



Volkovysk
וואַלקאוויסק
The Trilogy

Part III

וואַלקאוויסק

ספורת של קהילה יהודית-ציונית

Volkovysk

The Story of a Jewish-Zionist Community

**Published by
Katriel Lashowitz**

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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 from 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 the 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"ר 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.



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.



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 ש"י, 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 Quarters 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 named 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 Kapusta¹ 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, *Słownik Geograficzny Królestwa 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 Ringold², 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 rule 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 nine³ streets in the city: Slonim, Jasikov, Jesuitzka, Vilna, Piekarski, Piesk, Zamovka, and Petroshevsky, and to this day, traces of these streets can be found beside the Ros’ River.

³ Only eight are given. The *Biskupier* street from M. Einhorn’s book is omitted.

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.

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 to the 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 year 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.



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 Zamoschek, 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 Kushmir. 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 Karczyczna 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.



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 and 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 Shykevich⁵

Page 15: Eliyahu Shykevich

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.

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 man 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, and 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 have 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 United 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 they 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 *Selikhhot* 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 in 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 10°F 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 Zamoschek 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 (*zemiroth 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 his 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 store 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 swallows 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 find 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, *Hertzeiya*. 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 *Hertzeiya* 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 (Psziszlucz, 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 from 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 my 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 dressed 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 store: "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 sense 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 come 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 (Усадебныйкй). 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 together inputs on 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. If 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

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 distinguished 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 did 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,

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.

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 *Schvierder*.

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

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 Auxilliary 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 many 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 ‘Tzents’ 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 did 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 Second¹¹ World War has bequeathed a bitter and difficult legacy to us – thousands of orphans, abandoned

¹¹ Perhaps a Freudian slip: The context of the writing, clearly indicates that this refers to the period after the First World War.

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

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 one 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. Their 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 *Volkovyssker 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 Friedenber (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 days¹⁴’ 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 Russian. 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

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, *Hertzeiya*, 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 studied 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 Berliner¹⁵
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 Hertzeiya 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.

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*, “*Hertzeiya*.” 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 be 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 a 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, מרת, 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, as 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 Arlozorov¹⁶, 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 protocol¹⁷, 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

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.

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

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 that 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.

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 Aramaic¹⁹,’ 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 ‘*Shalsholet,*’ 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 utilize 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 Henoah Neiman were the **first ones** that sent their children to study at the *Hertzeiya* 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. These 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 *Heimische 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 Dworetzky, 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 to the committee of this organization: Koppel-Asher Volkovysky, Chairman, Shmuel Shapiro – Treasurer, Nakhum Halpern (The Teacher) – Secretary, Israel Efrat, Moshe-Leib Khmelnsky, Moshe Galai, Eliezer Yudzhik, and Shmuel David Yunovich. At the organizing meeting of this 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 Gottlieb) 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 Shpiatsky. 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 Shpiatsky 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 Yerusolimsky (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 Khmel'nitsky, Yitzhak Yudzhik, Raphael Ditzkovsky 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

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.

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

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 *Hertzeiya* 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 to 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, with 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 in 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 of 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 presentations 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 Andros 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* מר"ר (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 than *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 *Hertziya* 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 our thinking. An additional factor in setting this outlook was our 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 its 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-Mazyra, 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

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 its 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** came 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, in 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, and 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**, דניאל, 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 made 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 courses 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 pleasantries. 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 fulfill 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 and 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 listen 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 about Volkovysk. On page 123 of his book, it says that the name of the gymnasium was changed from *Hertzelija*, 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 *Hertzelija* 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 *Hertzelija* 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 Health 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.

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,

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*).

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 from 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 daughter³¹ 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 Ivie³², 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

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 to me 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 accursed 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 Novogradsky*, ז"ל, who was called *Reb Itcheh Shmuel Jonah's*. He was a highly respected man, "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 Zion*, 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 Mizrahi 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 Lithuania, 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 achieved 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 ז"ל 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"ר, 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"ר, 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.

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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 from 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 *Hertzeiya* 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 the 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. Every 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 assembled, 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 hearts 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 Dudelah*, 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 and 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 deserves 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"l³⁶, 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 *Hertzeleya* gymnasium. Dr. M. Einhorn, who himself was a student at *Hertzeleya* 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,

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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 *Hertzeiya* 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 from 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 Shprinzak³⁷ 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 his 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.

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, *Haltur, 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 Zion* movement, and in 1907 he was elected to the committee of the *Hovevei Zion*, 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 did – 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 *Hertzeiya* 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, ש"י to both their names, because neither of the two 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 and 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 to 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 *Tarbut* [school] and a member of *Gordonia* in Volkovysk. Already at that time, Shimon stood out with his fiery youth, with his 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 many 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, נ"ח, 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 *Khevera 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 Grabski³⁹ 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

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 to 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 a small number of the gentiles would get drunk and revel about. In general, there was a peaceful relationship 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 required 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 be 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 same 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, but 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"ר

was head of the Zionist funds, and my grandfather, Herschel Novick, ש"ח, 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 for 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

With the Mosty' Jews On Their Last Journey

By Dr. Noah Kaplinsky

How Did I Come to Mosty'?

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 climb 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.

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 renowned 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 1918-1920, 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 for 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 name), 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 *Judenrat* 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 one 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 Vishvenik⁴⁰ 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

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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 its 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

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.

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-

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 or 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 *kasher*ed 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 stores closed down. The idleness grew more intense, and as a result of this, bitterness and hopelessness grew stronger. Many of these sought 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 for a set fee. This was the case with myself and my brother Shimon ש"י, 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 a 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 ש"י 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, because 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 hand 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 months, 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 receive 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 *Hertzeiya* Gymnasium in Tel-Aviv. After graduating from the Gymnasium, he emigrated to the United States, studied 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 Hertzeiya 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 Novogradok 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, whom 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 its 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. Henoeh Neiman worked along with him in the area of education. These two were the first to send their sons to the *Hertziya* 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 to 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 did 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 very 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, ש"ת 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 *Yevarekheka!* 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 krenkas, etc.

Those were the days —

The Holocaust

Page 113: *The Monument In Memory of the Martyrs of Volkovysk at the cemetery in Nahalat Yitzhak*

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| June 22, 1941 | The First Bombing of the City by the Germans |
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| 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. With 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 Goldberg⁴²

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

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.

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 Karczyczna, 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

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 accursed 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 heels 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 friend 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 hid 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 sell 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 Novogradok 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! – Kopfhier!* 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 into 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, and 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 spot⁴⁴,

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)

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

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 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 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 him 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. They 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 their 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 our 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

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 to 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 her home at that time already was – *in the bunker*.

I 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 in 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 Germany 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 Svislucz 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 into 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.

I 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.

I 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. None 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 (I still had 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 Jude!*" (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 longer 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.

I 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 got 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 that 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 from 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 young 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 off the access from the men’s camp to the women’s camp. To us, this was a clear sign that the end was drawing near. In deep sorrow and with hearts 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-Kwiatokowsky⁴⁶ 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 about 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 about 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 would 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 by wagon, and with 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 to 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 with 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 from 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 would 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 did 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. In 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 I had been in the forests with the partisans, and together with him, I 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 my 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 young 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 for 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, there 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 refrain 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 from the mouth of Gallin's wife in the bunker, which told everyone that the beloved and dear Sioma Gallin 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 issued 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 from 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 no 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 would 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 would 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 were 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. Most 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: they 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 first 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 accursed 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. He 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 40°C (104° 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 life 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 Weiner⁴⁷

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 from 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. In 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)

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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. The 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 me 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 were 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 that 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, then 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 that 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 renowned 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 Schein⁴⁸

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 from 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

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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 here 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.

⁴⁹ The second volume of this Trilogy.

Leah Kreisman writes: “ I never imagined how

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 established 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 that 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, ש"ו, 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 about 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* ש"ו, 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 would 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. His 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 instead 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 its 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

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Beth David Cemetery.

and the rows lined up for them were often very long. One could read into this process a form of ‘schnorrings,’ 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 Country’ 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 their 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 fact 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.