were no longer easy for him, he would personally sell his records. According to Gedaliah Pick, a member of kibbutz *Amir*, he remained troubled by the fact that he never realized those ideals that he fostered in his time as the head of the *HaShomer HaTza'ir* chapter, and did not join a kibbutz. Nevertheless, Einstein was well received in many kibbutzim, with friendship and affection, when he would bring them 'the song of the Land.'

Yaakov Einstein as a Friend

by Katriel Lashowitz

Volkovysk bequeathed two good theater actors to the land of Israel: ***Raphael Klatshkin*** and ***Yaakov Einstein***. To our great sadness, we must add those somber letters, ז"ל to both their names, because neither of the tow is today alive. I was a very close friend to one of these, and in the following lines, I plan to portray Yaakov Einstein as a friend and companion.

Yaakov was a friendly and stimulating man, and after I reached the Holy Land by means that were not exactly simple or easy, with the partisans, Yaakov and his wife Dvora took me in warmly and graciously. I came and went in their house like a member of the family. Yaakov showed great curiosity about me, and all that I had experienced during the war, and would listen to my stories and "sold" them, as I later came to know, to the members of *Ohel,* who themselves were eager to hear the tales and experiences of a Jewish partisan. He wasn't always accurate with the facts. As an artist, blessed with talent, and as a man with a presence, he would occasionally embellish with something of his own imagination in order that the story appear even better.

In one of my visits to his house, I told Yaakov, that I was interested in renting a home in Tel-Aviv, and I already had the means to pay the rents demanded. A few days hadn't gone by, when Yaakov notified me, that he found a one-room place in an attic of a friend's home, and in order to agree on the rent, both of us would have to visit with the owner, and that's what we did. When we reached the house that evening, Yaakov asked me to remain outside, and when it will be necessary – he'll call me in to sign a contract or lease.

As I later learned from Yaakov, he saw a need to tell the owner exactly who the tenant was, and praised me as a fighting partisan, etc., etc. The lady of the house was busy at that time preparing some coffee and a snack, and she overheard us from the kitchen, catching only fragments of what we were saying, and before she brought in the coffee, she told Yaakov that she had no intention of renting the attic room to a partisan who had lived in the forest, skilled in sabotage, who knows how to shoot a gun, attack, etc., etc. She was simply frightened of this 'type' of an individual. None of Yaakov's explanations helped, as to who sent me, why I did what I did, and she did not agree to permit him to present me personally, so she could see for herself that the 'devil isn't really all that bad,' and that I represented no danger to her. She stood her ground: under no circumstances!

When Yaakov came out of the house, he relayed this story to me emotionally, and told me about the peculiar woman of the house, who had heard fragments of the conversation about me, and then refused to rent me the room. I saw that he was completely crushed and depressed, and I felt a need to comfort him. Since the house stood at the corner of *Arnon* Street and *Am Yisrael Chai*, in the north of Tel-Aviv, I said to him as a vote of confidence: don't worry Yaakov, look, *Am Yisrael Chai*, and a solution to the problem will be found, the influx of new *olim* into empty housing is very much the vogue right now, and I have in my life dealt with much greater problems...

I gave him a hint, and he got it. He said: I have no qualms about proving to the landlady that you were a partisan. They were my friends, but *were*. From this point on – the friendship is over.

I tried to persuade him otherwise, that it was not worth losing friends on account of so trivial a matter, and that I would most certainly find another place, but Yaakov said: "On the contrary, I want you to learn a lesson from this bitch, whose husband is nonetheless a decent sort of person, but she seems to be a mean person from birth. He proposed to me that we take advantage of my status as a partisan, and to arrange the occupancy that night by moving my effects through the room of this murderess of the house. He added that if to do this, it would be necessary to enlist the help of additional partisans, or to delay the process for a couple of days in order

to assure its success – his assistance was guaranteed. "This bitch will yet come an beg your forgiveness for her behavior towards a fighting partisan."

I decided to cause him some spiritual relief, and myself some residential relief. I took his advice, but I didn't ask his participation, and there was no need for his help. When I let Yaakov know that *Am Yisrael Chai*, and the partisan Katriel Lashowitz was already living in the bitch's house – his joy was boundless. Not only did the members of the *Ohel* troupe hear this story, elaborated with all manner of details, but also all his friends and acquaintances. His wife Dvora told all her friends about this adventure in the organization of working mothers, and also, their prominent son, Arik had he been a little older at the time – would have composed a song on this subject...

Abraham Makov

Page 84: *Untitled Picture of Subject*

Abraham Makov was born in Volkovysk in 1918. His father was a man of means, owner of a business and residential property in Volkovysk and Bialystock. According to Aharon Meged, as told in *Davar*, one of his grandfathers, on his mother's side, was a ZAKH"M (*Zera Kedoshim Heym*[38]), one of the martyrs, who gave himself up to the Russian regime in order to save an entire town that had been accused in a blood libel. His grandmother's mother, Batya Makov who was one of the pioneers of the First *Aliyah*, left her husband, and took her five children in order to settle in Rehovot and work the land. Batya's story is presented by Moshe Smilensky in his book, "The People of the Soil."

Abraham grew up and was educated at a Hebrew High School in Volkovysk, and after he graduated, he traveled to Nancy in France, in order to complete his studies in electrical engineering. When he returned for vacation to his family in Poland in 1939, the Second World War broke out. Abraham attempted to continue his studies at the University of Lvov, while this city was still under Russian control, but he was forced to suspend his schooling when the city was captured by the Germans, and his father was killed by Poles during pogroms that took place in Volkovysk. During the days of the first 'action' by the Germans, the remaining members of his family were wiped out. Abraham succeeded in fleeing. He wandered to the south, crossed the Carpathian Mountain range, and entered Romania. He was imprisoned there, but Jews who had commercial relations with his father got him released. He arrived in Israel by indirect means, and continued his studies at the Technion in Haifa, supporting himself by a variety of jobs, such as washing dishes in restaurants, hauling freight, being a guard at the electric company, etc.

A. Meged tells about this period:

"The image of his murdered father, and his family members who were driven to extermination camps – pursued him. The Andres army was in the Holy Land at the time, and he made a decision that in the light of those times appears absurd: at a time when Jewish soldiers were being yanked out of the army and 'swallowed' into the settlement, Abraham decided to enlist, on the assumption that in this way he would be able to get back to Poland and find members of his family, when Poland was liberated. But this illusion was quickly shattered. Two months after he enlisted, and after the broad-based anti-Semitism of this army became evident, and after the expectation of participating in the liberation of Poland vanished – he discarded the uniform, and returned to his studies. In 1944, he graduated from the Technion as a machinery and electrical engineer, and a year later, he married Malka Cohen, a graduate of the Teacher's Seminary in Tel-Aviv. Already then – he was recognized as a man with the skills and talents associated with fundamental concepts – he was drafted into the Haganah, to work in the underground munitions factories. From this point on, a career begins that is out of the ordinary, and mostly secret, that continued for 35 years, until he became head of the central section of the Israeli Military for the procurement of armaments, and a Deputy Managing Director and one of those who raised the military manufacturing industry to a major concern, not only strengthening Israel's security, and

[38] Hebrew, for 'They are of the Holy Seed"

contributing to its victories in battle, but also made it into a first-class international force in the advancement of all manner of weaponry. The equipment of tanks with 105mm cannon, that was developed by him, proved to be the best in the world. Orders that were received by the TA"Sh from its inception have totaled over one-half billion dollars."

Up to here is the summary of Aharon Meged, who was also related to Abraham Makov. His life's work and what Abraham accomplished is told by the CEO and Managing Director of the Israeli Military Industry, and his words provide a good perspective on Abraham's great accomplishments over the course of nearly forty years:

"Abraham arrived at the TA"Sh in 1947, on the eve of the establishment of the State, as a machinery engineer, and from that time on, never ceased top give of his energy and skills to the development of military manufacture, and its transformation from very modest factories to a manufacturing concern that employs about fifteen thousand workers. He was literally a genius at developing modern weaponry, and his achievements in this sphere can serve as a model of the development of Jewish talent in the area of day-to-day manufacture. He was able to complete projects within 5% of their target – a feat that many managers find difficult to achieve. With the meager resources at his disposal, with a handful of trained people – he succeeded in competing with the best talent and engineers in all parts of the world. His contributions to the improvements of the weaponry used by the IDF, under his supervision, is immense indeed, and it is because of this that he twice was awarded the Israel Security Prize, and was also awarded a commendation for his unique contributions in the development of tanks, which occupy a front row in the arming of the IDF for a modern war.

Abraham Makov continued to accelerate development up to his last days, and it is sufficient to note that up to half of the output of TA:"Sh is of his own design."

Regarding his final months of life, Aharon Meged writes:

"The last five months of his life – are a chapter of remarkable heroism. Despite the physical agonies that grew worse daily – he traveled each day to work, with the help of his chauffeur Albert, in order to provide oversight to development projects that he had initiated. As to examinations, radiation therapy and medical care – that he would only turn to after working hours. When because of the pain, he was no longer able to leave his home – all of his thought was dedicated to what was going on in the place where work was being developed. He remained in telephone contact with the factory, giving advice to the workers. Even when he became bedridden, with the cancer eating away at his body – his mind did not cease trying to provide solutions to technical and engineering problems. He would write them down on pieces of paper, or ask his wife to take dictation from him. His wife, an outstanding teacher and educator, told me that sensing the end was near, stimulated his intellect, as if he was seeking to round out and design additional concepts, so long as he still had a breath in him. When he was finally enveloped in the darkness of hallucination, the pain would confuse his mind, with regard to the unsolved problems at work, and from his thrashing about, he would give out confused sentences, half of which dealt with a complaint about his deteriorating spine, and half about a missile that wasn't mounted correctly. Like Jean Christophe, in whose ears the strains of music resonated in his last moments, he too, up till his last minutes, was producing solutions to engineering problems. In one of these last minutes, he mumbled to his son out of an hallucination: "They killed my father."

The memory of those depredations haunted him all the years he was in the Land. It is possible to believe that a hidden agenda to prevent a second Holocaust, was the moving force behind his feverish activity, from which he never rested, and was the fire that ignited his creative capacity."

On Wednesday, 29 Sivan 5741 (1980), when Abraham was no longer alive, he was awarded a third Israel Security prize, in the presence of the President of the State, the Prime Minister and the Head of the IDF, Head of the Security Office and the CEO and Managing Director of military manufacturing. The prize was received by his wife, Malka, and his son Ron. The prize was given to him for "a lifetime of dedicated work, and for his seminal contribution to the development and design of weapons for the IDF and for export."

In his concluding remarks at this event, the CEO and

Managing Director of The Israeli Military Industry, Michael Shur said the following:

"To our great pain and sadness, Abraham Makov is no longer with us, and his illness brought him down at the point where he was still full of ideas and plans for development and advancement. The award of this prize will remain as a tribute to his memory, and a recognition of his work during his long years of service, and will be a sign of honor to his family and the many thousands of workers in the family of the workers in military manufacture."

We, the people of Volkovysk can add only a few words: the contributions and achievements of Abraham Makov are also an honor and a source of pride to the Jews of Volkovysk in whose midst Abraham grew up.

Shimon Rogov (Reznitsky)

By Katriel Lashowitz

Page 86: The Twin Brothers, Shimon and Nakhum

I met Shimon while I was a student at the *Tarbu*t [school] and a member of *Gordonia* in Volkovysk. Already at that time, Shimon stood out with his fiery youth, with is desire to be of help to the community, with his commitment to fulfil the 10 commandments of the movement in their entirety. He had a difficult childhood. He and his twin brother Nakhum lost their father at the age of nine. Their mother shouldered the burden of supporting the family, and it was not easy for her in the little town of Krzemienica, considering that she wanted to give her sons a complete education. The twins moved from the little town to Volkovysk, and were quickly absorbed into the community, the *Tarbut* School and the movement.

In time, when he was already a student in the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium, he was appointed as a director of the movement, and when the time arrived, close to the outbreak of the war, he went for naval training in Gdynia, as part of an objective to organize a naval unit for *Gordonia* that would then make *aliyah* together to the Land of Israel.

The war subverted and nullified may plans, including those of Shimon. The Russians were not very enthused by his Zionist plans, and decided to exile him and a few other of his *Gordonia* comrades to Siberia. On his way to Siberia, the War between Germany and the Soviet Union erupted, and yesterday's enemy became today's ally. Shimon understood that everything had to be done to assure a victory for the Soviet Union. Among other things, he organized an effort in Siberia to produce skis for the Red Army. After a while along with the second Polish group, he was transferred to the Caucasus, and here he boldly renewed his energetic work, with an enthusiasm that had never left him, because he was appointed head of an orphanage.

At the end of the war, he went to Poland and joined efforts to re-establish the movement. Deputy Pesach Perlman, who participated in a *Gordonia* seminar organized by Shimon in Lodz in 1946 tell of him: "Shimon presented a variety of subjects to us, beginning with the teachings of A. D. Gordon, to creating settlements. Everything he had to say was well received by us, not only because of the content and presentation of what he said, but because we valued his modesty, the self-effacing way in which he conducted himself, and all the members knew that Shimon was not just a good speaker, but was also a good doer." Among his many fine qualities was his love for another person because he was a human being. Day and night, he would emphasize that it is necessary to be patient with the public even if they are not acceptable to you.

Shimon always had a word of encouragement for every member, and when he accepted an assignment in the 'Evacuation,' he was very concerned about offering encouragement to the refugees and "prepare them emotionally for the difficult journey ahead during the time of crossing the Alps into Italy from Innsbruck."

After his own arrival in Israel, he continued to work ardently in the assembly of the *aliyah*, and he did it

in his own unique way: he went to the homes of the *olim*, spoke to them at great length, and attempted to understand what was bothering them – ***and then help.*** In 1960, he was designated as revenue director and was transferred to the western Galilee. The door to his office was always open to everyone in need, and his eternal optimism stuck to everyone who came in contact with him. One of his friends at work tells that "Shimon would distribute small loans out of his pocket to the needy, without the recipients knowing where the money came from." He visited youth settlements frequently, and was a facilitator of relationships between world Jewry and Israel. The youth in the land rewarded him with their love and esteem, just as the members of *Gordonia* has done during his younger days.

The heart indeed aches that people like these are taken from us before their time.

Azriel Broshi

By Katriel Lashowitz

Page 87: Untitled Photograph of Subject

Azriel, the son of the *Dayan*, Rabbi Yaakov Berestovitsky, excelled even as a child in Lisokovo as a gifted youngster, good and doing good, modest in his ways, and scholarly. He was a Hebrew teacher in Lisokovo, a member of *HeHalutz*, and the sum total of his yearning was – to make *aliyah* to the Land of Israel. He was able to attain his heart's desire, and in 1921 he made *aliyah* with a group of the first elements of the Third *Aliyah* (he described his *aliyah* in one of the chapters of this book).

Upon his arrival in the Holy Land, he followed the same path at others in the Third Aliyah: he worked on road-building, in tobacco, etc. Broshi specialized in the knowledge of the country, and in time became famous as a tour guide in the Holy Land. He knew each byway and road in Israel, and the Tanakh never disappeared from his hand, and in his explanations of various sites in the Holy Land, he knew how to integrate the past with the present, and to all the tourists under his guidance, he was an encyclopedia on knowledge of the Holy Land. Only someone who loved the Land of Israel, with a love that was boundless, could lead tours the way Broshi did. He instilled this love in everyone who participated in tours under his direction. Occasionally, he also conducted tours in adjacent countries, and he demonstrated substantial expertise there as well.

In the first year of my arrival in Israel, in 1946, Broshi included me in a three-day tour of the Western and Upper Galilee. People like Ben-Gurion, Levi Shkolnik (Eshkol), Golda Meyerson [Meir] and others, participated in this tour. The direction of this tour by Broshi was a very profound experience for me. Thanks to this tour, I also decided to conduct tours of the Galilee. [I did so] during two seasons that I was in Safed and one season in Tiberias.

When the Tourist Office was established in the Operating Committee of the Histadrut, it was natural that it be headed by Broshi. To the thousands of tourists from the United States and other lands, Broshi served as an address and a reference point at the same time. He was also active in the Organization of Volkovysk Émigrés, never missing a meeting with his townsfolk, and did his utmost to help those needing assistance, especially the survivors of the Holocaust that reached our shores towards the end of the forties.

In Memory of Noah Tzemakh

By Katriel Lashowitz

Noah didn't experience the great Holocaust, but it is possible to say without exaggeration that he not only spoke and heard about it, but he lived the Holocaust with every element in his body, it was etched into the fiber of his heart, and he wanted with his entire might and main to assure that it would not be forgotten, and that the members of the younger generation should re-live this tragic episode without parallel, and that they too, should know how to assess the contribution of the Jewish community of Volkovysk to Jewish creativity. Because of this, he wanted to know about everything that had transpired

in this community, and he took an interest in the smallest details, went to great lengths to meet and talk to people who remembered the city or lived in it, until the *Abrogator* descended upon it. He assembled material for a Volkovysk Memorial Book, and looked after assuring that everything that was written about it was proof-positively correct, without exaggeration or embellishment. He also didn't want things to be published without obtaining the permission of the contributors. He saw a *mission* in the creation of this book, which he carried out faithfully. His 'tour' of Volkovysk that he carried out in his mind's eye, that is presented in this book, is but one element out of thousands, that bears witness to his great affection for the institutions of activity, and for the rank and file, good Jewish people of his birthplace.

He did not know that his end was near. If he had known – he would have certainly driven himself and his friends even harder to assure the appearance of a Volkovysk book. He 'turned me on' to this work, on behalf of the book, back in the days when we were still engaged in erecting a memorial to the memory of our townsfolk and those from its vicinity. There is no doubt that if we have been privileged to publish this book – it is in large measure thanks to Noah Tzemakh, ז"ל, for which many will be grateful to him. He died on 23.12.86.

And finally – an interesting detail: Noah's son, one of the senior officials in the Israeli police force, Deputy A. Tzemakh, would certainly know that his father went about with the idea of the preservation of the Jewish community where he was born, and when I came to their house on the day after Noah died, to fulfill the commandment of comforting the bereaved, he anticipated me by saying: "Don't worry about the memorial book. I will continue with the work in my father's place, and get it done."

The Story of Giora Epstein

Giora Even was not born in Volkovysk, but he has a relationship to this city, because of his father, Hillel Epstein, a man of the Negev, who was born in our hometown, and was very active in our time as the head of the *HaShomer HaTza'ir* chapter during the early thirties. We saw a need to bring the story of Lt. Col. Giora, who has the highest number of kills of enemy aircraft. During his service in the air force as a Mirage pilot, Giora shot down no less than 17 jets. His story, which follows, was first published by the air force office of defense, under the title of 'Skies Cleaned of MIGs.' The story speaks for itself, and it would appear that people from Volkovysk in the past, and especially their children and grandchildren, would find it interesting.

[*Ed Note: The text of this diary has not been translated. It consists of the notes of the pilot during his various sorties to shoot down the MIGs that are credited to him]*

The Surrounding Towns and Villages

The Jewish Communities in the Towns Surrounding Volkovysk

In the many towns and larger villages that surrounded Volkovysk, there were Jewish communities that were uprooted during the Holocaust. A number of them (Zelva, Svislucz, Piesk, Porozovo, Krzemienica, and others) had special Memorial Books written for them. Seeing as all of these towns utilized Volkovysk as a center, we see a need, in this book, to tell about these towns as well, where Jews resided, and made their final voyage during the Holocaust by way of Volkovysk, seeing that the Germans brought them first to our city, and from there they were taken together with the Jews of Volkovysk to the extermination camps.

Zelva

By Yerakhmiel Moorstein

This town, found on the banks of the Zelvianka River, that empties into the Neman, is at a distance of 20 km from Volkovysk. There were tens of villages around it, and estates that were populated by Russians of the Orthodox faith, and a minority of Poles, but also Jewish families lived there. They made a living by managing the estates of the nobility who preferred to live outside of the country.

During the First World War, when the German Army moved forward and captured several fortifications in which Russian soldiers were entrenched, the Russian Orthodox population began to transfer itself into Russia. Tens of thousands of Jews did the same, who lived close to the long German-Russian border, and in this way, long ranks of Jewish refugees were formed, who moved to the east, and along the path of their flight, many stopped and stayed in Zelva. The residents of Zelva received these refugees graciously, and helped them get settled in the town.

The Germans controlled this part of the world for about three years. They attempted to implement law and order in the area that they ruled, set up a citizens committee, headed by a German-speaking Jew, opened a school, especially for Jewish children, and slowly, slowly, life began to return to normal. But it became quickly evident that the Germans utilized the local committee for their own advantage. They implemented forced labor, especially in the forest, and confiscated everything that had remained in the possession of the residents. Lack of food became increasingly acute, and hunger grew, there was much suffering and these tribulations fell upon the Jews.

The town passed from one sovereignty to the next during the war years, and after the Bolshevik Revolution, a communist regime was established in the town, but it did not remain in power very long, because the Poles captured the town. In the interregnum, between governments, there were many groups that came through the town, which pillaged, plundered and destroyed whatever remained of the Jewish possessions – and very little remained indeed.

In 1793, the Russians invaded Zelva, a town in which there were then 846 Jews who paid taxes. By 1897, the number of Jews had reached 1,844, and they comprised 66% of the entire population. When the independent government of Poland was established after the First World War, the number of Jews in the town was 1,319, and they were 64% of the population.

Community Life

The Rabbi, understandably, filled an important position in Jewish life, in whose hands were the ledgers of the town in which he recorded births, marriages, and also provided various ritual rulings, and decided on questions of Kashrut, etc.

The Rabbi lived in the house beside the synagogue, and his modest stipend was insured by an exclusive franchise for the sale of yeast. The second in stature was the Cantor, who was also the *Shokhet* and the *Mohel*. The *Khevra Kadisha*, whose members were volunteers, dealt with funerals and burials. There were public servants righteous women, and others, who dealt with the needs of the poor, widows and orphans.

At the approach of Passover, the institution of *Maot Khittim* was organized to provide the needy with matzos. Before the High Holy Days, platters would be set out in the various houses of worship, and each plate had a label describing the beneficiary of the donation. In the synagogues and the *Batei Medrashim,* there were always volunteers who were available to lead the congregations in prayer, read from the Torah, or blow the shofar, etc.

The Schulhof as a Spiritual Center

The *Schulhof* square was the very center of the heart of the community, and it was here that all the community buildings were to be found. The single synagogue of the town was built of brick and stone. The Holy Ark was the product of an artisan's labor, to which he had dedicated decades of his life. By hand, he constructed and created an outstanding artistic piece, using only primitive methods (no electricity was available). When the ark was opened, a Torah scroll would be presented in the paws of a lion, and above the front opening winged creatures began to beat their wings, accompanied by the sounds of drums and cymbals. A picture of this Holy Ark appears in Volume IV of the Hebrew Encyclopedia.

Every community event, event family events, took place on the *Schulhof.* It was here that weddings were held, Bar Mitzvah celebrations, funerals, etc. When the deceased was being taken for the last journey, all the Jewish stores would be closed. During the month of Elul, the square would be teeming with people. Men, women, children, would all come to pray and say *Selikhot* at the second watch of the night, carrying lanterns in their hands. On the High Holy Days, during the recesses between prayers, the square would fill up with Jews, all wrapped in their prayer shawls. These were the 'strictly observant' who would come and go to their homes, not relying on the *eruv*.

Every *Bet HaMedrash* had bookcases stuffed full of books on religion and thought, and at every opportunity, especially between the afternoon and evening prayers, the scholars would give lessons in the *Gemara* or the *Mishna* to the common people. Religious articles were usually brought from the big city, although Leibl the Scribe of Zelva itself made no small contribution on his own.

There was a Fire-fighters organization, on the face of it, municipally run, but all of its members except for the head, were Jewish, and they were also the ones who established the Fire-fighters' orchestra. The meager equipment to put out fires (several hand pumps and pails) was housed in a wooden building in the center of town, that also served as a theater as well. If a fire broke out, the fire fighters immediately gathered , and those who owned horses harnessed them up, in order to bring the fire fighting equipment to the scene of the blaze, even though they were usually late, and only the wind could arrest the spread of the flames...

Daily Life in the Town

Most of the families were blessed with an abundance of children, and lived in simple houses that passed from generation to generation by inheritance. A barn or stable was usually attached to the house, as well as a storage bin for firewood. Behind the house was a small plot of land, and also several furrows for vegetable planting.

On the outskirts of the town, along the banks of the Zelvianka, there was a pasture of several hundred dunams, that served as a natural pasture for the farm animals, and it belonged to the Jews. Jewish herdsmen would lead the cows out to pasture.

There was a ***water well*** in the center of the square, and it provided for all the water needs of the house, and during fair days, also for the farmers and their

horses. The homemakers would wash their laundry in the Zelvianka River. On washing day, the children of the family were also recruited to help. There were other wells in the vicinity of occupied houses.

The ***Bath House*** was open only on the weekend. Every family was in the habit of bathing as a matter of course. After spending a couple of hours in order to be scrubbed down with a brush, then hot water, followed by cold water, they would return home clean and freshened. In the summer, they preferred to bathe in the river, and because of this, many knew how to swim.

The ***Cold House*** was a wide cellar at the end of the Schulhof square, in which hundreds of tons of ice blocks were stored, that were carted voluntarily from the Zelvianka during the winter. This ice was life-restoring during the summer months, and was especially critical for sick people running high fever. The tried and true remedy in these instances was – to put ice on the forehead. During the summer, the ice also served to preserve foodstuffs and to make a primitive form of ice cream.

The ***Diet*** was not particularly outstanding. The main intake was bread, potatoes and dried corn, and in the fall, also fruits and vegetables. The better off people would put cucumbers in casks and store them for the winter. Meat or fish was eaten only on the Sabbath and Festival Holidays.

The Fairs

Zelva was known as a commercial town as early as 1800. In those days, the Jews started to bring cows, horsed and leather from Moscow and other cities. This event was publicized between the main road and the railroad track, and merchants from the area, both near and far, would come to the town.

The Zelva fairs gained quite a reputation. Every town would prepare for the fair, because the income from that single day would keep them for several weeks. The farmers would begin to stream in from daybreak on, either on horse or on foot, to the fair, in order to get a good spot for their wagons.

About half the Jews in the town were either merchants or storekeepers. The commercial center, built like a square, was owned by a German family, that charged a rent to the storekeepers and the adjacent houses, that ringed the center on three sides, since the fourth side was set aside as a market for cattle.

The selection of merchandise in the stores was modest, and limited in the extreme. Those who were in need, made do with the least they could get, and accordingly, the revenue in most of these stores was minimal. The burden of taxes was great, and the Polish treasury official Grabski[39] was particularly outstanding in squeezing the Jews, and who in his time was the prime mover for a substantial *aliyah,* named for him – '*the Grabski Aliyah*.'

My Town, Lisokovo

By Jonah Borukhansky

Page 93: Top, A View of Lisokovo

Bottom: The Temple Choir in Lisokovo with the Cantor, Leib Karashinsky

Page 94: A Hanukkah Party of Young People in Lisokovo

It is questionable if anyone knows when this town was established, but if one goes by the gravestones in the old cemetery, most of whom are overgrown and neglected, it is possible to assume that Jews lived in Lisokovo for centuries.

It was possible to reach the town by way of dirt roads during the summer, but for the remaining seasons of the year, Lisokovo was practically cut off, because of mud and snow, that covered all the roads, and there were no highways in those days. Transport between Lisokovo and nearby towns took

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[39] Also referenced in Dr. Einhorn's book in the chapter on Yudel Novogrudsky. See the first part of this Trilogy, p. 264

place on wagons hitched to horses. In the thirties, and experiment was instituted to run a bus along the line from Volkovysk-Lisokovo-Ruzhany, but after a short while, it was seen that the line didn't pay for itself, and so was stopped. It was only in 1938, that the wagon drivers bought a new bus, and they established a form of cooperative for transportation.

Nearly all the Jewish dwellings were in the center of the town, as well as their stores, but the main form of livelihood was – labor. There were two flour mills that ran on steam power, which also belonged th a group of Jewish partners, and the farmers from the surrounding area would bring their grain for milling. Every two weeks there was a 'fair' that provided livelihood to many Jews.

The three policemen in the town had little to do on normal days, which was not the case during 'fair' days, when no small number of the gentiles would get drunk and revel about. In general, there was a peaceful relati0onship between Jews, and one could see a lot of Christians attending the weddings and festivities of the Jews. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, even the Christians would come to the sole synagogue in the town, in order to enjoy the singing of the Cantor and the choir. I am of the opinion that our town was among the few that permitted itself the pleasure of maintaining a permanent Cantor, and he was indeed, a young man from Ruzhany, and enchanted all the Jews of the town with his sweet voice. An interesting fact: After the Cantor began to serve in his post, it became known to the leaders of the town, that several years before, this very same Cantor was in the Adamkova estate, training along with other young Jewish men in agriculture, as preparation to make *aliyah*. There were many who saw in this a form of disqualification, and the town split into two camps: those who demanded that the Cantor be dismissed, and those who saw no reason for him to be disqualified. In the end, it was decided to bring the issue to the Dayan of Kosovo, and the Dayan ruled that Leib Karashinsky, this was the Cantor's name, was 'kosher,' insofar as qualifying as a Cantor, and the training he underwent does not disqualify him from rendering 'Song and Prayer.'

Lisokovo – surrounded by forests, and they spread to the distant plains. Also large estates of Polish nobles and many pastures surround the town. Many of the Jews in the town earned a living from working the land of the estates of the nobles. All the houses in the town were built of wood, and the roofs were covered in a thin slate. Fires were a frequent occurrence in the town, and it was necessary to bring fire-fighting equipment from Ruzhany, but until these would arrive, the fire would cause a desolation. The local fire-fighters had only several barrels of water mounted on wagons, and their fire-fighting process was very primitive. Only the better off *balebatim* could afford to insure their homes, but the victims of fires, who were from the poorer class, were forced to depend on the mercy of heaven and the mercy of the Jews....it is worth noting, that all the prominent people in the town volunteered as fire-fighters, and among them was the *Feldscher*, Goldman, who for many years was the only place that sick people could go to, and after he died, a graduate doctor came to the town, who was not Jewish, but many of the ill longed for the *Feldscher* who was not a graduate, who had earned a reputation as an expert in dealing with internal disease.

Almost all Jewish families had cows. The surplus of milk was used to prepare cheeses and butter. Each house also had a cellar that was used to store potatoes, cabbage, cucumbers, and other vegetables. The vegetables stored in the cellar were edible all year round. Fruit was also in abundance from the nearby surrounding forests, and the womenfolk became expert at preparing a variety of jams from these fruits. Mushrooms were dried, and Lisokovo mushroom soup was a real delicacy. Even the geese of Lisokovo gained a reputation in the area, because they were fat, and well-fed, and provided fat for the entire year. Their feathers were also very useful. One could find the goose feathers in all the blankets and pillows of the Jews of Lisokovo. Plucking feathers occupied all the women of the town.

In the wintertime, as soon as the rivers froze over, the winter sports season began, especially skating on the ice. Skates were made by hand, by the young

people, and the only thing that was requited was two pieces of wood, the length of a foot, and strips of iron inserted in their midst. With these simple skates, the people of Lisokovo were able to compete with people that had more modern skates. All the young people of the town could be found out on the ice in the afternoon on a Sabbath day. At the same time, parents would be fulfilling the mitzvah of 'sleeping on the Sabbath,' all the while that their children were skating on the ice and doing acrobatic feats to dazzle the eye. Not a few would fall into a hole in the ice, under which there was flowing water, and in order that they not be subject to getting beaten by their parents, they were taken to dry out in... the synagogue, in which there were large brick ovens, and by the time of the *Maariv* Prayers, the boys would be dried out.

There were charitable and goodwill institutions in Lisokovo that looked after the poor and destitute, and righteous women who would go from house to house, collecting '*tzedaka*.' It is worth noting that the women literally worked very hard. They would so laundry by hand, bake their own bread, sew clothing for the members of their families, establish the household, prepare mead from honey, bake matzos, etc., etc., but they never, God forbid, complained.

The ties of the town to Volkovysk were very strong, even though to reach Volkovysk from Lisokovo one had to ride all night in a wagon hitched to two horses. Frequently, the wagons would get stuck in mud or snow, and the wagon driver along with the passengers would have to get out and 'give a push' – that is, disembarking and putting a shoulder to the wheels. The wagon driver Benjamin Kuzhevitsky would bring the mail from Ruzhany, and even obtained authorization to carry a pistol to defend his life, in the event that robbers attacked him, however, it must ben immediately said that he was never attacked, and he never put a bullet into the gun...

When the war broke out between Poland and Germany, the Jews of Lisokovo found out somewhat later. The single radio in town was at the Polish tavern, and this radio broadcast one theme without interruption: "The Poles will not give the Germans so much as a button." And if the radio says so – who is not to believe it?

Not many days went by before the town was flooded with police and soldiers fleeing the front. The confusion was immense. Desolation and destruction. The Poles managed to discover the single autobus that was hidden under a pile of fodder, and they confiscated it for their own use, as well as the horses and wagons. Nobody knew what the day would bring, until the change came, and in line with the Ribbentrop-Molotov Treaty, Lisokovo was transferred to communist rule, to the Soviet Union. The Jews were elated by this change. The soldiers who had been drafted into the Polish army began to return to their homes, and in their wake, a series of arrests began of the bourgeois, property owners, Polish officials and anyone the communists suspected of being bourgeois. Among those detained were the Rabbi and several priests, but they were set free after a short while.

Very rapidly, refugees began to arrive from the territories captured by the Germans. According to everyone, there were terrible stories about the relationship of the Germans to the Jews. The Jews of Lisokovo did the best that they could to ease the distress of these refugees, until the Soviet regime transferred the majority of these refugees into the heartland of Russia. Tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, and various other tradespeople were organized into cooperatives, and wood sellers began to work as state employees, many were occupied with digging peat, that also served as fuel for the flour mills. A school was opened in which instruction was in Yiddish, but it was closed shortly thereafter, and the Jewish children were sent to a Russian school that also included children from the vicinity. There were difficulties in obtaining food, long lines stretched from the early hours of the morning to obtain sugar, oil and other necessities of life. One, and only one store served the entire area.

In time, the regime was installed and order returned. They began to develop the area, and a military airfield was established nearby. Prisoners who were brought from Russia worked on road building. Jews

in Lisokovo, who owned wagons and horses, were compelled as well to haul stones for some distance, to this air field. Tanks and armored troops passed through the town, and in the school, there was instruction in how to defend against gas attacks. In a word – all was "content" in the town.

This was the way things went along until June 21, 1941, when the German-Russian War broke out. A tremendous exodus to the east began, and the first of those to flee were – the workers in the *Komsomol*, and the communist party, among which were many Jews. There was great turmoil in the town, and young people again were recruited, this time into the Soviet Army.

The Germans entered the town accompanied by cannon, tanks and all manner of weaponry. Immediately Christians sprouted up who joined up to cooperate with the Germans, providing them with agricultural produce and all manner of foodstuffs, and all the information that was demanded of them. The Jews locked themselves in their houses, greatly alarmed and anxious. Once the front had passed the town, the Germans began to "deal" with the Jews. The first step – they assembled all the Jews, from the youngest to the oldest, in the center of the town, arranged them all in rows, with armed Germans opposite them. The local Christian citizenry stood nearby, who had come to "observe the spectacle." The Germans contented themselves at this juncture with the reading of their first decrees. Among these, the Jews were ordered to assemble gold and silver and turn it over to the Germans in the course of several days. Lisokovo was not endowed with many rich Jews, and it was difficult for the local *Judenrat* to raise the contribution that had been impressed by the Germans. An assembly of the Jews was called at the synagogue, and the Rabbi announced an 'excommunication' of anyone who had gold or silver, and refused to turn it over to the *Judenrat.* This 'excommunication decree' had an effect. Many sold all manner of their possessions to Christians in the Area, in order to raise funds. At the time designated by the Germans, the *Judenrat* had the designated sum, and the Jews breathed a little easier.

It is worth noting at this time that there were capable leaders in the local *Judenrat*, led by Abraham Kuzvitsky, and they found a variety of ways to satisfy the German demands. Moshe Resnick was also among the members of the *Judenrat*, and when he predicted the end of the Jews of Lisokovo was nigh, and many thought he had gone out of his mind.

There was no ghetto in Lisokovo, but decrees came one after another. The *Judenrat* would supply the Germans with labor in accordance with their demands. Tailors and shoemakers would repair the uniforms and boots of the Germans, and groups of young people would work on road repair. By comparison with the condition of Jews in other cities and towns, the condition of the Jews of Lisokovo was not so bad, and there were Germans who actually visited Jewish homes, and even made an attempt to be friendly with them. The *Judenrat* help them obtain what they needed and supplied food, and it appears that the news of the relatively good circumstances of the Jews of Lisokovo caused an influx of refugees from nearby towns, and they too received support with food and shelter to the extent available.

Small groups of partisans were active in the vicinity of Lisokovo, who, from time-to-time, would emerge from their hiding places in the forest, and carry out acts of reprisal. Among other acts, they burned the Mogolovtsa Estate and everything that was in it, in order that the Germans not derive any value from it. The Germans would periodically organize attack campaigns against parts of the forest where partisans were located, but without any particular success. The farmers of the area also allied themselves with the partisans. On one of those days, the Germans organized an encirclement against these farmers, and hundreds of them were captured and brought to the Catholic cemetery, where they were taken out and killed. The grave was dug in advance by Jewish laborers who were sent to do this work by the *Judenrat*. On that sam day, the cries of the family members of the slain went up literally into the heart of heaven. Many Jews stood in the area, and wept bitter tears.

In November 1942, the Germans began to commandeer wagons and horses from the entire vicinity. It was not difficult to guess the purpose. There were Christians with connections to the Germans, who sped to tell their Jewish neighbors and acquaintances, that the Germans are getting ready to drive out all the Jews from the town, and tried to persuade them to flee or find a hiding place. Very few fled. Fathers did not want to abandon their wives and children. "What will happen to all – will happen to us" – is what many said, and they stayed in place. Not a few committed suicide before the expulsion by taking poison. All the Jews of Lisokovo were transferred to Volkovysk, and their end was like the end of all the Jews of Volkovysk. All the homes of the Jews in the center of Lisokovo were burned down by the Germans, once they began to retreat after their defeats on the front. The youth that joined the partisans, who also showed no particular concern for the Jews, and succeeded in surviving after going through seven circles of Hell, lived to see Lisokovo after it had been destroyed.

Fragments of Memory from Lisokovo

By Tova Shantal (Kravchik)

The town of Lisokovo was surrounded by forests, agricultural villages, and the Estates of the Nobility. These estates were generally managed by Jews who comprised the majority of the population of Lisokovo. The Jews lived largely in the center of the town, and they made their living through commerce and labor. The market days brought in most of the base income. Many wagons of farmers would appear in town, containing the agricultural produce of the farmers, bought up by the Jews. This was a veritable fountain of commercial trade and barter, which after the farmers had sold their produce, they would spread to the Jewish stores and stock up on all the necessities that they required.

There was a Polish school in Lisokovo, bu on the Sabbath, the Jews were excused from sessions, apart from Sunday, when the school was closed as a matter of course. We would get the Saturday lessons from the Christian students. When the Nazis took power, we began to feel anti-Semitism from the Polish residents, and one of its manifestations was the fact that the Christian pupils would no longer give us the Saturday schoolwork. Even the teachers picked on the Jewish students in a variety of ways.

We learned Hebrew from local teachers. Once a week, we got a lesson in Jewish religion from the teacher, Hannah Lieberman. Upon graduation from the local school, most of the students traveled to Volkovysk to study at the *Tarbut* Gymnasium, or to Ruzhany.

There was one synagogue in the town, and on Friday evening, one could find all the Jews of the town within its walls. The image of my father and brothers returning from this synagogue is ever before my eyes. The house is flooded by light, his recitation of the *Kiddush* can be heard, rendered in a festive air, and all of the special Sabbath delicacies are placed on the table.

I particularly liked the winter in the town, and my heart was especially drawn to the winter evenings, when we would go out in sleds hitched to horses decked out with bells, and ring the town. Another picture etched in my mind is – baking of the matzos for Passover. In my mind's eye, I see the woman who was kneading the dough in a sparkling clean copper bowl, and beside her stands another woman, dividing the dough into small portions, and around them are rows of women lined up at the oven.

Lisokovo was surrounded by forests, that during the summer provided us with a unique experience of the sort, that we would go out with large baskets, and pick mushrooms, blackberries, mulberries and all other varieties of fruits, which were found in abundance in these forests.

There were two youth movements in the town: *Betar* and *HeHalutz*. When members of *Betar* arrived for training in our vicinity from all parts of Poland – the town bubbled with life, and even those who were at a distance from Zionism thought about making *aliyah.* As it was, my father's family made *aliyah* in 1914, and settled in *Neve-Tzedek*, in Jaffa, but my father, who was the oldest, and his brother Jekuthiel remained in the town. My father, Eliezer Kravchik ז"ל

was head of the Zionist funds, and my grandfather, Herschel Novick, ז"ל, filled many community positions, among others, he directed the only bank in town – the Free Loan Society.

My Town, Volp

By Shmuel Sidransky

Page 98: The Volp Synagogue (untitled)

As if through a dark cloud I see my town – Volp.

On the surface, it would seem to be a town like all other towns, but in many ways, it was nevertheless different and unique, not even mentioning its very unique synagogue, to which people thronged from all corners of the world to see.

The Jews comprised the majority of the population in Volp, and their livelihood was drawn primarily from providing necessities to the farmers in the surrounding vicinity, for a radius of between 15-20 km. In my time, there was no electricity in the town, and consequently, there was no factory, but there were plenty of butchers, wagon drivers, tailors, carpenters, builders, and especially storekeepers. There were no lack of movements, just like in a big city.

The streets of the town didn't have names, and they were called according to their location, that is to say, a given street would take you in the direction of the village of Lazi, would be called *Der Lazier Gasse*, etc. And indeed, people were not called by their family names, as was the usual custom, but rather in linkage to their father or mother's first name, depending on which one was the dominant one in the family, like: *Shmuel Chaya-Mikhlah's*, *David Leizer's*, etc.

The Jews of Volp had their own unique system of governance, apart from the general regime to whom all paid allegiance. This system consisted of a single officer, who was Jewish, called a *Soltis,* that was selected by the Jews. In addition to this, there was a community council that dealt with the needs of the Jewish community: a Rabbi, a *Shokhet*, bath house, mikva, study houses, and the like.

The Rabbi would adjudicate disputed between Jews in accordance with torah law, but in the case of more serious disputes, or disputes over land holdings, one turned to the government courts in Grodno.

Having arrived at this point, I realized that I would not be able to provide an 'objective' portrait of my town, without injecting a personal point of view – it's just not possible, and so, from here on, I will also tell about myself, my upbringing and experiences in Volp, with the kind indulgence of the readers.

I was born at the end of the twenties of this century [sic: the twentieth], in a house all of whose windows were broken by the shrapnel of all the warring sides: Russians, Germans, Bolsheviks and Poles. This was a house constructed of typical wood, whose roof had two large gables to prevent the snow and rain from penetrating. There was a storehouse that also frequently served as a stable, and a sort of room that served as a retail store, which during the *Sukkoth* Festival was turned into a *sukkah* with the opening of its roof, and with the covering of the ceiling space by branches and *skhakh*. At the end of the eight days, the roof would be lowered, and the *sukkah* reverted to being a store again...as it is said, "the ordinary and the sacred are used interchangeably." There was also a storage facility where scales stood for weighing of grain, flour, potatoes, etc. During the winter, apples were also stored there, wrapped in a great deal of straw, and also a copy of Josephus Flavius' book on the War of the Jews, in a magnificent cover. Apparently, whoever decided to acquire books, felt that this one was also sacred....in the Storehouse – the stable, two to three cows were quartered, and there was a special place fro the horse and the wagon.

The entrance into the house was through the kitchen. There were two bedrooms in the house, and a dining room (today called a 'salon') and I recall that in the dining room two large pictures hung – of the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, and of Baron Hirsch. Why these two people were selected to decorate the house – I do not know, but I do recall that Baron Hirsch was bare-headed with a barbered mustache.

The form of the house provided an insight into the source of income of the household: agriculture and a sort of inn. The peasants who would come to the fairs, would bring their horses into the storehouse, and they would sleep over in the living rooms and salon, on straw that was spread on the floor. They could also get a meal in the house, drink (that was mostly vodka), and something for dessert. Between 20-30 household establishments made a living this way.

Many of the Jews in Volp also owned parcels of land, and my late father told me how they acquired them, and this is his story: In 1861, during the reign of Czar Alexander II, after the serfs were freed, they began to divide up land that had previously belonged to the nobility – the owners of estates, and among others, they presented some free land also to the Jews. There were Jews, my grandfather among them, that refused to take any. By the end of the previous century [sic: 19th century], my grandfather realized that owning a piece of land was good business, but the land that we now own, he was forced to buy. His parcel was in an agricultural section, at a distance of 2-3 km from town. During the thirties, under the Polish regime, a law was passed that did not permit Jews to buy agricultural land. The Jews were only permitted to sell agricultural land, and only to gentiles.

Opposite our house, stood a house very similar to ours, with one exception – the roof of the storehouse was made of straw. A widow lived in this house, whose daughter married a shoemaker. From the early morning hours, until twelve at night, this shoemaker would sit on a footstool, with wooden nails in his mouth, in one hand swatches of leather, and in the second hand – a hammer. Whoever ordered a pair of boots measured up in the morning, could get them, perfectly made later on the night of that same day. The widow's home also served as a lodging for the indigent who came through the town. There were such indigent, who demanded charity in the form of money, that is to say, pennies, but there were those who were satisfied with only a crust of bread. These crusts of bread which remained, were sold for pennies and used as chicken feed.

Education

There was a law of compulsory education in Poland, and it was possible to go to public school for free for seven years, but the Jews of Volp did not take advantage of this, and many sent their children to study at the *Torah VaAvodah* School, and paid tuition. This school was maintained by the Jewish community, and by contributions from the United States. The language of instruction was Hebrew, and the Polish language was taught as an added subject. After six years of study in the Hebrew school, I learned together with 12 boys and girls at the public school. I rebelled against the participation of Jewish students in the study of the Catholic faith, taught by the local priest, and after a while, I was 'excused' from this subject.

The only connection of Volp to the larger world, was by way of 'Nioma the wagon driver and his son. They had a scheduled run to the train station in Ros'. They would also bring the mail and the newspapers. In time, as anti-Semitism grew stronger, the franchise to deliver mail was taken away from them and given to a Christian.

The bath house was an important community institution. As distinct from all the other buildings in the town, the bath house was constructed from red brick, and Nieta the Bath house Master, held sway with a strong hand. Beginning Thursday morning, he would begin to work the pump by turning a wheel that was attached to a piston that went up and down, and emptied the water into a large cistern near the boiler, and from there to pipes set in the walls.

When the Jews were transferred to the ghetto in Volkovysk, the Germans assembled seventy feeble Jews at the bath house, on the assumption that they did not have the strength to make the journey on foot, and would bring them by wagons. In the end, instead of taking them by wagon to Volkovysk, they were taken from the bath house to the cemetery and killed.

The Beautiful Synagogue

I recollected the magnificent Volp Synagogue at the beginning of my remarks. This was one of the wooden synagogues built in the districts of Bialystock and Grodno that were built at the beginning of the 18th century. It was 15 meters high, and 20 meters wide and long. Talented engineers, stone cutters, and first class wood workers all were involved in the construction of this magnificent synagogue. I can recall even in my childhood, I would see artists and photographers who would come to preserve the image of the synagogue in drawings and photos. Frequently, the roof of the synagogue would fall into disrepair, and it was repaired with the help of donations from America.

Many times, I would visit the 'Museum of the Land' in Tel-Aviv, and see many people standing around the picture of the Volp Synagogue, and wondering at the sight before their eyes. I was moved to tell them, that as a boy, I would clime the two towers that stood by the entrance of this synagogue, and I was moved to tell them that I went into the *genizah*, where damaged sacred texts were stored. But I refrained from this, so as not to appear frivolous in their eyes.

One of the first acts by the Germans, when they entered Volp at the beginning of the Second World War, was to burn down this synagogue, along with two adjacent study houses.

I am just now reminded, that several days before the Germans invaded Poland, I read an article in the daily paper, *Heint*, by the Zionist leader, Dr. Joshua Thon, and his headline was – 'They Wouldn't Dare!' – that is to say – the Germans would not have the nerve to invade Poland. It would appear, that despite his article, they did have the nerve...

It is worth telling a little about the various youth movements in the town, and the intensive activities that went on in their midst (I myself was the secretary of *HeHalutz HaTza'ir*), and also about the activities of the Zionists parties, but this would not add much that is new, and what took place in Volp was the same as what took place in many other towns.

With the Mosty' Jews On Their Last Journey

By Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

How Did I Come to Mosty'?

I was seven years old when I first heard the word '*Mosty*', in connection with the teacher who was known among us as *Der Moster*. He was renown for the fact that he hit his pupils. I was 'privileged' to be his student for only two weeks, and I am sorry even for that. In the years 191801920, I came across the nickname, *Der Moster* again, but this time it was a common man, however, with means, having horses and cows and a parcel of land on the outskirts, and lived in the very last house in the city of Slonim, on the road to Dereczin – Zelva – Volkovysk. This Jew, *Alter der Moster*, whose real name was Alter Boyarsky, is etched into my memory as someone who led prayer with a sweet voice, and he had a 'monopoly' on leading the Musaf service in the synagogue where I worshiped. I recall that in the initial days of the Polish regime, he returned to Slonim from his travels, and he was a bent with age. It was the work of the *Hellerchikehs* (named for General Heller), who excelled in demonstrating their anti-Semitism with the whip. Towards the end of the thirties, on the threshold of the Second World War, I drew physically close to Mosty' since I lived in Skidel at the time. The name Mosty' was substantive and popular there, and was the location of a railroad station on the Volkovysk– Mosty'– Skidel– Grodno line. This is to advise you that Mosty' was close to Skidel.

In September 1942, with the war at its peak intensity, matters developed in such a way, that I became a resident in Mosty' (as we will call it from now on, which is what the Jews called it), and what happened – happened.

Beginning from the first German conquests (June 1941) up to the final large 'action' (15.7.42 - 29.9.42), I was in Slonim. The few Jews that remained in Slonim after June 1942 began to move by stealth with the following plan: Ruzhany –

Volkovysk – Bialystock, because according to the news, the Germans had not yet assaulted the Jews in places that had been annexed to the German Reich. Along with the stream of refugees heading in this direction, I and my family reached Volkovysk. We must remember to the good, the Jews of Ruzhany, together with Epstein, who was the head of the *Judenrat,* and the Jews of Volkovysk, and their *Judenrat* heads (Dr. Weinberg and Dr. Sedletsky) who treated me so well, extending the hospitality to me of a guest, and the had of a brother to all the refugees from Slonim.

I lived with my family in Volkovysk fro approximately two months, in the midst of looking for a dwelling, that would also be considered as a place of work by the German medical institutions. The matter was not at all easy, but the solution materialized from a totally unexpected quarter. One day, two Jews visited in the home of Abraham Shereshevsky, where I was living, representing the *Judenrat* of Mosty.' After I made their acquaintance, and after they heard my story, the elder of the two asked me: "Listen, are you willing to come and be the doctor of Mosty'?" I responded with enthusiasm: "Most certainly!" In the ensuing days, it became clear to me that this same man who made the proposal to me (I forget his mane), and his younger companion, Kaplan, had excellent relations with the Chief of the German gendarmes billeted in the Mosty' railroad station, and they took advantage of these connections in the instance concerning me. He provided them with a case to be made to the district doctor in Volkovysk to retain me as a local physician to protect the local population from infectious diseases that were quite frequent in those days. Not many days went by, and the presentation bore fruit: I was sent to Mosty' as a doctor, and I transferred there with my family that consisted, at that time, of seven souls. We were given a spacious residence in the public school, which up till then had stood empty, And the two previously mentioned Jews looked after us with dedication and affection, and saw to all of our needs. In accordance with their request, the Chief (that's what the *Judenra*t people called him, and he was most certainly one of the few Germans who were decent), firewood, and even a portion of milk would reach us daily. During the evening hours, these two members of the Judenrat would come to my home, and we would talk about all manner of things, and during all my days in Mosty' these two displayed a concern and an interest in everything regarding my family.

The Desert Oasis in the Days of Extermination

Now, a few words about Mosty' itself, which it is questionable to call a town or a village, since it was about as 'large as a yawn,' as the expression goes in Yiddish. The entire population, according to my best estimate, was about five to six hundred people, and about half – were Jewish. The village, or town, was beside the Neman River, and the house I lived in was at the edge of the town, and it was a house apart by the edge of the river, which was shaded by very high trees, whose height bore witness to their age. When I would go out of the house towards the river, I was seized with a vision of a desert oasis. The wondrous silence of the area was in sharp contrast to the storms of those days – the days of that cruel war.

When the High Holy Days arrived, I was invited to attend prayers, organized in accordance with custom, at the home of the *Judenrat* leader, who in addition to all his other burdens, also lead the services and read from the Torah. These services added to the sense of equanimity of this desert oasis. And there was yet another virtue to this place: good neighbors. On the other side of the wall from my residence, dwelt a Polish family – Jaretsky. The father was a past principal of the school in Skidel, when I lived there, and I was at that time, their family doctor. And now, he lived as my next door neighbor, along with his wife and two daughters, and the neighborly relations between us were better than good.

Every time I would sit beside the river among the thick intertwined trees, and focus my gaze on the quiet flowing waters, I would wonder about the tragic contradiction between everything I went through in Slonim during the days of the total extermination of the Jews and what I was now

experiencing, in this quiet and wondrous place, only a hundred kilometers from the Valley of Killing in Slonim.

All the Jews of the area were shaken on October 1942 by the news of the arrest of the Jewish doctors of Volkovysk. The reason for the arrest – rendering medical assistance to a wounded partisan by one of these doctors. They were detained for a number of weeks, and during that entire time, the *Judenrat* in Volkovysk, aided by the head of the *Judenrat* in Bialystock, Ephraim Barash, worked on this issue, but all this effort was for naught, and all the prisoners were shot to death. There is not a shadow of doubt, that had I not left Volkovysk, I too would have suffered the same fate as the doctors taken out to be killed. Now, that Volkovysk was left with no doctors, I was summoned to the office of the district German doctor, and I was ordered to return to Volkovysk and to provide medical assistance to the Jews of that city. On November 1, 1942 I took my leave of the two good, benevolent *Judenrat* men, and I do not exaggerate when I say that this parting was very hard on me.

With the Mosty' Jews on the Way to Death

During the night, the wheel turned, and on the second of November at daybreak, before my departure, the *Judenrat* man knocked on my door, accompanied by a German soldier, who ordered us to take clothing and personal effects and go to the town square, where all of the Jews of Mosty' were gathering. It was clear to us, that the evil had reached us as well. Wagons began to arrive at the square, and the children and the old were loaded on them, while the younger Jews were arranged in rows, with tens of Germans, wearing steel helmets and armed head to foot, running back and forth beside them, as if they were about to engage in battle with a massive force...

The Jews who reached this location carried their bundles on their backs, and concerned themselves with getting the children and the feeble onto the wagons, before they got in line, for an unspecified journey, not thinking at the time that their way was to death.

I recall that before the order to move was given, a young woman cried out over the small village huts: "Be well, my birthplace, Mosty'!" This cry rent not only the air, but also the hearts of all the residents of the town on their last journey.

By nightfall we reached Piesk, where we were obliged to spend the night. It is questionable if this is the right word, because we loitered in the streets, stretched out on the ground, and only the children and the old remained in the wagons. On the morrow, we continued to walk in the direction of Volkovysk. The only difference was: Also the Jews of Piesk were added to our tragic 'procession.' When we reached the Zamkova Forest, we sensed a great deal of movement among our German escort. Police and soldiers were added to our column, who surrounded us with a closed human chain, until we passed by the forest. It became quickly clear to us that their dominant assumption was the suspicion of a surprise attack by partisans from the forest, but nothing moved, nothing stirred....

By the time we reached Volkovysk, it had grown dark. The city had been emptied of its Jewish inhabitants who had been imprisoned in a camp of bunkers. We were accompanied by unending loud cries, as every one of the hundreds of Jews groped about in the dark for a place to rest his weary body and his small pack of belongings.

Into the Extermination Furnace before Brit Milah

I had an unusual experience in its own way that night. Even before I had a chance to 'settle' myself for the night, with all of us broken and exhausted after this debilitating trek, we suddenly heard cries from the other side of the bunker. My 'gynecological ear' told me immediately that this was the sound of a woman giving birth, and in the final stages of labor. I succeeded in immediately taking out the necessary tools from my bag, and I headed in the direction of the screams, feeling my way along the darkness with my hands. When I reached the spot, I immediately confirmed that what I had surmised was exactly the case: a birth literally in its final stages. After a couple of minutes of work,

the newborn was out of the mother's womb, and a silence pervaded the bunker. I did for the newborn whatever was possible for me to do under the conditions there, and in this way, yet another Jew was added to the hundreds of Jews standing on the threshold of extermination.

The Jews of Mosty' and Piesk were added to the Jews of Volkovysk and the vicinity (including Ruzhany, Izavelin, Lisokovo, Zelva, Krzemienica, Svislucz, Narevka, Porozovo, and several other small settlements). One fate awaited them all: a terrible overcrowding, cold, hunger, and thirst. From now on, it was only a question of the length of time to the bitter end. After a few days – the last transport left for the death camp, and in a matter of numbered days, the people from the remaining settlements were taken to that camp. The Jews of Volkovysk were left to the last rank, and they also remained in the bunkers longer than the Jews from other places. The last transport left on January 26, 1943. The Jews of Mosty' were among the first sent to Treblinka, and among them also the newborn little boy mentioned above, who was taken to the crematorium even before being admitted to the covenant of Abraham.

Svislucz

By Shimon Finkelstein

(The Svislucz Memorial Book)

Page 101: The Ark in the Svislucz Synagogue

The town of Svislucz existed already in the fifteenth century, and was the property of a noble family named *Fokush.* During the 1700's, the town passed into the hands of other nobles – Krishpionov, and subsequently, in the 1800's it switched to become the property of the Grafs of the house of Tishkevich. At the entrance ways to the town, stone gates were erected, and at night the gates were locked, and no on e entered or left.

As was the case in many Polish towns, there also were large fires in Svislucz, but after each blaze, the town was rebuilt anew. It is difficult to tell when Jews began to live in this town. What is known, is that according to the census of 1847, there were about a thousand Jews, and by 1897, the Jewish population had reached 2,086 people. On the eve of the First World War, there were approximately 3,500 Jews in the town.

On November 1942, the Nazis took out many Jews to the Vishvenik[40] Forest to be killed, while the young amongst them were transferred to Volkovysk, and from there to the extermination camps. The education of children occupied a revered place in the life of the Jewish community, and a large amount of effort and resources were dedicated to it. The first school was located in a building that had formerly served as a hospital. It was established by the Zionist activists in the town, and since this school took the place of the *Heder* system that had gone before, religious instruction occupied a recognizable part of its curriculum. There was also a kindergarten beside this school.

A Yiddish school was established in the early thirties, but very few of the Jewish children attended. Apart from this school, there was also a Polish public school in Svislucz. Only very few of the young Jewish students were accepted for study at the government Teacher's Seminary.

There were noted Rabbis who lived in this town, and among them were: *Rabbi Gaon Meir Schatz* the author of many books; the brilliant Torah scholar, *Rabbi Moshe Zalman Rubinstein*; The wise scribe, *Rabbi Mordechai Salutsky*; *Aharon*, the son of *Rabbi Shneur Zalman Pines*, who later became known at the Slobodka Yeshiva as the 'Genius of Svislucz.' *Rabbi Mordechai-Dov Idelberg*, the author of many books; *Rabbi David Meisel*, and others. The last of the Rabbis was *Rabbi Gaon Chaim-Yaakov Mushinsky.*

Heder classes were conducted in the homes of the teachers, and the Talmud Torah was in the same building as the *Bet HaMedrash*. A transition institution between the *Heder* and the Hebrew school was the 'Reformed' *Heder,* in which instruction was carried out in Hebrew. Among the first of the teachers in the Reformed *Heder*, was *Lipa Sukenik*, who later became known as Professor

[40] Rendered as *Vishnick* by Dr. Einhorn.

Sukenik at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.[41] Among the cultural institutions of the town were two libraries: the first for Hebrew, and the second – for Yiddish books. All work at the libraries was voluntary. Among the many clubs, there was also a dramatic club.

Among the active youth movements, were *HaShomer HaTza'ir,* and *Brit Trumpeldor* [sic: *Betar*], that trained young people to achieve a Zionist fulfilment and make *aliyah* to the Holy Land. The *HeHalutz* branch also attracted a large number of young people.

Among the support institutions that provided local help and assistance, it is important to mention the *Linat Tzedek, Providing for Brides*, and the *Free Loan Society*, and others. Apart from these, there were other institutions of assistance at the hand of the Jewish community. The local fire-fighters organization was manned almost entirely by Jews, and it also filled roles involving self-defense.

There were three *Batei Medrashim* in the town, one of which was especially beautiful, and ita walls were covered in art which was the work of an outstanding artist.

A vibrant and active life was characteristic of the Jewish community. Ideological discussions were held between members of different parties, but the common ground for all of them was – the longing for Zion, for *aliyah*, and forsaking the diaspora.

Like all towns, there was a market here to which all the peasants would stream from nearby villages, and the various streets would clog up from them. Many of the townsfolk made a living from working leather and from like factories. Also, the sawmill was an important source of income. Thick trees would be brought to the sawmill, and they were worked into wooden boards that were sent from Svislucz to the length and breadth of the land.

Svislucz served as a center for the Jews who lived in the nearby towns and villages, such as: Yalovka, Alibud, Mikholka, and others. After the Holocaust, no Jews remained in the town. Everything was destroyed, and only the Jewish cemetery remained. The town was rebuilt anew, but the population was entirely – Christian. It is found 14 km from the Polish border, and is today part of the Soviet Union.

My Town, Piesk

by Chaim Shevakh

The small town of Piesk is located on two banks of the Zelvianka River, between forests and swamps, comprised of small wooden houses and roofs made of straw and shingles, and on them was a green covering of moss. Tiny windows, and wooden doors that react to every movement. Most of the houses consist of two rooms and a kitchen, with a shelter for chickens in the wintertime.

Behind these decrepit houses were gardens and orchards, which provided the principal sustenance to the residents. Not much was required: a slice of bread smeared with some butter, a glass of milk, a plate of potatoes, and not much of that. But observe the miracle: the doctor had nothing to do in the town, and if there was a problem, he would have to be brought from the nearby city.

The larger source of income was to be found in the ***forest and the water***. On the east, the forests of Oslian and Mosty' spread out, and it was there that the homeowners of Piesk would send their sheep and cattle to graze in the summer. Towards evening, the sheep and cattle would return from the pasture with their udders full of milk, and they would fill the town with the dust kicked up by their passing, and the smell of the fields and woods.

The Forests

To the west lay the Zelvian Forest, young and green, and to the left, the Strumnitz Forest with its stiff-

[41] In 1947, a professor of Archeology at the Hebrew University, *Eliezer Lipa Sukenik* (born in Bialystock), was the first to recognize the importance of the now famous manuscripts known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

straight pines, that extended their branches skyward, as if in prayer.
All of these great forests were a source of pride to the residents of the little town of Piesk. Among their plants, young and old alike would dream and envision the future, poor and rich alike. The Strumnitz Forest was clean and fresh, and spread out in the summer in all its charm, covered and draped in the greenery of grasses and moss, interlaced with the flowers of forget-me-nots, mushrooms and berries, both black and red. During Fridays and Saturdays, the forest was full of young and old visitors. This was the central location of all the strolls taken by the young people. There, one dreamt of love, and of better times, about faraway places, like the Land of Israel and America, about good fortune and happiness, everything that was not available in the town.

Here, the young people felt free, here not a single person bothered them, here there was no one to fear. The forest hid them, and shielded them from the dark visages of poverty and incessant hunger. The forest gave of itself equally to all comers, and with its full bounty. Soft, green earth, full of grass and flowers, and the field and forest was pleasant and intoxicating, filling everyone with a sense of power, and a strength to dream about something beautiful and good.

Close by, the cemetery could be found. At times, it seemed to me that the town tilted its head in the direction of the cemetery, as if the forest was trying to expel the dead of the world, because the town is old, gray and dark, and the forest – large, strong, green and beloved, pulling on the heart. Behind it, spread out huge stretches of pasture, where horses and cattle grazed.

Livelihoods

The town, and everything around it, including the fields, ponds and forests, was the property of the Nobleman Visfing, who leased out all the land to my grandfather, on condition that he establish a flour mill in the town for personal use and for export to foreign lands, especially to Germany. The days were measured by the movement of the millstones. Gentiles began to arrive, settlers from the entire area, who brought their wheat in their wagons, in order to have it ground into flour, and also chickens, eggs, cheese and butter, for sale to the homeowners who had no cattle of barnyard fowl. In exchange for the money received, the gentiles would buy muslin, salted fish, salt, and all manner of necessities required in a peasants home. The Jewish storekeepers would stand in the doorways of their stores, and call out to the peasants by name, and suggest that they enter their stores. They were always concerned that they would lose a buyer and the attendant income.

The flour mill, that rose to a height of three stories, and worked only on export produce, employed cylindrical grinders of the most modern design. The grain would be washed and dried, and the entire process was conducted automatically. Manual labor was only required to pour the grain into the machine, and to take out the finished flour. I recall how the mill was *kashered* for Passover, in order to grind the grain for flour to make matzos. Two Rabbis from the town would come to inspect the mill to assure its kashrut. They would inspect every place, to assure that there was no place that leaven could be stuck. After the inspection, the Rabbis would receive their fee, because the sale of candles and yeast was insufficient for them to support their families, typically blessed with many children.

The trees from the forest would be floated down the Zelvianka. My grandfather, and after him, my father ז"ל, would send them down the Neman in large log rafts on the way out of the country. Many of the Piesk residents worked on the river. I can see them now in my mind's eye: tall in build, strong, tanned faces, dressed only in their underwear, with strips of leather on their shoulders. They would step across the long logs as if they were walking in their own homes, and their long beards would actually touch the logs. For their long journey with the logs, they would provision themselves with food for two months.

The Batei Medrashim

There were five *Batei Medrashim* in Piesk, and the members of the older generation carried on their spiritual lives within them: *Chayei Adam* – for the trades; The *Mauer* – for the *balebatim*; *Hiltzener* (made from wood) – for the common folk; The *Hassidrania* – for the Hassidim; The *Schul* – for holidays and festivals. All the *Batei Medrashim* looked alike, both inside and out.

Chayei Adam – a large wooden structure, in which prayer was conducted at the first minyan. All of the tradesmen were inclined to get to this house of worship early in the morning in order to pray before going off to work. Between the afternoon and evening service, this *Bet HaMedrash* was full of people, carrying on conversations to their heart's content, one with another.

The congregants at the *Mauer* were generally people that had full faces and round figures. From their vest pocket, a golden chain dangled, attached to the watch they had received as a wedding gift. They were in the habit of getting up at a later hour, come into the synagogue in small steps, put their hands on each other's backs, and after exchanging a hearty welcome, began to discuss the politics of the Czar, who deserved to break his head, about the situation at the front, etc.

The *Hassidrania* seethed and was filled with noise as if a wedding was going on. Hassidim, dressed in long *kapotehs* and wrapped in their black-belt *gartels*, would be praying with great passion, and occasionally break out in a little bit of a dance. This was a community of joyful Jews, full of fire and devotion, especially – in their faith in the Holy One, Blessed Be He. They made do with the 'least of the least,' and with the leavings from the table of the Rebbe.

The *Schul* was the pride of the town. It was built in a Gothic style, with many spires, and it stood on a hill that was reached by a stone stairway. Here, mostly the young people worshiped, and more than worshiping – they conversed with one another. All the rumors and bad-mouthing reached here. Among these young people were young newlyweds, tied to the table of their fathers -in-law, who would swap novels and books of their fathers. These constituted the intelligentsia of the town. Among them were Hebrew speakers, Zionists, dreamers about *aliyah*, but until their dreams could acquire substance – they would wander about the town idle, pacing its streets.

There was another kind of youth in the town – workers who worked very hard to survive and support their families: shoemakers, tailors, dyers, carpenters, etc. Their dress was poor, and they smoked cheap tobacco. There were among them, those who had no one to whom they could hire out their skills. There were no factories in the town, and not even other workmen who could hire them. The Polish government did nothing to improve the conditions of the young Jewish workers. It was the opposite, it did everything possible to stunt their lives, in order to deprive them of their rights. All the licenses and concessions for tobacco, taverns, mail, etc., were transferred to Poles. Cooperatives were established, and at the same time, many Jewish stored closed down. The idleness grew more intense, and as a result of this, bitterness and hopelessness grew stronger. Many of these sough to find liberation as a result of the October [Russian] Revolution, and whoever got caught – was thrown in jail. Many young people crossed the border, wanting to breathe easier, but by and large, did not find what they were looking for on the other side of the border.

There was a Russian church and a Polish church in the town. These churches stood virtually abandoned during the middle of the week, however, on Sunday a large number of peasants would stream to them, coming by wagon, dressed in their holiday finery. They would leave their horses beside the church, tied to their wagons, and enter the church with the fear of God showing on their faces. After they would hear the words of their priests, saturated with hate for the Jews, they would come out with faces showing arousal, and look for opportunities to pour out their anger on the Jews, "the crucifiers of the Messiah." It was a rare occasion that a Sunday would go by without an altercation between the Christian and Jewish young people.

Krzemienica

By Nakhum Reznitsky

Volkovysk was surrounded not only by villages where the Jews were a majority, but also many villages where they were a small minority. Krzemienica was one of these.

There were many Christian villages around Volkovysk, and in each one, there were solitary Jewish families. In Krzemienica, there were only three Jewish families among sixty Christian families, and these were: the *Reznitsky* family, the *Pomerantz* family, and the family of *'Yud'l the Dyer,'* (that was how everyone called him, and I don't remember his family name).

The Reznitsky family leased the flour mill from the landowner, Zhurov, and operated it from 1929 on. During the period of its management, the family introduced many improvements to the mill that was driven by water currents, and we added a diesel engine, because of which we were then able to grind all sorts of flour. The Pomerantz family had a store, which apart from selling market goods also sold trifles, and the Dyer's family dealt in the combing of wool for the town residents, and the peasants in the vicinity who would bring their wool to them.

Until the outbreak of the war, the Jews lived quietly in Krzemienica, which served as a sort of 'spiritual center' to the Jews in nearby villages, who would gather together to celebrate Jewish holidays, and to form a prayer quorum (i.e. *minyan*), which they could not do in each village separately.

The issues of the village were handled by a local committee headed by an elder, called the *Soltis*. The police station with four policemen oversaw the nearby area, and another institution – distribution of the mail. The Christian children got their education and upbringing in a local Polish public school, and for the young Jewish children up to the age of nine, a teacher was brought in from the outside for 'semesters' of instruction. There were two 'semesters:' One from after Passover, up until Rosh Hashanah. The second – commencing from the first day after Sukkoth until Passover. Children ages nine and over, were sent to Volkovysk for further education, and they would be lodged in the homes of Jewish families fro a set fee. This was the case with myself and by brother Shimon ז"ל, who both went to school in the city, and we would come back to the village for vacation and holidays.

With the outbreak of the war, when the Russians reached the village, they immediately confiscated the flour mill, but because of the intervention of the local residents, my mother Malka, was designated to run the mill on behalf of the government. With the entry of the Germans, the Jewish families were brought to Volkovysk, and from there, they went on their last journey to Treblinka, along with the other Jews of Volkovysk.

My brother and I managed to be saved, because we reached Vilna after the Russians had turned it over to the Lithuanians. The youth movement at that time was organizing escapes of the young people to Vilna, in order that they find some way to reach the Land of Israel from there. I yet succeeded in visiting my mother, and my brothers, Yossi and Moshe, in Volkovysk before the Germans entered, and we agreed amongst us that if it should happen that she does not receive and letter or sign from us, this will be a positive sign that Shimon and I succeeded in our mission to reach the Land of Israel. It then happened that during the Nazi occupation, when Dr. Resnick found refuge in Krzemienica, my mother told him, out of a sense of satisfaction, that at least two of her sons managed to reach the safety of the Land of Israel. She naturally did not know that the war had caused the two brothers to become separated, and only at the end of the war, did we find one another, as a result of the efforts of the organization of the displaced persons of Europe. I joined Kibbutz *Netzer Sirni*, and after a time, transferred to work in the Histadrut in *Hadera*,. and my brother Shimon ז"ל was a senior government official – the head of taxation for the north of the country.

Porozovo

About six hundred Jews lived in Porozovo, nearly all of them living in the four streets and few byways alongside them. Apart from a few farmers, most of the Jews who lived there made a living at trades, commerce, and store keeping, as was the case in most towns of the area. The economic and spiritual center of the Jews was Volkovysk, and it was also the last station before they were sent to the death camps.

During the brief period of the Russian regime in the town, beginning in October 1939, the Jews continued with their way of life. Tradespeople were forced to organize themselves into cooperatives, but they made a living from their trades. There were no big-time 'capitalists' in Porozovo, and the Soviets didn't have anyone to exile to Siberia, as was their custom in the larger cities, but they did manage to put pressure on the small merchants and the store keepers whose stores had been closed. Opposite this, there was no change at all in the lives of those who worked the land, who kept on doing so as they had done since time immemorial.

On June 24, 1941, the sounds of the exchange of gunfire between the Germans and the Russians could already be heard in the town, and German vehicles could be seen in the area. After a few days, the fire reached the town, and a specific part of it was consumed in flames (including the *Schulhof,* the old and new *Bet HaMedrash*, the community hall, etc.). The Jews didn't even try to put out the fire, be3cause most, if not all of them went into hiding out of fear of the Germans, who destroyed the houses where the Jews lived, and took a number of Jews out to be killed that same day, for no reason. On Thursday of that week, the Soviet soldiers had the upper had in their battle with the Germans, and they returned to the town, but on the following day, German reinforcements arrived, and drove all the Russians out of Porozovo. All of the decrees used against the Jews (Yellow badges, prohibitions against commerce, and many other prohibitions), were publicized during those first days of German occupation. The Jews were ordered to elect a *Judenrat*, but there were none particularly leaping at the job, because the nature of the responsibilities were well-known. During the three months from September-November 1941, there was relative quiet in the town, but the economic condition got unbearably bad. The real power in the town at that time was the town head, a Pole named Radivinsky. The head of the *Judenrat* was the Baker, Lev, who succeeded in a number of instances to get several decrees abated by means of bribing the Germans and Poles. Refugees from nearby villages began to reach the town, and the Jews of Porozovo tried to assist them, even if their means were severely limited. At the end of the summer of 1942, a new German commissar arrived in the town, who increased the pressure on the Jews, even though he also benefitted from receiving bribes and payoffs. In general, one can say that there was a very effective partnership between the Germans and Poles, in all matter pertaining to making life miserable for the Jews, surprise searches of their homes, etc. There was no ghetto in Porozovo, but the entire Jewish population was compelled to do all manner of forced labor for the Germans, never less than 10 hours a day. One day, they arrested all the young people in the town, but after a week, they were let go, thanks to the efforts of the *Judenrat*, which greased the palms of the local people. After several month, a ghetto was erected that stretched for two blocks: the entry road up to Zapolia and Novy Dvor *Gasse.* The crowding in this small ghetto was literally awesome, and the sanitary conditions caused the onset of disease, epidemics and death.

On one of the nights, all the Jews were ordered to assemble in the marketplace square, and from there, a trek began in the direction of Volkovysk. Only mothers and small children were permitted to ride in wagons. About fifty old and sick people were left behind in the town. Thirty of them were later transferred to Volkovysk, but the rest were taken out and killed. All the Jews that were transferred from Porozovo were interred in bunkers, in which the Jews of other towns in the vicinity were already imprisoned, and after a time, they were sent to the death camps.

Personalities & Portraits

The Barash Family

By A. Novick

Page 105: Ephraim Barash

There is no doubt that this family was the crown of splendor of Jewish Volkovysk. The traces of their community work were recognized in many quarters in Volkovysk, and in Bialystock, and the Jews in both of these cities were proud of the fact that the Barashes represented them.

Reb Sholom Barash, the family patriarch, was the owner of a steel foundry and machinery construction plant, and a sawmill and flour mill. He was a loyal Zionist, a generous donor to the various national Zionist funds, visited the Land of Israel, and even thought of settling there, but that never came to be. Sholom Barash was elected to the municipal governing committee of Volkovysk on his own account, and also on the account of his many good works, exemplary character and his highly valued honest endeavors not only in concert with the Jewish members of the committee, but the Christians as well. There regard reached a level where they presented him with a souvenir gold watch, with a very heartwarming inscription, but Sholom Barash returned the gift, after Meir Shiff had the inscription erased, thanking the people who gave him the gift, but he told them he was unable to accept it because he did not do public service in order to receive a prize.

Engineer Ephraim Barash, son of Reb Sholom continued to walk in his father's way. He was the prime mover and living spirit behind of the Volkovysk Jewish community, and his influence was recognized in economic life, education and culture. The good of the community was ever before his eyes, and he was perpetually concerned with the less fortunate of the people, and if he ever found out that there were circumstances that increased the pressure on these people, he was quick to come to their aid. He established the Merchant's Bank and the Free Loan Society, and concerned himself with assuring that these institutions conduct themselves in a democratic fashion for the benefit of the community. The years 1935-1936 were years of crisis for the banking system in Poland in general, and for the Jews in particular. Many banks went under and were closed, but the Merchant's Bank, led by Ephraim Barash held fast, and survived the critical period intact. Barash spoke in a good, rapid style, and what he had to say was always clear, to the point, without roundabout expressions. Also, his Zionism was an active one, and he didn't talk about things that he personally had not done. It is fair to say that "Volkovysk was too small for him," and consequently, when he was appointed as the leader of the Bialystock Jewish community board, his public service was given a boost, and all of his talents became revealed. He led and helped in every way he could, and many were attracted to his leadership.

His work as the head of the *Judenrat* in Bialystock has been documented in many different books. Even though there is controversy over his various decisions, there is no doubt that, thanks to his comprehensive efforts in the organization of various projects on behalf of the Germans, that the Jews of Bialystock suffered less during the initial phase than the Jews in the other cities of Poland. He had hoped, that because of the productive work of the Jews in the ghetto, they would be spared from death, and he presented his thoughts in this regard quite openly to the members of the underground and the members of the *Halutz* movements with who he partnered in this effort. It is possible to find, in the minutes of the Bialystoker *Judenrat*, one can find evidence of his many thoughts and outlooks. As the leader of the Judenrat, he exhibited great courage, and his appearance as the representative of the Jewish community to the Germans was one of great pride, and not effacing. The well-know adage, "don't judge your comrade until you have walked in his shoes," Applies beautifully to Ephraim Barash under the conditions he had to deal with. The

'productive' ghetto extended the lives of many Jews, but did not save them from the danger of total extermination.

Ephraim Barash himself did not survive, and his fate was the same as those Jews whom he represented, and was incinerated for their sake. He was killed in Maidanek along with his two children. His wife, Dr. Jocheved Barash, who herself was active in many public institutions in Volkovysk and Bialystock, was killed in Auschwitz.

His third son, ***Yitzhak Barash,*** went to the Land of Israel in 1934 to study at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, but interrupted his studies, and was accepted in flight school. He was one of the first of the young people in the Land of Israel to received a pilot's certification. Yitzhak sought to join the U.S. Army as a pilot, however, his citizenship in the British Mandate was a barrier. He traveled to Cairo, and successfully passed another examination, but even after that, he was not asked to fly actively, and joined as an ordinary soldier in the BAPS. He was promoted after several months, but his young life was cut short by cancer. There is no doubt that the news regarding his family back in Poland did not help his health situation. A short number of days before he died, he revealed a great interest in matters pertaining to the *Yishuv*, and in particular regarding the Jewish Brigade that was being formed, and which he intended to join. He bore his suffering like his father, with heroism, and sought to keep them concealed from his relatives and friends.

Dr. Moshe Einhorn

Page 106: Portrait of Subject

A scion of a large and revered family in Volkovysk. His father was a pharmacist with extensive knowledge in this field. Many of the residents of the city would come to seek his advice on matters of illness and medicines. He was active in community affairs, and among other things, he would address the letters of the Jews of Volkovysk to their relatives in the United States, to whom they would turn with requests for help. His son Moshe, one of seven children in the family, received a traditional and national education, and he was among the first students to go to the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv. After graduating from the Gymnasium, he emigrated to the United States, studies medicine, and would frequently come to visit in Volkovysk and the Land of Israel. E maintain very strong ties to his family and friends in the Land of Israel and Volkovysk. In the United States he edited a medical periodical in Hebrew that had a circulation in the Holy Land. Einhorn established a dental clinic in the new Hertzeliya Gymnasium building, in memory of his sister, Rosa (Pshenitsky), who was a dentist. He also supported the establishment of *Bet HaRofeh* in Tel-Aviv, and the medical library in this building is named for him.

After the Holocaust, Einhorn assumed the responsibility of preserving the memory of his family, his home town, and everything connected to the Holocaust. He labored and worked hard in assembling material, maintained contact with the survivors of the Holocaust, gathered a great deal of information, and published the *Wolkovisker Yizkor Book* in two Yiddish volumes (see the reviews at the time of the publication of this book in the chapter on preservation of the memory of Volkovysk). He was proud of having achieved this goal, and hoped to see it translated into Hebrew (as he later told), but this did not come to be. In his frequent visits to Israel, he would meet often with the *landsleit* from Volkovysk, of which no few received help from him.

In a letter that Einhorn send to the Volkovysk *landsleit* in Israel, he inserts an excerpt of a letter he received from Eliyahu Velevelsky who arrived in Volkovysk on September 22, 1957, and stayed there for four days. Here is what Velevelsky wrote to him:

> "Volkovysk is entirely burned down. There are no streets. Cows walk about in the center of the city. Only ten Jewish families remain. I visited the local museum, and I saw your 'Yizkor' Book. I read your book, and that is how I found out about all the

> beastly deeds of the Germans, and about the extermination of the Jewish community. Your book also includes details about myself and my family, about Zamoscheh and all who lived there."

"This letter – Einhorn wrote – gave me satisfaction regarding the large amount of effort I put into publishing the Yizkor Book. There were times when I despaired of the work, but now that I am reminded that this book is the sole monument to our city, that look on and unfolds everything that was ours and is no more, the recognition that I did something to preserve the memory of our home town, fills my heart with a sense of gratitude for that oversight that strengthened my hand and enabled me to turn my thought into a reality. This feeling was especially reinforced upon reading the possibility that my book might be translated into Hebrew, and would appear as a chapter in the Encyclopedia of the Diaspora, and will stand as a signpost and monument for the younger Hebrew-speaking generation in the Holy Land, which does not have facility with Yiddish, and to be a guide to understanding the experience of generations of Jews in the diaspora, whose existence and development was stopped in midstream." Einhorn finished his letter with these lines:

My hope is that the scions of Volkovysk many of whom cast their lot in the building of the State of Israel, in all branches of work and creativity, will continue to give of themselves in the creation of Israel, until such time that it will stand like a strong bulwark against all the movements in the world, and that no enemy or malefactor will ever again be able to instill fear in us. I clasp each and every one of your hands from afar, and I wish you peace and blessing."

Einhorn passed away in the United States in 1966.

David Einhorn

Born in 1886 in Karlitz in the Novogrudok District, but came to Volkovysk as a child. His father, Kadish-Benjamin was a military doctor wanted to give his son a religious education, after he himself returned to the faith, and turned over the education of his son to a *Heder* teacher, and afterwards to the Headmaster of the Yeshiva. At the age of 13, Einhorn began to write Hebrew poetry in the style of the *Maskilim* of that period, and he only began to write poems in Yiddish after 1904, nearly all of which are assembled in his first book, *Shtilleh Gezangen* (Silent Songs) that appeared in Vilna in 1909. This book, and his second collection, *Meine Lieder* (My Poems) immediately garnered much praise and favorable acclaim from important literary critics such as Nomberg, Nieger and others, whop saw a change in the direction of modern Jewish poetry in his work. Under the influence of the revolutionary movement, Einhorn drew close to the *Bund*, and increased the amount of his poetry published in the organs of that movement. The romantic and lyrical themes in his poems expressed the spiritual orientation and the hopes of young Jews, that was beginning to awaken in those days, and it is no surprise that they found expression in his mouth. Einhorn also wrote essays, on the periphery of the formal literature, in the *Fraynd, Volkszeitung*, and many other newspapers.

In 1912, Einhorn was arrested on the charge of maintaining relationships with revolutionaries, and after spending six month in jail in Vilna, he was forced to leave Russia, and he went to Paris, and edited a *Bund* newspaper there, and afterwards went to Switzerland. After leaving Switzerland towards the end of the First World War, he settled in Warsaw, where his literary and journalistic work received great notice. In 1920, he went to Berlin, and served as a regular correspondent for the American *Forward,* and even published a novel on the Jewish emigrants in Germany. At the same time, he was involved in translating parts of the *Tanakh* into Yiddish. In 1922, his poem, *Rekaviyim* appeared, which was a major lament about the tens of millions of victims of the First World War. In 1940, when the Nazis were getting close to the French capital, he fled from Paris, and reached the United States. A collection of all of Einhorn's poetry that was written between 1904 and 1951 was published by the *Arbeiter Ring* in New York.

Einhorn was one of the better Yiddish poets, and not few of his poems became folklore pieces, to be heard on the lips of many during the twenties and thirties of this century. D. Einhorn describes something about his youth in Volkovysk in connection with gatherings of young people in the evenings at the beginning of the twentieth century: "And here comes the young David Einhorn. He lives, together with his parents in the Kulakowski house at the corner of the Szeroka *Gasse* opposite the church. Einhorn hurried to the house of his friend, Sonya Farber. Sonya is an interesting young lady, and all the young people and revolutionaries were in the habit of meeting at her house. Einhorn is running along speedily, with his pockets bulging from pamphlets and revolutionary literature, and all manner of pieces of paper on which he had sketched out thoughts that were on his mind, and impressions of experiences he had during the week. There will undoubtedly be many familiar friends at Sonya's house, who will read his poems, and whose opinion he will hear. On Saturday nights like this at Sonya Farber's house, the poet's skill and capabilities matured, who in a matter of days would publish *Shtilleh Gezangen*, and from this house, the festive ring of revolutionary poetry would be heard in Yiddish and Russian, that were in the mouths of the young revolutionaries."

Dr. Raphael Lemkin

He was born in 1901 into a venerable Volkovysk family. As a child, he was educated in Linevsky's *Heder* (even after he had developed a major reputation throughout Poland, he was in the habit of sending his teacher a greeting card before every Jewish holiday in a clear, precise Hebrew). He obtained his higher education in Warsaw, and after he finished his training in law school, he became famous as a brilliant lawyer, and also wrote a regular column in the Jewish newspapers of Warsaw, on matters of law and jurisprudence. He earned a high post in the Polish judicial system, and he represented the country at a legal conclave that was held in Madrid. At this conclave, Lemkin proposed the adoption of a law to protect nations from wrongful acts. The government of Poland, whom he represented at the conclave, was apparently not pleased with what he was doing, and apparently hinted for him to resign – which he then did.

Lemkin was one of the few jurists in Poland between the wars, who called out and warned about the threat from the Nazi regime for the nation in general, and the Jews in particular. He succeeded in fleeing from Poland at the onset of the war, and reach the United States, and there he became affiliated with a number of universities as a lecturer and expert on international law, and in time, became the permanent assistant to the senior judge, Robert Jackson, who later became the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials held against the Nazi criminals.

In his book, "Parliamentary Governments in Europe," which appeared in 1944, Lemkin describes the plans for the uprooting of the Jewish population, and it is here that the concept of 'genocide' first is mentioned. He wrote this book while he was still in Sweden, before he arrived in the United States, and this was one of the first books to reveal the Nazi crimes. In the Nuernberg trials as well, Lemkin made efforts to include the crime of genocide in the charge against the Nazi criminals, but the judgement did not include this crime in the charge. It was only because of Lemkin's personal efforts, without the support of any nations or organizations, that the United Nations adopted the genocide clause in it charter in 12.8.1948, in accordance with Lemkin's proposal, that is – a law against the murder of a people, and punishment of everyone who breaks that law. This law was also passed by the Knesset in Israel.

Despite his many accomplishments, Lemkin was a solitary figure, and was forgotten in his last days (his name is not even mentioned in the Hebrew Encyclopedia), and he passed away on 28.8.1959 at 58 years of age.

David Hubar

He was thought to be the second richest man in the

city (First place was occupied by Eliyahu-Leib Rakhmilevich). Those in the know said that he could put one hundred thousand rubles on the table, that he had at hand. Reb David conducted large scale and multi-branched business enterprises, and among other things, he dealt in commodities such as petroleum, sugar, and salt on a large scale. Apart from this, he owned fields and forests in the Volkovysk vicinity.

He was an enlightened man, and attempted to pass on an education to his children worthy of his name. The education of Jewish youth was first and foremost in his mind. It was thanks to him that the first modern *Heder* was established in the city, and afterwards, the first Russian 'Real' school. Henoch Neiman worked along with him in the area of education. These two were the first to send their sons to the *Hertzeliya* Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv, and they were also among the first to buy shares in the Colonial Bank, and parcels of land in the Land of Israel. In 1929, David Hubar and most of his family moved to the Land of Israel. He did not want to be involved in business in the Land of Israel, and he sunk his capital into planting an orchard of 200 dunams in *Ness-Tziona*. He was in the habit of saying: I dedicated more than enough time to commerce. Now, in Israel, I want to be a man of the soil, to plant and sow." He and his wife Pelteh passed away in Tel Aviv.

Meir Shiff

By Yitzhak Bereshkovsky

A first class watchmaker and silversmith, and a dedicated and loyal public servant. He was one of the visitors to the house of Rabbi Borukhov, and was dedicated to him, heart and soul. He would never taste a new fruit that he had cooked, without first bringing it to the Rabbi for a *SheHekheyanu* blessing. When he would participate in the initiatives of gathering wood for the poor, and providing flour for Passover to the needy, he would do so with complete dedication, and none of the *balebatim* ever got away from him without giving something.

His 'brain-child' was the Old Age Home. It was he who introduced the custom, that every happy occasion, wedding, *brit-Milah*, or Bar Mitzvah, should be an occasion to make a donation this institution, and even on the occasion that a child recovered from an illness. On the eve of a festival, Reb Meir would bring from the best of everything to the Old Age Home, and would spend many hours with 'his old folks,' who were always beholden to him. He was an exceedingly generous man, and many benefitted from Reb Meir's charity.

Tuvia Fenster

Page 108: Tuvia Fenster

He was one of the first bankers in our city, and when in the later years of his life, he settled in Antwerp in Belgium, he did a professional turnabout, and began to write in the local Jewish newspapers, and with his pen, immortalized the impact of the simple Jews the woodcutters and drawers of water, on the life of the Jews of Volkovysk.

Nakhum (Nakheh) Heller

By Dr. M. Einhorn

The Heller family (six brothers) was connected to Volkovysk through many means of support they offered to institutions that they were concerned with establishing and developing. It is especially important to recognize Nakhum, who in the final years of his life, was thought of by the Jews of Volkovysk as a redeeming angel. At that time, he lived in Berlin, but his heart was attuned to the needs and exigencies of the needy Jews in the city of his origin. Thousands of stories tied him to the Jews of Volkovysk, and legends about him grew in the city. And the name Nakheh Heller became an icon for Jewish wealth, and unbounded philanthropy, and accordingly, he was the archetype of the rich Jewish philanthropist, whose hand was always open, and dis not refuse his help to anyone.

His business was in very large scale lumber

operations, and hundreds of Jewish families in Poland and other lands made their living in his factories and offices. Anyone who had a post in one of the offices of the Heller businesses, saw himself as secure as if he had a respected government position. Nakhum Heller never let anyone go who worked for him, and even when the First World War broke out, and all the connections of his enterprises were broken apart, Heller ordered that all his employees be paid their monthly wages on schedule.

Heller founded the Jewish hospital in the city in 1889. This was a first class accomplishment in medical care. There was not a hospital that large in the entire Grodno Province, and it was equipped with all the requisite equipment and facilities. The establishment of the hospital was dependent on an expenditure of thirty thousand rubles – a huge sum in those days. Among other things, Heller concerned himself with the planting of many trees and a garden around the hospital, and he hired expert agronomists for this purpose from the YK"A. He also established the *Bet Lekhem* Institution on the *Schulhof* that provided breakfast and lunch for the children of needy families.

Heller began living in Berlin in 1905, but he would send a set sum of money before each holiday and festival to provide holiday fare for the needy. Also, his wife, Hinde, offered considerable assistance to families without means. It should not come as a surprise that the Jewish community bestowed a great deal of love and affection on the Heller family, whether it was on a happy or sad occasion that might befall this family. Nakheh's brother, Horaczy, was thought to be one of the richest men in all of Poland. He dealt in exporting lumber, and was in contact with the biggest importers in England. He also supported the strengthening and continuity of the Jewish institutions offering help in Volkovysk, and when the news of his passing in Warsaw arrived, a large delegation from Volkovysk headed by the Rabbi and the President of the community went to attend the funeral.

Rabbi Abraham-Zalman Kurtz

Born in Suprasl near Bialystock, and his father served as the Cantor and *Shokhet* in the town. As a youth, he studied in the Yeshiva at Bialystock and at the "Chafetz Chaim" Yeshiva in Radun. After his marriage, he went to Kovno, studied at the Yeshiva, and received his ordination as a Rabbi from the son of the great scholar, Rabbi Gaon Isaac Elchanan, and the Rabbi of Slobodka, Rabbi Moshe Danishevsky. When he returned to Volkovysk, he did not use the Rabbinate as a means of livelihood, and preferred to take up commerce, but dedicated a significant part of his time to public service. Many families, whose breadwinners were taken into the army, were left with no means of sustenance at the outbreak of the First World War, and Abraham-Zalman Kurtz, together with Joseph Rudy and others, organized a store on their behalf, that provided them with necessities at low prices. When the Germans captured the city, and many refugees streamed through Volkovysk on their way to Russia, Rabbi Kurtz organized a committee that would meet the refugees at the train station, and provide them with foodstuffs and other necessities. When a lack of bread was sensed in the city, during the German occupation, he managed to use the city resources to obtain 50 pood of corn grain for purposes of baking bread, that was sold to the populace at reduced prices. 468 families received bread at that time for a cost of 3 cents per pound, and it was in this fashion that he compelled the peasants to lower their bread prices that had escalated at that time. He was one of the leading workers on behalf of *Linat Kholim*,, the Orphanage, Gathering of Wood, and the *Shas* study group. He was the head of "Clothing the Naked," a group that provided clothing to poor of the city. Many other workers gather around him, to help with his community endeavors.

He came to the United States in 1923 with the other members of his family, and served as the Rabbi of Rochester, NY. He was equally dedicated to community work in his new home, and was well-known for his charitable work.

Israel Novick and His Sons

Israel Novick was known in our city as a lumber and forest merchant, and also as a dedicated Zionist, and a loyal and exemplary public servant. He was also a Gabbai at the *Tiferet Bakhurim Synagogue*, and assured that his children would get a traditional and national education. His daughter, the teacher Hannah Novick, emigrated to the United States, and there she also continued teaching and being active in various Jewish institutions, especially in the educational institutions of the *Yiddisher Arbeiter Farband.*

In his time, his son Yitzhak emigrated to Argentina, and from there he went to the United States. He lives in New York, and is active in immigration and naturalization affairs. One of his sons is a scientist in the field of atomic and electronic research, and has published books that have been translated into many languages. He is also the editor of a monthly scientific periodical in the United States. Another son of Israel Novick, Ze'ev, was one of the first residents of our city killed by the Nazis when they entered the city. His wife and two daughters were killed in Treblinka.

The only son of Israel Novick, who went to the Holy Land as a *Halutz*, one of the heads of *Gordonia* in our city, is Abraham Novick, who lives in Hadera to this day, and is known as a vary active individual in many community institutions, and on this account, also with the Organization of Volkovysk émigrés and its environs.

Reb Abraham-Eliyahu Markus

By Zahava Graf

The home of my father, ז"ל abounded with Jewish people, who had come to consult him in order to straighten out disputes, to clarify misunderstandings, or just to say hello, etc. What characterized my father, was first and foremost a certain faith in the justice of the Divine, study for its own sake, and what would flow from it. All the time he could spare from public service, which he did without consideration of reward, he dedicated to Torah study. He was the Chairman of Bank Ladowy, and a member of many community institutions. Apart from all of this, he also would lead services in the synagogue, and composed many prayers and melodies, and many were drawn to the synagogue to hear his prayers and melodies, because he also had a very pleasant voice, and he put a lot of feeling into his praying. Father also set himself another goal – to draw the community closer to the *Shas*, and his lessons in *Shas* are well remembered by those who enjoyed them. He would have the *Siyyum* celebration at his home, with great ceremony, in the presence of the Rabbi and all the students.

When he went up to the Land of Israel and joined his sons, he did not sit around idly, and he worked in the supermarket that we opened in Petakh-Tikva. He loved to walk about in the streets, enjoying the fragrance of every tree and every flower, and his love for the Land of Israel knew no bounds.

One day, as father sat in front of the store, an American tourist went by the storefront, and when he saw father, he approached him and embraced him with great emotion, and began to tell passers-by with what esteem father was held in Volkovysk.

Father was the chairman of the selection committee to find a successor to Rabbi Borukhov after he went to Israel, and he was strongly in favor of Rabbi [Yitzhak] Kossowsky. One time, when we lived in Petakh Tikva, father went to the local Rabbi to sell the Chometz on Passover eve. He was surprised when he found out that this Rabbi was none other than Rabbi Reuven Katz, who was the second choice to be Rabbi of Volkovysk, but was not selected. Rabbi Katz recognized father, and he said to him: "I didn't get your support at that time to become Rabbi of Volkovysk, but as your eyes bear witness, I did succeed in earning the appointment as the Chief Rabbi of Petakh Tikva."

During the High Holy Days, father would lead services in a synagogue in Bnei Brak, where my brother Shlomo lived, and after he passed away, this synagogue bears his name. At every appropriate occasion, especially at family gatherings, we resurrect our memory of him by singing the melodies he composed. May his memory be for a blessing.

Grandfather Meshel

By Katriel Lashowitz

The image of my grandfather Meshel is well-secured in my memory, and quite possibly in the memory of many of those from our city, because this was a unique image of its kind, and it was not because he attracted the affection of Jew and gentile alike, simple folk and well-connected people. Or in a word – everyone who came in contact with him. The degree to which this affection extended can be gleaned from the fact that the simple Christian peasants appointed him to be a judge and sole mediator, and they would bring to him any and every dispute that arose among them. No one took issue with the final decision of Meshel Lashowitz. Both sides accepted his word at the outset, and this was due to two traits with which he was blessed: *a*. He was a wise Jew, and *b*. He was straight in his ways, and unbiased in matters of law. And after all, these are the two traits that every judge or mediator must have. It should therefore come as no surprise, that among his acquaintances and supporters, were many important government and municipal judges from Volkovysk who from time-to-time sought his advice. They knew well that Grandfather Meshel was not schooled in law, and was not versed in the terminology of judgement and jurisprudence, but despite this, his 'common sense' was not discounted, and was a counterbalance to formal education.

He was handsome, able-bodied and broad-shouldered, he had a long, well-combed beard, always spotlessly dressed. He looked like an aristocrat. He had many businesses: commerce in forest products and grain, an owner of land and grain silos several kilometers from the city, but above all – the holder of the franchise for mail delivery for the entire Volkovysk district that was not reached by the train. To this end, he employed carriages, wagons and horses that were housed in a large station behind his house on the *Kholodoisker Gasse*. He received this franchise from the authorities, and not everyone was so privileged. The fact that the government, which was not known to harbor any special affection for Jews, would bestow this franchise specifically on a Jew, gives further testimony to the extent to which his popularity reached, and Grandpa Meshel was a stalwart Jew, who did not conceal who he was. It was the opposite: he was very open and public about it.

One thing to be learned from our research is that his many businesses required him to hire help, but most of the workers were members of his family: his sons, daughters, and relatives. He depended on his workers, who worked, naturally, under his direction, even though himself, had to turn to engage people who had come to see him, and to participate in mediation for which he took no compensation, and for community service. He loved the people, and always sought to achieve compromise between them, he hated strife and contention, and pursued peace.

While still a child, I benefitted from the work of my grandfather and his associates. During vacation from school, and at harvest time, I would frequently ride out with my grandfather on one of the wagons that would travel between the fields and the silos in his back yard. My joy was boundless, and I had no peer during the hour when I sat on a pile of wheat or barley trying to be seen by everyone, especially by my friends, who could not hide their envy for Lashowitz's grandson, who was so lucky to have such a grandfather... and so much more, when I would go through town – on a sleigh with a big lettering that said 'Polish Post' emblazoned across it, and I, the little one, pulling on the reins, and every time I would see one of my friends, I would yell out a thunderous '*Dyo*,' so the horses and my friends would know exactly who is in charge here...

Grandpa Meshel was also a *Kohen.* During the holidays and festivals, when it came time to bestow the priestly blessing in the synagogue, Grandfather, accompanied by his four sons and two grandsons would go to the front of the congregation to administer the blessing with their voices raised high in *Yevarekhekha!* It appeared to me that the administration of the priestly blessing was one additional monopoly enjoyed by Meshel Lashowitz

and his family. If my memory does not mislead me, I think there was only one other *Kohen* in our synagogue, and this was Beinish the dye storekeeper. Him and no other. This was a profound experience for me, the hour at which we descended from the *Bimah* after administering the priestly blessing, and we passed by the two rows of worshipers with feelings of great pride, who would shake hands with every one of the Lashowitzes, offering us a *Yashir Koakh*...

I loved visiting my Grandfather Meshel's home when I was a youngster, from whose handsome face a smile never vanished, and who would graciously receive anyone visiting his home – and there were many who did this. In his large yard, on piles of hay, one could meet with young people who felt there as if they were in their own home.

I remember one other fact about my grandfather's house, and this was very characteristic of those times: in his attic, he had laid out, one on top of the other, sacks of currency of all color and denomination, which in its time probably represented enough capital to buy many houses, but today isn't worth the husk off a clove of garlic, and the only use they have is that his grandchildren could play with those rubles and kerenkas, etc.

Those were the days —

The Holocaust

Page 113: *The Monument In Memory of the Martyrs of Volkovysk at the cemetery in Nahalat Yitzhak*

Table of Dates

June 22, 1941	The First Bombing of the City by the Germans
October 14, 1942	The Murder of the Jewish Doctors
November 2, 1942	Concentration of all the Jews of Volkovysk in the Bunkers
November 23, 1942	The First Transport (Jews of Ruzhany) to Treblinka
November 26, 1942	The Second Transport to Treblinka (Jews of Zelva, Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Yalovka, Amstibova)
December 6, 1942	The First Transport of Volkovysk and Svislucz Jews to Treblinka
December 8, 1942	The Second Transport of Volkovysk Jews to Treblinka
January 27, 1943	The Final Transport of 1,700 Jews to Auschwitz

The Russian Occupation at the Beginning of the War

By Eliyahu Rutchik

In 1938 I was drafted into the engineering division of the Polish Army. I was posted to the city of Lomza. At that time, the tension could already be felt in the relationship between Poland and Germany. Hitler demanded day and night that Poland return the 'corridor,' and his armies entered Czechoslovakia.

I recall my days of service in Lomza as being largely favorable. The local Jewish community showed considerable interest in the Jewish soldiers that were stationed in this city, they organized meals for us, many Jews would invite us to their homes for a meal, and on the Sabbath and holidays, we would receive permission to leave camp and attend services at the synagogue.

With the Nazi German invasion of Poland, we were sped to the East Prussian border. The Poles set up a line of defense on this border, and I served with the security guard. Not many days passed, and we began to retreat, but the Germans were reaching our fallback points ahead of us. Our command was left with no options. Many of the officers fled and disappeared. When we reached Slonim, we were left with only one officer, who began to a new reorganization. We began to fortify ourselves on the banks of the Shchara River.

It was on Sunday morning that I requested permission from my commanding officer to go into the city, on the pretense of visiting with members of my family. When I went down a street past a long line that had developed to buy necessities, a Jew of about fifty years of age approached me, looked into my face and directly asked, "Are you Jewish?"

When I answered affirmatively and told him I was from Volkovysk he said to me: "The Russians have crossed the border, and you have no reason to wander about. A boy like you needs to be with his 'mother.' He took me to his home and gave me civilian clothing, and that's how I was transformed into a civilian, and I went out on my army bicycle and headed for Volkovysk.

The roads were full of soldiers and police that had deserted from all of the fronts, and they were armed. I moved along expeditiously, because I knew that if they detained me – I would meet a bitter end. In a pouring rain, and in torn clothing, I reached Zelva. I had relatives in this town, but when I reached them, I must have had an altered appearance. They recognized me only with difficulty.

I stayed in their home until the Russians entered in long columns of vehicles, tanks, foot soldiers and cavalry. There was a great deal of happiness in the town. The Russians were met with song and dance. The political officers of the Russian Army immediately initiated an explanation, and they spared no metaphor in describing all the good and plenty of the Soviet Union. The constant refrain on their lips was, "We have everything" – and the faithful are indeed fortunate...

In the course of walking the streets of Zelva, I met up with several friends of mine from Volkovysk who were fleeing through Zelva on their way home. They proposed that I join them. Together, we rented a horse and wagon, but even so, we did almost the entire trip on foot.

We entered Volkovysk by the road that went past Schlossberg's brick factory. When I reached the center of the city (Boulevard), I discovered some friends there, the newspaper vendor Mopsik, and my brother Berel was there too. The joy at this meeting was indescribable. I walked home with my brother Berel, and along the way, he told me about a pogrom that the Poles had organized against the Jews, the murder of the linen storekeeper Makov, and a Jewish soldier from Piesk. Among the rest of the news he relayed to me, he told me that a friend of my from the army, Mandelbaum, was a guest at our home.

The news about the pogrom organized by the Poles worried me greatly. Suspicions of predations that the Poles might organize against the Jews existed during the first days of the war, and even before that. I was told that several members of *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, among them my brother Berel, began to organize a self-defense force, in order to anticipate the imminent trouble, and when our friend Mandelbaum reached us by indirect means (he was from Sokolka, and was treated like a son in our home), he also joined this self-defense force. When they found out that in the station there was a train car at the unloading dock, full of abandoned military armaments, they did not lose the opportunity to arm themselves. Among those who carried out this step were: my brother, the son of the smith, Munya Lapidus, and several other young men. Even the workers in the brick factory, most of whom were communists, took weapons from the same place. The defense group that was organized did not get involved in any major actions, because the Polish brigade that was stationed in the city, scattered in the meantime, and the Red Army entered the city. They turned over their weapons to the new regime. There was no need for self-defense from this point on, since the new rulers (the Russians) began to run the city, and set up life in it, according to their will and taste.

Under Soviet Occupation

A wave of Jewish refugees cascaded over Volkovysk. Most came from the center of Poland, that was already under German control. The Russians saw no need to close this border. Overcrowding was great, and there were refugees in practically every Jewish home. After several months, when the overcrowding became excessive, the synagogues were transformed into gathering places. Wit the consent of the heads of the Jewish community, the army erected a wooden gate around the new and old *Mauer Synagogues*, and the *Ein Yaakov Synagogue* (the Large synagogue was left outside the gate), and it was in this way that several

hundred beds for lodging were added for refugees. On a daily basis, an army field kitchen would arrive at the gated square, and the refugees would receive bread, warm soup, etc., without charge.

At the direction of the new regime, various cooperatives were formed, government and municipal marketplaces, and the factories of Barash were used to repair train cars and engines. In the town of Ros' near Volkovysk, they began to build a military airstrip, and many of the refugees were taken in to work on this project and others in the nearby towns. Political activity was also conducted according to the direction of the new rulers. All parties that existed under the Polish regime – were declared to be illegal. Various Jewish institutions, and also non-Jewish institutions, were taken over by the government, and the Jewish communists that were underground emerged from hiding, received appointments, and became 'close to the regime.' In order to help with maintaining order and policing, communist party operatives arrived from Minsk, among them many Jews. The communists were especially active in the police force, and in setting up the cooperatives. One of these was ***Mulya Schein***, a carpenter by trade, who organized all the carpenters in the city, and set up a large cooperative for carpentry. Meir Lidovsky was appointed as the head of labor (*Meister*), and those that worked in special areas such as wood-carving and furniture making, included myself and Moteleh Shifran. After completing a number of jobs well, and submitted several artistic samples – I received a permit and was even sent for training in Minsk.

In the course of time, the new regime established itself, and Soviet citizenship was extended to the residents of the city, and a temporary, limited citizenship to the refugees. Those deemed by the new regime to be 'capitalist elements,' were exiled into forced labor, and a voluntary draft began among the refugees to go work deep in Russia. One day, the regime announced that any refugee interested in returning to their former home should register with the police. Many among the refugees, most of them Jews, went quickly to sign up, because they knew what awaited them from the German regime. The Russians provided trains surrounded by guards for the refugees that were signed up, and the refugees that were crammed into the cars were not taken westward, but rather into the heart of Russia.....many young Jews were drafted into the Red Army, among whom as I remember were: my brother Berel, Shmuel Epstein, Naphtali Golder, Daniel Lemkin, and many others. My brother Herschel and I worked in the cooperative, my father worked in the government butcher store, and somehow we survived intact.

When I was notified that I was selected for training in Minsk, I obtained a letter from Chaim Berel the shoemaker to his sister who lived in Minsk. The letter was a form of introduction and entreaty to take me in, and to assist me during the time of my training in Minsk. All the members of my family came to see me off at the train station – and that was the last time I ever saw them.

During my time in Minsk, everything went along calmly up until June 22, 1941. That was a Sunday, and I could sleep to a later hour. When I got up and turned on the radio, I discovered that war had broken out and that Germans had managed already to bomb cities well within Russia, and are advancing at a fast pace. At a later hour, I managed to get a taste of German bombardment, because Minsk was also bombed. The electrical generating plant was also hit, and the city was plunged into darkness. In a number of days, all supplies into the city had stopped, and the city was in flames. I had no news about Volkovysk or my family there. I convinced the family with whom I was living, the Shelovsky family, that we should leave Minsk together and head to the east, but they refused, since they wanted to wait for their son, Vovka. On June 26, 1941 I left Minsk, and under the direction of Mr. Shelovsky, I headed in the direction of Volkovysk.

The Initial German Occupation

(According to Dr. Einhorn)

The first detachments of German troops marched into Volkovysk on *Saturday, June 29, 1941.* Their

arrival instilled great fear into the Jewish community of the city. The SS Division immediately distinguished itself by its barbarism, and shot at any Jew that they saw along the way. The first victim was *Israel Tzemakh* (Alibuder's son-in-law) who was shot in the streets on June 29, and many Jews were shot after him. The Jews remained crammed into their partly burned out wrecked homes and in barns, three and four families crowded in at a time, fearful of what awaited them in the near future. Many families sent their children off to nearby towns – Svislucz, Izavelin, Lisokovo, Mosty', and others. The largest percentage of the Volkovysk Jews, together with those who had saved themselves by going into the fields, and then returned later to the city, accommodated themselves anew on the *Neuer Gessel,* in Karczyzna, and in Zamoscheh, and in the few remaining houses on the other streets. Because of the shortage of housing stock, overcrowding became severe. Signs of hunger began to appear in the city. The Christians pillaged all the stores, and they lacked for nothing. However, the Jews suffered severely from hunger.

The Germans were unable to construct a ghetto as they had done in almost all other Jewish cities and towns, because of the awesome and thorough destruction wreaked by the bombing of the city, there simply was no place where such a ghetto could be constructed. All of Volkovysk, and in particular, the Jewish quarter, looked like one big devastation. In order to set up a ghetto, the Germans would have had to drive the Poles out of that section of the city that had remained intact, from Zamoscheh, Volya, or Karczyzna – and they did not want to take such a step. Six German leaders were appointed to direct the security work of the city, and it was on them that the role fell of carrying out the systematic administration of the local Jewish population.

Regarding the first decrees by the Germans against the Jews, these have already been covered in other chapters incorporated in this book, and we will not repeat them. We will only mention that many fines and punishments were levied for the slightest 'infractions,' and the Germans attained their goal in this way – to prevent any possibility of resistance or uprising against their regime.

The Judenrat

A *Judenrat* was established in Volkovysk a short time after the arrival of the Germans, but this was quickly transformed into a tool of the Nazis. On one side, the *Judenrat* directed the internal and external lives of the Jewish community; and from the other side, it was tasked by the Germans to provide Jews for forced labor and carry out all of the cruel decrees of the Nazis.

The entirety of Jewish life became concentrated on the *Neuer Gessel* in those times. The seat of the *Judenrat* was found there, in a small building, on the left side of the street, which the Jews referred to as "The White House." All the departments conducted their activities from a larger building to the right. At the entrance to the yard, was the Secretariat, and the management center of the "*Ordnungs-dienst,*" from where the Jewish Support Police were called.

The head of the *Judenrat* was *Dr. Yitzhak Weinberg*. He served in this position from the day the *Judenrat* was established up until the time that the Germans arrested him, and later killed him. After that, Noah Fuchs, who had previously been the Deputy Head, took over the position. Dr. Weinberg's closest co-worker was *Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky*. Both of these doctors, who were so different in their character, nevertheless, joined together in a really harmonious fashion. Dr. Weinberg, previously an assimilated Jew, looked like a gentile, an aristocrat; Dr. Yaakov Sedletsky – a man of the people, was beloved by everyone, and was very popular. Both, however were distinguished in their decent character, commitment to the community, diligence and unusual energy. Both worked ceaselessly, abandoning their personal interests, and because of this, both became very revered by the Jewish populace.

The director of the Secretariat in Dr. Weinberg's time was *Noah Fuchs*. Assisting them were the heads of different sections who filled various posts.

Because of the shortage of housing stock, the *Judenrat* also directed effort in this area. It allocated housing on the basis of family size, distributed food, organized free medical help, and had oversight regarding the hygienic and sanitary conditions. For a long time, it also concerned itself with the refugees from White Russia, providing them with the necessary papers and transportation to a variety of more distant cities and towns, primarily to Bialystock. The *Judenrat* also had a *Jewish Support Police*, headed at the beginning by *M. Khantov*, and was later led by a Galician Jew by the name of *Glatt*.

The Jewish Support Police stood at the behest of the *Judenrat* and serve the interests of the Jews of Volkovysk. But in reality, it served an entirely different purpose. The reason for this, is that the police body was composed mostly of individuals from the underworld. They made use of the privileges given to them for their own benefit. In particular, one of them named *Khiller*, "distinguished himself" in this regard, and caused the Jews a lot of trouble. He could not even shame the worst of the Nazis in the way he related to and dealt with the Jews.

Arrests and Mass-Murders

The arrests began immediately after the arrival of the Germans in Volkovysk. The arrests were in reality carried out with the use of lists, which had been prepared in advance by anti-Semitic Christians in the city. It was enough when a non-Jew would represent to the police that so-and-so, a Jew, was a communist during the Russian occupation, such a person was immediately arrested and shot the next morning. The arrests were carried on without stop. Those arrested were brought to the "white jail," which had remained intact after the bombing of the city, and from there, they would be conveyed by buses to the Mayak forest, where they were shot on the spot. In that small forest, ready graves had already been dug for them, prepared by Jewish slave laborers. When it happened that one of these unfortunate young people managed to get out of the clutches of German hands and try to escape, the Poles would catch them and again turn them over to the Nazis.

The arrest of the innocents intensified the feeling of terror and hopelessness among the Jewish populace. One simply was totally uncertain about one's own life, and before it was even possible to calm down from this most recent misfortune, the Nazis quite suddenly carried out a new action of mass murder among the Volkovysk Jews. At that time they took over *two hundred* men to the Mayak forest and shot them all. The news of the fate of the innocent two hundred Jewish victims disassembled the entire Volkovysk Jewish community. Everyone felt totally worthless in the hands of the enemy.

Shortly thereafter, Volkovysk was incorporated into East Prussia, and in this manner became part of the Third Reich. The fact that Volkovysk was counted by the Germans as part of the Third Reich, served as a positive influence on the circumstances of the local Jews. Because, it just happens that in those days, terrifying tales began to reach Volkovysk about mass-pogroms against the Jews in surrounding towns and villages, which were a part of the Eastern Lands,(i.e. enemy territory) such as Dereczin, Slonim, the towns in White Russia, etc. These hopes strengthened after a year went by without any incidents of mass murder or extraordinary events. The Jews began to accustom themselves to the 'minor' decrees: the yellow badges were worn, one walked on the edged of the bridge, and in the middle of the road, and not on the sidewalks, one performed hard, forced labor, etc., and took comfort in the hope for redemption and liberation, but those times never came.

Every day, the *Judenrat* received a list of workplaces where the Jews were compelled to present themselves for work. Hundreds of Jews were compelled to present themselves for the hardest labor: to clean off grass from the wrecked houses, to dig foxholes and other military work. Naturally, the Germans paid no salary for this work. It was exactly the opposite, we thanked God that they gave us the work. This was the sole comfort, that so long as they had a need for Jewish labor,

they will continue to let the Jews live. In this respect, by comparison to other cities in which mass murder was committed (Slonim, Baranovich, Lida), the condition of the Jews of Volkovysk in the summer of 1942 was better.

The First Miracle

By Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg[42]

Page 118: Dr. Yitzhak Goldberg

Monday, June 23, 1941 – The second day of war

The attack of the Germans upon a defenseless population continues at an intense level. Every 20-30 seconds there is a new attack, that leaves many citizens, including children, killed. The people are without hope and disoriented, running from one hiding place to the next. Early in the morning, a bomb hit the hospital dispensary. Many sick people were killed. Another bomb hit the house of Dr. Shlackman, the lung specialist... he personally was not at home, because he was sent to a large city in the heart of Russia for additional training. The house was destroyed, and his only son was killed.

The municipal hospital was bombed and many patients were killed. Among the dead were two hospital nurses. Most people found sanctuary in cellars, because there were no real places to seek shelter. At four in the afternoon, the Germans began to drop incendiary bombs from their aircraft. The city was entirely engulfed in flames. People took things out of their houses to the extent possible. I saw Stolovitsky the flour merchant running out of his house which was ablaze, in the direction of our house, and he asked me if I had seen any of the members of his family. I had not seen a single one of them — I had stored my diploma in the cellar of our house, but when I saw the degree to which the incendiary bombs were burning up and destroying the houses, I retrieved it, and I still have it with me. It appears that I was the only doctor in Volkovysk that was able to save his original diploma credentials that I had received in Italy.

We took the most essential necessities with us, and we were quick to flee to the house of my brother, Hona, who lived in Karczyzna, outside of the city, where no incendiary bombs fell. Hona lived in a big house with his wife and children. A large yard around the house separated the dwelling from the street. – There was no place to sleep in the house, because many people had gathered in the house and outside it. Everyone wanted to be in a secure place. We slept on the floor. My mother returned to the city at a late hour of the night, to see what had happened to our house. I tried to convince her not to go, but I did not succeed, and because of this, I joined her. That night, I saw our house, and the houses around it consumed in flames. I wanted to get nearer to the house, but the heat surrounding it was not bearable, and I was forced to relent.

Tuesday, June 24, 1941, the third day of War

The intensive bombardment of the city. Every hour – an alarm. The city is going up in flames, but not all the houses are completely demolished, our house was burned to the foundation ---- I stood with my

[42] Dr. Goldberg was born in Ruzhany, but came to Volkovysk while still a boy. His father (Yaakov) and his mother (Hannah) were active in the community affairs of the city. His son, Yitzhak was a student first at the *Tarbut* School, and afterwards at the Polish High School. He enrolled as a medical student in Vilna, continued in Prague, and completed his medical studies in Italy. A short while before the outbreak of the war, he began to work as a doctor at the Jewish hospital in Volkovysk, and continued in his position during the Soviet occupation. A few days after the Nazis entered the city, Dr. Goldberg's mother was killed. He went with the members of his family to Ruzhany, and from there he was sent to Lisokovo where he worked as the municipal doctor. Dr. Goldberg was taken along with the Jews of Lisokovo when they were expelled to Volkovysk, and he again began to work at the Jewish hospital, and went through all the tribulations of the Jewish doctors until he reached Auschwitz. In his English book, Dr. Goldberg describes what went on in Volkovysk during the first days of the war. We transcribe the first chapter here.

mother beside our burned out house. She looked, but she didn't say a word. I could well imagine what was going on inside of her. She was a successful business lady. Everyone held her in high regard. She worked hard her during her entire life, and now she saw what the war had done to the fruit of her labors. She was sorrowful, but she reconciled herself to this fate. We went to Levitt's house. This was one of the few houses that hadn't been hit, and we rented a room for ourselves at this house.

My mother went to pray to the Creator of the Universe, that this accursèd war would come to an end, and that peace would return to the world. On the way, we met Mr. Lakhovitsky, who told us that he had not eaten since Sunday. My mother gave him the slice of bread that she had with her, and had set aside for a later time. Lakhovitsky thanked her with few words. More was not possible because of his emotion, and weakness. That night we were in our room at Levitt's house.

Wednesday, June 25, 1941, the fourth day of War

The air attacks have reached their peak intensity. The number of dead and wounded grows. There is chaos and anarchy. People are running in all directions. Bombs are falling with no let up next to houses that have been wrecked and burned already. Hopelessness intensifies. At ten in morning, we hear a bomb hit my nephew's house where my brother is sleeping as well. We were all bewildered and worried. Who knows what took place there? We find a hiding place in the cellar of Pelteh, which was a strong brick house and could withstand shells and bomb shrapnel. It was impossible to come out of the cellar because of the relentless bombing. To try and walk to my nephew's house under these circumstances was very dangerous, but my mother was not deterred by this danger. What are bullets and bombs in the eyes of a mother bent on rescuing her son? She went. After a while, when there was something of a lull, it was clarified that my brother was alive, and was not even wounded. He saved his own life literally at the last minute by having fled into the cellar. Many in this house, and nearby houses, were killed. Among the victims, were Dr. Berman, and his five year-old daughter. Dr. Berman had a medical laboratory to do analysis, and he gave his heart and soul to his work. All the doctors trusted him without reservation, because he did his work exceptionally well. Literally, the peak of the profession.

Many were severely wounded, and I did the best I could in order to speed medical help, eliminate contamination, prevent complications, and move the severely wounded to the hospital.

Friday, June 27, 1941 The sixth day of War

The *Luftwaffe* attacks continue. Today, not like usual, they began at 3AM. A bad sign. We leapt out of bed and ran for cover – to Pelteh's cellar. There were many neighbors there already. The bombs were falling close to the place, and on top of this, we could also feel the German artillery very much – cannon and mortar. This was a sign that the Germans were not very far from the city. We were terrified of a direct hit. Shrapnel hit the door and walls of the cellar. We were clearly in great danger. Women and children cried, all of us trembled in fear. Even Russian soldiers came into our hideout, in order to find shelter from the shrapnel. My endangered mother was covered in a cold sweat. A bomb fell beside the cellar, and a huge hole was blown out of the ground, a few meters away from where we were hiding. Someone came to our hideout, and asked me to go speedily, to attend a neighbor at his house, who was severely wounded. He was bleeding profusely, and nobody could stop the bleeding. I went there quickly, and I stopped the bleeding, cleaned the wound, and put on a bandage. On my way back, I met my mother, who wanted to return to our room at Levitt's. I went with her, and attempted to obtain some food for her. I succeeded in getting a little bit of milk, but my mother refused to drink. Instead, she took her *Siddur* and began to pray to God that the destruction and devastation should stop. I laid down on the sofa, because I was very tired, and I fell asleep immediately. My mother woke me up after barely an hour, and asked that I bring water to my father who was in Pelteh's shelter, because he was very thirsty. I got up, and took a pitcher of water with me. I had to pass a short distance to reach the hideout. I was already beside

the hideout, when the bombing resumed. I quickly jumped into the cellar, and gave my father the water.

Suddenly, we got news that Levitt's house, where I had barely an hour before, talked with my mother, who was praying from her *Siddur,* was hit by a bomb dropped by a German pilot. At this news, I quickly exited the cellar. Without paying attention to shrapnel and bombs, I ran to the bombed house where my mother was. It was impossible to enter the burning house. There were explosions without end. I laid down on the ground and waited for a lull. The house is disintegrating. My father and brother quickly reached the place, on the run. We cut a way for ourselves through the wreckage. I focused on the place where my mother had been sitting a while ago. Feverishly, we cleared the wreckage at that spot, and one of her hands was revealed, which had a gold ring on one of her fingers. We extracted her body from the wreckage. My mother! My beloved mother was dead. At the same instant, many German planes began to drop bombs. We found cover under a pile of bricks. In a matter of seconds, the house went up in flames. Thanks to my mother, who had sent me with a pitcher of water to my father, I was saved and remained alive. This was the first miracle that occurred to me.

With the Doctors Who Were Taken Out to be Killed

By Herschel Roitman

In the summer of 1942, when the situation was so serious that the vicinity was plagued with outbursts of pogroms and mass slaughtering, and tides of Jewish blood were being spilled in Slonim, Baranovich, Lida, and many other places – there was relative quiet in Volkovysk. Despite this, a part of the young people perforce understood the seriousness of the situation, and they took stock of the imminent danger that was preparing to arrive. We worked in secret, and managed to establish contact with a larger group of Russian partisans, that was located in the Zamkova Forest. The first ones to establish contact with the partisans were Sarah Rubin and her brother-in-law. Once, Sarah's brother-in-law turned to me (this was before we started to work together), and asked me if I would go into the forest to repair a radio there that belonged to a group of partisans. I responded positively to this request, because of my desire to participate in a practical way with real partisans. It was agreed that on the following Sunday, I would go into the forest, and in the meantime, I would equip myself with the necessary equipment to repair a radio.

I knew fully well the danger in this step, because there was a standing order that any Jew found outside of the city was to be shot. As to entry into the forest, that goes without saying. There, it was forbidden even for non-Jews to enter. Anyone found in the forest or in its vicinity was taken for a partisan and shot on the spot. However, we reached the designated point without incident. A sentry from the partisans waited for us in the forest. I saw before me a sympathetic young Russian boy with a light machine gun in his hand. We identified ourselves, and afterwards we were taken into the depths of the forest to his group. After an hour of walked through byways and various paths, and contact with a variety of sentry posts, we reached a camouflaged location among trees that were low and close together. A number of tents stood on a small square . A campfire burned in the middle of the square, and a cheerful group of Russian men and women soldiers were carrying on a lively conversation. I saw that I was in a different world that enchanted me from the first minute.

I was presented to the commander, a tall pleasant looking fellow from Georgia,[43] and they showed me the place where the radio was, and asked me to repair it, because it had been several days without any news from Moscow, and because of this, they were cut off from news at the various fronts. I went to work immediately, and in a matter of several hours, I returned the radio to its normal state, and it began to function again. They were very satisfied with the work that was done, and I had sufficient

[43] That is *Russian Georgia*, or Gruzinia.

time to engage in conversation, and become familiar with their work. All of them were soldiers of the Red Army that had retreated in the midst of battle, and there were even a number of Jews among them. They did a great deal of sabotage: blew up bridges, tore up rail lines, burned grain stores, etc. The Germans had the impression that the area contained an entire army, a large force, and the Germans at night, had to mount a watch of peasant farmers with staves along the entire length of the rail line, but even this was to no avail. In the mornings, they would find piles of peasant farmers from their district tied up together in rope. The role of young people from Volkovysk was far from minimal in these actions. They provided all the necessary materiel, starting with medicines, and ending with the tools for destruction. One of the most dedicated of the workers in connection with this important work, was the Smith, Bom Zuckerman, Lemkin's son, and others.

I wanted very much to remain with these partisans, and not return to the city, but they decided that it was incumbent upon me to continue working with the existing group that already existed in the city, whose primary mission was to organize young Jewish men, and in a measured process, transfer them out to the forest. Towards evening they escorted me out of the forest, and we returned to the city. The forest was the province of the partisans.

Thanks to my work in the export slaughterhouse, I had the opportunity to procure many different things that were needed by the partisans. I would put these things in Sarah Rubin's hands, and she would get them to the right place. Several times, on Sunday, the day of rest, I would myself go into the forest. Largely, this was because I had been designated to communicate a specific mission. I became very friendly with the group, and I did the best I could to help these young Jewish partisans. Despite the relatively quiet conditions in Volkovysk, we knew that the evil would not pass us by, and that is how it was.

It was in September of 1942, a week before Rosh Hashana.. That same night, after work, Sarah Rubin came to me with a weird notice: I was being summoned. I understood who was calling, and I immediately presented myself at the designated location. A Russian girl was waiting for me, and she told me to go along with her, because she is an emissary of the commander. I went without reservation. The truth of the matter was, that the situation was not conducive to thinking things out, because on the following day, I was required to be at work, and that would no longer be possible, and not to show up for work to the Germans was called 'sabotage,' which carried a death sentence by firing squad, but I did not hesitate, and followed in the footsteps of the Russian girl. There was an air of mystery about this. I didn't know what suddenly prompted this summons at night, and what caused this pressure for immediacy. I thought perhaps they found some fault with me, and I would have to defend myself, or maybe it has some connection to the arrest of the doctors. In short – I found myself bewildered and disoriented.

At about midnight, after passing many sentry posts, we reached the camp. Everyone except for the watch were already asleep. They showed me to a place where I could lie down. Only on the morrow would I be able to talk to the commander apparently in connection with repairing the radio again. I breathed more easily. In the morning, after questions about what was going on in the city, and other things, he told me that the radio had malfunctioned, and that I would have to fix it rapidly. The commander told me, that because of the large size of the group, and apart from this, because of the oncoming winter, the position of the group in a small forest in relation to bare trees, was not secure enough, and it is incumbent upon them to move to larger forests, with the intent of going to Bielovez. He told me to get ready, to provision myself with a variety of necessities, and with tools, and in the following week I was responsible to come on the day of the planned move.

I worked there until afternoon, and fixed the radio, and one of them escorted me out of the forest, and from there I walked into the city. I skipped over the roads, choosing to walk through fields, in order to

avoid passing people and buses. When I arrived at the city itself, from the side of the slaughterhouse, very near to Volya, it was already five o'clock. Even before I entered my house, as I was walking along the *Grodno Gasse*, facing *Tatarski [Gasse]*, I met Fish'keh, a butcher who worked with me. He ran to me greatly upset; Roitman, where have you been? The Chief of Police is looking for you.

A cold sweat covered me. I knew the implications of not showing up at work. I began to think up alibis, and among these thoughts I reached home. When I entered the house, they all surrounded me and told me that the Chief of Police had personally come here to look for me. I apprehended that the matter was serious, because it was not usual for the Chief of Police (A German Officer, SD) to personally come for a matter of an arrest, but rather to send members of the auxiliary police. It became known to me, that in addition to arresting the doctors, they had yesterday also arrested electricians and several radio technicians, among them: Herschel Galiatsky, Polya, and others. I was also told that the Chief of Police said that I had until 9:00PM to appear at the police station, and if not — there isn't more to say...

I decided to go in to see the manager and to advise him of what had transpired, and he liked me and had trust in me. He soothed me, and told me that I am very diligent in my work, and there is nothing to fear, that he will be asked – he will testify that I was busy with a specific assignment of work away from my normal place of work, and they will release me immediately. His words calmed me a bit, but I had barely left the manager's office, when I saw two Polish auxiliary policemen from Volkovysk coming at me, Chmienecki and Mihalczek, saying that they had a warrant to arrest me; they had already been to my house. I was brought to the police station. There, I met up with four men who had already been arrested, two strangers whom I did not recognize, and: Galiatsky and Polya. I was asked why had I come so late? Where was I? I relied on my manager, and I said that I was busy at work, and they ordered me to go outside, and we got into the plain SS car which we recognized only too well, as the one with which they would take all the accused Jews of the city to be shot with machine guns outside of the city in the nearby forest. After a short hour of riding in the dark, he turned the car and entered a gate. We did not know in advance where they were taking us, but when the car stopped and they ordered us to get out, and they took us into an underground bunker (a cellar), we saw that we were in the Barracks extermination camp. This was the famous camp that the Germans put up in 1941 using Russian prisoners of war. Here, in the dark bunker, I recognized the other prisoners, and from my conversations with them, I discovered that the accusation against me was providing help to the partisans in the repair of their equipment. I decided not to admit any guilt, because if I did, I would create the possibility of an accusation that the Jews of Volkovysk were aiding the partisans – a very serious accusation liable to bring a Holocaust down on the Jews.

On the following morning at daybreak, we saw through the single tiny window that was above the door to the bunker, that was flat with the ground, that the doctors were coming out of the bunker opposite us. The water source was close to our bunker, and it was in this fashion that we were able to exchange a few words through the iron bars on the tiny window. Dr. Weinberg told us in a few words that they were accused of providing medical help to the partisans. He related that a number of them had already been interrogated. In general the doctors presented themselves as not having fallen in their spirits. They looked tired, and without adequate sleep. However, in general, they appeared to hold themselves well. Especially Weinberg, who stood looking fresh and energetic. At that time we saw Dr. Weinberg, Velovsky, Dr. Cantor, Dr. Tropp, Dr. Press, and Dr. Sedletsky. Afterwards, when the men had finished washing, they brought out the women, among many Russian women, and also Jewish ones from the vicinity, we saw Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova.

After a few days, we got a good report that they were letting Rosa Einhorn and Piesikova go free. On the hells of this news, our spirits improved, and the spirits of the doctors improved; they began to

believe that their fate was not yet sealed. Three of my comrades and I were able to prove this as a matter of the actual truth, and I was able to do so by relying on an agreement with my manager that he would vouch for me being at work on that day, but the doctors could not prove their innocence. After the three other electricians and I were set free, it became clear that it was not our successful justifications that stood us in good stead, but rather the German managers for whom we worked, involved themselves in the matter, and indicated that our work was very critical for them.

We hoped that the doctors too, would be released, but it became clear that the Gestapo had brought a group of Jewish doctors from Bialystock to Volkovysk, in place of those who were arrested, and on October 14, 1942, the Gestapo took a group of Jews for work on a special detail; it took them out to the Izavelin Forest, and forced them to dig a large pit meant for the Jewish doctors. When the pit was dug, they took them away to some distance, and after barely an hour, they heard the sound of machine gun fire that killed the doctors.

Now, there is no longer any point for it to remain a secret, that Dr. Weinberg himself, the Head of the *Judenrat* gave the medical attention to the wounded partisans. It is only a pity that there were so few like Weinberg! He understood that there was an obligation but he did not choose to confess under interrogation that he had in fact rendered this assistance, because such a confession carried the risk of endangering all the members of the *Judenrat,* of which he was the head, and perhaps all of the Jews of Volkovysk.

The day on which the Jewish doctors died was a bitter and abrupt one for the Jewish populace of Volkovysk. Now the illusion that perhaps the Jews of Volkovysk would be spared from the fate of the Jews of surrounding towns and villages, was shattered. Now they knew it all: the end was rapidly drawing nigh.

That Children and Grandchildren Might Know

By Mira
(From a letter to her cousin, Hillel Epstein)

— I was seventeen years old when the Nazis reached our city. The first decrees: to sew two yellow badges on our clothing, to wear only wooden shoes, and a prohibition against walking on the sidewalks, were actually quite benign decrees compared with what was to come later.

It was 1942 (I don't remember the exact date), when the Germans broke in the windows and doors of the houses. They broke the window panes, and ordered everyone outside in order to walk to the ghetto. Asleep and half-naked, everyone went outside. Mant's wife walked with us, beautiful and sweet. She swallowed some pills and gave them to her children. They never reached the ghetto. The remained at the side of the road. Mant was killed by the bullets of the Nazis.

We entered the ghetto. The wife of Dr. Feinberg stood at the gate entrance laughing. She had lost her mind. Her husband, and all the Jewish doctors in the city had previously been murdered. It was hot in the ghetto, and the children were very thirsty. It was near a well of water, but there was little water in it. About twenty German soldiers stood there and laughed at the desperate mothers trying to slake the thirst of their children. In those moments I thought: is it possible that these are also human beings?

When we were in the camp, we saw how they daily took out the corpses of people that had died of hunger. In order to be certain that people did not feign death in order to escape from the camp, the corpses were stabbed with bayonets. Once they brought us to the bath house. It was awful and terrifying to look at the naked people. Skin and bones. The attempted to shake the lice that stuck to them off of their bodies. This was not easy. There was very little water with which to do this.

The end of January. I came out in the morning and

saw naked corpses. The living would strip the clothing off of the dead. We were hungry, and the hungry are always cold. I saw a little boy rolling on the ground, crying terribly. They took him out along with the dead. The image of this little boy haunted me for a long time.

I decided to get out of the camp no matter what. Up to this time only two people escaped from the camp: Levin and Galai. They were caught, and dug their own graves. I approached the guard at the side of the gate, and I put some money in his hand. He refused to take only money, and demanded a watch as well as the money. He took everything, and told me to hide myself until the changing of the guard, but meanwhile, he would send me to the head of the SS of the ghetto. I realized that I had failed with this guard. In the meantime, my mother arrived, and she begged the German guard to free me, but in reply to her entreaty, he pointed his weapon at her. At the time of the changing of the guard, the sentry took me to the SS commander and conveyed what had been said between us, and he even put what he had taken from me on the table. I was sent to jail.

Towards nightfall, they called me and told me to bring other valuables (after they had divided up what I had previously brought). I remained in the ghetto, in the men's section. My father and brother were also there, and that night I spent without my mother. In the morning, they took men to work on the mail, and I joined them. The following day, I succeeded in taking my brother along to work on the mail. My fried Sasha came there, advised me to get out of there, and promised to help me, but they did not succeed in getting my father out.

End of February 1943. We were among the last to remain. In the evening, the Germans gathered us together, conducted a roll call, and I managed to get away. I remember how I reached the bathroom. I took out several boards, and found myself outside, in an unfamiliar yard. The German started to shoot indiscriminately. All around there was pandemonium and yelling. Bitter cries of people. I ran with all my might, and reached the Russian cemetery. I did not fear the dead. I especially feared the living. I knew that I had to continue to run. Suddenly, I bumped into a policeman, who apparently did not recognize me, and he graciously begged my pardon. I walked in the direction of our home. Sasha worked on the first floor, and it was forbidden to enter there. I didn't have the strength to get up to the second floor, because death reigned there. I hid in the stable.

At two in the morning, Sasha came and took me into a warm house. That night, they searched Sasha's house. In the morning, I transferred to the attic in the house. It was intensely cold, and a cutting wind was blowing. I had a bottle of spirits beside me, and one gets drunk from spirits. Suddenly voices reached me. I understood that they were conducting a search in my house. They did not detect the attic, and there was no ladder that stood by the entrance to it. The searchers tore the planks, the pillows and sheets that were in my room, and left.

After a week, I went out to a village dwelling in Kanbaczy. The homeowner was a stutterer, and his wife received me with glowering looks. According to an oral agreement, between me and the woman, we arranged for me to remain there until the end of the war. After about two months of being there, the master of the house told me that his wife was scheming to cancel the agreement, and before anything else, she wanted to tear my eyes out. Then he added haltingly, "But I feel for you." She demanded money from me, and I could not meet her demand. The pressure grew. On one Sunday, when I held the homeowners little daughter by the hand, the homeowner came to me as if drunk, with a terrorized look on his face, took his little girl away from me and threw her to the ground, and attempted to take me in his arms. I felt his large hands on my throat, and the thought raced through my mind that I am at the brink of death, and a useless death at that. I saw a knife on the table. In a second, the homeowner lay on the floor bleeding. In the corner lay his daughter, not recognizing anything. I did not regret what I did, and after a while when the wife came and saw her wounded husband, she began to question me as to who wounded him. I told her that e apparently had hurt himself in the house. One

thing was clear to me from this point on: I had to get out of there as quickly as possible.

I promised the wife that I would leave the house in a matter of days, and I stood by my story that her husband had hurt himself in the house. The injured man apparently didn't know what was being discussed, but his glare did not bode well.

In two days, the brother of the wife came to the house. At that time, I was sitting beside the stove. He laid down on the bed without taking his eyes off me, and after barely an hour, he let go words to the effect that it would be quite expensive to settle this matter for Kaplinska. I had nothing to fear, and I told him that the money that I had was now in his sister's hands. He got dressed, and said he was going to the police station. I smiled, because I couldn't cry at that moment. He replied: "Money, Kaplinska, or you will stop laughing forever." His sister, the woman of the house, promised him the money and my fur coat. They emptied a few more glasses, and in the morning, he traveled somewhere with his sister. A miracle happened, and he died along the way, and he took his secret with him.

After a while Sasha arrived, and we spoke of meeting in the forest in a few days. She told the woman of the house that if she valued the life of her daughter – that she shouldn't dare touch me, and she really didn't touch me, but she made my life miserable and starved me until I met Sasha in the forest. We walked the entire night for a distance of 20 kilometers. We were forced to go around the settlements along the way, and hunger gnawed at me greatly. We reached the forest sentry. Sasha went ahead, and I waited at the entrance to the forest. Suddenly, I saw two sparks of light, and it looked to me like two people were smoking cigarettes. I was frightened, because nothing was worse to me at that time than men. To my good fortune, it turned out that the two points of light were coming from the eyes of a wolf, And wolves in those days were better than people...

In the morning, I reached the house of Sasha's parents. During the first days, I succeeded in not appearing in front of his family, but after a while, it became impossible for them not to sense my presence. His father said to me, after seeing my embarrassment, that I should leave the house immediately. In reaction to this Sasha said, that if I leave – he will leave as well. He made me a hideout. For two years, I his under the floor, and I suffered everything that comes with such a condition. I learned how to dress and wash in the dark, without the light that would surely give me away.

Meanwhile the front drew closer to us. The thunder of the Russian cannon got closer, and were like a sweet melody to my ears. The Nazis retreated, but along their retreat, they blew up and destroyed everything they could lay their hands on along the way. We came out of the house and dug out foxholes. I remember the last German airplane that dropped a bomb only a few meters away from our foxhole. It was swallowed up in the ground, as if it too, was tired of the continuing war...

All the things that I am telling you in my letter do not even encompass one percent of what I endured. I have written you these things because I am of the opinion that your children and grandchildren need to know how their kin suffered and vanished.

The Path of Suffering and Heroism

By Eliyahu Kovensky

Page 125: *Eliyahu Kovensky (untitled)*

The partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky was interviewed upon his arrival in Israel by Eliezer Kalir, and he told him about all that had happened to him from the day the war broke out. Kovensky was awarded the title of *Hero of the Soviet Union* because of his outstanding abilities in fighting the Germans.

Immediately after the Germans entered the city, a severe hunger set in, and there was nothing to eat. The gentiles plundered the stores abandoned by the

Russians, and they had their pick of everything, and the Jews, scarred by fire, missing everything, would go to ask for foodstuffs from the gentiles. Many young people were arrested immediately on the excuse that they were communists – and they were taken outside the city and shot; – if it became possible for one of these young people to get away and flee – the gentiles apprehended him, and turned him over to the Germans. All Jews over the age of six were forced to wear a white band with a blue Star of David on their arm. – afterwards, they were changed to yellow badges; a prohibition to walk on the sidewalks was enacted, only in the middle of the street with the horses, cattle and wagons. Commerce was forbidden, it was forbidden to own a horse, cow, etc. A *Judenrat* was established, which had as members, Dr. Weinberg, Dr. Sedletsky, Noah Fuchs, Berel Amstibovsky, Sham'keh Samiel, and Israel Gurevich. The office of the *Judenrat* was also on the *Neuer Gasse*, opposite the house of the rag merchant. Its job was to provide conscripted labor to fill the various filthy orders of the German regime. Beside the Judenrat, there even was an auxiliary Jewish police, initially with Khantov at its head, and afterwards headed by a Galician Jew named Glatt.

On my street, on the *Neuer Gasse*, a bomb fell, and the children were covered with shards of glass. I extracted the children, and fled with them in bare feet to a field in Karczyzna. In my haste, I took only the bicycle. The house was on fire. I also had a cow. She was in the pasture. Towards evening I waited for her on return from the meadow, and I took her with me into the field, in the place we had bedded down in Karczyzna. There, one of the employees of the railroad approached me, and proposed that I seel him the bicycle. I did a deal with him. I gave him the bicycle in exchange for a blind horse and wagon. I tied the cow to the wagon, and together with my wife and children, we set out in the direction of Zhetl, where I had a father, four brothers and two sisters. The Germans were there already also, however they hadn't handled people badly. And after the tribulations of Volkovysk – I breathed easier here. In this way, about a week went by.

On the eighth day, they ordered all the Jews from age seven to seventy to gather in the marketplace square, to form rows, and they told them to sing and dance. This went on for three hours. The Christians stood beside their houses, on their balconies, holding their hands to their bellies and rolling with laughter. After three hours of this, they chose 120 men (from what we learned later: they were sent to Novogrudok and shot them to death), ordered everyone to put on yellow badges, and to return home. After a short while, another order was issued to turn over gold, jewelry and money: – and when the Jews were brought together on the market square, for purpose of turning over their assets and what they had worked for so hard – a German felt around in the pocket of one woman, and found a gold ring, and he then shot her to death in front of everyone else.

In this way, 8-9 months went by. We had already heard about the massacres in Slonim, Kozlovshchina, and in the towns of the vicinity, but we thought the evil would pass us by: we worked for the *Wehrmacht,* and our 'Overseer,' was not all bad. In the meantime, a ghetto was put into the town. They assembled the Jews into two streets, fenced them off with barbed wire – at the height of a man, with a gate, and we would have to pass through it on our way to work, under police guard.

On May 1, 1942, the ghetto was suddenly surrounded, and they ordered everyone to go out to the old cemetery for the purpose of receiving new 'papers.' Many did not respond to the order and hid themselves in 'hideaways,' that everyone had prepared individually in the ghetto. At seven in the morning, when the Germans reached the place, and saw that very few people were coming – they went to the houses and took them out of their hiding places and gathered together three thousand people. My family and I lay in a hideaway, and they didn't find us. On the square they ordered that people form up in rows, and they began a selection: right, left! It became clear that this was a matter involving death – but they didn't know which way was death – to the right side, or the left side!...

They gathered 1800 people together, and took them for a distance of a kilometer – to the outskirts of the town – and there they saw huge pits, ready. Gentiles from the two villages had dug them during the night, and machine guns stood not far from them... they started to bring twenty people at a time.. They shot them – into the pit... except for the last 60, there was no room left in the pits – so they sent them back to town, and they told how people tore their hair out, pulled out their teeth, went crazy, how the air was shaken with the screams and wailing, how the elderly Rabbi of Zhetl did not stop praying, reciting verses of the Psalms from memory, the confession of *Avinu Malkeinu*, and of *Ashamnu, Bagadnu;* But when he saw with his own eyes, that they were killing people by shooting them, and tossing them into the pits like slaughtered cattle, he had a change of attitude, and began to rail against the heavens, shouting with his last strength: here, is this the justice of the Law, here, merciful and considerate God, what has my precious and pure congregation done to deserve this?!... he pulled out the hair of his beard, tore the shirt on his back, and with hands outstretched to the heavens – was taken to the slaughter!

My uncle Leizer Kovensky, a jolly and alert Jewish man, one of the people from whom advice was sought in the city, and my uncle Shmuel Kovensky, with his father – had a bottle of whiskey. They drank the whiskey, recited their confession, lay down together, and were shot. The entire process didn't take more than two hours!

— Eight weeks had not gone by, when they again surrounded the ghetto, and ordered everyone out onto the market square. My family and I, and 50 other people, were hidden in a bunker, but this time they found us, and took us all out to the marketplace square. When we arrived at the marketplace square, we met five hundred people already there, who lay with their heads on the ground, with boots off, they also made us get down on the ground, telling us to take our shoes off as well, and let us lie there for a half an hour. Afterwards, they ordered us to get up, arranged us into rows, and told us to go in the direction of the pits. Along the way, wives became separated from their husbands, their children, struggling, screaming, insanity... trapped together, we were led along the street to the cemetery... on our way, we ran into those who were already killed – men and women – lying in the gutters. At the corner of the street stood the SS commander – the overseer of the slaughter, with a detachment of Germans, and they chose a quantity of people from the rows. When he saw me – he said snappily: – *Rimmermeister! – Kopf hier!* My wife and children held onto me, and didn't want to let me go... and at that moment, they shot my wife... she fell at my feet like a sheaf of grain... the boy begged – don't shoot me, I am only 8½ years old! A bullet ended his begging. They dragged me and threw me into a stable, a place where there were already several hundred people – and they locked us in for two days. The rest of the people were taken to the pits, and they killed every last one of them. The ground heaved for three straight days, and the blood did not stop from running out of the pits – that's what the peasants told us. In the town, not a single Jewish soul remained alive. I, along with 212 people who had been detained in the stable, were sent to a camp in Novogrudok that had approximately 4000 people in it, who were divided up int detachments and did a variety of work for the army. After being there for eight days there – and seeing that the whole deal was leading to oblivion – they gave no food, and treated us with cruelty – 14 of us organized ourselves, and we escaped into the Zhetl forest in the middle of the night, from behind the wires.

When we escaped, we had only one pistol among all of us. During the day, we would sleep in the forest, and with the night, we would get up and go to look for bread and anything else in addition to it. – because we knew the area well, we knew which of the peasants had Soviet arms; we would come at night, wake him up from his sleep, and ask him to give us his rifle, – and if not, we told him to grab a shovel and start digging a hole for himself. In regards to food, we didn't run into difficulty, but regarding armaments, we had to deal pretty harshly with them, to the point where the children would start to cry and beg: father, give them the rifle – so that they don't kill you... in this manner, we

accumulated arms for 14 men.

After being 12 days in the forest, we decided to send 5 men to make contact with the larger groups of partisans, about whom we had heard, and who were partly composed of Jews who had fled the massacres, and Red Army personnel who had stayed behind. I and four others went out on this expedition to a certain village, and asked a peasant who was known to us, whether anyone from the partisans comes there at night; the peasant showed us a path, and according to the tracks, we entered the forest, and after a few hours of wandering around the forest, we ran into the watch – a Jew with a rifle. When he saw us approaching, he aimed his rifle at me...Hold on there, my fellow Jew, I rebuked him. After so many slaughtered Jews – you're the first Jew ready to fire a bullet! Blessings upon you, and please tell us, how can we reach your commander? – I related to him who I was, and he directed me into the forest. Deeper in the forest, around a campfire, there were several hundred armed men, Jews and soldiers, with the commander in their midst – a Russian Lieutenant. I came up to him, and explained to him where I had come from, and that with me there are fourteen men, all armed. He told us to come, and that we would be together. I sent 2 men and they brought the nine others. Once we were together, we decided what we have to do from now on: we sent people into the forest, and gathered together all the small groups, and in a short time, we had organized about us a complete brigade of 1000 men – all of them armed from head to toe. – The Russian Army had sunk a great deal of weaponry in the Shchara River – so we dragged a great deal of weaponry out of the river, including even a couple of tanks. In our area, another group of Jews from Dereczin were active, headed by the well-known Dr. [Yekhezkiel] Atlas. They did not want to join us; they were beautifully organized, and operated their own forces. The name of the group was: The Atlas Battalion. Once, Dr. Atlas came to us with five men, and proposed that we go blow up the bridge across the Neman River. Our commander agreed, and appointed me to go with another person from Zhetl – Medvetsky – to support Atlas. We fished out underwater shells from the river, dried them out, and from the villages, we obtained from the peasants gunpowder and six bottles of turpentine, and in the middle of the night, we went to the Bilitz Bridge. In our stealthy approach, the first thing we did was roll the German sentry into the river, and then we blew up the bridge. Dr. Atlas, came to ask the commander to transfer me to him as a battalion commander. With his consent, I transferred to Atlas, and became head of the battalion. It happens that in that battalion, there were many Jews from the town of Kozlovshchina. When all the commanders got together, we established that we had forces required to launch an attack, and on one clear morning, we fell upon the town, and fought the Germans for four hours. I used a 'Maxim,' the machine gun with 259 cartridges of 13 caliber. The Germans put up a stiff resistance – but we broke into the center of the town, set fire to it on all sides, we killed 30 military police, and we captured the SS commander who had conducted the massacre, and brought him alive into the forest. In the forest, we untied him, and from the same rope, we fashioned a stout noose, and hung him. It was in this fashion that the Jews of Kozlovshchina took revenge for the spilling of the blood of the Jews in Kozlovshchina, and the aging Rabbi of Kozlovshchina, whom they dragged behind a wagon, and afterwards was buried alive. This attack was lead by a Russian Lieutenant Bulat, who was missing one hand.

In the meantime, the groups grew daily, and in time, the strength of the partisan forces grew substantial in the forest, and it created earthen bunkers, equipped itself with horses, cattle, a great deal of weaponry and cannons. After a time, an attack on Dereczin was organized. We surrounded it on all sides, and we set the streets on fire, we killed many Germans and took them prisoner, we captured horses and armaments. Towards the end of 1942, the Germans sent a very strong force against us. They surrounded the forest, and we carried on a battle with them for three straight days. We lost many men, among them Dr. Atlas, the Jewish Hero with such a gentle soul, the fearless warrior commander. May he rest in peace! He died beside me, and his last words were: be strong and take courage, my brother, take vengeance for the spilled blood of our

brethren, of our unfortunate people! We brought him to final rest on a hillock in the forest, and we honored him as a partisan, ans we surrounded his grave with shell casings – the Jewish partisans knew where the final resting place of their commandant was – and perhaps some day, they will bring him to be buried in Israel. Seeing that the German forces were superior to ours, we set ourselves a course, and retreated back into the forests of Slonim.

During the siege, we sustained ourselves with a few potatoes, or from small handfuls of dried grain. The Russian officers sent [troops] into the surrounding villages to bring food – however, little was given to the Jews. Then I sent several men from my group to bring food. However, along the way, the Germans rained down a hail of bullets on them, and they returned empty-handed.

Out of intense anger, I returned to the forests we came from with my group. The following morning, the commander came to me all heated up: who gave you permission to leave the battalion!? I answered him, that when I saw my group was hungry – therefore, I could not be with him. Meanwhile, he sensed that two of the women partisans did not have their arms. – Where are the rifles? – he turned and asked. They explained to him, that in their escape from the siege, they threw their rifles away. He took down his rifle, and shot the two girls on the spot[44], and pointed his rifle at me. – Shoot, I said to him, if I deserve it! He relented from using the rifle... – True, he said – you don't deserve it, and just remember that this time I forgive you!

We returned again to the brigade that we had left a day ago.

In a short while, a group of paratroopers reached us – 112 men, directors, officers and troops. They took over the leadership of the partisan movement completely. They asked the leadership for four people who know the area very well, the roads and the rail lines. The leader designated me as one of their escort. In this manner, I was transferred to the paratroop battalion, in which I participated in various partisan actions, I blew up 19 German trains, I destroyed rail lines, and when the Red Army crossed the border into Byelorussia, we delayed the German trains for two straight weeks between Minsk and Baranovich. Under the command of the paratroopers, a standing partisan army of approximately seventy thousand men was organized, in the wastes of [the] Naliboki [Forest], between Baranovich and Stalovičy, that encompassed entire districts, that would regularly receive arms and tools for sabotage from the air, directly from Moscow, and transport the wounded to Moscow, where they could be treated in Russian hospitals.

In 1943, the Germans launched a mighty siege against the Naliboki wastes. Through espionage, they discovered the extent of our forces, and on one bright morning, a full German Division surrounded the forest, with tanks and planes. They went through the entire forest, and we fought them for fifteen days. Being a good fighter, I excelled in many of battles, and I was awarded with the Medal of Honor, First Class of the partisans, and the Red Star, and an

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[44] ***Shelovsky, Feyge -*** (Fanya), Daughter of *Yitzhak & Rachel.* Born in Dereczin. Fled with her family into the Lipiczany forests, and joined the *Pobeda* Brigade.

During the sortie, she participated in all battles. When the pressured partisans were surrounded, many hid their weapons, lest they fall into German hands. When her unit returned to its base, she was asked for her weapon, and she explained where she had hidden it. The commander, *Bulak* sentenced her and her companion, *Bella Becker* to death, while other non-Jewish partisans, who had left their weapons behind, were held free from harm.

The Dereczin Memorial Book, p. 317 (see also, p. 310)

The account by Kovensky varies from that found in the DMB. In a conversation with Gutka Boyarsky-Salutsky on 27Aug01, she favors the DMB account, which states that the girls were first taken back to camp and then shot. Gutka remembers Kovensky very well as one of her partisan comrades in the Naliboki Forest.

Order of Battle for the Fatherland, Second Class. In 1944, I was awarded the Order of Lenin.

On July 19, 1944, during a battle with the German guard near Staloviči, I was designated with storm troopers to blow up German bunkers of concrete and steel. After exchanging fire for four hours, we could not get the upper hand over the Germans, who dug themselves into their bunkers, and rained heavy fire down on us – we received an order to attack the bunkers frontally with hand grenades. We stormed the bunkers and succeeded in getting two grenades inside, against the tanks that were inside the bunkers, where 18 Germans lay. All of them were blown into the air.

In running from this bunker, I was fired upon with a machine gun from a second bunker about five meters away, and the fingers of my right hand were shot off. Because of swiftness, I was able to mount my horse (I was a horseman), forded the Neman, with a boot full of blood – and I swam to the rapid aid provided by the partisans, which was on the second side of the Neman. They bandaged my hand, and brought me 10 kilometers deeper into the forest, where there was a sanitary station. My fingers were supposed to be amputated, and there was no anesthetic to put me to sleep. Out of great pain, I gritted my teeth to the point where they broke slightly. Then, my partisan comrade Boruch Levin came over to me, and with a fist placed near my mouth said: take and bite my hand – and to the doctor – cut!....

When I got a little better – they sent me to our aerodrome station in the forest, and from there, by plane to Moscow. There, I lay in various hospitals for eight months. My hand was operated on twice. As a Hero of the Soviet Union, I enjoyed the best attention and care. After my recuperation, I returned to my home areas, which had by them\n already been liberated. However, I met not a single person, only one grave after another. I came to Zhetl with a cluster of the partisans that remained, and we erected a memorial to our exterminated brothers and sisters, above their common grave.

From Zhetl, I walk to the city where I had spent the best of my years, where I had married my wife, and where my beloved children were born, who were so dear to me – the heartwarming city of Volkovysk. But there, I did not even find graves! All the Jews of Volkovysk had been turned into ashes in the crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz... It was in my heart to simply spread myself out, down on the ground, and weep without end... A familiar gentile (Bulyash Sharyika) ran into me, and asked me into his house, to sit down, and asked if I wanted something to eat? No, I said, I am full, you're welcome; but out of our friendship, give me a little ashes!... I took the ashes, and spread them on my head, I went out to the street and sat on a rock. I sat *Shiva* for my wife, my children, and the dear Jews of Volkovysk... The gentiles looked at me in sympathy for my sorrow. Well, I said to them, now you have it good, there are no more Jews."

They attempted to justify themselves: we are not responsible for this thing, we did not get involved... in the place where the hammer and sickle reign – there is still some respect for the Jew, and his life is not entirely forfeit!... and words to that effect.

I went out to look for the solitary Jewish partisans, who had remained in the city, I took my leave of them, threw my knapsack over my shoulder, and went out on the road. Through cities and towns that had been destroyed, towns without Jews! I headed to the east, to the Alps, to the way that leads to Israel!

Thanks to a Broken Machine Gun

By Katriel Lashowitz

The incident, that I am going to related here, took place in the Zamkova Forest in November 1942. We mercifully managed to settle ourselves in a sort of bunker by digging with our hands through the frozen earth with the last of our energies. We assembled the tools to do this from the wrecked houses in Volkovysk. I remember, that among other things, we

succeeded in bringing an iron stove with us into the forest for warmth and cooking, and also remnants of food that we came across in the wrecked houses.

The size of the bunker was 30 meters in total, within which 16 Jewish boys and girls found shelter. For purposes of camouflage, we covered the bunker with branches, and we cast earth over it, in order that it not attract any sort of suspicion. Going down into and ascending from the bunker was accomplished by a ladder at whose foot there always stood a guard, whose head only protruded slightly outside, in order to maintain surveillance of the surrounding area, and to call for help when needed.

On one of the days towards the end of November, the guard alerted us to the approach of police escorted by forest sentries. All of us quickly made for the ladder in order to flee out of the bunker. A number of us managed to flee the bunker before the police opened fire, but when it came to the turn of one of the boys (Aryeh-Joseph Yudzhik) to get up the ladder and exit, there already were police at the edge of the bunker, and one of them gave his an awesome blow with the butt of the rifle in his hand. This lad, nicknamed Orays'keh, was strong and fearless, managed to seize the policeman's rifle, and aimed it at him, and the policeman began to beg him to return his rifle. The rest of the police and sentries were firing heavily, but they didn't hit any of our people, and there is some basis in believing that they didn't intend to hit us, because they suspected that the people who were still inside the bunker possessed significant firepower. They satisfied themselves with grabbing one of the partisans, who was the last one out of the bunker – (Mazyeh – his father worked in the city of Volkovysk) and left the place.

From Bunker to Bunker

It is self evident, that once our bunker was discovered, we could no longer use it, and in accordance with the proposal of our leader, we decided to temporarily move to a different part of the forest, where we would determine our next steps – and that's what we did, but after a consultation, we decided to divide the group in two. Even before this, the Lemkin brothers had decided to return to Volkovysk, and three other boys (Yerakhmiel Hablan, Aryeh-Yos'keh Yudzhik, and another boy fro Piesk) separated from the group, and went their way, and the remaining 11 stayed on as a group led by Bom Zuckerman (among them were Sarah Rubin, Zlatkeh, Izzy Gallin, Moteleh Shifran, Geller, Abraham Spektor from Kosovo, A communist and his wife Sonya, and another young lad who had served in the Polish Army, and the author). Our provisions consisted of digging implements and a little bit of food. With these supplies, we walked through the forest for the entire night, and wit the coming of the dawn, we based ourselves in one of the groves in order to avoid detection. Quickly, the yelling of the family of a nearby peasant's family reached our ears in our hiding place in the grove. The danger of being discovered was imminent, and we had no choice but to fold up and move as quickly as possible with nightfall, and find a more secure place in the thickness of the forest. To our good fortune, or perhaps misfortune, it began to snow, and we could not move, because our tracks would reveal us to the Germans. Having no choice, we remained in our place, and the optimists among us deluded themselves into believing that the Germans would think that no group of partisans would deign to hide out in so meager a grove of trees that was literally a step or so from the central road. The only virtue in our current hiding place, was that it was possible to occasionally go out to a nearby village and obtain some food, on the strength of the arms that we carried at that time.

We dug yet another pit, that served us as a bunker, covering it with branches, grasses and trees, like the other bunker in the Zamkova Forest, we also put up a ladder for entrance and exit, as needed. We made use of the flour we had brought with us to prepare a soup over a small fire in the bunker, but the soup was ver lukewarm, because we were never able to get it to boil, because in place of water we used snow.

It is hard to say that we passed the winter in our bunker on a sea of tranquility. We didn't lack for

difficult experiences, and I will not elaborate on them here, but there is one that may be worth noting. One day, three of our lads set out on the road to Kosovo. They were: Abraham Spektor from Kosovo, Bom Zuckerman and the communist. The first of these knew all the roads and byways that lead to his hometown of Kosovo, and the others knew about a cache of 15 rifles – a valuable treasure worth making an effort to find. On the way to this cache, they had to pass through many villages, entering the houses of the peasants and engaging in conversation with the local people and even getting some direction on the best way to get to the cache in question. In this fashion they were invited into the house of a forest watchman one night. The latter did not deny his advice from them and even provisioned them with food, but as soon as they had left, this peasant immediately ran to give the alarm to additional armed forest watchmen. They proceeded to pursue our lads by following their footprints in the snow, who had not gotten very far, and quickly came upon their place of rest. At that moment, the communist, who was the oldest among them, was occupied in disassembling his semi-automatic rifle, in order to clean it. They opened fire, and the communist was wounded. They grabbed his weapon, and decided not to endanger themselves and satisfied themselves with this booty out of fear, and the speedy reaction of the other Jews, after which the remaining two of our comrades came to the conclusion that there was no point or purpose in continuing the long journey to Kosovo during the snow season, and it was better to return to the base camp. The returned to us three days after their departure, and briefed us on this tragic incident.

The Meeting with the Russian Partisans

One day, we were witness to an event that made a change in our lives, but in this case, it was a pleasant event. It was on one morning, when the snow began to melt everywhere, and all of us were outside the bunker. Suddenly, we detected loud voices engaged in speech, and while we were still wondering what these voices signified, we espied armed men. We immediately sprawled out in the snow behind the grasses, with our hearts pounding from fear of discovery, but to our wonderment, the cries of "Andrei! Andrei!" reached our ears. Now we understood that these unexpected guests were Russian partisans, and that "Andrei" was Bom Zuckerman's nickname in the days when we were with the Russians in Zamkova. The fear turned instantly to elation. They told us that it is over a month since they knew of a group of Jewish partisans in the area, but since they did not want to leave footprints in the snow while looking for us, they preferred to stay hidden until the thaw, and that is how they followed our tracks. From them we learned that the group of Russian partisans that was in contact with us while we were in Volkovysk, based itself for the entire winter in precisely the same grove of forest where we were, except on the other side of the road, and their grove was a continuation of the larger forest. They found out where we were from a peasant that we had frequently visited, at night of course, and where we obtained bread, potatoes, etc. One night, after we had left this peasant's home, the peasant followed us without our knowledge, and from what we learned, this peasant was a liaison for the Russian partisans.

After exchanging news, and an assessment of the situation, we decided to transfer to their bunker on the second side of the forest grove. From this point on, a beneficial change took place in our circumstances. They had stores of water, many potatoes, and what was no less important – they had a much richer experience, and more friends among the local peasants, something that made it possible for them to be out of the bunker for many hours of the day. One thing we saw immediately, is that they had significantly more weaponry, which could not be compared to the little that we had, as well as considerable ammunition. They now distributed their surplus weaponry to us, and I was given a machine gun. We arrived at an agreement with them, that with the arrival of spring, we would together go in the direction of the nearby forest, the *Svisluczka Pushtsa*, where thousands of partisans were already located, who had direct contact with Moscow. Until then, we contented ourselves with establishing relationships in our immediate vicinity, and once, when we were on our way to get food

provisions, we fell into a German ambush. Our comrade Abraham Factor was lightly wounded, but my machine gun managed to silence the German fire. After the exchange of fire, I heard the sound of crying coming from somewhere very close to me. It was the crying of our Zlatkeh. When the exchange of fire began, she lay down on the ground. I didn't see her at all, and it was sheer chance that the fire from my machine gun did not hit her. After it quieted down, I began to pull back with her, since our entire group was no longer in the area. In order to reach 'our' grove, we had to cover a distance of about five kilometers, and this was not at all simple. I was forced to urge Zlatkeh to move along the entire distance, and encourage her to move more quickly, because it was clear to us, that when our group would reach the grove, they wouldn't stay there very long, and head in the direction of the Zamkova Forest, in accordance with the plan that had been agreed to prior to the battle. I explained to Zlatkeh, that if we didn't get to our bunker rather quickly, that is to say before they embarked on the road, we would be forced to walk tens of kilometers by ourselves, with all the dangers that it implied. There was no place for doubt as to what would happen in the next few hours. Germans and police were preparing to conduct a search in the vicinity in order to flush out the partisans, and this fact would impel our comrades not to lose any time in getting on the road immediately.

My explanation apparently had its effect on Zlatkeh, who picked up her pace as much as she could, and in this way, we succeeded in reaching the grove at midnight, seconds before our comrades were ready to depart. By morning, after a strenuous and unnatural march, we managed to reach the edge of the Zamkova Forest.

In two weeks time, after we returned to our grove, we "settled accounts," also with a number of Jew-haters in this vicinity. The head of the partisans of the second group, who was a Lieutenant in the Russian Army, decided we would head for the Svislucz forest as planned, but only after we would provision ourselves with an appropriate amount of food. One day, we headed for a large estate, whose owner was known to be friendly to the Germans. We killed a number of pigs there, and took other foodstuffs. But we hadn't accounted for the fact that the butchered pigs that we took back to the grove, would leave a trail of blood that was ultimately capable of revealing where we were hiding. And that's what happened, while we were still waiting for nightfall, and we could then depart, our sentries alerted us to the fact that a large contingent of Germans and armed police were surrounding us on all sides.

The leader of the partisans was a courageous and experienced man, but also a terrible anti-Semite. His tactic was – to hide until the Germans stormed us, and then, he would decide at what point we would counter-attack. After one attempt at a counter-attack, and being trapped by a withering fire on his position, the leader decided to attempt a breakout to the Royal Highway at the darkest hour. He ordered me to be the first to go, and secure my position with my machine gun, and only after everyone would pass over to the small grove, the one that had previously been ours, would I rejoin them.

Russian by themselves, and Jews by themselves

The tactic was carried out successfully, and in the course of an hour, we were already several kilometers from the grove. When we stopped to rest at a point along the way, the leader advised that because we were a large group, it would be necessary to divide into two groups again: our Jewish group – separately, and the Russian group separately. We, the Jews, knew fully well, that if we remained in the area as a separated group, we would confront difficult circumstances, and accordingly, Bom Zuckerman requested that one of the Russian partisans,.who had agreed to remain behind, be permitted to stay with the Jewish group. The leader agreed, but he indicated that the partisan in question possessed a machine gun as his personal weapon, and he gave his consent on one condition: that I, also armed with a machine gun, remain in his place with the Russian group. To my great surprise, the Russian partisan also demanded that I exchange machine guns with him. I didn't know the purpose of this exchange, but I agreed immediately, with the added basis that his machine gun was in working order, because in the immediate past battle, there was a strong exchange of fire. I myself did a lot of

shooting, and I was sure that the Russian partisan who lay beside me, fired his piece as well. The transaction was done, and then the trouble started.

From the first minute that I was with the Russian partisan group, I felt I was different from them, and they made trouble for me and aggravated me. Most of the partisans were former soldiers, in excellent physical condition, and I was just a Jew, who had starved for bread for most of the winter months – something that could be seen in my health. We had to cover many kilometers at a fast pace, and not always on level ground, and with me having to carry a 16 kilogram machine gun with ammunition. Despite all my efforts, I could not keep the pace with the rest of the partisans, and I lagged behind them. And it was in this way that it happened, when we had to cross a railroad track on a sloping hill, my strength gave out, and I rolled down to the bottom, and after all the men had traversed the rail lines and continued at t6heir fast pace – I was still at the bottom, and the distance between me and the remaining partisans widened.
I would be less than truthful if I said that I was not afraid and concerned about my fate, but in the end, I marshaled my remaining strength, and I crossed the railroad tracks, but in the meantime, the distance between me and the rest of the members of the group had grown larger. To my good fortunes, they reached a place that looked secure, and they decided to rest a bit, and during the time that they rested, I continued to walk in the direction that my intuition told me to go. In the end, I met up with them and rejoined their ranks.

I continued to move with them after that, and when we reached the edge of the middling-sized forest where we had been staying, the leader with one of the officers went to get direction and intelligence from the liaison people in the area, as to where the Germans were. They returned before morning, and at noon we began to move in the direction of our forest – the large forest. On our way to the forest, we had to pass by a large village, where Germans were permanently stationed up until that time. They had established headquarters in the village school, and had even put up a wooden barricade around it. When out leader discovered that the Germans had just recently left the village temporarily, he decided to burn down the school and the fortification around it, in order that the Germans not have a place to billet themselves, should they return to this area. All the partisans were ordered to march to the edge of the large forest (*Svisluczka Pushtsa*), and I was ordered to stand at the entrance to the village with a seconded partisan (my deputy), and when the leader and two other partisans entered the village and opened fire – we had to be aimed and ready to open fire with my machine gun, in order that the residents of the village be made to believe that there are many other partisans in the area prepared to reinforce the officer and his comrades.

My position was between the village and the big bridge across the river, which provided the only access to the village. A few minutes after my leader and two partisans entered the village, we heard shots from the automatic weapons in their possession. In accordance with the order given to me, I aimed my machine gun, but to my great disappointment, I could not get it to fire, and all my efforts were in vain. I asked the partisan who was with me to start firing with his rifle, and meanwhile, I would put a few bullets into the machine gun, and maybe get it to work, but he was afraid that the Germans would capture him, and he fled leaving me alone at the position. After being left with a non-working machine gun, I had no other choice, but to leave in the direction of the forest, where the rest of the partisans were waiting. I told the group of partisans, which I had rejoined, the entire story, leaving nothing out. The head of the additional group of partisans showed an interest in my story, and while I was still elaborating on the details, I heard the shouts of the leader of our group: “Where is this Jew? I will kill him on the spot!”

It’s Decided: Death!

Seeing as I knew this officer to be a terrible anti-Semite, I believed he would carry out what he said, not only that, but I saw him walking towards me with a drawn pistol. To my good fortune, the leader of the second group of partisans came to my aid,

who previously had heard my story, and received confirmation from the partisan who had been with me.

In all, even the explanations of my deputy were not enough to convince the leader, and he aimed his automatic at me, after the second commander had taken away his drawn pistol, but he was persuaded at the very last minute based on the arguments of a number of other partisans, that I did not deserve this type of punishment on account of a machine gun that didn't work.

I don't remember who it was that came up with the compromise that everyone agreed to: my machine gun would be taken by another one of the partisans, and when we get into the depths of the forest, he would try to make the machine gun fire. If the piece worked – it would be a sign that I lied, and the officer would have the right to shoot me. If it didn't work, that would be evidence that I spoke the truth, and did not deserve the punishment.

When we reached the thick part of the forest, after a two hour walk, the leader gave an order to the partisan who had received my machine gun, to disassemble the gun, clean it well, and put it back together again – and then try to fire it. The attempt to bend the rules in this case really stood out, and a number of partisans argued that this was not fair on the part of the officer, because the right thing to do was to try the piece in the condition in which I had received it into my custody, *prior* to it being cleaned and re-armed, but the leader paid no attention to these arguments of his comrades. He had clearly decided he was going to kill me, and I felt like a person in the last minutes of life.

The machine gun was disassembled in a half hour, all its parts were cleaned, and it was re-assembled and armed anew, and afterwards – literally a miracle. The partisan who had been ordered to examine the piece cocked it, and I heard the "click" of the mechanism, but to my great good fortune – the piece did not work. The leader was not satisfied with just one try, but even the second try didn't work. It was at this point that it became clear to me why the Russian partisan who had joined the Jewish partisan group was so interested in making a swap for my machine gun, but the most important thing is that I was saved, and remained alive.

The Tribulations of Ida Mazover

(From a letter from Ida to the Lashowitz Family)

Page 130: Ida Mazover (Rak)

Page 131: Liba Lashowitz

Page 133: Reception for Ida Mazover in the Home of Rita Korn

– After our house on the Kosciuszko Gasse was burned, my entire family moved into the Protestant cemetery along with many other families that were l
left without a roof over their heads. It is possible to say without fear of exaggeration, that most of the Jews in the city found refuge here, until the Germans entered the city. Our relative, Israel Gubar, proposed that my sister and I come live in his house on the *Brzezka Gasse*, and we understandably responded positively to his suggestion. No furniture remained at home for our use, with the exception of two burned iron beds, which we brought to his house. A number of our Christian friends donated a table and some chairs for our use.

Gubar's house had two stories. A Christian family occupied a part of the ground floor, and the remaining quarters were allocated to Jews by the *Judenrat*. Initially, my sister and I had an entire room to ourselves. However, with the shortage of living space, we took in the younger daughter of the lawyer, Efrat. The overcrowding and lack of space in the entire house was unbearable, one kitchen servicing several families, but we managed somehow, and everyone tried to accommodate one another. There was a harmony, as if we were all members of one family. A little at a time, we became used to the difficult and oppressive conditions in which we found ourselves. The few possessions that we had among us, we would sell off

to the Christians. My sister and I would go to work each day, which enabled us to bring a small amount of food into the house, because there even were Germans who wanted to help us, and who would surreptitiously provision us with specific necessities. An interesting fact: when my sister, Fanya, was sent to do road work, the official didn't let her go, because he wanted her to be able to sing all day since she had a strong, sweet voice.

Our circumstances were very difficult in those days. Jews were in a state of vulnerability, and any Christian could take advantage of them in whatever way he wanted to, without being accountable for any sort of punishment. All Christians who wanted to get rid of a Jew, for whatever reason, went the police and told a convenient lie about the Jew, and immediately the police would come and remove him from the house, never to return.

Despite all of the decrees and hardships, we, the young people, continued to meet in the evenings after work, at the home of Rachel Pilatovska on the *Neuer Gasse* which had not been burned down, and the office of the *Judenrat* was there also. We would play cards, or find other forms of diversion. Couples that were romantically involved moved in together, because the feeling was that time was short, and it was necessary to find a little bit of enjoyment with one another under these harsh circumstances.

Pita lived in Gubar's house. This was a very unique man of his kind, who would bring news from personal sources of his own, on conditions at the fronts. Mostly, these were optimistic reports on the advances of the Russians, on the defeats of the Germans, who were retreating, to the extent that the end of the war was drawing near, and the Soviet Union will not permit the Germans in any way to exterminate the Jews of Europe. We also got tied up to a limited degree in Pita's information sources, and we were taken in by them, because we had nothing else to hold on to.

On November 2, at 10AM, while my sister and I were at work, we were suddenly ordered to leave work and return home. On our way home, my sister decided to flee, but since she could not find refuge in the city – she returned home after several days, and hour home at that time already was – ***in the bunker***.
In remember, that when I reached home, without my sister, my father cried bitterly. He feared that they would kill her in the city, because the rumor had it that the Germans and the Polish police were shooting every Jew that they encountered in the city.

There was palpable hunger in the bunker. The men who worked for the German Army were left to spend the night in the city, and the rest of the Jews – their place was in the bunkers. Only small groups of men, employed by the Germans, were taken out of the bunkers. It was at that time that the thought came to me – to disguise myself as a boy, and in this way get out of the bunker. I bought a pair of pants, a jacket and a man's hat, I cut my hair, and in this way, succeeded in leaving the camp for work and bring back food for my family. When I was outside, that is to say, in the city proper, I entered the house where we had lived, and in the cellar, where my parents had hidden various possessions, I removed my mother's school diploma in midwifery. My mother had graduated from this school, but had never worked at this profession, but it was her hope that with the aid of this diploma she could remain alive as someone possessing a needed skill. On a different occasion, when I had gone out to work, I decided to take out the gold that my father and I had hidden n the oven in our house. When I came out of the house, the policeman who guarded us while we worked grabbed me, and wanted to take me to the police station in order to determine if I had taken anything out of the house. I succeeded somehow in passing the gold that I had taken to my friend Hanokh Rappaport. Only after that, did the policeman rummage through my pockets, and finding nothing, he let me go. When we returned to the camp, Hanokh refused to return the gold that I had given him, but after the intervention of his parents, he returned what I had given him, and only kept a specific amount for himself.

Only very few managed to save themselves. The entire district was anti-Semitic, and it was known

that all who would give sanctuary to a Jew in his home – would be sentenced to death. Karol (from the pharmacy) managed to find sanctuary with a Christian, but after her presence was revealed by one of the neighbors who informed the police – they took the Jews and the Christians out to be killed together. A few managed to obtain Aryan papers, and there were among them some who traveled to German to work as Christians. I was in this way that my friend Rachel Weinstein, who also lived in Grodno, traveled to Germany and worked there as a Christian. May fled to the forest and went through much suffering until they were able to join up with the partisans, and took an active part in the war against the Nazis. [Engineer Ephraim] Barash, who was the head of the *Judenrat* in Bialystock, and before that one of the community leaders in Volkovysk, helped many. He got his brother out of the bunkers, his friends, and close acquaintances. The will to get out of the bunkers was so great, that many would hide themselves in the pile of excrement, and would be carted off out of the camp with the waste – and all this for the payment of money, naturally. Others hid themselves among the corpses and would leave in the dark of night together with dead being taken out for burial who were taken out by auto to a distance of 15 kilometers from Bialystock. If the living were discovered among the dead – they were killed immediately, yet there were those who succeeded in escaping by this means.

On November 20, the Gestapo began to send out 'transports' from Volkovysk, one town after another. In the end, only the people from Volkovysk and Svisluczc remained in the bunkers (the wealthy town in the district). At this point, great effort began on the on the part of the *Judenrat* to keep people alive. After a negotiation with the Germans, at which time they were given bribes, the Germans agreed to leave 1,700 Jews behind to work in the factories of the Germans, and among them would be 100 women. My parents pressured me to try and escape, and after Daniel did not agree to enter me onto the list of those who would stay behind for work – I decided to find another way.

My friend Esther Markus and I were acquainted with a Belorussian policeman who had promised to get us out of the camp. The truth is, that I had promised to pay him a fee for this, but in the end he didn't want to take anything. To this day, I do not grasp why he behaved this way. He took us out, along with other workers, and brought us to Lazarovsky's Jewish bakery, which baked for the needs of the bunkers, and promised that he would come the next da at 7PM and take us to the punishment camp. Lazarovsky told us, that every night, police came to search the bakery to determine if anyone stayed behind illegally, and he therefore advised us to spend the night in the stable that was in the yard. Not knowing that this stable was always open – we locked it after we went inside. When the police came at night, and saw that the stable was closed, they entered it in order to search and find who was there. Only after they got a watch from Esther, and a ring from me – they left us alone.

The Belorussian policeman whom we knew, came the next day, and took us to the concentration camp, and these were the instructions he gave us: since every morning there is a roll call prior to going to work, we are to give the appearance of being sick to be able to remain behind, and lie down in that place. We followed the instructions given to us, and this is the way things went along until December 8.

It was still dark when they gathered all the Jews together on that day, and without counting them, they were led in the direction of the bunkers – after a number of days, we were again returned to the camp and the watch over us from this point on was in the hands of the army, and our lives got measurably a little easier. We would go out to work under the watch of the local Christian police. We were no longer hungry. The German soldiers related to us in a more humane fashion than the Gestapo, but the sanitary conditions in the bunkers were terrible. Epidemics of dysentery and typhus that broke out, were a direct consequence of these conditions. Typhus literally ran wild, and the death rate grew daily. Even though they promised that 1,700 workers would remain until August 1943, the thought of escape never left my mind. It was easy

enough to steal off int the city. I would take off my yellow badge, give a few coins to the soldier on guard – and disappear. I became friendly at that time with Alia Glickfeld, and we came in contact with Mrs. Maria Rodnitska who agreed to take us into her house until such time that we would find a way to reach the Bialystock ghetto.

While we were in Rodnitska's house, we both got sick with typhus, but we received good care. I don't know if what she told us was true, but according to what she said, a German lived in the room next to us, who had traveled back freely to Germany. We stayed with her until January 26. She forced us to leave her house, citing warnings that had been publicized in the city, that anyone giving sanctuary to Jews would be executed, and advised us to go to the hospital to the section for infectious diseases, because the Germans don't go there, or to go to Bialystock. Alia went to a Christian of his acquaintance, and I set my foot to Bialystock.

In had a high fever when I left Rodnitska. When nightfall came, I entered a village along the way, knocked on the door of a peasant's home, and asked to be allowed to spend the night in his dwelling. The peasant agreed on condition that he bring the head of the village, the 'Soltis,' because without his permission, it was forbidden to permit a stranger to enter his house. Seeing that I had no choice, I proposed that I go to the Soltis myself. In the end, we agreed to go together. After the Soltis determined that I had no papers with which to verify my identity, he advised me that he had no choice but to take me to the local police station on the following day, seeing that many partisans were circulating in the area. I agreed to this, and we parted peaceably.

I returned to the peasant's house, and at night, while everyone was asleep, I left. I continued on the way towards Bialystock, but my fever went up and I became very thirsty and I went into one house to ask for water to slake my thirst. After leaving this house, they went and had police sent to follow my trail. It appeared to me that they had two reasons to suspect that I was Jewish. First – my peculiar dress, especially my father's coat that I was wearing. Second – my adherence to Rodnitska's advice to go by day and not by night. She explained to me, that all those who go anywhere at night, arouse suspicion. The Germans, however, didn't show any particular skill in identifying Jews (as evidence of this – I personally passed the Gestapo headquarters between Volkovysk and Bielsk, and the Germans did not stop me), but the local Poles knew very well how to distinguish between a Jew and a non-Jew. In short: the police that were following my trail contacted the police station, and after a half hour, two Germans and a Christian policeman reached me, and took me directly to the jail in Horodok.

In was kept in jail for six days. They brought a translator, because I stubbornly stood my ground that I was a Christian woman from the villages that does not understand German. I argued that I was born in Slonim (this city was part of White Russia) and lived at Number 45 Adolf Hitler Strasse (it later became clear to me that there was no such street in Slonim) – and seeing as I had received an order to present myself for work, I had decided to flee to Bialystock, which was under German control. I did not take any papers with me – so I argued – in order that they not know from where I came, and would not send me back to where I had come from. All the details that I conveyed were taken down in their ledger and sent to Slonim to be verified for correctness. I knew that if they did this, it would be revealed that there was not one single word of truth in my entire story, and it was easy to imagine what would happen to me then, but maybe some miracle would happen. Meanwhile, something else happened. N one of the days when I was called to the office of the chief, I went over to sit near the stove in order to warm myself up (In still has typhus, but the Germans didn't know this). I had barely sat down next to the stove, when I heard a shout in German for me to stand up. Instinctively, I stood up from where I was sitting. When the German saw how I had reacted to his command in German, he came close to me and slapped me in the face and shouted: "*Du verstehst Deutsch, du bist Juden!*" (You understand German, you are Jewish!). I was taken back to my cell, and the attitude toward

me became more hostile.

After several days, I was called to the chief of the jail, who demanded that I tell the truth, and this is what I told him: my name is Ida Mazover. I was born in Bialystock. I was sent to work in Volkovysk together with a group of girls from the Bialystock ghetto, Seeing that I had become sick, I could not return home with the rest of the girls in the group. I turned to the head of our labor camp, who was a good-hearted person, and I requested his permission to return home. He agreed, but did not want to give me this permission in writing, because he apparently was not authorized to issue such permits. The interrogation ended for the time being on this note.

When I ask myself now, while writing these lines, what was the point of telling this sort of story that was ultimately doomed to be revealed as a pre-meditated lie – I have no other answer other than being able to gain a few more days of life and postpone my execution.

After two days, I was taken along with two partisans who were in irons, escorted by two armed policemen, to the Gestapo in Bialystock. They took the chains off of us and they stood us against the wall with our hands up in the air. I had a feeling common to all prisoners sentenced to death – a pain in the belly and a strong need to run to the bathroom. I was given that permission. When I left the bathroom, I no long expected anything, and was not waiting for a miracle – but the miracle happened. Some Gestapo official came out of the office, and asked me, "Do I want to get to the Bialystock ghetto?" "Jawohl," I answered him immediately, not giving myself any time to consider the implications of this move. I was bewildered in the extreme. He took me from where I was standing by the wall, to the ghetto gate, and turned me over to the Jewish police. Instead of wasting a bullet on me, they had decided to kill me by transferring me to the ghetto.

In do not know how the news of my arrival at the ghetto reached the members of my family. Nevertheless, it is a fact, that as I came out of the baths, my sister was waiting for me, who told me that the ghetto was already sealed off, and everyone who works in a factory has permission to sleep in the factory, and the Germans are scheduled to begin an 'action' the following day, and they are going to take out all those who are in the ghetto that do not have work permits. Only husbands and wives of workers in the factories received permits to bring their spouses and children to the factories. Being a ***brother*** or ***sister*** was ***not enough*** for this purpose, and for this reason, my sister Fanya went out to find me a place of refuge. She go in touch with Liba Lashowitz, sister of Katriel Lashowitz, who was living with family in Bialystock (she had gotten there from Volkovysk with the 300 girls from Bialystock, who were returned there by the Germans), and asked her to request that her relatives agree to take her sister, that is me, to have sanctuary with them. They responded positively to her request, and gave me a hiding place in their sanctuary. That day, I was in a very weakened condition, and I literally had to be carried to get there before midnight. I spent two days with the Lashowitz relatives, I coughed endlessly, and I feared that everyone would end up suffering from my infection, but it is worth noting that nobody complained. After this, the husband of my cousin took me, who was the manager of an absorbent cotton factory, and they arranged to get me papers as the wife of one of his friends who already was in the factory. I had to play the part of a wife of a man whom I didn't know at all, and this was plenty strange and hard enough.

The 'action' continued for about a week. After it, everyone was convinced that life in the ghetto was coming to its end. In the meantime, our relatives arranged a room for us. My sister went to work in a brush factory, and I – began to work in the absorbent cotton factory. In addition to this, the two of us would have to leave the ghetto for forced labor. At the same time, there were many residents of Volkovysk in the Bialystock ghetto, who had gotten there because of the head of the Bialystock ghetto, Barash, who had taken them out of Volkovysk (relatives, friends and acquaintances of his), as well as those who had arrived there with the girls from Bialystock, and other people who has

managed to flee singly. Apart from these, some residents of Volkovysk arrived from Grodno, after the ghetto there was liquidated. The 'Patriarch' of the Volkovysk people was Smazanovich, the owner of the sawmill. His home was open to everyone, and he would assist with advice, and provide help to the best of his ability.

This is a good place to record the mania of weddings hat took place then in the Bialystock ghetto. It is possible to say that this was a wave of hysteria that attacked many people. The operative phrase was, "going in twos is better." It is possible to explain this phenomenon by the fact that people simply did not know what the next day would bring, and whether they would be alive tomorrow or the day after, and they wanted to enjoy sexual relationships, or just being in intimate relationship with another human being, and maybe there is yet another explanation for this phenomenon. Nevertheless, many were caught up in this. My sister Fanya and I continued to seek a way out of the ghetto, and in the end – we found the way.

In Maidanek

We knew a young man from Volp named Fulkes,[45] who apparently had contact with the partisans that were in the forest, and he promised to create a connection between us and them, but it seems that he was unable to do this, because on August 18, 1943 the ghetto was closed, and they began to take us out in groups to the 'transports.' They would gather the people in the field, outside of the ghetto near the railroad line. After two days, a German came and selected girls from these groups to do sewing and brush making. Since my sister had worked in the brush factory, I presented myself as being skilled in making brushes, and when my sister saw that the German took me, she joined me. My sister and I disagreed. She did not trust the Germans, and argued that her end would come frm a bullet, and In, despite all that I had gone through, still believed in miracles. I told my sister, that if the Germans were still picking out groups – it was a serious sign that those selected will still have some time to live, and it was worth joining such groups. The end of this was, that in the confusion and tumult that ensued from selecting these groups, I lost my sister. I was pushed into one train car, and she into another. The train cars did not go to a sewing factory or to a brush factory, but – straight to Maidanek. The girls who were in the train car with my sister told me afterwards, that my sister, along with Sarah Levin from Volkovysk, jumped off the train. The Germans shot at them, and Sarah fell, but my sister Fanya was not hit, and she continued to run. Worst of all: In Maidanek I remained already without my sister.

After they took away the last possessions that remained with us, they ordered us to take off our clothing, and they dressed us in 'uniforms' with stripes and brought us to Field Number 5 of the camp. I suffered a great deal there. After a time, they took us to Bialystock, a labor camp, where there were also several people from Volkovysk who had come to Bialystock on a different 'transport.' I became friendly then with Fruma Vand, Chaim Tzipkin, Ruzha Zlotnitska-Kwiatokowsky, who was born in Kalish, and married Yazhernitsky from Volkovysk. We also met some young men from Volkovysk in the labor camp, who had been soldiers in the Polish Army and were captured by the Germans. These yung men served in various capacities in the camp, and when they discovered that other people from Volkovysk had arrived in the camp, they hurried to provide all the help they could. We lived like one family, and the dedication and loyalty of everyone to the whole was boundless.

That is the way the days went by until November 2. Even before this date, they sealed of the access from the mens' camp to the women's camp. To us, this was a clear sign hat the end was drawing near. In deep sorrow and with hears aching, we said our farewells to our relatives at the fence. On November 2, they arranged us in lines, five to a line, and began to drive us in the direction of Field Number 6, with armed SS troops and guard dogs at our heels. Field Number 6 housed the crematorium. Everything was

[45] Spelled *Sulkes* in Dr. Einhorn's account.

clear...

The lines began to head toward their end o the sounds of Wagner's music. My tactic, and that of my sister, in all the prior 'actions,' was – to attempt to stand at the sides, and under no circumstances to get pushed into the center, because from there, it is impossible to escape. This time, I also behaved in this way. While we were still standing in these ordered lines, an SS soldier came over and waved off 300 boys and 300 girls for some special work, and In was among them.

From what we subsequently learned, 19,400 Jews were exterminated in Maidanek on that day.

The following from Volkovysk survived the mass slaughter of that day: Inker, Ravitz, Davis Spindler, Jocheved Barash, Ruzha Zlotnitska-Kwiatokowsky, and I. The task that was set for the girls taken out of these groups was – to arrange all the clothing of those taken to be killed. We worked in two groups in various storage areas.

And once again, fate was good to me, that same luck that had pared me from the bitterness of death. I worked under the supervision of an SD officer, that was known for his ugly disposition. He didn't care how much money we found in the clothing of the people who were killed, just so long as he would get drinking money into his personal strongbox. As is well known, the Jews would conceal gold rings, dollars, diamonds, etc., in their clothing that were sewn into the seams of their garments. We discovered no small amount of valuables. My good fortune was to have been thrown into this group, since the overseer of the second group was literally a tyrant who meted out murderous blows to any girl found trying to hide anything in her pocket and not put it into the general pile.

All 300 of the girls were taken to the First Field of the K.L, but they did not permit us to come in contact with the other prisoners. After work, we were shut in under lock and bolt, because we were witness to the mass slaughter, and their was an imminent danger that we would reveal to the other prisoners what we had seen with our own eyes. We knew, at sooner or later, our day would come. During working hours, we could secretly come in contact with Polish workers, who had also been brought to the camp to do specific jobs, and by bartering with the money we had hidden in our sacks, and while nobody was watching, we received food from them...

We continued in this way until April 13, when the first steps to dismantle the camp began with the defeats at the front and the approach of the Russians. They notified us to get ready to travel, and one of the German female overseers revealed the secret to us by saying: "Girls, try to run away, because they are taking you to your death." On April 13, they took us to the train station and they put us in cars used to transport horses. About sixty people were put into such a car. The car was divided into three sections. In the center, close to the door, two soldiers sat with swords in their hands. In the remaining two sections, there was a small window towards the top of the wall. At night, the soldiers would extinguish the light in order that we could sleep a little.I concentrated on this little window, and in my heart I decided: there is nothing to lose, I'll try to escape through this window. In order to be able to fit through this window, I took off my jacket, and by a signal from me, three girls hoisted me up, and I jumped out of the window.

It was midnight. All around me it was pitch black. When I wanted to stand up on my legs – I couldn't. One of my legs was broken in two places.I tore my shirt, and bandaged the leg in order to stop the bleeding. What does one do under these circumstances? Before I jumped, I has agreed with my friend Yazernitska-Kwiatokowsky[46] that she would jump immediately after me, but she apparently didn't jump, and all our assets remained in her possession. – a small diamond the size of a button. Now, I was left without a single penny. If I stay in this spot – my end comes from a bullet. With

[46] This may be an error, since the writer had previously referred to a friend as *Zlotnitska-Kwiatokowsky.*

the coming of the dawn, they will shoot at me and kill me. I detected a faint light shining through a crack in a window or transom of some sort. I decided to try and reach that house. I put the broken leg on my good leg, and I began to crawl (according to what I was told by two people who followed the trail of my blood, I crawled about 300 meters). I reached the house and knocked on the door, and I asked for a little water, saying I was badly hurt and that they should bring a priest to hear my final confession. They took me inside, and laid me down on a pile of straw, and I made a pretense of being delirious, and didn't answer any of their questions.

At dawn, the head of the village and the owner of the house brought me to the town of Vovolnitsa, and in the dispensary, I received an injection against infection, and I was interrogated by the police who came to the dispensary. My story was written down in their ledger, and this is its essence: My name is Halina Rodnitska. I was riding on a train in which the crowding was terrible. Somebody unintentionally pushed me, and I fell from the train and was injured. I have no papers or money, because all these were in the jacket that I had hung up in the train car. The police wrote down everything that I said, and after the priest arrived, in accordance with my request, they put me on a wagon and took me to a hospital in the city of Apolia Lubloska that was nearby. The doctor who examined me decided, that since more than 18 hours had elapsed since I broke my leg – it was impossible to save the leg. It was necessary to amputate.

While I was still in Vovolnitsa, a religious woman took an interest in me, who had been the principal of a gymnasium in Polvi, and lived in the village during the war. She was greatly impressed by the fact that before I had asked for a doctor, I had asked for a priest. She began to send me parcels of food at the hospital. Another religious woman from Apolia would bring me milk daily, because the ration of food given at the hospital was meager indeed.

I somehow managed to pretend that I was a Christian, without even knowing the basic prayers of the Christians. What did I do? A few days after the amputation, I told the maid that worked at the hospital that I was an expert in magic, and if she wants to, I will predict her future, and all she has to do is write out her prayers on a piece of paper, and according to her handwriting, I would be able to tell her what awaits her in the future. She did this, and the story that I unfolded for her about her future held much good news, and it was in this way that I learned the prayer that all Christians are required to know by heart. A week later, I also received a gift from the religious friend – a prayer missal. I learned a few other Christian prayers, and I was able to join the choir that sang these songs in church.

All the means that I employed to hide my Jewishness did not work. Someone told, that after the amputation, I cried out in a language that sounded like Yiddish. I attempted to gloss over these suspicions, and said that in the recent past I had worked with Germans, and was in the habit of speaking German, and perhaps his was the reason for the German cries I uttered after the operation. Doubts abut this explanation grew, and what's more, nobody came to visit me in the hospital – this alone being a sufficient reason for suspicion.

These various rumors abut me reached the ears of the principal of the school that I knew, and she saw a need to test my knowledge of Christian liturgy, and it quickly became evident that my knowledge in this area was very deficient. After the test she arranged she said: I see that you are Jewish, but I will not inform on you, but I will also not help you. And in this way, we parted.

German soldiers would come to the hospital frequently, searching for wounded partisans. To my good fortune, I never aroused their suspicions, and they never bothered me. Despite all this, in order to strengthen my alibi, I wrote to Mrs. Rodnitska in Volkovysk and explained to her everything that had happened to me. She answered me immediately, and proposed that I turn to relatives she had not far from Lublin. I began to find out about these relatives, but discovered that they had for some time been detained by the Germans. To one of her letters to me, Rodnitska also appended a letter to the head of

the hospital, asking him to keep me in the hospital until someone from my family would obtain permission to travel and take me out of the hospital to take me home.

And so it was that several weeks went by. My wounds began to heal, and the time came to leave the hospital, but where was I to go in my present condition? I had no choice, and I tore off the bandages and aggravated my wounds slightly in order that there be some justification to let me stay in the hospital.

The front was getting closer, and it was dangerous to remain in the hospital. The hospital management also advised all the patients that they must return to their homes. Relatives of the patients came and took them home, and in the end, only I remained with one other man who originally came from Warsaw. They took us to a nearby village, and there, a peasant family took us under their wing, and they took care of us properly without compensation.

One day, a neighboring lady came in to the house of the peasant that was caring for us, and said that: "Halina (meaning me) looks very much Jewish."

"Stop speaking nonsense," – the peasant replied, "If there were a Jew in my house, I wold kill him with my own hands."

After the Red Army reached the area, I conveyed my thanks to the peasant and his family, and I said to them: the time has arrived for me to go home. The peasant personally made me crutches, and brought me to the nearby town b wagon, and wit the help of the local authorities I sped towards the Russian border with the intent of crossing into Russia, my father had two sisters and a brother there. I didn't reach Russia, because I was compelled to stop in a hospital in Chelm. While I was there, I heard rumors that there were Jews to be found in Lublin. I asked the head of the hospital to have me transferred to Lublin at the first opportunity, because I had relatives there. He responded t my request.

When I reached Lublin, I stopped pretending to be a Christian. I discovered that surviving Jews from the nearby towns were gathering daily on Lortovska Street. I also reached there. The gathering place was beside the house that before the war was the famous Yeshiva of Khakhmei Lublin. By chance, I met Katriel Lashowitz from Volkovysk in Lublin, who was one of the active people in the smuggling operation. From that time on, my life took on a different character, about which this is not the proper place to continue.

From the Memories of A Partisan

By Katriel Lashowitz

Page 135: *The Partisan, Katriel Lashowitz at the time he emerged from the forest.*

In July 1944, after battles with the retreating Germans, our Partisan group united with the soldiers of the regular Red Army. Our group, which was called the 'Brest-Litovsk Unit,' was divided in two. Most of the soldiers in the group headed for the front, and the minority were sent to Brest-Litovsk (Brisk) to fill specific positions. I was among these later, along with my comrade Hillel Schneidler from Baranovich. He took the position of policeman, and I was attached to the supervision of the new prison in Brisk.

My job was to support the deputy commander of the prison who was a major in the NKVD, who was responsible for all aspects of provisioning. I received training for this position wit the partisans, when I grappled with providing food for the command of the group, and in a short time, I was able to demonstrate to my superior, and thereby to the commander of the prison, that befriended me, that my nomination to this position was a good one.

The city of my birth, Volkovysk, had already been liberated by the time, and even though I knew what fate had befallen the city and its inhabitants, I yearned very much to see the city with my own eyes, personally, the last house in which we lived,

and to get first-hand accounts about the members of my family, and what had happened to them.

About six weeks after I had assumed the position in Brest-Litovsk, I turned to the head of the prison and asked him for a '*kommandirovka*' to Volkovysk, and he was responsive to my request. I equipped myself with a travel permit and personal arms and began to move in the direction of Volkovysk, in the hope that my partisan comrades that were with me during the entire winter in the forest had returned to Volkovysk and that I would be able to avail myself of their help.

The closer I got to the city, the more my heart palpitated. I had no illusions. I knew what had happened to the city, and I did a personal assessment of the extent of the destruction, but nevertheless I had these sparks of hope: Maybe there will be a miracle? Maybe I will find someone from my multi-branched family?

No miracles took place there. When I came into Volkovysk I met immediately with the young Jewish men, partisans like myself, who had returned fro the forests and were living in the house of Bom Zuckerman, near the Polish Gymnasium. The meeting, understandably was an emotional one, and after an initial conversation with them, it was clear to me that all was lost and there was no foundation or a hope to create one.

The house in which they lives was abandoned and neglected, and was missing the essentials of life as would be conducted in a properly equipped house. I was reminded of the hideout in which my family had hidden various necessities. The hideout was in the home of Meshengisser, in which my family lived during the Nazi occupation. I thought I would succeed in revealing these items in that house, that were made to improve the condition of the house in which the Jewish partisans were living. I oriented my steps towards that house. After I knocked on the door, someone approached me who was the head of the fire-fighters in the city before the German occupation, who now also served in that capacity. When he asked me what brought me to his house, I explained to him gingerly, that my family had lived in this house in the days of the Germans, and it was my desire to remove certain belongings that had been hidden in the house. He responded with resistance, saying that now he is the owner of the house according to the law, because the regime had placed this house at his disposal as an officer of the NKVD, and in line with that, everything that is found in the house belongs to him and him alone.

I returned to the house of my comrades and I told them the entire story. Bom Zuckerman and Izzy Gallin a that time occupied important positions in the municipal Soviet government, and they promised me that they would deal with this issue. On the following day, they brought me a permit that improved my power to remove everything that had belonged to my family from the house they had lived in, and no person has the right to contest that.

Armed with this official power, I returned to my family house of the past, and when I showed the new occupant, the head of the fire-fighters, the permit that I had in hand, he became downcast, and began to justify himself and explain to me, that he didn't think I was entitled, and since a high-ranking German officer had lived in this house before, he had a basis on which to think that after the liberation he would be the sole heir to everything that was found in the house.

I removed all sorts of necessities from the hideaway under the large stove, and I even designated various pieces of furniture and other possessions that were sorely needed in Zuckerman's house, including two large beds with all their accouterments, which I claimed, because I knew that this type of furniture was needed for my comrades.

The Meeting with Malka Kaplinsky

On the following day I went to meet Malka Kaplinsky, who was living with her Christian husband in Panter's house on the *Vilnaska Gasse*. Here I had a chance to see manifestations of hatred, scorn, and uncivilized behavior on the part of the Christian mother-in-law towards Malka. At this

time, Malka was in the last months of pregnancy, but her Christian mother-in-law did not feel ashamed to call her all sorts of embarrassing names in my presence. Malka's husband had worked in her parent's bakery before the war, and it was he alone who hid her in various places until the war ended. After I saw the attitude of her husband's family towards Malka, I proposed that she leave Volkovysk and travel with me to Brisk and after that, leave Poland, until she wold give birth, and could then join up with groups being organized to make *aliyah* to Israel.

In response to this offer, Malka explained to me well, that her husband loves her a great deal, and she loves him, and between them there is a deep understanding, and the outbursts of her mother-in-law are the result of a bitterness that has festered during weeks in which there hasn't been so much as a slice of bread in the house. She had no doubt, that if she could just come by a little grain, or flour for her, her attitude would change markedly.

Her words touched my heart, and I began to formulate advice on how to help her. I recollected that in its time, my family turned over all of its agricultural produce in its possession, to one specific Christian peasant, and this same peasant helped us as well, the Jewish partisans who were in the Zamkova Forest, who would come to him frequently to get provisioned with food. He also promised me and Bom Zuckerman that he would provide us with arms, that members of his family from another village had hidden in a specific place.

I decided to travel to this peasant, and attempt to get some flour or grain with his help, which was so vital for Malka and the members of her family. For this purpose, Malka got me a bicycle, and I got to his isolated house at the edge of the village of Rokszaczy, quickly. The peasant hugged and kissed me, but I could not help noticing the sadness that radiated from his eyes, and this could have only one meaning – he suspected that I had returned to reclaim all the possessions that my family had left in his hands.

Initially we spoke about general things, I told him about everything that had happened to me, and he listened to me intently. Afterwards, he put out a suitable meal, the likes of which I had not eaten in some time, we drank vodka from tea glasses amidst toasts of congratulations and good luck. After that, when we were both feeling flush with the vodka, I approached the core issue for which I had come to see him, and I advised him, that if he will fill up a wagon load with grain and flour and take it to Volkovysk, I will sign on behalf of the Lashowitz family (I already knew at that time that I was the only survivor of our family) that all the assets that we had left in his care belongs to him, and only him.

It appears that this announcement on my part pleased him a great deal. A day sis not go by, and the peasant succeeded in commandeering many sacks of grain from his neighbors and buyers, and when I arrived at Malka Kaplinsky's house with a wagon laden with grain, all the members of the household came out astonished, and moved by the appearance of these laden sacks, and began kissing one another out of great joy. They literally could not believe their eyes, because one cannot forget that many, many people hungered for bread, and a slice of black bread was considered a luxury. I, of course, was the recipient of a cornucopia of blessings and kisses, and I used the opportunity to let them know that I did what I did only because of the *zydowka* (the Jewess) Malka. Malka's mother-in-law, who was the one who derided her with epithets, took the thorn that I had aimed at her without saying a word.

I had a truly expansive feeling after having carried out the mission that I had set for myself, and when the time came for me to take leave of my comrades -in-arms (Zuckerman, Gallin, Rubin, Zlatkeh, Shifran, Geller, and others) prior to my return to Brisk, I told them where I was and what I had done during those two days when I was not in their company. The looks on their faces answered me, because these deeds were in accordance with their desires.

Hatred for Jews – As it Was, So it is Now

In accordance with the *kommandirovka* that I had been given, I was obligated to return to Brisk, but even without that, I would not have tarried in my birthplace. I had nothing more to do here after receiving the information about the bitter fate of all the members of my family. The hatred for the Jews had not abated here, even after the great mass murders. It was possible to sense it in the conversation of everyone coming and going. One of the Christian women who recognized me, from the days when we worked together, identified me while I was walking in the street, and her first question was: "What, you too remained alive?!" The tone of happiness was not in her voice.

On my way to the train station, I passed through desolate and burned streets. I walked as if dumb, talking to myself: "Here, such-and-such a family lived, and there, yet another family." It is all over. Desolation and waste. I had a choking sensation in my throat, I felt as if everything was turning over inside of me.

Once I reached the train station, it became clear that I had to spend a couple of hours waiting for the train. I spread out in a corner and lay down on the bundle I had in my hand, and everything that had been dammed up inside of me during the days in my birthplace – burst forth. A fountain of tears, that I had not been able to find during all those days, was opened, and they ran without cease, to the astonishment of the many who were at the train station at that hour. My weeping for my family, of which no trace remained, for my city that had been destroyed, for the denouement of my people, for the thousands of good, righteous Jews that were taken out to be killed, for the whole past that had gone up in flames.

I do not remember how long I cried this way, but I do remember well, that once I had regained my composure, and I began to look about me, a fire of revulsion was kindled in my being towards all of the Christians that had participated in this robbery, plunder, and murder of these masses of Jews, in this extermination of my family and my people. The lust for revenge suddenly seized me. If I could have, I would have killed them one at a time. I my ear, the mysterious cry reverberated: "Katriel, Avenge! Avenge!"

When I reached Brisk the following day, I met with my good friend Hillel, with whom had been in the forests with the partisans, and together with him, wove the dream that one day we will reach secure shores in our Homeland, in the Land of Israel.

I naturally told Hillel about everything that had occurred in the days that I had been away from Brisk, I filled him in on all the awesome experiences. It was finished and sealed for the two of us to leave these monstrous killing fields as quickly as possible.

After several days, I was asked to assume a new position – the deputy for a shift of the prison, in which there were three shifts all 12 hours consecutively, with 24 hours of rest or relief. As an officer, I enjoyed the privilege of living outside the prison walls. Together with m dear friend Hillel, we set up quarters in a solitary house, that had belonged to Jews, after evicting the gentiles that had been living there. Hillel's job as a policeman was to bring prisoners that had not yet been tried to court, and then return them to prison after their sentence had been passed. Hillel and I had an agreement that any prisoner that was suspected of murdering Jews or informing on Jews, would get a double dose from us, even before they came to trial, and for sure after sentence was passed. It was enough for Hillel to give me a sign, before the prisoner was brought to my office, to know how to treat the prisoner. Also a sign from the officer to the jailers was sufficient to let them know how to treat a prisoner of this type...

I continued in this position until December 1944. Towards the end of December, Hillel and I crossed the Russian border into Poland. We knew that in Lublin, intensive activities of people smuggling were being conducted, and since the desire in our souls was to be in Israel, we traveled to Lublin to the *Vishinskogo Gasse* and joined the smuggling

activities and up to September 1945, I filled various positions in the smuggling mission, especially in the transfer of Jews across various boundaries to Rumania, Hungary, Austria.

Katriel at the End of the List

Considering our past, as workers in the Zionist youth movement, they added us in Lublin to the activities in organizing the smuggling operations. I was given the responsibility to facilitate the transfer of Jews to Rumania and Hungary, in order that they could continue from there on their way to Israel. I settled myself in the city of Omna in Slovakia, and from there, I would direct the refugees to Hungary through the city of Chup, that served as a rail head for many trains. After several months, when groups of Jews began to move on a regular schedule to the city of Gratz in Austria, which was then under Russian control, I was given the task of transferring these refugees into the English sector, and the members of the brigade would then take them by vehicle to Italy, through points on the Trieste border. The focal point closest to the border was the estate *Bagna da Lucniza.* Here, I was under the command of the famous underground commander Mordechai Surkes (who later became the head of the city of Kfar Sabah and a member of the Knesset), who tasked me to bring emissaries from Israel across the Hungarian border who were disguised as officers of the brigade. He provided me with a beautiful letter of introduction to Abraham Shereshevsky, who was the responsible person on the 'point' at Bari in Italy, and when I got there, Shereshevsky turned me towards a 'point' that was called 'Dror,' that served as a training location for Holocaust survivors and was also a departure station for voyages to Israel for those attempting entry by illegal means, and it was in this way that I too, was supposed to make *aliyah.*

At this location, I suddenly felt that I had made passage from Hell to Paradise. The entire group of people that were assembled there were in very high spirits, songs in all languages were heard there, especially songs about Israel, which was the object of our yearning.

On October 15, 1945, after an inspection of the personal belongings of every one of us (it was permitted to take only one bundle and there were other restrictions), we boarded the cars that were waiting for us nearby, but after going for not a long distance, we were ordered off the cars and to walk quickly to the seashore. We walked stealthily in the night, until we reached a place where a small fishing boat awaited us, which this time, for a change, was not transporting fish, but rather 171 passengers. I will not even attempt to describe the conditions on this boat. We felt, undoubtedly, the way sardines feel in a can. To my good fortune, I was able to be on deck for many hours of the day, because I was among the few who could assist the people in charge of the boat.

On October 22, we reached the shores of the Land without the English detecting us. Despite their many patrols, the *Petro 2* (that was the name of our boat) succeeded, and we also succeeded in reaching the right place.

With the Last of the Jews In the Volkovysk Bunkers

by Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

Dr. Kaplinsky was transferred on November 2, [1942] along with the other Jews of Mosty' to the Volkovysk bunkers (see his memoir, 'With the Jews of Mosty' on their Last Journey,' in this book). In what follows is – an accurate portrayal of what transpired in the bunkers, and the last journey of the Jews of Volkovysk to the extermination camps in Treblinka and Auschwitz.

The First Days in the Bunkers

We were transferred to Volkovysk from Mosty' in the dead of night, and only on the morning of the following day could we look at our surroundings and assess our new circumstances, which were

overly depressing. It became apparent at the outset that the transfer of the Jews from all the towns in the Volkovysk district was accomplished at the same time. This transfer was accomplished in a number of ways, and the worst of all was the method the Germans heaped on the backs of the Jews of ***Ruzhany***. It was not only that they had to walk 50 kilometers on foot, but they also behaved towards them in a barbaric manner. They separated the children from their parents, and during the two sets of two days that this forced march from Ruzhany to Volkovysk took place, they permitted mothers to feed their children only once. Also, along the way, the marchers were beaten heavily, and about a hundred of them who collapsed along the way from exhaustion, were killed. In Svislucz, it amused the commissar to play 'Russian Roulette.:' He took out 200 Jews from the lines and shot every tenth one just 'for sport....'

The Jews of Volkovysk itself were ordered to present themselves at the bunkers within two hours, and in all the outskirts of the city, and on all street corners, police and SS troops were posted for observation and containment. The German command in Konigsberg issued the following order: "All the Jews of the Bialystock District are to assemble at concentration points to be announced. Each Jew is permitted to take with him food for 48 hours. Working clothes, money, jewelry, and valuables may be taken in unlimited amount. The objective is to be transferred to centers of work."

Approximately 20 thousand Jews were accommodated in the bunkers as follows: two blocks comprised of 15 bunkers were allocated to the Jews from Volkovysk, with each bunker holding five hundred people. The rest of the bunkers in the area were allocated to the Jews of Amstibova, and Yalovka. One block, consisting of 6 bunkers, was allocated for the Jews of Svislucz; a block of 8 small bunkers with low ceilings – for the Jews of Ruzhany, and the Jews of Zelva, Piesk and Mosty' were allocated two large horse stables.

During the first hours, rumors spread about that we had been gathered to be sent to Bolivia, which was prepared to take us...directly, but not much time went by before the camp commander, Tzirka, called for Fuchs and Daniel from the Judenrat in Volkovysk, who received the following notification from him: This concentration camp was temporary only. From here, the Jews will be sent by transport, 3,000 at a time, to a large labor camp that has been set up only for Jews. The transfer will last for six weeks, and until that time, there is a need to instill order in the bunker camp. ***Fuchs*** was appointed at the head, and ***Daniel*** – his deputy. It was required that each bunker have its own leader, and he was responsible to provide a list of the 'residents' in his bunker, concern himself with arranging and distributing the food. Every person would receive a daily ration of 170 grams of bread and a plate of soup. Health and sanitary conditions would be supervised with the assistance of the medical resources within the camp itself.

On the following day, a committee of senior Gestapo officers arrived by car, accompanied by the district physician, and the head of the city of Volkovysk – Winter. Since the camp lacked water. The head of the city promised to provide the Jews with water, with the help of the fire engine. A small amount of potatoes and groats were also promised, that would be taken from the cellars of the Jewish houses. The pessimists among the Jews argues, after hearing these promises, that the fate of the Jews had been sealed, and they were being treated like fowl before the slaughter, but there were also optimists who did not cease from keeping hope, and that everything would turn out all right, and not to give up.

Nothing came of all the good promises. What did reach the camp: several casks with lime, for use in the lavatories, and several boxes containing bottles of insecticide against lice. After a while, the issue regarding water was settled to a degree, and then hunger started to afflict us, after the food that the Jews had brought along ran out. It didn't take but a few days before an epidemic of lice spread throughout the camp to an enormous degree. This was at the height of the fall season. The yung people wandered between the bunkers foraging for food,

while the very old and the very young lay in a torpor on the bunks, being hungry and exhausted.

The physicians among the people in the camps divided up the work, and organized a dispensary and a sort-of small hospital for the sick. On the fourth and fifth day, the people were taken in by an illusion that not everything was done for, and this on the basis that the young people were taken out to do various jobs. Because of this, the possibility was created to smuggle in foodstuffs, yet the hunger continued and grew. When it was discovered that a wagon load of potatoes was being delivered to the camp, the ravenous Jews fell upon those wagons, with each individual trying to appropriate a few potatoes fro himself, but immediately shots were heard from the German guards. They shot directly into the mob, killing and wounding many, because they saw in this mass surge on the potatoes as a 'breakdown in law and order.' It seems that hunger overpowered the fear of being shot, because these scenes of riot were repeated several times a day. People did not hesitate to put their lives in danger for the price of a few frozen potatoes.

Daily Existence

It is difficult to describe the ambience and living conditions in the camp which were largely sub-human. I worked at that time in directing the health services of the camp, and I could see what was going on from up close. The day started in the camp while it was literally still dark outside. Those who were going out to work, would gather outside in the yard at an earlier hour. The women looked for ways to warm up a little bit of water for the children. There was a great deal of movement in the area of the primitive latrines. The latrine within each bunker was set aside only for the children and the elderly, and all the others had to attend to their bodily functions out of doors. Beside the latrines, which was not more than a large barn with a place for 20 people, there were two rows – for men and for women. After a row of men came out, a row of women went in, and God-forbid, someone needing to return. A young lad attempts to convince the women and says: "Go in together with the men, there is nothing to be ashamed of, because in any event they are going to throw us into the same grave...."

It was the practice, that after dawn came, each individual would prepare his own bedding place, and afterwards go to get water, or stand in line to get the rotten bread. In all the bunkers, tens of Jews would get together for communal prayers. The Rabbis decreed community fasting. The *Selikhot* prayers were said, prayers were said with great conviction, and a great wailing goes up when the prayer *Avinu Malkeinu* is reached. The leader of the prayers cries out bitterly when he reaches the phrase, '*grant us salvation speedily*,' and the wailing intensifies with the verses, '*do it for those who suckle at the breast*,' and '*do it for the babies in the house of the people*.' And the cries pierce the heavens. The worshipers stand oppressed and pushed together in mud, one with a prayer shawl and phylacteries – assuming he had the foresight to take these things at the last minute – and another without. The bunker is sunk in dimness, and with the last of their strength, the worshipers knock at the Gates of Mercy which are shut.

Tzirka appears in the bunkers several times a day. This is a cynical and cunning murderer, who attempts to appear before people as someone concerned with the sick and their needs. He returns with frequent promises, that in the new camp there will be better conditions. The workers return from their places of work towards nightfall. One will be carrying a slab of wood, a second – a few onions or leeks that he had managed to 'arrange,' and there will be a lucky one who will be holding a slice of bread he had gotten from some peasant. With the descent of darkness, everyone goes into the bunkers, and everyone tries to illuminate his corner of the bunker in accordance with his means to do so. Not a few, attempted to use the insecticide for lice as a fuel for lamps. Everyone is crawling around on the bunks, and a long time goes by before everyone gets themselves arranged somehow for sleep on a side, because there is no room here for any other position. A Jew sitting in a corner recites the Psalms by a flickering light, a second is reciting the *Shema* out

loud from memory, a woman is talking to herself without end, and another woman, much younger, rocks a sick baby back and forth in her arms, this being the third day with no stop to her recitation of a refrain of *'I want to go home...*' Many continue to pick off the lice – a task that will never end. This is the regular picture that is repeated every night.

The Death of Sioma Gallin

On November 11, the camp was suddenly sealed off, and no person was allowed to leave for work. Many theories, some peculiar, immediately spread to explain this event. There were those that connected this to a major political event, and spoke of a German surrender (this assessment seemed to fit the facts...), possibly a Polish rebellion, etc. On the other side, thee were those who predicted that the final liquidation was coming nigh. In several hours, it became clear that the closing of the camp was related to a sanitation inspection by an appointed committee, which had just arrived for this purpose. Three Gestapo officers dressed in their military finery and fat as pigs, descended into the rotten and filthy bunkers, and without hiding their contempt and revulsion for the 'filthy Jews,' ruled that the camp was infested with lice and it was necessary to put it under quarantine. Afterwards, we found out that a German soldier who had stood guard, had gotten sick, and there was a suspicion that he had contracted typhus. The implication was that he had caught it from the Jews, and that it was necessary to implement drastic measures. Fortunately (if it is even possible to use such a word in this place under such conditions) the soldier recovered and the suspicion against the camp of the Jews was lifted.

Sioma Gallin ran the kitchen, a community activist, recognized and respected in Volkovysk, alert, full of life. Sioma did not lose his optimism, even under the most trying circumstances. His constant refraI was – "We'll get them yet." On one day, as he was getting water from the fire engine, he got into a conversation with the driver, a local Christian, and the latter gave him a little bit of benzene for his lighter. The Gestapo guards saw this, and threw Gallin to the ground and proceeded to rain blows on him with their rubber truncheons. After he was all swollen and bleeding, they carried him back to the bunker. Towards nightfall, that 'cold brigand' Tzirka came to the bunker, and pretended to take an interest in Gallin's condition, and he demanded of the doctors that they should not, God-forbid, neglect him... I visited Gallin at nine that night. His suffering was great, breathing with great difficulty, and was able to get an utterance out his mouth only with the greatest difficulty. At eleven at night, the bunker was startled by wild shouting from the Germans: *"Gallin Raus! Gallin Raus!*" A Jewish policeman from the internal guard hurried to tell Gallin that the Germans are demanding that he come out immediately. The bunker was deathly quiet. Everybody elevated themselves from their places in order to see how this situation would end. Approximately five hundred eyes were glued to Gallin who, with the last of his strength, attempted to get himself up off his bunk. With a tortured voice and his last energy, Gallin called out to the Jews who didn't take their eyes off of him: "*Yiddn – zeit alleh gezunt!*" (Be well, Jews!) – and he disappeared into the darkness. The sounds of Gallin's cries and shouting were heard immediately, after which three shots rang out in the air. A heart-rending cry came fro the mouth of Gallin's wife in the bunker, which told everyone that the beloved and dear Sioma GallI was no longer alive. As soon as people arose the next morning, they found the body of this great optimist, and dear man, discarded at the entrance to the bunker.

The First Transports to Treblinka

Once again, they confined us to the bunkers for about three weeks, without anyone knowing why or for what reason. Tzirka would say at every opportunity that there were difficulties with the transfer and therefore our departure for work was being delayed. In the meantime, they renewed the process of taking the young people out to do work, and the Christians knew how to take advantage of this work in order to extort gold coins and money in exchange for pieces of bread. In addition to the affliction of hunger, the cold began to take its toll. Anyone who tried to steal a board of wood from a

fence for purposes of keeping warm – was shot immediately. On one late Friday night, a proclamation was issues that all the residents of ***Ruzhany*** were to prepare themselves to travel at two o'clock in the morning, and the responsible leader of the bunkers was required to create a list of their names, ages, occupations, etc. As previously mentioned, the Jews of Ruzhany imbibed the most heavily from the cup of hemlock. Their conditions were the worst of all, from the standpoint of filth and mortality rate. They were also the first to go to their death.

On the following morning, the Ruzhany block was empty and locked. Only on the third day were about one hundred young people taken to clean out the block. Among the remaining utensils and rags they found several tens of stiffened corpses of individuals, who by virtue of their infirmity or sickness, were unable to join the transport, and the Germans abandoned them to a beastly and barbarous death.

The second transport left three days later, and Zelva was in that rank. This was the only transport that left in the daytime. The Jews of Zelva and its surroundings arranged themselves in rows in the pathway between the Volkovysk blocks, which were surrounded by barbed wire. They stood for several hours in the mud, snow and rain. The Jews of Volkovysk gathered around them, and it is not possible to know if those who were leaving envied those who were staying behind, or the opposite... At that time, someone from Volkovysk, who was remaining behind in the camp, had the idea of giving something to those who were leaving, through the barbed wire, as a going away gift. Quickly, several hundred people from Volkovysk followed his example, who pressed against the fence in order to give their donation to the Zelva Jews. Hundreds of scrawny, veined and stiffened hands, were pushed through the fence in order to receive a dry piece of bread, a potato, and onion, etc. The hands of many were cut to the point where blood flowed, and the gifts of solidarity and affection were mixed with blood.... the Jews of Zelva disappeared quickly in the same way as they were walking in the same direction that the Jews of Ruzhany went only a few days before.

A little at a time, the bunkers and stables in which the Jews of Porozovo, Mosty', Piesk, Yalovka, and Amstibova resided, were emptied out. At intervals of 3-7 days, Jews were taken out by the thousands in the night, and those that remained behind in the bunkers, would 'clean out' the emptied places, gathering up the rags, broken utensils, and the corpses of those permitted to die a lingering death. By the end of November, only the Jews of Volkovysk and Svislucz remained. A transport of several thousand Jews from Svislucz, and about 1,000 from Volkovysk (2 bunkers) left at the end of the month, such that at the beginning of December, there remained approximately five thousand Jews, mostly from Volkovysk and about 1,000 fro Svislucz.

Where did these transports go? – This question gnawed away at the minds of all those left behind. The members of the *Judenrat* attempted to clarify this question with Polish railroad employees. First they were told that the transports went to the ***west,*** but afterwards, it became clear that the transports were going through the Bialystock railroad terminal to Malkinia, and in the end – Treblinka. There was no clear information about Treblinka, but ne thing was certain about that destination: "All arrivals will never return."

The Struggle for a Place on the "Lucky" List

At the beginning of December, news reached the camp that precipitated a very real upheaval in the lives of the Jews who remained in the bunkers. A group of workers from the bunkers worked in Petroshovitsa, a few kilometers from Volkovysk, whose work was in the construction of various buildings. The *Judenrat* leaders, Fuchs and Daniel, had been several times to see the German managers of the work at Petroshovitsa, and bribed them accordingly under the condition that they wold influence the central command not to liquidate the remaining bunkers, and that they should leave behind 1,700 Jewish young people for construction

work until August 1, 1943. After a negotiation, an agreement was reached on this matter, and that among the fortunate ones, about one hundred women would be permitted to stay. Several hundred places were also promised to the Jews of Svislucz, but because of this, the Germans did not agree to allow children among those who would stay behind. The selection of the 1,700 was a task to be done by the *Judenrat*, and this fact intensified the confusion and panic that coursed among the Jews, who faced two alternatives: Treblinka immediately, or an extension of less than six months in the bunkers. The arguments on this matter before the members of the *Judenrat* took on the appearance of a struggle for life or death. The bunkers took on the appearance of a Garden of Eden to the Jews, and the extension of six months – an eternity.

Hundreds of Jews besieged the bunker of the *Judenrat*, each pleading for their lives and the lives of their families. Fuchs and Daniel wrote and erased, ceaselessly. And they made frequent changes. And this is the way it went on, endlessly. Blood relationship, friendship, begging, threats, screaming, weeping – all these were part of the struggle to be included in the list of the 1,700. And during this time, Tzirka would walk around between the bunkers, observe what was happening, and inquire if the list was complete yet.

After a week, they announced that all those who were included in the list of the selected ones had to move from their blocks to the bunkers previously occupied by the Jews of Ruzhany, and the transfer would be conducted under the watch of the Gestapo and Jewish guards. People ran back and forth as if they were crazy. They tried with all their might to find ways to save themselves by getting into the Ruzhany bunkers. Fathers who had small children, fed them a quarter pill of tranquilizer (Luminal) and while the children slept, carried them over to the new quarters. Towards evening, *Tzirka* came into the lager in order to take a count, and again the children had to be given a new dose of Luminal leaving them asleep in the sacks, so that Tzirka and his two aides wold not detect their presence. A few tens of older 'illegal' children were hidden on the lower bunks, out of hope that they would be able to blend into the ranks of the 'fortunate,' who were being allowed to remain.

Three Gestapo officials with rubber truncheons carried out the first count among the remaining people, and then went off to eat their dinner, leaving the final inspection for later. A fearful silence reigned throughout the block. There were those who listened with a pounding heart, wondering if the tranquilizer they had given to their children in the sacks was still working, but most of the remaining people were sunk deeply in their own thoughts about their relatives and dear ones who remained behind in the Volkovysk bunker, who are waiting any day now to be sent to the death camp. Two hours later, the officials returned with Tzirka, finished their count, and Tzirka then said that he has the required number. At two in the morning, the members of the *Judenrat* came into the bunker with the Jewish police and with that the selection ended.

Tzirka's Victory

On December 8, a new and last period began in the camp. From approximately 20 thousand Jews that were here only a few months ago, there remained a little more than 1,700 that began to organize and settle themselves anew. One of the prior Volkovysk blocks with 8 bunkers, and a wooden shack were allocated to the 'lucky ones.' The transfer process was a lengthy one, and lasted about a week. Initially, a German exterminator disinfected the eight bunkers, after which groups were transferred from the Ruzhany bunkers to the baths, and from there to the bunkers that had been allocated for their use. This was the way they wanted to rid themselves of the lice epidemic.

I was in the first group who came to look upon the scene of the abandoned Volkovysk bunkers. A frightening picture unfolded before my eyes: At the entrance to the block, near the small house used by the *Judenrat*, was a veritable mountain of corpses, one on another. Bloodied heads, broken arms and legs, half naked and pushed together bodies of people, who were killed in the final liquidation. In and around the bunkers there were many sacks, parts of various utensils. Everything was tossed about and scattered, and almost everything had blood stains on it. Between the bunkers, an old woman with gray

hair ran about, screaming out loud: "Why did they not take me too?" She ran up to each and every person, and implored them, begging to be turned over to the Germans, so they would kill her. All the bunkers were empty, except for Bunker Number 3, where we wee struck dumb when we found approximately 70 elderly and sick people who apparently could not find the means to reach the transport. Most were left frozen, with their eyes fixed on one spot looking like they were insensible. Only a few of them began to move a little when they saw us, asking for bread or water. A few days later, Tzirka invited two doctors and demanded that they poison all of the old and the sick in Bunker "Number Three." "You know," he told the doctors: "we have a quick method to kill them with machine guns, but why should we cause such a tumult?" The doctors categorically refused to do this. "We have time," the cold-blooded murderer said, with a cynical smile. It was only the following morning that we were dismayed when we smelled the burning sulfur coming from Bunker Number 3. Mos of the dead in the bunker were in various contorted positions and one could see the suffering they underwent from the looks on their faces. Tzirka celebrated his victory. He didn't need the noisy assistance of the machine guns...

After the period of the transfer ended. The Gestapo guard was removed, Tzirka left the *lager*, and control of the lager was transferred to the hand of the Wehrmacht, and control of the remaining seventeen hundred remaining Jews was transferred to the hands of the army. Every morning the soldiers would come and take the men to work, and in the camp, and the members of the *Judenrat* and the Jewish auxiliary police would stay in the *lager* (about twenty men), with the doctors, the kitchen staff and the overseers of the bunkers. The food portions were now improved, because the *Judenrat* members were allowed to go into the city, and they would buy from the Polish bakers. The guard that escorted them to and from work, would turn a blind eye to the various dealings that the Jews had with the Poles, and this, thanks to bribery. In general, it is possible to say, that the Jews in the camp displayed an ingenious skill in adapting themselves to these new conditions: hey smuggled in iron stoves, that served both for cooking and warmth, twice a day they distributed warm water, warm soup was given in the afternoons, etc. Unrelated to these improvements, the filth got worse, and the disinfectants didn't help, so that the epidemic of lice hit a level where more than 800 people were affected by it. It is noteworthy to mention the dedication and sacrifice shown by the doctors and nurses, who organized three hospitals in the bunkers, with disinfection equipment. They were also the firs to get infected from all manner of diseases, and yet they continued to do their work and their mission.

The 'Final' Transport

Six weeks went by from the beginning of the new arrangement with the 1,700 'privileged ones,' who held on to the word that it would end on August 1. The Jews in the camp got used to the idea that the camp was something permanent. Their entire desire was to get to the spring, when the dirt would diminish and the various epidemics would fly off. On *January 23, 1943* Tzirka re-appeared in the *lager*. Before people became aware of the purpose of his visit, his presence alone threw everyone into a state of great panic. The news of his arrival spread from bunker to bunker with lightning speed. One thing was clear to everyone: The accursèd Tzirka was not bringing good news. And so it was. Tzirka came to the *Judenrat,* where he told the members that all the prior transports were settled, and the time had come for the remaining people in the camp.. He emphasized – that this last transport will be easier than the prior ones. H promised to provide prior notification for the departure schedule, but, for now, he requested an accurate list from the members of the *Judenrat* of those found in the *lager*, and to have it copied on a typewriter.

On *January 25th*, Tzirka notified that the transport was set for the following morning, and there is no way to describe the pandemonium that erupted on the heels of this announcement. Hundreds of the sick, some running fevers of 40ºC (104º F), began running about between the bunkers out of a suspicion that because they were sick, they were going to be liquidated out of hand. Most of the people, oppressed and resigned, began to get ready for the trip, and tried to provision themselves with

an extra slice of bread in their bundles.

A great deal of movement was observed among the families of the members of the *Judenrat*. After it became known that the camp would be liquidated on January 26th , these began to make preparations to go to Bialystock with their families by clandestine means, because there, according to various reports, a normal live went on, more or less. However, the Jewish police noticed this unusual activity. The head of the Jewish police immediately arrived on the spot, and he warned that no one should dare to escape, because they would not succeed in any event. Internal control then passed from the *Judenrat* to the Jewish police, and during the night of the 25th, the members of the Jewish committee were put under house arrest.

At 3PM on January 26, hours before the liquidation of the camp, I succeeded in escaping together with my friend and comrade Dr. Resnick (see my letter about him – "That Long Day" – in this book). Were it not for this, we too would have been among the 1,700 last ones, who were taken to Auschwitz.

From the Birkenau Camp – To Israel

by Chaya Weiner[47]

After the last 'action,' 1,300 people remained in Volkovysk, I among them, but quickly our turn also came. The Germans decided to transfer us to Birkenau (Auschwitz). The SS troops told us that we were being sent to a labor camp. They put us into transport trains, compressed and crowded in the cars, without air to breathe, and without food. From time to time, when the train would stop, the SS troops would give us snow with which to slake our thirst.

When we reached Birkenau, the train cars were opened, and whoever didn't get out quickly from the train car either was severely beaten, or bitten by dogs. The screams were terrible, but in the depths of one's heart, each person hoped that some kind of miracle would occur, and they would remain alive. The Germans immediately separated the men, who went into a separate line, from the women and children. The SS troops went past each line and indicated who was to go the right, or to the left, without any one of us knowing which side was better. At the end of this 'selection,' 130 women remained among 200 men. All the rest were taken to be incinerated in the crematorium, and among these were many members of my family, acquaintances, and friends.

The women were taken to a women's camp on foot, balancing themselves on the snow that covered the entire area. They shaved our heads, stripped us naked, and admitted us into a steam bath. After this, they tattooed the numbers on our arms, and from that time forward we ceased to be women and were transformed into ***numbers***. The sanitary conditions in the block that was allocated for our use were terrible. There was no drinking water at all. Most of the women contracted typhus, and other diseases, and fell like flies. Every morning, before we went to work, we received only a mug of tea, and that was our intake until evening, when we would receive a slice of bread, and some drippings that had been made into a soup.

The number of women in our block diminished with each passing day, because anyone who was incapable of going to work was taken immediately to the furnaces. When we went out to work, we were escorted by SS troops with dogs, who watched our every step intently.

We did a variety of work: removing stones and bricks, handling arms, gardening. The best work was gardening, and whoever had the fortune to be selected for this work was lucky. It was possible to 'organize,' as we said, a few potatoes, a carrot or two, and share this 'booty' with the other young women in the block. Frequently, inspections would take place at the entrance gate, and whoever

47 *Chaya Weiner* is the sole survivor of the multi-branched Weiner family of Volkovysk. Her father, *Yaakov*, and uncle *Moshe* were among the active members of the Fire brigade.

couldn't get rid of these 'organized' vegetables would receive 25 lashes as punishment. An orchestra was located at the gate, and we were forced to march into the camp in cadence to German music. Those whose strength gave out, and fell during such marches – were taken out of line and sent to the place from which there was no return – the crematorium.

One day, a 'selection' took place at the camp gate. I was walking in line then with my friend, Nionia Kaplan. She was very weak, and every step she took was with great difficulty, and she had a feeling that she was 'finished.' I held her by the arm with all my strength, supporting her, and in this way we managed to get back into the camp (Nionia lives in America).

The good camaraderie encouraged and perhaps even saved many girls. Five girls from Volkovysk and its vicinity 'stuck together:' Nionia Kaplan frm Volkovysk, Rachel Tykoczinsky from Sokolka, Sally Levin from Slonim, Alta from Svislucz, and me. I will not even attempt to describe how we survived under those terrifying conditions. It is beyond my powers, even now that over forty years have passed since then.

When the Russian forces began to get closer, and the Germans began to feel that their retreat was inevitable, they initiated our 'evacuation,' in the direction of Germany. That was when our 'death march' began, and anyone who fell by the wayside was left to die. We were taken to different camps. My last camp was Neustadt – Galba. We dug there. Trenches, but we began to sense that the war was coming to an end.

Before the Russians entered the camp, the Germans tried to liquidate us by sealing the camp, sealing all the windows and doors with barbed wire, and we were certain that we would never leave here. To our good fortune, they did not complete their plan to exterminate us. On the last day of the war, May 8, 1945, the Russians reached us and we were liberated.

Knowing that my entire family had been exterminated at Auschwitz, I did not want to return to Poland. I had nothing to search for there. I crossed into the American sector, and afterwards – to Belgium. There, I met Shayna Lifschitz along with soldiers from Volkovysk that had served in the Jewish Brigade: Chaim Sheref, Moshe Kossowsky, and others. N 1946, I reached the Land of Israel on the ship, "*HaKhayal HaIvri*."

That Long Day

by Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

(From Dr. Noah Kaplinsky's letter to Dr. Yitzhak Resnick)

Page 143: *Dr. Noah Kaplinsky*
Page 144: *Dr. Yitzhak Resnick*

— Every year, when January 26 arrives, I feel a storm of emotions within me. This year too, I find it difficult to free myself from this turbulence, and I feel a deep need to write to you, the partner to the events and experiences of those days, and perhaps my writing this will free me from the burden of the memories and emotions.

The day of January 26, 1943 is etched into my being as the longest day of my life. Both of us started that day as 'residents' of the concentration camp in which only 1,700 'chosen ones' or 'special ones,' remained, out of 20,000 men, women and children, that has been concentrated on November 2, 1942. Once again, we were a cohort of Jews, getting ready for the final 'transport.' From mouth to ear, the rumors flew, that the destination was – Auschwitz. People were occupied packing, gathered together a little 'nothing on top of nothing,' that they possessed, moving like wraiths on the frozen ground of the camp. The sick, and there were many of these in the camp, with high fevers, falling faces and bulging eyes, with the speckles that the typhus had covered their limbs with, put on the appearance of being healthy and attempted with the last of their strength out of a will to proceed, to go, but not to be left in place. They were prepared to do anything to join the trip to the unknown. Despite all the rumors about this 'unknown,' a small spark was lit within

each person, encompassing the hope: maybe, despite all this, the salvation will come from ***there***?

News of a great German defeat at Stalingrad arrived. Perhaps this was the beginning of the end – many thought. For us that day ended when we fell like sheaves of wheat, silent and crestfallen, tired and drained, at the house of the gentiles who opened the doors to their houses to two aimlessly wandering Jewish souls, two wanderers who had fled from death, whom anyone could do with them as they pleased.

At the end of that day, we found ourselves alone and bound together, torn apart, yet also united, light-years away from relatives and those distant, from our flesh and blood, from the entirety of the Jewish people, exposed to a mysterious, vanished destiny.

Can you remember, Yitzhak, how many events overtook us on that day of January 26, 1943? First of all, we stood ourselves with the group of workers, that went out each day under a German escort to get the 'Jewish horses," (that's what the two horses were called that were stabled with a gentile near the forest). A young German soldier, with a rifle on his shoulder, escorted about 10 young Jewish men who were supposed to bring back bread for the remaining 1,700 residents of the camp, that had been designated for 'transport.' The *Judenrat* deliberately added us to this group with the understanding that it was our intent not to return. On the prior day, I had presented our interest to Noah Fuchs (the *Judenrat* leader). I said to him: "Up to the last minute of the existence of the camp, we have done everything in our power to make it as easy as possible for the people during the months of epidemic and plague. Now, that everything is being liquidated, we are seeking freedom for ourselves." We receive this permission, with a blessing to go on the way.

We reached the shelter of the gentiles frozen from the cold. We breathed easier in a warm, human house, the likes of which we hadn't seen in many months. The woman of the house, perceptive, understood the signs: a fire was lit, and water was boiled, eggs were fried up and strong drink appeared on the table. Not much time went by, when the German joined his ten 'subjects,' ate and drank a lot, while we only gave the appearance of drinking ... the breakfast turned into a big party, and 'our' German got lubricated as usual, and began to sing, grabbing the gentile woman and dancing with her around the table, which was standing in front of one of the Jewish workers, giving him his rifle and shouting: "Run to the partisans!" and returned to drinking and dancing until he became subdued and fell asleep in some corner of the house.

All of this did not fit our plan. It was only at this point that the day began for us. It was about ten o'clock. I was nothing short of foolishness to attempt to flee the town at a morning hour like this. We were supposed to wait for nightfall in order to flee in the wake of the onset of darkness. We sat, somehow, near the sleeping German and waited. We were not hungry and we were warm.

We fell into thought about those we had left behind in the camp, preparing for the 'transport.' We felt choking in our throats, as if stones weighed on our hearts. Th German awoke from his sleep in the afternoon, found himself in the environs, and became surprisingly energetic, alert and started to give orders: harness up the 'Jewish' horses, ride to the nearby bakery, load up the bread, and return to the camp. You undoubtedly recall how we started to slow down our pace, until we 'lost' the German with the horses and the workers. The critical moment had arrived – we could flee and run without interference.

I remember my sins today. Suddenly I stopped. I felt a pang in my heart. I said to you: " I am going, Yitzhak, go alone, I am going back to everyone." You didn't pressure me, you didn't argue. You said quietly: "We will go back together."

It cannot be believed, but the fact is: Despite the fact that the path to freedom stood open to us, in a short period of time with the wagons, and in a quarter of an hour we returned once again to the camp behind the barbed wire,

The reception we got when we returned to the camp from this 'freedom,' was laden with complaint, anger and dismay. From all sides we heard one word – "have you lost your minds?" What could we reply? With our own hands, we sealed the little

aperture that had been opened to freedom.

Did we have the nerve to think at that time that the very sealed crack would open itself yet again? – no. Despite this, that very thing happened which we thought to be impossible. Someone – I can't remember who was then the bearer of this good deed – came to us on the run, and said: " Hurry, hurry, the wagons are leaving to bring additional bread." It emerged that in the morning, they had not taken into account how much bread would be required for the anticipated 'transport.'

After only a couple of minutes, we were walking in the direction of the gate. My brother walked behind me, and speaking to m back said: "Go in peace, that at least one survivor from among us remain alive to tell what happened."

After a ten-minute walk, we were already separated from our 'group.' We stopped behind a corner house amid the wreckage of the Russian houses. In the bat of an eye, we took off the yellow badges from our chest and back, and we were transformed into two young men walking quickly through the wreckage to the city limits.

It was after three o'clock in the afternoon. It was starting to get dark. There is not a living soul in the wreckage. The cold intensified. The snow crunched under our boots. Not much time passed, and we ere out of the city. With the setting of the sun, vast tracts of fields appeared before us covered in deep snow. We found our way by the light of this snow. We are walking in the direction that you chose. You recognized all the byways and paths, you are showing the way, and I am following in your footsteps. On both sides of our path, fields covered with snow are spread out. Only occasionally, do we pick up signs of some small, isolated house, a shack with a dim light shining in its windows. How I envied the residents of those shacks, sitting in a warm room, eating a warm meal after a market day, living literally like human beings. By our walking, our eyes discerned the sleds of gentiles moving across the frozen snow-covered ground. Perhaps they were going in the direction of the market. We continued to walk, as if we were indifferent to this movement, vigorously, with strength, almost with pride.

The feats we had performed during the day began to show their signs. We got tired. Legs ceased to serve us. I saw well that it was difficult for you to walk, because it had only been a few days since you had gotten over the speckled typhus. Your stride became slower and slower, and yet there was still a long way to go, long and far. I am thinking in the meanwhile, that I had not yet had the speckled typhus that was raging in the area. I was the only one among 17 doctors not to get infected. Perhaps I am carrying the disease in me? There is no choice, we must exert ourselves a little more. A wagon went by. I raised my arm and requested a 'lift' from the peasant who was driving it. He was responsive to me, and pulled hard on his reins. The sled stopped, and we got on. We rode for about four or five kilometers on this sled, and during this time we struck up a conversation between us and the peasant. He took an interest in discovering who we were, and where we were heading. I was the spokesman, as we had agreed previously, since you were known in the area. Your silence through all of the ride evoked surprise from the peasant who even asked: "Why does your friend remain silent all the while?"

I made use of all my powers of imagination. I told him that we were conscripted laborers, and that we worked not far from Warsaw, and hat we had been sent to Zelva. The peasant then asked: "Why are you on foot? This is a long distance, and you won't get there until night." I answered: The incompetents there apparently didn't know the distance to Zelva, and we won't have a choice but to stop in some village.

"The only village you will be able to stop in is Krzemienica" – said the peasant – "But you should know that Krzemienica has a police station and a gendarmerie."

We discerned in this peasant, who from the outset didn't seem to trust us, as trying to find out who we were, and he looked to see how we would react to

his information. I acted dumb, and replied: “If so – that’s very good. They will most certainly let us spend the night, and send us on in the morning.”

When this interrogation ended, the peasant ‘recalled’ something else, and said: “You know that today they shipped out the last of the Jews from Volkovysk. He awaited my reaction, and again I played dumb and said: “ In reality, we didn’t think there were any Jews left at all.”

I thought that with this, the subject had been exhausted, but the peasant didn’t think so. He added an ‘historical explanation,’ saying” “The truth of the matter is that Jews have no savior and they are not of any use to anyone.”

At a fork in the road, as he prepared to make a right turn, we debarked from the sled, thanked him in sincere terms – “May God be With You” – and began again to go on foot, and this was not easy, but we were anxious to get rid of our ‘inquisitor.’

It was about eight o’clock in the evening, when the village appeared before our eyes. A round, full moon rose in the sky, and by its light, and the light of the deep, shining snow the covered the entire area, it was possible to see for a radius of several kilometers as if one was looking at one’s own hand, and as is known, th light is the foresworn enemy of those fleeing, and on the run.

I already recognized the village that we were getting ready to approach, because you had explained well to me, down to the last detail, what the layout of the village was, and who its residents were. In order not to run into people on our way, you and I walked by a roundabout way, through fields. I recollect what was written in the book of Exodus – “...and the Lord led them not through the land of the Philistines, for it was nigh...”
The last part of the trip to the village, several hundred meters, was very difficult to traverse. The fields were covered in deep snow, and each step would cause our legs to sink in up to the knee. We spit blood with every step we took. All our thoughts were focused on one thing: we could not cross the open field, because our silhouettes would stand out against the ground. Every second seemed like an hour to us, but despite all these difficulties, we reached the village itself. Here you were as if in your own home. You walked with extra confidence, and I followed you step by step, in the expectation that we would encounter people who were your relatives who had invited you here.

I was a stranger here, a stranger for sure. When several days ago, you had proposed that we go to ‘your’ town, to Krzemienica, I had many doubts. I placed great stock in your proposal. I knew you had friends here with whom you had relationships going back to your childhood. Apart from this, I knew that other people in the camp pressured you to take them instead of me. Among other things, I thought of the difficulties that await those good people who were supposed to provide us with a hiding place in their homes, when they see the uninvited guest, “a son-in-law to feed,” – as would be said in Yiddish.... I raised all of these difficulties to you, and I even warned you that I could be an impediment to you along the way, but you were clear in your mind and you stood behind your proposal. Somehow or another, I went with you – and I have no regrets.

I recollect it was about ten o’clock when I knocked on the door of Shiviatsky’s house, by which time the first set of difficulties were over. The elder Shiviatsky did not want to honor his daughter’s invitation. Afterwards I discovered that he had said to you angrily: “What else, you brought a friend along too?”

I didn’t know about the negotiation that was taking place in the house. I sat in the dark hallway, holding the mug of sweet drink that someone had given me. I felt a tremendous tiredness from everything that had happened to me that day, and a sort of light-headedness. I thought I had lost all sense of time and place. I thought about my relatives and the ones who were most dear to me, that were doubtlessly being transported in stifling train cars to some unknown fate. I don’t know for how long I sat this way, silent and sunken in thought. Suddenly, you emerged to me with decisive and clear news, as usual, and you said: “Come, Wanda is going first,– with you 10 meters behind her, and after you – me.”

We went out. The night was now colder and clearer

than before, when we had first arrived. The snow groaned as if from pain after each one of our steps. We nearly reached the gendarmerie, hen our guide disappeared. We reached a courtyard – with me behind you. You knocked on the door of Chernikova's daughter. When she heard your name, the cry of 'Oy!' escaped her lips, and the door was immediately opened. Before you had a chance to tell her, that you were here with a friend, she said: "Come, get inside!"

There was no small amount of fear in these words of hers, but also a great deal of warmth, humanity, and the expression of extending hospitality to guests. She asked: "Would you like something to drink? To eat?" After a brief pause: "Right now, we would like to sleep, tomorrow we will discuss everything."

And this is how we reached the end of that long day. An epoch of 18 months was begun. The two of us, two embers rescued from the great blaze, tied to one another, for life and death.

Thirty years have passed since then. When I take stock of those times, I know that despite the many years hat have gone by since we fled together, my affection for you has not diminished, but rather has grown stronger and deeper, and cannot be expressed in words. Everything that I have written here is but a pale reflection of that reality, and I have tried to portray it here.

Our two houses, our two families are a result of that one long, miraculous, day.

Yours
Noah

Holon, February 3, 1972

Concerning the Volkovysk that Is No More

by Yaakov Rabinovich

We present the words that were spoken by the renown author, Yaakov Rabinovich, when the first news about the destruction of Volkovysk arrives, The words are presented as they were said.

Page 146: *The memorial stone over the grave of Naphtali Herz Nakhumovsky in the Volkovysk cemetery. Right – the widow of the deceased, Left – his daughter Resha Milkov. The picture was sent by Elchanan Nakhumovsky from New York.*

The glory days of Volkovysk past, that of great and famous Rabbis, and scholars who later became great Rabbis outside of her, was for me also a thing of the past. I know about this only from word of mouth. Those who were there at my time, were not from the level of the 'originals.' Despite this, Volkovysk was a city full of Torah even in my day.

Volkovysk was also a city that brought up or produced from her Batei Medrashim, enlightened people and writers as well, and famous writers that maintained contact with her from many sides.

She was also full of charity. There were marvelous incidents of this nature. Yeshiva boys that studied there, and Jewish soldiers that worked there – valued its generosity and character.

She was then also a working city. In essence, the entire district was a working area. In my youth, there was not a single craftsman in the city who was not Jewish. There were also Jewish smiths. The maids in Jewish homes were all Jewish. There hardly was a form of work in which the Jews of the area did not engage in. After the great fire of 5646 (1882), Volkovysk was re-built from scratch with brick houses, and all the construction was done by Jews, in which practically no stranger had a hand.

In a transition period, there was still Torah there, even though the attentions and the inclinations of the younger generation had changed. At the beginning, the children from the better families learned to work out of idealism, and those generally went to America afterwards. After that came a time when the city filled with the *Bund* and Yiddish, even while work was declining more and more. A time

finally arrived when not only were the gentile stores in the majority, but there were also gentile craftsmen. The emigration to American and to the Land of Israel took workers out [of the city], and even the houses were full of Polish and Russian maids. There practically were no more young Jewish women [for this work].

And yet once again, after the prior war [sic: World War In], there was again a change in mood. Zionism grew strong, together with connections to the Land of Israel, and the education took place mainly in *Hebrew*. A Hebrew Gymnasium, including Polish subjects, a Tarbut High School, and as a result – a generation was raised that knew Hebrew, even though most of the teachers were from Galicia Volhyn.

When I visited in 5785 (1933), after having been absent for 26 years, I found great changes. The community was standing as if on the exit threshold, especially the young people. While the *pioneering spirit* could not be sensed in the city, the inclination to go to the Land of Israel was widespread. There was not a family who didn't have someone in Israel. And the will to emigrate to Israel engulfed Bundists and non-Zionists. I happened on an interesting phenomenon: Bundists, simple ordinary people, were sending their children to *Hebrew* schools, while the intelligentsia preferred a Polish education. I had the impression that even in the *Yavneh* school, there was more Polish than Hebrew.

The use of the Polish language spread among the Jews more so than Russian had in the prior period. In my letter to the newspaper, *Davar*, I dwelt on this phenomenon in connection with the Polonization of the Byelorussian base – Polonization of the entire youth.
In the Jewish section of the city I didn't recognize any buildings or extensions. In this location, the city was built practically as a new Polish city, and parts of it were beautiful indeed.

Despite all the changes that had come that were not good, nevertheless, there was a feeling of a *Jewish settlement.* A city with a Jewish legacy, with Hebrew education, with Zionism, with charity, and in general, like most of Poland, and especially like Polish Lithuania, and Volhyn – Judaism with a clear desire for a Hebrew-based culture and the Land of Israel. The older generation, even if the Rabbis fell under the influence of the *Agudat Israel,* were not jealous of their prerogatives, tolerant, pleasant and inclined to the Land of Israel.

The heart tightens when one remembers both the cemetery with all those dear Jews would found their resting place there. What was its fate? It is difficult to think about all this. I spent some good times in Volkovysk, even in these last hours. It is hard to speak, and it is not easy to write. The pain is very great.

Pages from the Album

by Mulya Schein[48]

The appointed moment has arrived, which all of the people with blood flowing in them have yearned for, especially aching Jewry – the moment allocated to memorialization.

The cannons of victory are thundering in Moscow, church bells are pealing loudly, announcing the victory in Washington and London. Everyone has forgotten, for a short minute, the suffering, pain and incidents that caused millions of innocent people to be killed. All are joyous, and everyone thanks his Maker that *he* has remained alive.

Coincidentally, I am sitting in a pained and darkened mood beside the radio, withdrawing into myself. I apprehend the sounds bursting forth fro the radio, but my heart is pained, and other voices, voices from *there* reach me, from the town of my birth, Volkovysk, from where who knows what

48 In his day, the writer was the head of the Maccabi soccer team in Volkovysk, a dynamic and lovely young man, and outstanding role model for many young people. This item was published in 1945 in the periodical of the Organization of Volkovysk émigrés.

remains of it, and whether anyone of my relatives survived, or my Jews.

Volkovysk was a little city, but how profound are the memories that I have bound up in it. I look for and find the album with the pictures from my childhood, and begin to turn the pages, and from the stimulation of the pictures of those bygone days, I immerse myself completely in the near-distant past. Here is a column of pictures from the night of the Seder of a family gathering. Here we are, seated about the table, all members of the family, with our father at the head of the table. At the sight of this picture, something begins to stir in my heart. I am reminded of how the family would arrive before the holiday. They came from Warsaw, Vilna, and other cities to celebrate the holiday together. Everyone's faces shone with light. Handshakes, kisses – and here is a picture of the Jewish Synagogue, and it too arouses a wave of memories. My gaze falls on a picture of the Jewish hospital, and I see this institution, in which many died and many were cured within its walls, as if it was standing literally before my eyes now. - - - And here is a picture from the summer: the *Burkehs, the Mayak, the Volya, the Schlossbarg,* the *Poritzim Gasse*, the *Bog of the Priest*. Each and every location reminds me of something, more than just something. I peer at a photo of a party at the *Burkehs*, a party that is well guarded in my memory: on a big porch, around a large table on which a samovar stands, my friends are seated, all smiling and laughing. I begin to think: which of them are still alive? And here, in a second photo, we see the hammock hung between two trees, with groups of young people spread out carelessly on the grass, enjoying the ambience - - - and her is the Volya River, in which nobody had ever drowned. Its waters flow quietly, and the small boats on it sail gently – the pictures follow each other quickly. Now come pictures of a different nature – pictures that remind me of the winter in my city buried in snow. I flip the pages. A picture of the Keren Kayemet committee appears before my eyes, and beside it – a picture that reminds me of the going-away party that we organized for our members that made *aliyah* to Israel.

I also found a picture in the album of the reception we arranged for our friend, the actor, Raphael Klatshkin when he came to visit his hometown. There is also no lack of pictures of the two very popular 'institutions' of their day: Pigalgal's Café, and Chaya-Yenta's Kiosk, in which the best tasting ice cream was sold.

Now come several pages of the *Maccabi.* I dedicated no small amount of year to the *Maccabi* movement, and when I look at these pictures – I relive those years anew.

I am reminded of the *Maccabi* flag celebration that was transformed into a celebration for the entire city – I continue to turn the pages, and I reach the last picture, a picture that is not in my album, the terrifying picture of my Volkovysk going up in flames. In my mind's eye, I see heartrending images of mothers screaming beside the bodies of their children, of dying infants in the arms of their parents. I see concentration camps, and the extermination camps, gas chambers — there are no more pictures, but there also are no more friends, neighbors, companion, and acquaintance, my entire city no longer exists.

The album falls from my hand, my tears fall on the pictures of friends and relatives.

May my right hand lose its cunning if I forget them, my dear ones.

Efforts to Create Permanent Memorials

Page 149: *Top –* *Tablet at the Memorial Grove of Trees for Volkovysk*
Bottom – *Beside the Memorial to the Martyrs of Volkovysk*

Page 150: *Here is interred the Scroll of the Martyrs, and the Remains of Martyrs*

Memorials to the Volkovysk Community In Israel

Many activities were undertaken by the Organization of Émigrés from Volkovysk in Israel to establish permanent memorials to the Jewish community that was exterminated. We will record a number of these here.

A. In 1945, after the first survivors from Volkovysk reached Israel and the United States, and they brought the upsetting information of what had occurred in the city, and about the bitter end of the Jewish community, the Organization published a folio titled, '*The Destruction of Volkovysk in the Second World War*.[49]" In this folio, eye-witness accounts were documented concerning everything that had happened, from the oral accounts of Herschel Roitman, who excelled in his partisan initiatives, Dr. Noah Kaplinsky, Eliyahu Kushnir, Eliyahu Kovensky, who was an active partisan decorated as a Hero of the Soviet Union, Katriel Lashowitz, who was also a partisan that was very active in the Zamkova Forest, and other places, Joseph Kotliarsky, who told about the night of the Passover Seder in Auschwitz, and others.

This folio was received and read with great interest by the Volkovysk Émigrés in Israel, for most of whom this was a first and tragic bit of news from their birthplace.

B. In 1967, the *Aliyah School* in Beit Galim, Haifa published a folio in memory of the Volkovysk community edited by the principal of the school, Mr. Y. Kaplan. This folio specifically deals with a detailed accounting of an evening of memorial activities conducted within the walls of the previously mentioned school. Among other things, the following is recorded in the Principal's introduction to this folio:

"We have decided to perpetuate the memory of Volkovysk. To ask 00 what is this city to our children, we can say – Volkovysk was no more than typical of hundreds and thousands of similar cities, encompassing all that is beautiful and good in them, scholars, babies in all homes, charitable institutions, sincere help and love of man. Why, especially, Volkovysk? – because it is mine, I was born there, and in its midst I absorbed the tradition of my ancestors. In it I became a Jew, as best as I could, and in its midst – my family and thousands of brothers and sisters.

We dealt not only with the Holocaust in school. We allocated special attention to the living, vibrant Volkovysk. We attempted to probe the hidden light within her. This light was sevenfold stronger than the dark cover of the Holocaust.

From probing the life [of the city], we went on to probe the Holocaust. Volkovysk drained the cup of hemlock to its dregs, fell to its knees, and never rose again. With our meager resources, we attempted to create a modest *Yad VaShem* here at our school, in order that our pupils remember her, in order that we could promise the martyrs of Volkovysk who charged us, the living, that this shall never happen again. From our probing of the Holocaust, we will come to know how to protect ourselves, our homeland, from now and forever."

From what the students of the school wrote, we learn the measure of how they were influenced by what was told to them about our city. Let us introduce a few excerpts from these writings.

Leah Kreisman writes: " I never imagined how

[49] The second volume of this Trilogy.

horrible the Holocaust was. On one of the weekdays, a survivor of the Holocaust visited us, who was a witness to the death camps and Volkovysk's bitter end, Joseph Kotliarsky was his name. He spoke to us as if we were adults, with great emotion. What touched me most of all was the cruel attitude of the Germans towards the Jews from the day they invaded until they were transferred to the concentration camps. Even their names were taken away from them. The number tattooed on their left arm replaced their names, and that's how each of them were identified. I have now received a much clearer picture of the Holocaust. I understand how it is possible to exterminate six million men, women and children, old and young. Why? Solely because they were Jewish."

Rafi Tevakh writes about this same meeting with Kotliarsky:

"Mr. Kotliarsky responded to our invitation, and came to us from Jerusalem to tell us about the last days of the Jews of Volkovysk in the Auschwitz camp. His speech was soft, and one could hear a trembling in his speech, his face covered in sweat, with tears running from his eyes. The description of life under the German occupation, and their abusive treatment of the Jews made a deep impression. A number is tattooed on his arm, and he was told a the time it was put on, that from now on there no longer was a Joseph Kotliarsky, but just a number....we all sat transfixed, full of sorrow and anger."

Sarah Hirsch tells about her impressions of the lessons given in her class about the community of Volkovysk:

"We had interesting lessons about the annihilated [Jewish] community of Volkovysk, and we learned to recognize the city from the day it was founded, its glorious past in days of war and peace. Most of all, I was impressed by the charitable institutions of the city, and Jewish aid. For example: ***The Orphanage*** – the beautiful work that was establish with the volunteer work of Eliyahu Shykevich. This was his life's work. The concern and dedication to the children that were left without parents, the concern for their sustenance and education. Another example – ***The Hospital*** or – ***Old Age Home*** – the institution that looked after the elderly without support or a roof over their heads. It was headed by Reb Meir Shiff nicknamed 'The Patriarch of the Elderly." here were also other institutions, like: Receiving guests, free loans, discreet [secret] charity. The purpose of all of these was one – helping the poor and needy. And all this was done without a great deal of publicity, out of an exceptional sense of forthcomingness and dedication.

Who will count all the beautiful institutions that the city of Volkovysk was blessed with, and who will offer solace for their loss?"

Apart from the writing of the students, of which only a part are reproduced here, many excerpts were also included that were published in the folio, *Hurban Volkovysk*, and a facsimile was published of the memorial image tat was presented by the students of the *Aliyah School* under the supervision of their teachers in the presence of the elders of the city and Volkovysk émigrés.

C. A Memorial to the Jewish Martyrs of Volkovysk.

About the Memorial and its Creators

by Aharon Podolinsky

Page 151: Top – Harold Goldrei and Moshe Scher from the United States, at a meeting of the Émigrés from our city, at the dedication of the Grove of Trees in memory of the martyrs of Volkovysk in the Forest of the Martyrs.

Bottom – Noah Tzemakh and Katriel Lashowitz at their first meeting about the Volkovysk Book.

Every year on the Tenth of Tevet, we are in the custom of gathering at the memorial to the martyrs of Volkovysk in *Nahalat Yitzhak*, to remember our loved ones who were exterminated in the Holocaust. This memorial brings back a story that is worth telling.

It was one of the days of October 1982 when I entered the office of my friend, Shlomo Bereshkovsky, ז"ל, as was my frequent habit, and when he merely saw me, he literally accosted me joyously. The reason was – a dream he had dreamt that very night. He didn't recall all of the details, but when he saw me, he was reminded that my image had appeared to him in this dream, as well as the issue of the memorial in memory of the martyrs – a matter that had not been accomplished yet at this time. This dream served as a fountain of nostalgia to Bereshkovsky, who was already in the winter of life, and that everything must be done to raise this memorial, and he asked me to look after this.

After several days, I traveled to the home of my friend, the lawyer Noah Tzemakh, who also lived in *Petakh-Tikva*, and I told him abut Bereshkovsky's dream. We agreed to invite Katriel Lashowitz to the discussion, who also lived in *Petakh-Tikva*, on the assumption that if there was anyone capable of getting the memorial put up, certainly – he was the man. When we met with Lashowitz, we conveyed to him our feelings regarding the financing of the memorial, and Lashowitz said to us: "Don't worry about the financing, leave this matter to me, rather, concern yourselves with a suitable place for the memorial, and the most suitable place from my point of view is in the cemetery of *Nahalat Yitzhak*, where the memorial to the victims of Treblinka also stands, and as is known, many of the sons of our city met their death there."

Only a few weeks went by when seven members of the committee to put up the monument entered Bereshkovsky's office: the lawyer Menachem Anyan, Shlomo Bereshkovsky, Benjamin Galai, Katriel Lashowitz, Abraham Novick, the lawyer Noah Tzemakh, and the undersigned. Six of the members donated 500 Shekel on the spot, and Lashowitz matched the amount given by the others together, and in this way, 6,000 Shekel were collected in the treasury.

On 17.11.1982, the committee came together a second time at the house of Lashowitz, and the chairman, A. Novick reported: A) The location for the monument beside the Treblinka monument had been promised). The administration of Yad VaShem had promised that the remains of martyrs that had been killed in the Holocaust will be buried under the monument, this being added to the scroll with the names of all the martyrs from Volkovysk.

Bereshkovsky's dream began to come into reality, and in the end, it came to fruition thanks to the tireless efforts of the lawyer, ***Noah Tzemakh*** ז"ל, and Katriel Lashowitz, to be set aside for long life. In 21.14.1984 the cover was taken off the monument at Nahalat Yitzhak. He would dreamt about it, was not privileged to live to this occasion, but the lawyer, Noah Tzemakh did live to see it, together with many Volkovysk émigrés in Israel, and a respectable representation from the émigrés from the United States: Daniel Lemkin, Dr. Resnick, Shereshevsky, Ephraim Mushatsky (Morris), and others.

Critical Acclaim for Dr. M. Einhorn's Book on Volkovysk

Page 152: Top – Reception of the First Survivors by the Committee of Volkovysk Émigrés.

Bottom – The First Survivors from our Town with members of the Jewish Brigade. Sitting (Right to Left): Kotliarsky, Roitman, Na'ava [Shayn'eh] Lifschitz, Kovensky, K. Lashowitz. Standing: Chaim Kaplan, Kushnir, Fuchs.

Dr. M. Einhorn's book, which appeared in two volumes at the end of 1949 in the United States received much critical acclaim and positive articles in the Jewish press. Many of the best Jewish literary critics reacted in articles and essays on the great work of the editor, who took upon himself the work of gathering the material, pictures and the permissions that were all included in the book, and even financed the publication himself.

Hillel Rogoff, the editor of the widely distributed *Jewish Daily Forward* wrote the following about the book in his article: "This was an heroic effort, to literally assemble the material from a variety of

sources that were spread all over the world. Even more difficult than that, was the construction of a complete [literary] edifice on the foundation of this material – Dr. Einhorn's book will serve as a reference that will not disappoint any future historian who will want to immerse himself in the lives, of the Jews of Poland, which was prematurely ended, and additionally, the book will be of help writers and poet who will want to find expression for the literary art of the city and Polish Jewry."

The well-known journalist, B. Tz. Goldberg wrote in the New York newspaper, *Der Tag* : "The book is written in good Yiddish, that flows well and is idiomatic. The writing is clear and interesting, without excess elaboration or phrasing. Additionally, it is not one of those light tasks to write about this subject – the tragedy that befell your family and your hometown. Dr. Einhorn found the right tone. The book has a wealth of information about the city of Volkovysk, its traditions, and personalities. This information is conveyed not only through dry narrative, but also by means of many pictures."

That same newspaper provides an extensive article by the well-known critic Sh. Nieger: "There is almost no corner of life in Volkovysk of the past fifty years on which light is not shed in this book, and it is correct as the editor says in his forward, that his book depicts not only the life of the Jews of Volkovysk and the towns in its vicinity, but also the lives and works of Jews in hundreds of cities and towns during the past two generations."

Articles appeared in weeklies and various periodicals in America and Canada that round out the praise of the important effort expended by Dr. M. Einhorn.

At Daniel Lemkin's Fresh Grave

by Katriel Lashowitz

Page 153: Daniel Lemkin (right) meeting Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. To the left is Dov Nir.

I had it in my mind to write in this book about Daniel Lemkin, not only because he was among the first to encourage me to publish this book, and not only because he was my friend as a youth in our home town, but simply because I loved him so much, and he deserved that affection. Accordingly, I did not imagine that at the hour that I would sit down to write about him, Daniel Lemkin would no longer be among the living, and my tale about him wold be written in ***past*** tense.... this is no doubt the reason for the oppressed feeling that I feel in my heart, at the time I am writing these lines.

In the Tarbut School and Gymnasium, Daniel was one grade ahead of me. Even in the *Gordonia* youth group, he was in an older group than mine, but this fact did not interfere with the good friendship between us, to the point where we would 'catch hell' together frequently... I recall very well those evenings when we would sit by the banks of the Volkova River, singing songs about the ***Jordan*** and ***Kineret***. Both of us loved Volkovysk and the Volkova, but we loved the Jordan and the Kineret even more. This should not cause any surprise if it is told that the youth was schooled at Farber's *Heder*, continued at the *Tarbut* School and the Hebrew Gymnasium. A variety of turns resulted in me reaching Israel after him, even though he would come as a ***tourist.***

★★★

I knew his parents well also, and Daniel's brother. His father was an impressive looking Jewish man, thought to be the tallest Jew in Volkovysk. He earned his living from a dyestuff store, and he had a house with much in it that he also gave out. Generally, his mother was in the store, while his father was in the warehouse preparing dyes, turpentine, etc. Two of Daniel's brothers were with me in the partisans in the Zamkova Forest, but when our unit was divided into two groups – the brothers returned to Volkovysk. That is how they met up with their bitter end, when one of them was shot by the Germans in front of his parents. Daniel always thought about these brothers, and attempted to organized thoughts about the last days of their lives, and he was very happy when one of the partisans gave him a picture of his brother.

Personally, he was taken into the Russian Army in 1940, advancing and then retreating with it, mostly retreating. In this manner, he reached Tiflis with his unit, and afterwards to Krasnodar, which changed into his 'base,' thanks to an Armenian Russian General that took an interest in Daniel. He used his special talents to recognize the value of personal relations, and even knew how to apply his talents for his benefit and the benefit of those close to him. Daniel managed to have a good existence under the command of the general, but didn't only look after himself. He knew how to make things better for others. In essence, this was his passion – ***to do good things***. Even the general's brother-in-law went out better off. Daniel helped him to open a bakery in Krasnodar, and in those days in the Soviet Union, not only a bakery was a big deal. Even a loaf of bread was not something trivial...

★★★

Daniel continued to wheel and deal in this manner, buying and selling, making things better for his crowd, and 'his' general – until the end of the war. He had no contact with his family, with his Volkovysk, but he thought and worried about them on a daily basis, hour-to-hour, and when the first crack opened up that enabled him to get there – he presented himself to the Armenian general, and said to him: I am compelled to go there. The general understood, and despite all the difficulties, he provisioned him with those necessities that would permit him to reach Volkovysk a few days after it was liberated from the Germans.

I remember Daniel's story of his arrival in the city very well, and how he reacted after he saw the great devastation. He story is well-known to me, since in time, I also went through this experience. He also, sought Jews in the desolated city, and a Pole pointed him in the direction of a Jewish woman named Bash'keh, This woman was about forty, and from her account, he discovered what happened to his family. Through her efforts, he established contact with about 18-20 Jews who were in Volkovysk at that time, among them: Moteleh Shifran, Bom Zuckerman, Shipiatsky, Dr, Resnick, Dr. Kaplinsky, and the undersigned. Even though I only spent a few days in the city, since that is all I had the strength for, Daniel remained for four weeks. He searched through the attic of their former house for pictures and letters (those who lived in the house wanted to place the house at his disposal), but he deferred in favor of the family of a Christian who had worked for his father, but from that man's wife he found out that the Germans had killed her husband because he had pillaged Jewish assets (and booty was considered their province only...), he looked for relatives – but all he found was destruction. Only destruction. From Volkovysk, he traveled to Moscow, and spent ten days there. He visited the office of the anti-Fascist Jewish Committee and conveyed to them all that he had found, seen and heard in Volkovysk. They were very interested in his account because Daniel also knew what to convey.

★★★

From Moscow, he returned to his 'base' – to Krasnodar, and again began to get involved in a variety of deals, on his behalf and for the general and his relatives, but after seeing the disaster that befell his people in Volkovysk, the realization coalesced in his heart that he had nothing really to do here, and it was obligated to reach the Land of Israel. His plan was: to return to Volkovysk, and from there – to Poland, and afterwards – to Israel.

That's not what happened.

When he reached Poland there, again, anti-Semitism had reached a peak. They would take Jews off the trains and kill them. He stayed a while in Bialystock. His strong commercial connections pulled him strongly to Krasnodar, but when he reached there, he general anticipated him by saying two words only: "It's burning, flee!" He understood the meaning of these words. Something about the general's dealings had infiltrated to the government. The general began to have doubts about his own fate. Daniel flew immediately to Moscow, from there to Kiev and from Kiev to Lemberg, from Lemberg to Kharkov, and from Kharkov to Lodz. Shipiatsky, from Volkovysk, who at that time was in Lodz, placed a room at his disposal and looked after his comfort, but he also told me that his best friend, Shmuel Epstein, who managed to accumulate

significant wealth through various undertakings, was killed by the Poles after they stole all of his money. Daniel mourned greatly over the loss of his dear friend, and arrived at the conclusion: it was forbidden for him to tarry in Poland. He traveled to Czechoslovakia and from there to Germany, and in stead of spending several days or weeks there, as he had originally planned – he stayed for five years. His commercial instincts and talents brought him a wealth of opportunity, that he was not a refugee. He opened and ran several commercial establishments, did a great deal of good on behalf of Jews as was his usual way, and it was not until 1950 that he reached, not Israel, but the United States.

His first job was – selling dust cleaners, and in time he also began to clean up – money. His talent for commerce and organization were not frustrated in America either, and he began doing business in real estate, partnered with the radio and television star Joe Franklin, and with his help, set up a business that organizes concerts and performances for the elderly, got involved in other businesses – and did very well. His greatest 'wealth' that he created in America, by his own words were his wife, Marilyn, and his four children: Benjamin, Joseph, Jonathan and Rachel. Yes, he valued these assets very much. He was so proud of the fact that his son Benjamin (Benjy) was studying at university, involved in Jewish affairs, and tears stood in his eyes when he showed me the open letter that his son had published in newspapers, in which he attempted to dissuade his uncle from marrying a Christian woman. The Volkovysk spark was guarded within Daniel, and he nurtured it during all the long days of his wandering. He was the un-anointed ruler of the Volkovyskers in America.

During his last visit to Israel, he spoke at length about the great tour he was organizing to Israel on the occasion of it s 40th anniversary. On this tour, under the auspices of Joe Franklin, his friend and partner, he was preparing to include 'his' Jewish people from Volkovysk, Bialystock, Grodno, Baranovich, etc. Daniel the firebrand, the dynamo, the ardent Zionist who never got to Zion but guarded his faith to her, had many other plans. He spoke about a number of them with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who knew him from Volkovysk. His heart couldn't hold out in his fast pace with all these activities, charities and good deeds.

He died on February 19, 1988 and the host of people that came to attend his funeral that was held in Elmont, Long Island (at the Bialystoker Center Plot)[50], were living eye witnesses to the measure of love and affection that was extended to him by all who knew him.

I lost a good and dear friend.

Volkovysk Organizations Abroad

by Katriel Lashowitz

Page 155: Philip Morse (Ephraim Mushatsky)

The emigration of Jews from Volkovysk to the United States, South America, Canada and other countries was a natural occurrence that went on continually, never stopping. What characterized the emigrations from Volkovysk was, that they never forgot where they came from, and at all times, in all ways. They maintained a vital connection to their relatives, and acquaintances that remained in Volkovysk and did the best that they were able, to help from a distance, to strengthen various institutions, to help families that had become impoverished, and other causes. It is no wonder that the Jews of Volkovysk were proud of their *landsleit* in other countries, because of whose generosity, in large measure, they were able to support and open such a large network of local charitable assistance, which was the pride and joy of the Jewish community. And not only this, every family that hit a crisis, or had a misfortune occur, always knew that the gates of mercy were never closed, because whether it was in the United States, Argentina or Canada, there were Volkovyskers willing to help. And they did help, whether a lot or a little, as they were asked, or even beyond that. It should not come as a surprised that the 'educated' Jews who wrote the addresses to places abroad, were very occupied

[50] Beth David Cemetery.

and the rows lined up for them were often very long. One could read into this process a form of 'schnorring,' that infected our Jewish brethren from years ago, who engaged in this in the days of the poet, Ch. N. Bialik, when he wrote "As you begged – so you shall be begged," but it is also possible to see this from the standpoint of a display of love for one's fellow Jew, of solidarity, and philanthropy. In any event, it isn't possible to pass a single judgement on this matter.

These 'Societies,' of Volkovysk émigrés, especially in the United States, also carried out the function of paving the way for newer emigrants, most of whom arrived without knowledge of the language, with no trade, and no other options. Many of the émigrés from Volkovysk, who today are comfortably ensconced each 'under his vine and fig tree' in New York or Chicago, Buenos Aires or in Toronto, know how to tell about the help that they received from those who came before them in the emigration, at the time when they took their first steps in a strange land under circumstances to which they were not used to at all. Because of this, émigrés from Volkovysk were close to one another and stuck together, organized meetings and parties frequently, mostly for purposes of – ***remembrance***. From time to time, articles and writings would appear in New York and Buenos Aires with stories of Volkovysk of the past, but time wrought its own work, and the people of that first generation grew old, and the young people, who already were born in the lands of Canada or America – their ardor for the 'Old County' is considerably weakened and no longer demands much.

Dr. Einhorn cites the names of several of the émigrés to America, who in his time, did great things for the 'Old Country,' For example, ***Saul Barash***, the son of Jekuthiel and Mikhlah Bereshkovsky, who arranged fund-raising among the Volkovysk émigrés in the United States, and even among Jews who didn't know the city at all, on behalf of various charitable institutions. In this way, [he also mentions] ***Meir Segal*** and ***Matthew Rutchik***, thanks to whose large contributions many families who lost their means did not go under.

In New York and Chicago there were active Volkovysk Ladies Auxiliary organizations in his time, who would hold frequent meetings, and despite the fact that the members in these organizations knew very well that every meeting ends with a fund-raiser for some institution in faraway Volkovysk – this did not deter them from coming. There was a Volkovysker Synagogue in New York [City], which after the First World War, sent special emissaries to Volkovysk to assess the seriousness of the local situation and organize productive assistance to the needy.

What we have learned from our review of this activity, is that these organizations would especially bestir themselves after a great fire, after a war, etc. A large range of activities was undertaken by these organizations after the end of the Second World War, when the survivors were in desperate need of assistance. It is worth noting that not few of the families in Israel also availed themselves of the help extended at various times, and in various ways, by the various Volkovysk societies. From the words of ***Philip Morse***, known to people from Volkovysk by his original name, ***Ephraim Mushatsky***, who is currently serving as the head of the Volkovysk Society in New York, we have heard this not only about the great donation that was made within the bounds of the various societies, but also the pervasive indifference by children and grandchildren of Volkovysk émigrés, in connection with everything connected to the birthplace of their parents and grandparents. Even Daniel Lemkin, in whom Volkovysk was etched well into his memory, also spoke about this, and spoke of the need to tell the younger generation about Volkovysk in a language that they understand – ***in English***. We hope that we will shortly be able to publish a summary about Volkovysk in English, not for purposes of fund-raising, but only that the descendants of Volkovysk should know what was special about the city of their ancestors.

With the Completion of the Book

To my dear granddaughter Yael, and my dear grandsons, Barak, and Lior, and other many grandsons and granddaughters of the emigrants from Volkovysk

I hope, Yael, that you remember that very night on which you asked me to tell you about the city where I was born, about the Jews that lived there and there way of life, and about my childhood and the days of my youth. About the schools where I learned, about my parents, etc. I began to tell you then, but the story was interrupted in the middle. I was not properly prepared, and also tears put a choke in my throat. I promised you then, that at an appropriate time, I would continue to tell you. And in that respect, Yael, here is that continuation before you, and this time there is not only a story, there are also pictures.

I am not sure that you will find an answer to all of the questions that you asked of me in this book, and the questions that you wanted to ask. I was very happy about the essence of your interest in the past, and in the origins of your father, just as I was pleased when you told me that you had been given a homework assignment in your class to write about the subject of "Youth Movements During the Period of the Holocaust." I want to hope that you will continue to take an interest in this subject, and that you will avail yourself of this book and other sources. I am aware that in the last few years, many schools in Israel have begun to organize missions of students to visit Poland, which has been left without any Jews. They visit the death camps of Treblinka, Auschwitz, Maidanek, and see with their own eyes how the Jews died, but to me, it is more important that these students see and know how the Jews *lived* in Poland, how they created things, and what they created.

In the summary that is in front of you, you will find the answer to two questions: How did they live? How did they die? Also, here in summary, the lives of your grandfather and great-grandfather will be told, even if I had already told you about my life and the deeds of the partisans in the forests. You will find the stories of other partisans that will round out the picture, such as the story of the partisan, Eliyahu Kovensky, that was awarded the title of 'Hero of the Soviet Union,' the story of Ida Mazover, that could literally serve as the theme of a major movie, etc. I have no doubt that you will be very interested in the story of Giora Epstein (Evven), to whom a substantial hour was dedicated on *Kol Yisrael* radio. Even though it isn't germane to this story, the 17 MIGs that Giora shot down – were not shot down in Volkovysk, but rather during the Yom Kippur War in Israel, but I saw a need to include Giora's story in this book as well, just as I included something about the deeds of Eliyahu Golomb, Abraham Makov, and Moshe Saroka. Giora is the son of my good friend Hillel Epstein, a scion of Volkovysk, who is today in Kibbutz Negbah; Golomb, Makov, Saroka and others, who achieve fame because of their work in the Holy Land, are scions of Volkovysk. It is inconceivable that they were not shaped by the same forces as the Jews of Volkovysk, it is inconceivable that the legacy of their ancestors did not adhere to them, it is inconceivable that the education they received in the Jewish schools of Volkovysk did not have an influence on them. For this reason, I have included their stories.

Dear Yael, I have included many stories here about the Holocaust. If you read these stories well, including the stories of the partisans, it will become clear to you that there is no foundation to what many young people of your generation wither thought or suspected, that "the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter" during the period of the Holocaust. This is a canard, and baseless canard from which you must distance yourself. It is not possible to conceive that a community that could produce the likes of Eliyahu Golomb, Abraham Makov, Giora Epstein and others, could condition its members to go like "sheep to the slaughter." In fact, it is exactly the opposite, if you read about all the deeds of cunning deception and assault by the Nazis, about the

technology and equipment that they utilized, about the speedy eradication of the choice young people from every Jewish settlement – then it will become clear to you why the Jews did not rise up against the Nazis in cities and towns like Volkovysk and others.

Dear Yael, when I began to get involved in preparing this collection, I was thinking primarily about young people like yourself, who might read this book, and because of this, I did not include many stories about personalities and figures whose names are not known to you, and perhaps don't interest you and people of your age, but regarding a few of them, I could not skip over those who dedicated their entire lives to the public good. I advise that you do not skip over those chapters that describe how the extensive network of charitable institutions and local support in Volkovysk was established, the institutions of Hebrew education, Zionist and pioneering youth movements, because of whom, our city of Volkovysk was transformed into a Zionist city and a nationalist spiritual center for all of the surrounding towns. And don't forget, my dear Yael, about the feats and under what conditions all of this great worth was created. There was no video, television or radio sets in the homes of Jews at that time, there were no modern means of communication available, medicine and technology was still in its infancy, and despite all of this, the Jews, with their own hands, established a modern hospital with no outside help that was available to non-Jews as well, and to many Jews in the surrounding communities, Jewish banks, charitable funds, etc. I am not prepared to attest to the fact that Moshe Saroka of Volkovysk, who gloriously established many hospitals in Israel, including the ones found in the vicinity of latter-day Petakh-Tikva, was not influenced by the Jewish hospital in Volkovysk – his birthplace, which also was surrounded by trees and flowers, just like the modern hospitals in our Land.

I could not conceal my emotion in the lines of this book, and between the lines, that I loved my home town, and that I continue to love it. This, despite the fat that in Volkovysk, the Jews weren't particularly 'adored.' There was anti-Semitism, there were pogroms, and all manner of troubles, but there were also many days of festival and happiness, many parties and celebrations, walks and picnics, the music of the fire-fighters' orchestra reverberates in my ears even now. And about us, there was a vibrant world, seething with market days and fairs, groups of youth movements, synagogues and churches, snows and snow houses, ice skating, walks in the Zamkova Forest, with lovely, happy girls, festivity and the vibrancy of life,

The curtain fell on all of this, and it was ended, but it is impossible to forget all of this.

I know, that you 'sabras,' those who were born in Israel, sometimes used the appellation of a 'Diaspora Jew' as a pejorative, and I say to you and those of your age: there were many things in my city in the diaspora that I am proud of to this day, and from time-to-time, when I read in the newspaper about all manner of shortcomings and liabilities in the modern Israeli community, I whisper to myself: In Volkovysk, we never had things like this...

Your grandfather

Katriel

Page 158: *Top – The row of stores (Rad Krommen) opposite the homes of Einhorn and Shiff*

Bottom – The Bus Station beside the Church

There – And Here

Page 159 Top – Boruch Rothbart and his wife, Shlomit

Bottom –

This book ends with a picture of a house that stands on Rothschild Street in Petakh-Tikva. A house that has special significance to the subject of this book. This house 'made history' and for many who left Volkovysk, it will bring back the days of the distant past in Volkovysk and the days of the recent past in Israel.

Why the distant past? – because this house is literally a copy of a similar house on the *Szeroka Gasse* in Volkovysk, the house of Mordechai and Nechama Rothbart. And the recent past – why? – Because this house served as an address for many of the émigrés from Volkovysk that reached the Holy Land. Here, in the Rothbart home, they were received graciously, and whoever needed guidance, a meal, a loan 'to tide him over,' or work – knew that he would not leave the Rothbart home empty-handed. Mordechai Rothbart made *aliyah* from Volkovysk to the Holy Land in 1924 together with his four sons. He build his house in Petakh-Tikva and built hundreds of homes for other Jews who wanted to settle in Petakh-Tikva. After the father of the family passed away, his sons continued in his path. Of the four sons , only the youngest, Boruch, remained in the construction business, and he is one of the largest donors in Petakh-Tikva, who also supported the erection of the Monument to the martyrs of Volkovysk and the publication of this book.

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