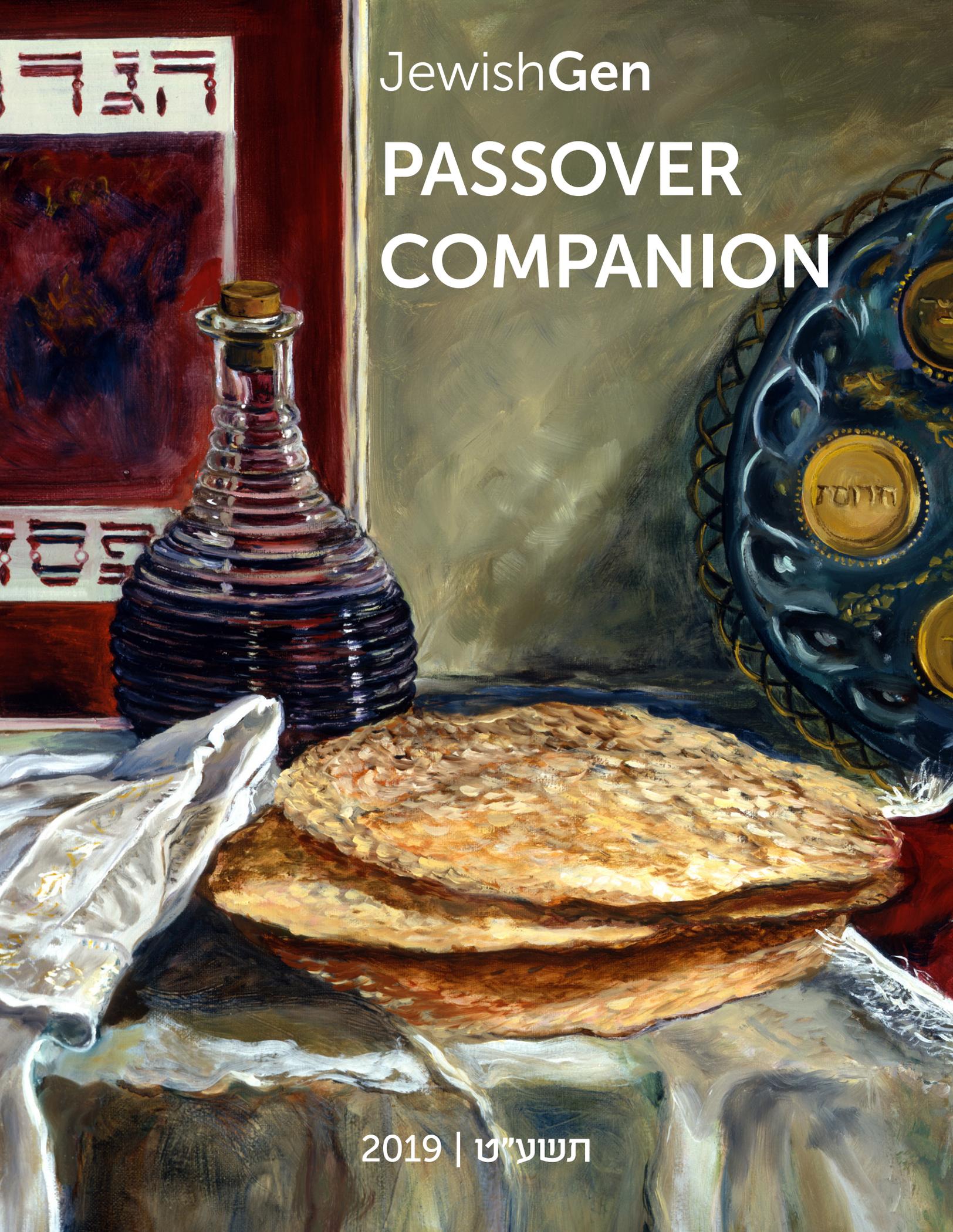


JewishGen

PASSOVER COMPANION



תשע"ט | 2019

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JewishGen

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TO THE HOLOCAUST

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Introduction

April 2019/Nissan 5779



Dear JewishGen Community,

The Haggadah instructs that in “every generation” each individual should feel that he or she was personally redeemed from Egypt. The story of the Exodus is not just about what happened to our ancestors. It is our story, too. But in order to understand how each of us can connect to this personal feeling of redemption, we need to consider where we came from, and what experiences we are a product of. It is necessary to explore how we fit within the continuum of the Jewish people, while recognizing our responsibilities to future generations.

The enemies of the Jewish people exist in every

generation, and our history has been marred by catastrophe, trials and tribulations – yet we are defined by perseverance, faith and hope in the future. As Michel (Mikhl) Radzinski wrote to his children and grandchildren in the Yizkor Book of Siemiatycze (a town located about 80 miles east of Warsaw):

..you who will read the story of my life, you must understand that the life of your fathers and grandfathers in the old-time shtetl was both holy and tragic. Shtetl-dwellers — shopkeepers and craftsmen — toiled day and night

and not seldom had to get by on dry bread and water. Houses were small and cramped and were often damp as well. The kitchen smoked and there were families with eight or nine children who lived in a single tiny house. They slept on the bare ground. And yet they lived and celebrated Sabbaths and holidays... The character of the Siemiatycze Jews reveals itself in their Sabbaths and holidays. The holiness of the Sabbath day placed its stamp on me, as it did on every Jewish child, for life; it formed my sensibility, my love of beauty and of nobility of spirit, my feeling for poetry and song... The beauty of the Seder night was boundless and it was celebrated with pure joy...

It is within this context that we present this year's JewishGen Passover Companion. It features an anthology of Passover related vignettes culled from Yizkor Books (memorial books published after the Holocaust), along with other material that JewishGen has translated into English. Each excerpt focuses on a different element of Passover in various communities, along with direct testimonies about the great effort

and personal risk (*Mesirat Nefesh*) Jews took to observe Passover during the Holocaust.

As you sit at the Seder table this Passover, and tell the story of the Exodus, we hope that this companion will have helped inspire you to uncover your own story as well, and to consider the role you will play in ensuring its transmission to the next generation. Finally, when reciting "we were once strangers in the land of Egypt" – take heed of the countless examples of kindness, faith, compassion, and hope, which are described within this Passover Companion. Let us remember that oppression still continues to this day, and that our mandate to show compassion for the "strangers," and downtrodden, applies both within our community, and to all mankind.

I would like to thank Lance Ackerfeld for coordinating the JewishGen Yizkor Book project, Joel Alpert for ensuring hard-copies are available to those who are interested, Nancy Siegel, Nolan Altman, Bruce Drake, Anne Vaccari and Karen Franklin for their assistance in compiling this Passover Companion, and to all of the JewishGen volunteers who help ensure that our Jewish history and heritage will never be forgotten.

Happy Passover and *Chag Kosher V'Sameach*.

Avraham Groll, Director
JewishGen.org

Youthful Preparations for Passover

Antopol, Belarus

The following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Antopol, Belarus, was written by Moshe Polak. Antopol had a long history of Jewish settlement and scholarship and many great Rabbis, including Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik (later of Yeshiva University), served the the community over time. In this piece, the author describes the youthful excitement that permeated the air leading up to the Passover holiday.

Antopol was in the Grodno province before WWI, and was in Poland between the wars. In 1900, there were 3,137 Jews living in the town, comprising a majority of the population. Located 46 miles from Brest, Antopol was annexed to the new Poland formed after WWI, and soon became a center of fighting between the Russians and Poles. The Russians took over Antopol toward the beginning of WWII, and held it until the Nazis overtook the town in June 1941. Under the Nazis, “the Jews of Antopol were persecuted, tortured, and imprisoned in a ghetto, but they did not surrender. They fought back, joined the partisans and took an active part in the underground.” In July 1944, the Red Army reconquered Antopol, but her Jews were no more. Thus came an end to more than three centuries of Jewish life in Antopol.

PASSOVER and the preparations for it involved a lot of cleaning. There was not a thing that was not taken out of the house for cleaning. All our clothing and bedding were cleaned and aired. All the closets and cabinets were swept and washed. Even the eating utensils used for all the year but not on Passover were completely cleaned before they were stored in the attic.

The preparations included cleaning the storage areas for the holiday, barrel for matsah, a closet with jams and cans of goose fat, and a big wooden mortar. Everything was cleaned and made kosher.

My father also would be busy outside the house. He would hurry to make ritually fit the mill to grind

flour of Gedyah in order to grind the wheat that had been watched not to leaven. Afterwards, there came in line the cleaning and fixing of the oven of Esther the baker. The very baking of matsah was done with mutual cooperation among all the relatives. It took each family about five hours and about three days for all of them. Mainly, girls did this, rolling the matsah before baking it. One or two boys would be enough to pass a wheel with teeth to punch holes in every matsah before its baking. Adults put the matsah in for baking and took it out.

After baking the matsah and preparing the house, I would bring a sack of shaved wood to spread on the floor. Afterwards, I would rush to polish all the copper pots, baking, and eating utensils. Mainly on

the afternoon of the day before the Passover seder, I would rush to the study hall to put in some places crumbs for the ceremony of the taking out of the leaven. And after the evening prayer of the evening on the day before Passover, I would go with my father,



Yeshiva Students from Antopol

and with the aid of a burning candle, we would search out the crumbs so that we could recite the blessing of taking out the leaven and then burn the leaven.

I would buy the haroset (the mixture of fruits, spices, and wine) from the rabbi R. Hersh. I would dig in the garden of Tikhan for a radish to make the bitter herb. I would buy wine from Yosel Shemuel Riles for the study hall. And afterwards, I would help my father to completely clean the study hall in honor of Passover. After that, we would run to town to see that the eruv (symbolic enclosure) was complete and finally go to the bathhouse to get a bath in honor of Passover.

Generally, we children would play games in the synagogue with nuts. However, it happened that my father took me and set me on a bench on the platform (where the Torah is read) and would watch me so that I would not get dirty. And truly when I came home

clean and sat by the table, I had complete pleasure.

Father dressed in his white robe with a white skull cap and sat at the table at the set place on the east side. The matsah made of watched unleavened grain made into flour was covered with a tablecloth embroidered in honor of Passover. The wine cups were put by each person (in the appropriate size) according to his age and the cup of Elijah was in the middle of the table near father. It was set next to the colorful plate with the chicken wing, egg, bitter

herb, lettuce, and the mixture of fruit, nuts, spices and wine. The wine and the mead were produced at home and served in antique glass cups. The Passover Haggadahs were also early editions and illustrated on every topic.

After father made the blessing over the wine with the festive sanctification, we went on with the Seder itself. As I was the youngest child, understandably, I asked the Four Questions. And afterwards when they continued reading the haggadah, I mainly slept until food was served. I heard the last song "*Had Gadya*" while in my sleep...

To learn more about the Jews of Antopol, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Antopol-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Antopol-Y>

KehilaLinks: There is no KehilaLinks page for this town. To create one, please visit: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>

A Tale About a Deserter from the Passover Fund

Bender, Moldova

The following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Bender, Moldova, was written by David Weiser. Located 31 miles away from Kishinev, this major Jewish community had more than 10,000 Jews in 1900. Prior to WWII, the town had 18 synagogues, a Jewish hospital, a seniors residence, several schools, kindergarten classes, a Talmud Torah and a Hebrew High School.

In 1941, when the Nazis invaded Russia, thousands of Jews were able to escape deep into Russia, and many Jews from Bender were among them. According to Rabbi Shmuel Bronfman, who studied in Beit Midrash of Bender prior to the Shoah and also served as a rabbi there between 1945-1960, the Jews of Bender were more fortunate than others in that it was easier for them to escape, but there were still several hundred victims of Nazi persecution.



Rabbi Israel Bronfman with his family (rabbi, ritual slaughterer 1945–1960) in his backyard on Potshtovaya Street

OUR town was blessed with the publication of two newspapers that honestly reflected life in our community and in the Jewish Diaspora. These were: Bessarabski Telegraph (Bessarabia Telegraph) and Yuzni Krai (Southern Corner). There was a reporter who wrote under the name of “Yurick.” He was a sharp guy, a good listener with penetrating eyes. He was aware of all that was near and far and knew about different peoples and various languages. Nothing escaped his attention and we tell a story about him:

On the eve of Passover the community leaders levied a tax on the wealthier members to help needier members. It was *Maot Hitin* (*kamkha depaskha*).

One of the influential members of our town,

Anonymous (I deliberately do not mention his name since he passed away many years ago), refused to donate saying: “The amount I was ordered to pay is slightly exaggerated.” These words reached Yurick and he wrote a scathing article denouncing Anonymous. At the end he added “It is easier to put Mr. Kradonsky, owner of the cinema “Decadence” through the eye of a needle than to receive a donation from him.”

The matter was settled in a positive way. Kradonsky complained that he was not as heavy and large as described by Yurick. He said he only weighed about 150 kgs.

To learn more about the Jews of Bender, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Bender-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Bender-Y>

KehilaLinks: <http://tinyurl.com/Bender-K>

The Brisker Rebbetzin: Sara Diskin and Her Zeal for Pesach

Brest, Belarus

The name of the town, Brest, is known in Yiddish as “Brisk” to the Jews who lived and thrived there for six centuries. Jewish “Brisk” had an illustrious history; the famous Brisker Yeshivah attracted scholars from all over Europe. The list of Rabbis of Brisk includes Rabbi Solomon Luria, Rabbi Joel Sirkes, the Katzenellenbogens, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin (Maharil Diskin), and three generations of the Soloveitchik dynasty, among many others. Brisk also produced Menachem Begin (the 6th Prime Minister of Israel), Jacob Epstein (an important Talmudist at Hebrew University), and many other major religious, literary and political leaders.

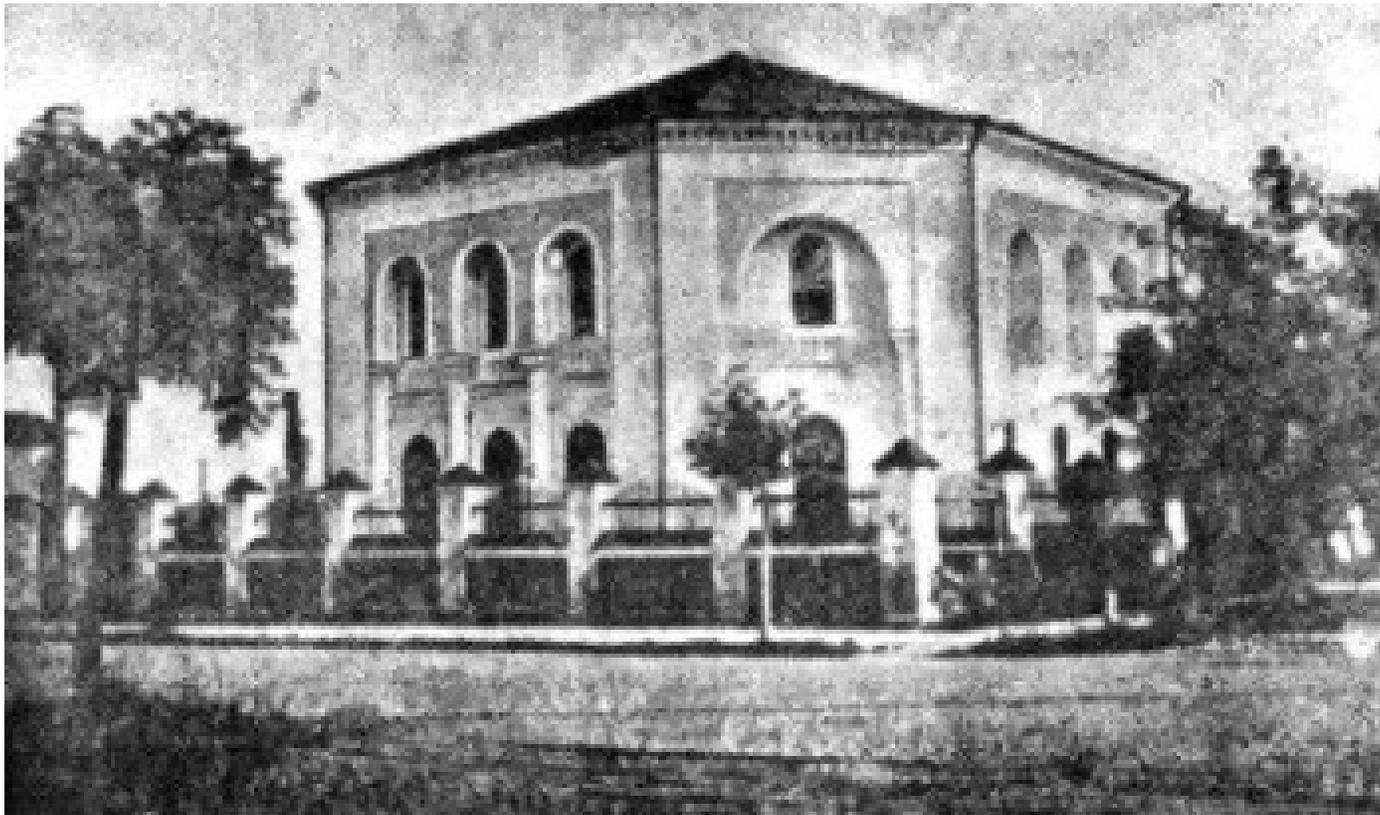
The following partial excerpt, written by Menachem Berisha, focuses on Sarah Diskin, who was the second wife of Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin. She herself came from a prestigious rabbinical family. Her scholarship, strong-mind, and determination, earned her admiration by many, and led her to be known simply as the “Brisker Rebbetzin.”

RABBI J.L. Diskin’s second wife Sarah was famed as the Brisker Rebbetzin. She was learned and knowledgeable in all the laws. She was very strict in the matter of orthodoxy and mixed into all the community affairs. She had a very strong mind; she came from a very prestigious family – she was the granddaughter of the rabbi “Nodah BeYehudah” – and she also came from the wealthy family of Joshua Zeitlin. When she married Joshua Diskin she brought with her a sum of 40,000 rubles (a huge amount in those days), with which they built the J.L. Diskin Orphanage in Jerusalem.

Although she had very strong opinions, she was very

knowledgeable in the laws of what was forbidden and what was permitted – she would even at times give her opinion in front of her husband the rabbi. And it would happen that she sometimes disagreed with her husband’s rulings. Joshua Lieb’s method was to try and make things easier for people – the Rebbetzin was far stricter.

Once, on the eve of Passover, a Jew came and asked a question – a kernel of corn had fallen into the soup.... Rabbi Diskin considered and decided that the soup remained kosher for Passover. When his wife the Rebbetzin heard this, she jumped into the conversation and said: “Although I’m not allowed to



The Great Synagogue

give my opinion in front of my husband the rabbi, if we should follow Rabbi Diskin's verdict, then God forbid, the whole city would eat Chometz during Passover!"

After the writing of the marriage contract, she said to her husband the groom Joshua Leib: "Mazal Tov! Don't take your bride's blessing lightly..."

On the eve of Passover, she would even scour the door handles, afraid that there was a residue of Chometz on them. It was said that she was responsible for the majority of disputes and fights between the Neturei Carta and the leaders of the new Zionist settlements.

She passed away in Jerusalem in 1907, and was accorded much honor after her death.

To learn more about the Jews of Brest-Litovsk, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Brisk-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Brisk-Yizkor>

KehilaLinks: <http://tinyurl.com/Brisk-K>

The Potato Raffle

Brody, Ukraine

Known as the “Jerusalem of Galicia,” Brody had a Jewish presence extending more than four centuries. It was known as a center for Torah scholarship, the Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) movement, cultural programs and activities. It is reported that the founder of Hasidism, Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer (Baal Shem Tov), spent time in Brody in his early 20’s. During its peak in the 18th century, Brody was considered to have one of the largest Jewish communities (in proportion to its general population) in Eastern Europe. The following excerpt, which describes the steps taken to help Brody citizens with Passover related provisions, was authored by Mrs. Adele Mises around 1929.

Brody is located 54 miles from Lviv, and 42 miles from Ternopil (Tarnopol). Prior to WWI, the town was in Austrian Galicia, and then part of Poland, between the wars. In 1880, more than 15,000 Jews were recorded as living in the town, while in 1910 that number dropped to a little less than 13,000. In 1943 the remaining Jews of Brody who still lived in the town were deported to extermination camps. By the time the town was liberated by the Russian Red Army on July 7, 1944, there were very few Jews left who had survived and would return to the town. In 1948, the Soviet Union published a booklet commemorating the 900th anniversary of Brody’s establishment, yet with barely a mention of Brody’s Jewish history. Readers would have been hard-pressed to know that Jews had ever lived in the town at all. Jewish Brody was no more.

ONE of the most important charities in our native city was a drive quite incorrectly known as the “potato raffle.” Weeks before Pesach, the town was seized by feverish excitement. First of all, tickets or “chances” had to be produced: slips of paper with an imprint I no longer remember, plus the year and a number. Since each ticket cost only 20 Kreuzer, huge amounts of raffle tickets had to be sold to achieve a halfway decent return. Tickets were sold not just in Brody but all over the world. Wherever Brody people lived, even if they had emigrated decades ago, in Lemberg,

Vienna, Leipzig, Hamburg, London, etc., the familiar little papers would flutter down, to be received and bought willingly. We too, even after a long residence in Vienna, still received a great many of those tickets, to be followed a few weeks later by the monstrosities which we had won.

After the tickets came the roundup of prize donations. At first, they were supposed to be “products of female skills.” But people become lazy after a while and began to donate other objects, especially faferkes, miniatures made of porcelain, inkwells, ash trays,



Ukrainians from Brody, and the Jews they hid during the Shoah.

figurines — and of course not those charming Meissen dolls found in many homes as souvenirs from the Leipzig Fair, nor products of the Vienna Manufacture, but rather awful junk of unknown origin.

Yet even the handmade prizes displayed a truly grandiose lack of taste. I, too, have them on my conscience; as, for example, a paper lampshade depicting a ghastly bird with a glass eye, which I had ordered from Lemberg. This prize object found its way back to Lemberg. My brother-in-law Max, who had been present at the purchase of the eye, kept teasing me about it for many years.

Another time I donated green curtain tassels, which I had wound artistically around a thick pencil and which also looked quite hideous. The guilty party in all those crimes was our handicrafts teacher, the wife of dear Mr. Löwisohn, who combined outstanding technical skills with a catastrophic absence of taste. Unfortunately, only the latter was passed on to her pupils.

The result of all this was that most of the lucky winners donated their prizes in the following year so that the same objects appeared as prizes year after

year. As another result, when old Brodyers come face to face with something particularly tasteless, they're apt to exclaim: "Aha! The potato Raffle!"

Now, when all those lovely things had been assembled, a house had to be selected for the drawing of the Raffle. This was an important social event, which took place in the home of one of the committee members, including our house on one occasion. The last drawing

I remember was in the

home of Dwoirale (Deborah) Minz, the grandmother of my present-day family physician. Mrs. Minz was socially very ambitious and her display accordingly ostentatious. At the head of the tables loaded with prizes stood two urns, from which two festively dressed children had to pick the rolled up tickets and hand them to Mrs. Minz. She was very excited, her face was purple, her spectacles were crooked and her announcements were garbled: "Number 2300! And the winner is . . . number 12!" We couldn't stop laughing, but she noticed nothing because she was so excited!

But of course, all that was intended for a good purpose: to provide potatoes for poor people, whose Pesach meal consisted of little else other than matzoh. In the weeks before Pesach families received 1/8, 1/4/ or 1/2 Koretz (*korzec*, a Polish measure) of potatoes, depending on the size of the family. A few days before Pesach the potatoes were unloaded in warehouses and then the distribution could begin.

Here again, the children were enlisted. Of course, only the girls; the boys couldn't miss school and their mothers were busy in the kitchen. Barricaded

behind massive tables in the entrance of the warehouse, we would receive the vouchers and announce the proper amounts to the “carriers.” Occasionally, there’d be trouble. Some recipients might feel discriminated



Brody Ghetto during the Holocaust

against or question our ability to read; perhaps it should have been 1/4 and not 1/8? By and large, though, it went smoothly; the people were grateful and they rather liked us. I can remember only one unpleasant incident. In a time of steeply rising prices, bread that had been rolled rather than kneaded was made available at cost. With my two girl friends, Mathilda (later my sister-in-law) and Sophie (later Strisower), I sat in front of the store when a bunch of sinister fellows attempted to storm the place and steal the bread. The hefty carriers standing behind us quickly restored order; only we were a little bit scared.

During another time of shortages, my dear father instituted the distribution of so-called “Rumford

soups.” Much later, in Vienna, I came across a recipe for those soups which he must have obtained somewhere in Germany. The ingredients were barley, peas, beans, potatoes, etc. cooked in a big kettle out-of-doors.

Once there was an accident; the thermometer attached to the kettle broke, the mercury ran into the soup, which had to be discarded, setting up a big outcry among the hungry people. I also learned to distinguish between a shortage and a famine. According to Jewish law, it is permissible to eat rice and beans on Pesach in times of famine. One time, when prices were extremely high, the town council of Brody wanted to take advantage of that law to feed the poor. A rabbi was consulted, who refused to give his permission. A famine, he explained, exists only when no food at all is available at any price. But if the food was just more expensive it would be wrong to replace it with unlawful products just because they were cheaper.

To learn more about the Jews of Brody please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Brody-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Brody-Y>

KehilaLinks Page: <http://tinyurl.com/Brody-K>

Maot Chitim (Money Given to the Poor to Buy Matzah for Passover)

Brichany, Moldova

Evidence of Jewish settlement in Brichany, Moldova (which was in Romania between the wars), dates back to 1760, when Jews were invited by local estate owners to settle there and participate in the town's economic development. Over time, the Jewish community would represent the overwhelming population of the town. In 1897, the 7,184 Jews of Brichany represented 96.5% of the overall population. In 1930, Jews still represented 95.2% of the population, and by 1940, more than 10,000 Jews were recorded as living in the town. After the Shoah, approximately 1,000 Brichany Jews returned, and tried to once again create a Jewish way of life. A local priest returned Torah scrolls which he had hidden in his attic during the War. Soon, daily prayers resumed in the Synagogue. The Jews of Brichany lived on. As of 2004, there are still more than 50 Jews who live in the town.

The following excerpt was written by Shloime Lerner, and includes a discussion about efforts to raise funds for Maot Chitim (charity for the poor who could not afford to purchase matzoh and other Passover provisions). However, it was not always simple. One time, in an effort to save time, costs, and resources, there was a discussion about using machine-made matzos, which were said to have been “miraculously wondrous, better, tastier, more hygienic, and more flavorful than the conventional matzos that were rolled and kneaded by hand.” That would solve a host of problems, not the least of which was easing the burden of those who otherwise had to work “12–14 hours and then around the clock for four weeks.” But it had its complications too: How to get the approval of the rabbis? This piece includes Shloime Lerner's take on the issue, along with a comment from Yakov Amitzur, which was appended to the original article.

AROUND Chanukah time, the businessmen began busying themselves with “*Maos Khitim*” [“Wheat Money”]. At that time, the Rav, Reb Yisroel'nyu Mezhbizher, a great grandson of the Baal Shem, of blessed memory,* would come down to Britshan. The tradition was that he would bless a golden ring [coin]

(15 ruble) and then present it to the community. They would display it, and then the children would have the job of dispensing (selling) the raffle tickets [for it]: The mood had developed for the beginnings of *Maos Khitim*. Additionally, the businessmen set up a committee to collect money for the same cause.

I remember an episode that is very typical of the time, and it is worth telling.

Among the members of the committee was Dr. Fajnberg. A very dear Jew, even though a little assimilated. He was an administrator at the Jewish hospital. He was a good Zionist, and was even a delegate at the second or third Basel congress.



The Old Talmud Torah of Brichany, established in 1826.

He was a good doctor whose practice had a fine reputation, but he could still not get a position in a Zemski hospital [public hospital] because he was a Jew. A fine man by nature, a golden heart, but a very particular person. So, there was a story:

When Dr. Fajnberg had to go to town to collect money for *Maos Khitim*, Yosi Phinjes lent him a wagon and wagon driver, Khaim “Zawarukhe” [“storm”], a small, skinny little Jew, who was a coachman for the wealthy wagon drivers and was promoted to be a wagon driver for Yosi Phinjes.

Khaim Zawarukhe was a very poor man with the burdens of a large family, and in addition, had a terrible temper (therefore his added name of Zawarukhe). If Khaim would get angry, he would rant like a lowlife. As he left with Dr. Fajnberg one cold, frosty day, the doctor delayed somewhere for a long time. Khaim was sitting on the coach-box completely frozen, and murder was boiling inside him.

When Dr. Fajnberg came back out, Khaim gave him an earful and poured out his whole dark heart. Dr. Fajnberg, as it was said, was also a person with a temper, easily angered, did not offer excuses, but lifted up his hand and gave Khaim a resounding smack...

Understandably, Khaim sobbed, and asked: “Why are you hitting me?”

Dr. Fajnberg caught himself, and realized he had done an ugly piece of work, and soon showed compassion for the poor coachman.

“Khaim, does it hurt you, Khaim?” the doctor asked. Khaim mustered some energy, and poured out his package of problems, that he was a poor man, that he had a house full of young children, and so on.

“Do you have a house, Khaim?” Dr. Fajnberg asked. “What do I have... I have nothing... I wander around the neighborhoods,” Khaim said and he sobbed. “So, that’s good,” said Dr. Fajnberg. “Here’s a hundred, and go buy yourself a small house. I’m sorry, Khaim,

but I was upset, so I raised my hand. Forgive me, Khaim.” And Khaim Zavarukhe bought himself a small house with a straw roof, not far from the small river, behind the baths, opposite the tombstone makers.

These were our Jews!

When the Russian–Japanese War broke out, at the end of 1903, Dr. Fajenberg was called up to military service. His big Jewish heart that bled for each Jew, and for all Jews in general, did not survive, and in Khotin, in Dr. Klopstok’s home, Dr. Fajenberg had a heart attack and died on the spot. By chance, here in Buenos Aires, I met his son who had run away from the Bolsheviks.

And again there was *Maos Khitim*. – The city grew, and with it the number of poor, and among them, as usual, the ordinary beggars. The collections were not sufficient, and the need to create a more secure fund for *Maos Khitim* grew. My father, may he rest in peace, and his friends thought of building an oven (they did not yet know about building factories) to bake matzos made by machine [meaning, not handmade, as was the custom].

In town, they discussed how machine made matzos are miraculously wondrous, better, tastier, more hygienic, and more flavorful than the conventional matzos that were rolled and kneaded by hand. But how do you build it?

First you need capital to construct the building, set up the appropriate ovens, and then install the machines and other utensils. Other than that, they have to think of the workers issue, which is very important and complicated.

In Britshah, already before Purim until the actual eve of Passover, 20–25 ovens were being used; these were especially used only for baking matzos. There were [hired for this], God forbid, no bakers, no craftsmen with baking skills, only poor Jews who worked all year at all kinds of other jobs, and they [still] didn’t have enough to make Passover, and besides, one has to

give a child a pair of shoes, clothing, occasionally buy some utensils for the house, and so on.

There were also those types of houses that had special ovens, and where the man was an expert in shuffling (putting in and taking out the matzos from the oven), the wife was an expert at kneading, the children – one a water–carrying young boy, another a matzo “reidler” [the one who makes the holes in the matzo], and they worked smartly for weeks at a time, became blackened, just so as to somewhat guide fate, and celebrate the holiday with the correct directives.

And where should the tens of wives, young women, and girls who kneaded the matzos be? So, a difficult problem. A committee was set up of societal community activists, who thought about this and studied all the problems, and finally, they concluded with a plan.

The committee summoned all the Jews who were involved with baking matzos. They put forth that all the specialists and their staff would have to go into the new matzo bakery. The advantage: Instead of everyone working 12–14 hours and then around the clock for four weeks, he would only work eight hours a day and he would be guaranteed the former earnings. But that wasn’t all. They still had to resolve the “legal” question, meaning the religious people should not have any complaints about the matzo not being kosher, God forbid.

They had to get the approval of the rabbis, and here our three rabbis put up resistance, saying that they could not give their approval for machine matzos...

What’s the problem? Our rabbis were afraid that they would lose their earnings from the income that they used to receive for making the ovens kosher. But they were reassured of the opposite: In the place of 20–25 ovens they would have only to make kosher and keep watch over one single oven and yet they would receive the same earnings. The logic was for naught. They did not give in. There is no mention of machine matzos in the Code of Jewish Law...



Pupils of the Old Talmud Torah

So, we would have to get the endorsement of a great rabbi, a well-known certifier, whom other rabbis would acknowledge and accept as well. We sent off a letter to a rabbi, drafted by my father, may he rest in peace, to Reb Alter Konstantiner, a rabbinic personality renowned for his knowledge in Jewish law, and we soon received a reply that machine matzos were kosher to the highest degree of observance [“kosher le’mehadrin min hamehadrin”].

Now, our rabbis had to consent. And money? Where to obtain capital?

For that, a dear Jew came forward, Borukh Mottel’s. It’s worthwhile to pause for a moment and talk about this person’s deep devotion and loyalty to meet the needs of the community, with good faith, this Reb Borukh Mottel’s (I don’t remember his family name). He was a Torah scholar, a fine student, and an intelligent, well thought out person, and on top of that, a practical, wealthy businessman. He dressed, however, not like a cosmopolitan, modern Jew, such as he unquestionably was.

He stands before my eyes with his fair-colored beard, God forbid not trimmed, with a large “talis

kattan” [“small prayer shawl” or four-cornered garment], with the tassels hanging out from under his warm waistcoat, wearing a long frock, and with his curled sidelocks. Disregarding his mode of dress, he was a fine Maskil.

His large home stood between Berel Broide’s and Shloime’le

Akselrod’s homes. In his youth, he was a melamed [teacher of religious studies], then later went into business, which was really not commonplace in our area.

He moved to Austria on the Caspian Sea, and there provided the entire region with salted, dried fish, fat, and other products. His manager was Shmuel Mintze-Laya’s, a dear Jew, a friend of my father. Borukh Mottel’s would leave Britshnan just after Passover and not return until Chanukah. As it is told, Borukh Mottel’s was one of the first members of the committee to set up a new oven to bake machine matzos.

The first thing he did was to buy 600 sacks of flour from Boris Bernstajn, thinking that the price of flour before Passover would increase. And really, in that year, the price of flour did rise one ruble per sack.

There was no appropriate building for the planned factory in the city, so it was decided to build a special wooden building. Yosi Phinyes pledged to donate all the wood for the building. Shloime Yoir’s, an energetic grain merchant, took upon himself the administrative portion of the huge project. A whole



group of younger and middle-aged devoted community activists threw themselves into the job. Understandably, not for any particular reward.

From that time on, Britshani made a profit from making machine matzos for Passover. The poor were taken care of, not only with matzos, but also with the four cups of wine, eggs, fat, and so on. The factory provided for everyone.

The following note was written by Yakov Amitzur, and appended to the original article: In writing that “Our rabbis were concerned that they would forfeit their earnings,” Shloime Lerner makes a great error. It’s possible that the Maskilim of the time actually thought that, and maybe they simply made that remark in order to rile up the rabbis.

When I grew up, I read all the correspondence of my father, Reb Hershele, of blessed memory, that he had with great rabbis in Russia about many issues, and among them was the issue of machine-made matzos, and the picture actually looks very different.

There were three rabbis in Britshani at that time: Reb Yudele (Rabinowycz), Reb Daniel (Finkensohn), and my father Reb Hershele, of blessed memory.

In this question [of the machine-made matzos], the thinking was divided among the three. Reb Daniel was perplexed, and Reb Yudele, who was very careful about Jewish law, literally stirred up worlds, and in no way gave permission. Therefore, we had to turn to greater rabbis (not only to Reb Alter Konstantiner) in order to get their endorsement. But whoever knew Reb Yudele, knew how far he was from the material world (they said of him that he had no interest in anything financial). How wrong it is to write about him in the context of profits...

To learn more about the Jews of Brichani, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Brichany-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Brichany-Y>

KehilaLinks Page: <http://tinyurl.com/Brichany-K>

An Unforgettable Erev Pesach

Rietavas, Lithuania

“Holidays were given to man in order that he should be with himself, with his thoughts and with his people,” writes Rabbi Aharon Ben-Zion Shurin, author of the following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Rietavas, Lithuania. The remembrance of Passover in Rietavas tells of the ritual and celebration of the holiday, but also includes an “unforgettable” Passover eve when the community was thrown into “fear and panic” because of an event very similar to the one that led to the 1905 pogroms in Kishinev, Moldavia. A gentile boy went missing and Jews faced a “blood libel” — that the blood of the lost child had been used for the baking of their matzo. Through a “miracle,” the boy was found and tragedy averted and the community could go on to celebrate Lag Ba’Omer and then Shavout which “carried the true grace of the awakening of nature” when “the earth would grow flowers and grass. The trees would blossom and the birds would sing.”

The first known record of Jewish life in Rietavas, which is located 21 miles from Telz, dates to 1662, when 421 Jews were said to have lived in the town. By 1897, the Jewish community comprised 1,397 people, representing 80% of the overall population. When the Nazis invaded, they committed horrific atrocities, some of which are documented in the Yizkor book. By the time the war ended, only 30 Jews had survived.

MY hometown Rietavas, in what was then Jewish Lithuania, no longer exists. It was destroyed in the Nazi Holocaust, suffering the same fate as so many other Jewish communities of blessed memory. The only indication of its past Jewish life is the cemetery.

From time to time, especially on the eve of festivals, youthful memories of both joyous and sad events are evoked. I remember an event of 40 years ago, which threw the community into fear and panic. An unjustified accusation of a blood libel was levelled at

the community when a young gentile boy suddenly disappeared. It happened on the eve of Passover and if I’m not mistaken in 1925 or 1926. It was well before my Bar mitzvah, but the events remain vividly in my memory. I remember clearly the fear and panic of the community as rumors and threats against the Jews were being spread by the local gentiles, in the event of the boy not being found before the festival. The issue was clear to them: a classic case of the blood libel, when it was alleged that Jews were unable to celebrate the Seder without the blood of the lost child for the



A postcard of Rietavas, probably from the early 1930s, giving some idea of the countryside

baking of their matzot and the making of their wine. In short, all that was needed was for the priest to give the word to attack and kill the Jews of Rietavas.

This is what actually happened.

Two weeks before Pesach on the regular market day on Wednesday, hundreds of peasants gathered from the surrounding villages to sell their wares to the local population in the Rietavas marketplace. Due to the approaching festival of Pesach, the market was larger than usual. One of the peasants among the crowd had brought his young son, probably to show him the sights of the beautiful Jewish town and the Catholic church overlooking the marketplace. In the commotion of trading, the father did not notice his son's disappearance.

As night fell and he was preparing to depart, he saw that his 'pride and joy' was not there. After much searching, rumors began to fly around. Seeing that Passover was close, who knew what could have befallen the boy at the hands of the Jews? The peasants put two and two together, and for them, there could only be one explanation... Attempts were

made to placate the anxious father with suggestions that the boy had probably gone home on his own, since there was no knowing what boys get up to! The father accepted this suggestion, since relations between Jews and gentiles in Rietavas had been good for generations and no such event had ever been heard of before. However,

the next day the youngster was still missing and, in spite of intensive searching by both the Jews and gentiles of Rietavas, the child could still not be found. The matter was reported in the local newspaper, but which peasant could read a newspaper? There was no response.

In Rietavas, there was a so-called 'intellectual' who was a known anti-Semite. He began to threaten that if the boy was not found all the Jews would be killed. He began a campaign of incitement, warning my father (Rabbi Moshe Shurin) that he himself would gather the important Jews of the town, lay them out and cut off their heads with a scythe as revenge for the blood of the boy. The atmosphere in the town assumed the character more of Tisha B'Av than the festival of Passover. The Jews were becoming more and more alarmed every minute, while he, the anti-Semite, was preparing, in his fanatical, bloodthirsty rage, for his great moment.

The Jews did their utmost to avert the disaster. They pleaded with the priest, they begged the police and sent emissaries to high places, but to no avail, for where was the child? The question remained

unanswered and they were at their wits' end.

In the first few days, there were rumors that the child had been seen here and there. However, the community was already anticipating a bitter outcome, rather than a joyous festival. Their anguish grew day by day and no amount of pleading with the authorities could avert their evil fate. But Jews are a people who trust in miracles and they awaited a miracle to save them. And indeed, a week later, one occurred.

I remember the great joy when it was discovered that the boy was safe and sound. He was found in a remote village by a Rietavas youth who was completely unaware that the threat of a blood libel was hanging over his hometown. It so happened that the young man, Leibe Itzik Maze by name, who is to this day living in Cape Town, South Africa (Louis Maze), being a peddler by occupation, had come across a strange face in a small village whose inhabitants he knew well. He had not heard that there was a search for the young lad. since no newspapers reached these remote parts. On his return home, he became aware of the very serious situation due to the boy's disappearance and the fate awaiting the Jewish community. Suddenly it struck him that he had seen a boy answering to this



The synagogue and the shul (Beit Midrash) at Rietavas

description in the remote village.

In no time horses and carts were made ready and Leibe Itzik directed them to the village, where the boy was found. When questioned as to why he had disappeared on that market day, he replied that he felt like working away from home. Thus a thoughtless act...almost brought calamity to a whole community.

That Passover, not only was the Exodus from Egypt the cause for celebration, but also the miracle brought about by a local Jew named Leibe Itzik Maze.

To learn more about the Jews of Rietavas, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Rietavas-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Rietavas-Y>

Kehila Links page: <http://tinyurl.com/Rietavas-K>

Passover in Siemiatycze

Siemiatycze, Poland

“Passover was not an easy holiday and it took a lot of work to ready the home for it,” writes Michel (Mikhl) Radzinski, the author of the following excerpt from one of the Yizkor Books of Siemiatycze, which is located about 80 miles east of Warsaw.

As it was in many communities, daily life was not easy in Siemiatycze and did not provide the physical comforts that so many now take for granted. And yet, life was marked by joy as well. As the author wrote to his family: “yes, my children and grandchildren, you who will read the story of my life, you must understand that the life of your fathers and grandfathers in the old-time shtetl was both holy and tragic. Shtetl-dwellers — shopkeepers and craftsmen — toiled day and night and not seldom had to get by on dry bread and water. Houses were small and cramped and were often damp as well. The kitchen smoked and there were families with eight or nine children who lived in a single tiny house. They slept on the bare ground. And yet they lived and celebrated Sabbaths and holidays. The proverb says: ‘If you want to know a people, go and see how it celebrates the Sabbath and holidays.’ The character of the Semyatitsh Jews reveals itself in their Sabbaths and holidays. The holiness of the Sabbath day placed its stamp on me, as it did on every Jewish child, for life; it formed my sensibility, my love of beauty and of nobility of spirit, my feeling for poetry and song.”

The following piece recounts the meticulousness that was required in getting ready for the holiday of Passover. Jews in the town began studying the laws governing the holiday a month in advance before launching into the “battle against leaven” which involved the thorough cleaning of utensils and the house. And after all the preparation, it culminated in a magnificent shared experience: “The beauty of the seyder-night was boundless and it was celebrated with pure joy.”

PASSOVER preparations took place long before the holiday arrived. Actually, as early as the preceding summer fruit season, wine and jam were prepared. During Hanukka, the geese which had grazed all winter were slaughtered and the fat was rendered to be saved for Passover. Right after the New Year's Day for Trees (*Tu B'Shvat*), people began to worry that the mill be kosher and began to get ready the utensils for baking the Passover unleavened bread (*matses*, 'matzas'). Nowadays there are factories for baking unleavened bread, but in those days the Jews in the towns and villages had to provide for themselves, often each group baking its own matzas.

The Jews of Semyatitsh took pains not to eat any unleavened bread that did not come from a bakery which was kosher for Passover. Matza-baking (*dos baken matses*) remains in my memory, since as a child I often helped out in preparing the unleavened bread for baking. Specially filtered water had to be readied, and the water for the matzas had to be Mayim Shelanu (water which had been kept overnight in our home). We therefore had to remember to draw water from the well a day earlier, at night.

Passover was not an easy holiday and it took a lot of work to ready the home for it. We began studying the relevant laws a month before Passover; the battle against leaven (*khomets*) had begun. More than any other holiday, Passover is governed by dietary laws (*kashres*). The last days before Passover all homes in Semyatitsh were busy cleaning and koshering.



The Cover of the Yizkor Book published in 1965

The house was cleaned, the utensils were made kosher, and the main effort was to destroy the leaven. After everything had been cleaned and cleared in the last days before the holiday, on the night before the eve of the holiday Father fulfilled the commandment of Searching for the Leaven (*bedikes-khomets*). The war against the leaven didn't end there. The following morning, after eating the last meal that contained leaven, the commandment to burn the leaven was carried out with great solemnity. Householders and youngsters used to gather in an open space

and there burn the leaven.

When I studied at the yeshiva in Sokolov, I was introduced to ethical works (*muser-sforim*) which mention the leaven of the heart, lust and the inclination to evil. That is the secret — so teach the Kabbalists — of burning the base instincts. Jews must approach the holiday of freedom not only with scoured utensils but with cleansed and purified hearts. Our parents were far from being such impractical and idle people (*batlonim*) as a lot of “enlightened” (*oyfgekleyrte*) persons, who had broken with orthodox Judaism (*frumer yidishkayt*), used to like to think in order to mock tradition. They failed to see the deep purposes and truths hidden in all these old customs, ceremonies and traditions.

The night of the seyder in particular brings Passover to my mind. On that night Father was king and Mother was queen. As I grew older, the queen image of Mother on the night of the seyder revealed itself

more sharply. The beauty of the seyder-night was boundless and it was celebrated with pure joy. On that night you left your daily routine and became immersed in ancient Jewish history, in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, with the great dream of deliverance.

I was strongly taken by the figure of Elijah the Prophet (*elyo'hu hano'vi*), for whom the door of the house was opened at reciting the passage that began, "Pour out your anger..." (*shfoykh khamosekho*). I see our home vividly before my eyes, the candles in the candlestick burning with holiday brightness, the swinging lamp (*henglomp*) over the festively set table, Father at the head of the table in a white linen robe (*kital*) and behind his back, on both sides, the reclining couch (*heseyv-bet*) of two large cushions. Father sat leaning (*ongeshpart*), nestled in an expanse of softness, and one could sense how great were his pleasure and his pride (*nakhes*) in his wife and children.

The great enjoyment of a Jewish king on the seyder night is to sit in a reclining position (*zitsn mesubin*) on soft white cushions. Mother, although she did not sit leaning on cushions, nonetheless glowed like a true queen. She sat relaxed and beaming, taking in with her kind eyes the entire table and the faces of all the family. Unfortunately, she was not lucky enough to

enjoy for long the children she so loved. I was eleven years old when Mother became ill and died.

The seyder-night was marked in every Jewish home in Semyatish. No matter how small and how poor a family was, it conducted its own seyder at its own table. This is what made everyone feel a part of world Jewry. On the same night all Jews celebrated the holiday of deliverance and held a seyder as a religious service. It is important that we remind ourselves from time to time how our parents prepared for Passover, Father with his devotion to the Passover ceremony, Mother with her outstretched arms, her radiance, her warmth over the seyder. Like a lovely queen she warmed everyone with her glow, a true Jewish queen whose power lay in her goodness.

True, good food and wine were served at the seyder table, but most important were the Haggada (*hagode*) and the hymns and rituals connected to it. The solemnity of the seyder began with the questions of the youngest in the family: "Why is this night different from all other nights of the year?" Father's reply and the tune in which he began to read the Haggada's description of the dramatic course of Jewish history made you feel you were taking part in the great drama of deliverance.

To learn more about the Jews of Siemiatycze, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Siemiatycze-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Siemiatycze-Y>

KehilaLinks: There is no KehilaLinks page for this town. To create one, please visit: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>

Drinks and Matzos for Passover

Dusetos (Dusiat), Lithuania

This short passage from the Yizkor Book of Dusetos in Lithuania is narrated by several people who share their reminiscences of the holiday. One memory was of the “King of the Matzos” whose intensity at his craft left the young children who volunteered to help him “afraid to breathe a word” as he did his work. The Passover table was set with plates “fit for royalty” and, for the holiday, “the absolute greatest joy was when everyone got new clothes.”

Dusetos is located in northeastern Lithuania, near the Duseta River, from which the town got its name. It is thought that the earliest Jewish settlement in the town dates back to 1530. By 1847, there were 486 Jews in the town. Because of various fires that took place over the course of many years, Dusetos saw many of its residents constantly on the move, but before the Shoah, there were still approximately 90-100 Jewish families living in the town. On August 26, 1941, (3 Elul, 5701) all of the Jews — men, women and children — were marched to the nearby Deguciai Forests, where they were murdered together with the Jews of Zarasai and surrounding communities. The last Rabbi of Dusetos, Rabbi Tuvia-Dov Schlezinger, was among those who were murdered. After the war, a memorial was erected near the murder site. Its inscription reads: “Let us hope that this will not happen again – The Jewish People Lives!”

A Drink for Passover

WE already began preparing the drinks for Passover before Purim. We usually prepared raisin wine. But there was another drink – mead. And what was special about it? It wasn't made with yeast. Yeast at Passover? Absolutely forbidden! That is why they used hops, which caused fermentation, and the drink was fit for a king! The Gentiles, who are known as lovers of wine, were happy to be offered this drink. During peaceful times, every Jew had a Gentile whom he would serve mead and matzos.

Matzos for Passover

The preparations began at Purim. In the home of Yudel Slep, Motele's father, there was a spacious room containing a brick oven in which they baked matzos for Passover. Yudel used to bake matzos and sell them. However, you could rent space in his oven, and then he would just take care of the flour and wood for the oven. Families would get together to carry out the baking, and thus I see the “bakery” in my mind's eye: the oven at the side, the long table covered with white tin (lest the dough begin to sour), the rolling pin and



Dusiat Elementary School – Second and Third Grade Classes. July 18, 1921.

The “King of the Matzos” was Zuske Levitt.

He would hurry to put the dough in the oven, lest it sour, and would hurry to take it out, lest it burn... We, the young children, volunteered to help him roll out the dough and to prick holes. I remember that we were afraid to breathe a word because he set about so intensely at his work.



A woman lighting candles before Shabbat or Yom Tov

the instrument for pricking holes in the dough.

A woman would stand and quickly knead the dough, and girls who sat around the table each received one portion of dough, and as quick as a wink they rounded and rolled out the dough, and one of the boys would bring the “round

sheets” to the baker, who quickly placed them in the oven, and in two minutes, perhaps less, round, warm and tasty matzos came out of it. There was a lot of tension in the room. “Quickly! Quickly! So the dough doesn’t sour ...

I recall taking down the dishes, the Passover dishes, from the attic. For Passover we used the prettiest dishes, and to me they were dishes fit for royalty. The glass sparkled like crystal, the cutlery was polished to a shine, and on the table were seven tablecloths, one on top of the other, for fear that there might be the residue of hametz – leavened bread or any food not kosher for Pesach...

For the Bdikat Hametz – the symbolic search for the last crumbs of leavened bread – my mother would place some breadcrumbs in different places in the house. The house was dark, and my father, with two feathers in his hand, would go from place to place by candlelight, searching and gathering the crumbs into a wooden spoon. The next morning they burned the leavened food. The absolute greatest joy was when everyone got new clothes. We would go outside and show them off.



Survivors Unveiling the Monument on August 26, 1947

To learn more about the Jews of Dusetos, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Dusetos-C>

Yizkor book translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Dusetos-Y>

KehilaLinks page: <http://tinyurl.com/Dusetos-K>

Before the Deportations: A Funeral and Eulogy on Passover Eve, 1944

Královský Chlmec, Slovakia

The following short-excerpt was recorded by Rabbi Shelomo Dov Ostreicher in his preface to 'Nahlat Yoel Zeev' and reprinted in the Yizkor Book of Královský Chlmec. It was a dark moment. As the Holocaust loomed, an old Jew died that night and the town's rabbi delivered a *Hesped* (eulogy) – even though eulogies were not customarily delivered on the night before Passover.

Královský Chlmec was part of Hungary prior to WWI and in Czechoslovakia between the wars. The first synagogue and Mikvah (ritual bath) was established in 1838, and by 1880, 311 Jews were recorded as living in the town. In 1944, the entire Jewish population of 970 people were forcibly transferred to the Sátoraljaújhely ghetto, and then to concentration camps. Only about 100 people survived.



I could not forget the event that took place on the last Passover Eve in our Rabbi's life in 5704 (7 April 1944), when Hungary was already being trampled under the Nazi-German

boot, when the skies over Hungarian Jewry grew covered

with black clouds, when the Holocaust loomed ahead and, day by day, new cruel edicts against the Jews were being added.

On that Pesach Eve an old Jew passed away and our

Rabbi, of blessed memory, found it proper to eulogize him, though no eulogy is delivered in the month of Nissan, particularly not on the Eve of Pesach. Our Rabbi considered it a temporary need and a necessity due to the then depressed situation.

In his funeral oratory the Rabbi said, **'How blessed is this Jew to be worthy of a Jewish burial now when, much to our distress, many of our brethren are not so privileged.'** All the participants burst into terrible weeping. Our Rabbi seemed to feel the terrible tragedy awaiting him and his brethren in Hungary.

This happened less than two months before the deportations and the Holocaust, in which he and his people were killed in Auschwitz, and that without having a Jewish burial.



The old Synagogue Building. Rabbi Yoel Glatstein, was the last Rabbi, and served until 1944 when he was taken to Auschwitz.

To learn more about the Jews of Královský Chlmec, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Kralovsky-C>

Yizkor book translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Kralovsky-Y>

KehilaLinks page: <http://tinyurl.com/Kralovsky-K>

The first Passover in the Camp of Deblin-Modzjitz

Deblin-Modzjitz, Poland

Jews found ways to celebrate the Passover meal even in the camps. This excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Deblin recounts how the director of the camp agreed to let its religious Jews eat kosher food during Passover — as long as everyone who wanted to participate came up with 120 zlotys. He was good to his word.

Deblin-Modzjitz is located in central Poland, approximately 65 miles south-east of Warsaw. The name Modzjitz is well-known to the broader Jewish community, as a result of the well-known Taub rabbinic dynasty. Melodies composed by Rabbi Israel ben Samuel Elija Taub, the Modzjitz Rebbe, are sung throughout the Jewish world until this very day.

There were 550 Jews recorded as living in the town in 1850. Before the Holocaust, there more than 3,300. After liberation in 1944, 82 survivors returned, but encountered fierce hostility and persecution. The remaining survivors left in 1945.

A month before Passover, 1943, a group of religious Jews approached Mr. Venkart (the director of the Jewish camp in Demblin) with a request to allow the Orthodox Jews to eat kosher food in the coming Passover. Mr. Venkart promised to look into it.

A few days later, Venkart gave the delegation this answer to the proposal: to eat kosher food during the eight days of the holiday (one liter for every portion a day). But he conditioned, that every Jew that wants to enjoy these portions must sign up and pay 120 zlotys. This list with the money needed to be delivered two weeks before the holiday.

A committee was established. It was headed by Avraham Fledfabel, Moshe Rozen and Yosef Shildekroit, may God avenge his blood. They took upon themselves the responsibility to collect the money and to make sure of that, God forbid, there would not be even one religious Jew who would that

will stay without kosher food because of financial problems. But as luck would have it, some Jews overpaid and thanks to them, it was possible to get the kosher food for all on Passover.

About two weeks before the holiday, the list with the 80 names and the money was presented to Mr. Venkart and he promised to arrange a kosher kitchen and to prepare potatoes, onion and margarine.

A week before the holiday, I and my very best friend, Yosef Shildkroit, may God avenge his blood, were called to Mr. Venkart. He told us that all the necessities were already in his hands and the kitchen was fixed and arranged. Because it was decided to make us responsible for the kitchen, the food preparation and its distribution to the assigned people, he would release us for 10 days (2 days before the holiday and the eight days of the holiday) from work in the airport but he asked us to prepare the kitchen,

after our work day, for the kitchen to be ready for Passover.

He walked with us to the end of the cabin of the guards (*comendiatora*), there stood a structure by the size of 9x9 square feet that in its north corner was the cooking oven by the size of 140x1, but because there was no room for storage, we were promised that every evening after handing out the food we would get the supply for the next day. They ordered for us a new pot that could accommodate eighty portions and also a pan and red beets to cook soup for the four cups.

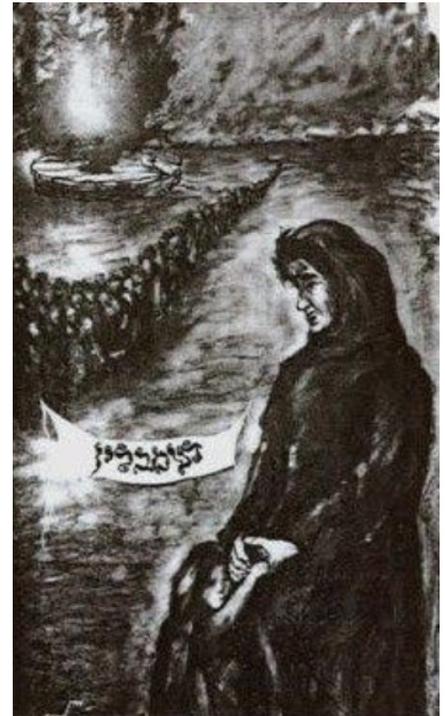
Two days before the holiday, we were baking matzos on the oven for the Jews, and succeeded to get 2 ½ kilos of flour, and also to arrange that every assigned Jew would receive at least three matzos.

In the morning of the eve of the holiday we prepared the beet soup, but the main dish was cooked in the afternoon. We were very anxious for the taste of the festive food.

In the evening after the evening prayer, the crowd gathered in a special cabin to have the “seder.” At the head of the table sat Layrish Bigelman, Moshe Rozen and Ahron Meir Edelman of blessed memory (the last one was a distinguished scholar from the Kotzak Hasids that came from Pulaw to our camp. On Passover, 1945, while staying in Buchenwald, he lived on one potato a day, and when he was told that eating chametz isn't like being killed and not to transgress he answered that anyway his verdict was to die in the camp on Passover, therefore it was better to appear pure before God. And he really died the last day of Passover in Buchenwald.)

Around the table sat all the assigned ones to eat the

kosher food and following them sat the rest of the public. Rabbi Layrish Bigelman made the blessing on a cup of beet soup and the director of the camp, Mr. Venkart, was honored to sing the four questions, and after that the whole crowd shouted “We were slaves!” and burst into a bitter



Cover of the Deblin Yizkor Book

cry. When the time came to say Vjje Sheamda , Rabbi Ahron Meir read with a strong emphasis: “For more than once have they risen against us to destroy us, in every generation they rise against us and seek our destruction, but he Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hands.”

The people felt some of a relief as they were promised a promise that certainly would be fulfilled.

Late at night, this very special seder was over and the kitchen functioned during all eight days of the holiday.

Every morning for the eight days of the holiday, just before being called to work, they handed out the food portions and in the evening after work the hot kosher soup was distributed.

To learn more about the Jews of Deblin, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Deblin-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Deblin-Y>

KehilaLinks: There is no KehilaLinks page for this town. To create one, please visit: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>

Baking Matzohs at Rabbi Avraham Breitfeld's House

Bobrka, Ukraine

The making of matzoh for Passover is a subject that can be found in many Yizkor Books, each with their own varied accounts. For one family in Bobrka, located in Eastern Galicia (today Western Ukraine), the process started three days before the holiday when the father roused everyone at 5 a.m. to start the task. When it was completed, they “drank a toast ‘l’chaim” and “wished each other the privilege to bake matzohs again for years to come in the Land of Israel.”

One of the oldest towns in Eastern Galicia, Bobrka (or Bóbrka, as it was known during Austrian, Polish and Soviet rule) was established in 1469, and Jews may have arrived as early as 1661. By 1900, there were 2,500 Jews in the town, comprising 47% of the overall population. The Nazis entered the town on July 2, 1941. The Jewish population of Bobrka, which had extended nearly four centuries, was nearly wiped out by March of 1943.



Cover of the Yizkor Book published in 1964

THREE days before Passover when the house was whitewashed, after fresh straw was put in our beds, when the everyday dishes were scattered like orphans in the middle of the house and people were sitting on top of large cans, and we children were already tired of working and could barely stand on our feet, and our hands were already swollen from scrubbing the little bit of furniture, and when our eyes already longed for a little more sleep — just then our father woke us up at five o'clock in the morning so we could prepare to bake the matzohs.

With eyes half shut, we got up, we carried everything out of the house and our father went up to the attic to bring down all the holy equipment (tools) which are: the boards, the rolling pins, the water barrel, the large pans, the matzoh wheels (to pierce the matzohs) and other important utensils. Water had been prepared

already yesterday, since it had to be water “that slept (stood overnight).”

My sister Hinde’s friends and also my friends, whom we invited a week ago, started gathering, white kerchiefs on their heads and wearing well ironed only-for-Passover aprons.

The water carrier from our street, Chaim (the gravedigger’s son), had koshered the pails especially for the occasion. All dressed up in holiday clothes, he came over very early. It wasn’t for everybody that Chaim agreed to carry water. For us he had a special feeling and felt a spiritual uplifting. Actually, he hoped that one of the two daughters in Reb Abraham Hirsh Mayers’s household would become his wife.

First of all, we had the well in our yard. Second, our home had a tin roof (a very great attribute in a small town). And third, our father was the sexton in the big shul. And if Avraham Breitfeld would not give him one of his daughters, surely he could find a wife amongst the many girls rolling out the matzohs.

The roller of the wheel (the matzoh piercing wheel), through whose hands the matzohs passed, the head of the household, was my father Reb Avraham Breitfeld, may he rest in peace. There was one craftsman still missing who played a very important role in matzoh baking, known as the “pusher” (he pushed the matzohs into the oven with a wooden shovel). It so happens at that time, a student from Boiberke, Feivel Shleider (now Dr. Shraga F. Kallay) came home

for Passover from his studies in Rome, Italy. This guest was a daily visitor in our house and my father immediately designated him the “pusher.” And so we began to work.

The girls started banging with their rolling pins, there was a cheerful atmosphere in the house, we sang songs from the “Hashomer Hatzair” because all the co-workers belonged the youth movement and Chaim the water carrier was very happy and had a big smile spread all over his face.

My father took over the piercing with the wheel and studies which is the perfectly round matzoh, and finds out that his daughter Hinde rolls out a perfectly round matzoh, as if it were cut out with a circle, and he shows the other girls how to roll out a matzoh.

The pusher of the matzoh was hot and red-faced and his shovel ends up touching the pretty Yetke Gottlieb. “Help”, yells my father noticing this. “You bandit, you will contaminate my matzoh “(G-d forbid!). The crowd is smiling and the beautiful Yetke blushes a little. The day was gone before we realized it. There were a whole lot of matzohs baked.

My father thought of all his relatives and matzohs that had been baked for them. Then, close to the end, we drank a toast “l’chaim”, and we wished each other the privilege to bake matzohs again for years to come in the Land of Israel.

To learn more about the Jews of Bobrka, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Boabrka-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Boabrka-Yizkor>

KehilaLinks page: <http://tinyurl.com/Boabrka-K>

The Eve of Passover

Ruzhany, Belarus

The following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Ruzhany, Belarus (between the wars, located in Western Poland), was written by Meir Sokolowski. It is a loving description of the anticipation that filled people with joy before the holiday: the aroma of baking flour for matzos, the laughter that filled the bakeries as men, women and children prepared the dough, the making of the mead, whitewashing the house, the arrival of guests, and the setting of the table at home. “Who can describe an enjoyment greater than this?”

In December 2010, a Jewish visitor to the town was given a Haggadah by a young man in the mayor’s office. The man recounted that the Haggadah had been found in the home of a local jeweler after the war, and that his father had instructed him to “make sure this religious service book for Passover should one day be given to some Jewish visitor to Ruzhany.”

THE pleasant aroma of the Passover holiday was already wafting through the air. One must prepare fine flour, from the best of the best, for the purposes of baking matzos. Our hearts swelled and rejoiced at the sight of the holiday preparations. We impatiently awaited the great day that was approaching — the day of the baking of matzos. Who can describe an enjoyment greater than this? All the people of the town had the same feelings that we did. There was excitement.

There were a few matzo bakeries in town. The bakeries were cleaned and made kosher for this purpose. The families of the city took turns baking their matzos there. Who could imagine when our turn would come?

Father removed the flour from the wagon and brought

it to the bakery. The horses pushed the wagon from our house, through the Kanal, until the bridge next to the bathhouse. The precious cargo crossed the bridge over the Kanal Stream, and we arrived at the bakery. Mother and we children accompanied the wagon.

The Baking of the Matzos

We entered the bakery, which was filled with men, women and youths. One woman kneaded the dough in a shiny copper bowl. Two boys stood next to her and brought her the correct measure of flour and water so that the kneading would not stop and the dough would not become leavened. Another woman apportioned the dough to the women who were dividing up the dough into the portions for the matzos. From then, the matzos passed to a table



A copy of one of the pages from the Haggadah from Ruzhany

to time, but the drink was already good and fitting to be served on the table of kings. We children did not put our hands into the plate. Rather, we surrounded Mother, cupping our hands and asking her if we could taste the steaming liquid. We drank it and praised the drink, for it was good. This was not Mother's opinion, for she continued to cook and taste, and we continued to request and receive additional portions of this sweet, sweet drink.

covered with a clean metal sheet, upon which several youths are making holes in the dough with hollow rolling pins.

During the work, the girls conducted conversations spiced with local gossip. Laughter filled the rooms. Laughter and diligence of the hands. The perforated matzos were transferred to the hands of the baker, who used a baker's shovel to put them into the oven. He would remove the baked matzos in about a minute. Most of them were white, but a few were brown as they were slightly singed. We received some of both. They were hot, and the heat spread to all parts of the body. We spent most of the day in the bakery, and when the day was finished, we were sorry that such a happy day had passed.

Preparing the "Mead"

We had other such days before the festival arrived. One of them was the day of the preparation of the mead.

The day of the preparation of the mead was a holiday for us. Mother cooked the honey, tasting it from time

Whitewashing the House

The days of cleaning the house were additional days of joy. The order of the world changed when they arrived. Everything that filled the rooms of the house until this time was taken outside. Only the walls and ceiling could be seen. Where was the floor? It was covered with straw so that it would not get too dirty during the whitewashing.

The white angels — that is the whitewashers — appeared, wearing clothing that was white from the whitewash that stuck to them. The work began. Our empty rooms, which grew and broadened in our eyes due to the removal of the furniture, continued to grow with their new whitewash and shining white. We entered the rooms and stretched out our necks to see the whitewashing. However, we were chased out by the adults who asked that we do not run between their legs and not dirty ourselves from the drops of whitewash that were dropping all over the place. We fled outside, wandered around the furniture, and played hide-and-seek. We were served food at

irregular times. We ate at times eating on a bookshelf and at times standing next to a table, all outside. After the hasty meal, we were free. What was demanded of us further? How good was it for us? How good was our lot.

Splendor, Beauty, the Glory of the World

The vacation was complete. The month of Nisan was the month between school semesters. G-d did a kindness for the school children, and the yoke of studies was lifted from them. We no longer sat in the closed cheder from morning until evening. We were able to enjoy the glory of the world. How many interesting, attractive things were there!

The day shone down from hour to hour. Look up. The winter clouds have disappeared. The sun, which had hidden its face for weeks and months, appeared. It was bright and brilliant, warm and caressing. Look down. The white covering had melted and the earth was exposed. Puddles gathered on the ground, sparkling with the colors of the sun. Many images were scattered over the face of the earth. Pleasant aromas arose from it and spiced the air.

How high was the sky! The firmament of the sky! It is blue! An azure sea atop your head. And a sea also beneath your feet. This was the small river that passed close to our house, the “Kanal Teichl” changed its form and became a mighty river. It had a meager flow all year, and now it overflowed all of its banks. Its quiet flow turned into a mighty, noisy stream.

Guests for the Festival

Now you raise your head again, and a family of storks had arrived, passing sleepily from their peaceful kingdom. They arrived, and with them came the month of Nisan, the month of spring. A pair of storks were nesting in the tall chimney rising up from between the buildings of the liquor still on Schloss Gasse, heralding the advent of spring.

However they are not the only ones that arrived. Many birds of all types fill the sky with joyful chirping, a new song. There are so many of them! Who told them about the renewal of our world? Who told them about its return to life? From where did they appear? Indeed, they came from the lands of the south for the festival of spring and renewal, the time when our town is filled with song and melodies (of the matzo bakers, the house whitewashers, the children on vacation, with splendor in their eyes, songs in their ears, and desire for redemption in their hearts). They, the birds, tell me about our Land and our birthplace where we came from. The heart is filled with pangs of longing. If the joy of Passover is so great here, how great would our joy be if we celebrated it there, in our native Land. Oh, would it be soon!

In the Synagogue

The eve of Passover arrives. After bathing, we don our new clothes and new shoes. The sun is about to set. We walk with Father with deliberate steps to the synagogue, like the sons of kings with their king. People are streaming to the house of worship from all sides. The Great Synagogue is filled with joy and light. Thousands of candles light up this holy place. Thousands of bright eyes are lit up with the joy and happiness of the Festival of Freedom. The synagogue is filled with song and joy. Cantor Kaplan and his choir perform splendidly. The echoes of freedom emanate from their throats with wide hearts and clear intellect. The service ends, and the masses of Jews stream to their houses to conduct the Seder and tell about the Exodus from Egypt. There is a pleasant tumult in the streets. Light is planted along the entire route, bursting forth from the windows of the houses lit up with extra lights.

In the Home

We arrive to our home, which is not far from the synagogue. The house is filled with light and joy. The Seder plate is set up, the goblets are arranged, with



The Maier Beis Midrash. It is said that its doors were never locked.

the cup of Elijah rising above them. The wine for the four cups is on the table. Father puts on his white kittel [ceremonial garment] and his appearance is that of an angel. He reclines on a pillow like a king. Mother is dressed up as a queen. The faces of my mother and father are beaming. They look upon us children with satisfaction, joy and bright eyes. It is good for us, and our hearts are warm. The youngest

child asks the questions in a festive voice, and father reads the answer with a sense of great importance, as we read after him. A unified voice, lofty and festive, a voice filled with faith in the freedom that will yet come continues until a late hour of the night; a voice saturated with love, from which the Song of Songs naturally emanates.

To learn more about the Jews of Ruzhany, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <http://tinyurl.com/Ruzhany-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <http://tinyurl.com/Ruzhany-Y>

KehilaLinks page: <http://tinyurl.com/Ruzhany-K>

The Unforgettable Passover of 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Poland

The following excerpt from the Yizkor Book of Jedwabne, Poland, was written by Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Greengrass, and describes how Jews imprisoned at Auschwitz-Birkenau managed to conduct a Seder. He writes: “The celebration of this Seder night left imprints on my soul. Now, when I perform the Passover service, I understand the meaning of the statement that each man in every generation is obliged to consider himself as if he personally was redeemed from slavery into freedom.”

Jedwabne was in the Lomza province before WWI. In 1897, there were 1,941 Jews living in the town, which is located 11 miles from Lomza and 18 miles from Kolno. By 1940, that number had dwindled significantly. After the Nazis invaded in 1941, the town became infamous for the Jedwabne pogrom on July 10, 1941, when approximately 300 Jewish residents, men, women and children, were murdered and buried in two mass graves. The following day, the Nazis rounded up the remaining Jews and transported them to a ghetto.

THE Baal Hagadah says: B'chol dor v' dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'eelu hu yatza m'mitzrayim. “In every generation we are obliged to consider ourselves as having personally participated in the exodus from Egypt.” All my life I could not grasp the meaning of this passage until the advent of World War II.

Among the many experiences during the terrible period of time under the furious German Nazi rule in Europe, when millions of Jews, young and old, were mercilessly persecuted and destroyed, we, a group of Jews from all parts of Europe, made careful preparations to celebrate the Holiday of Freedom, Passover. Passover of 1943 was an experience that

I shall remember always. The observance of it took place at Birkenau near Auschwitz, one of the greatest annihilation camps, built by slaves to exterminate themselves and the innocent people that would follow. Planning and preparations started right after Purim. There were many things to be taken care of. The main problem was how to get the two most necessary items, matzoh and wine for the Seder.

Greece, an independent, peaceful nation, was seized and brought under the terrifying Nazi yoke. Many Jews were living there, especially in the harbor city of Salonika. They did not expect to be removed from their homes to be killed. They prepared matzot,



Children in Auschwitz after liberation

raisins and other things for Passover. The Nazi machine took these unfortunate people out of their city just two weeks before their Holiday of Liberation. Many transports of Jews, Squeezed into unbearable sealed freight cars unfit even for animal, reached the last station of their lives – Birkenau. Their total possessions were in the small package each tied on his or her shoulder, and they were accompanied by lovely children, many of whom were carried in the arms of the parents. They were separated from their poor

worldly goods by force, and the parents and the children were sent to the gas chambers.

At that time, I was assigned to a special unit, called by the peculiar name of “Canada”, whose job was to assort the belongings of murdered Jews. Thus the worldly goods of the slain Greek Jews came to our place of work. We opened the miserable packages and to our surprise found hand-baked matzot, raisins, and other necessary Passover products carefully prepared for the Seder. With trembling hands, knowing how meaningful these items were to the dying Jews, we hid them in a secret place to make good use of their sacred purpose. After hard and dangerous preparations in order not to be caught by the S.S. men, we finally accomplished our first task and hoped to celebrate the lovely Holiday of Freedom while being slaves in a concentration camp under the yoke of Nazi Germany.

Erev Passover 1943 was a very busy day for our special small group.

All products accumulated for the Seder and piled up at our working place had to be brought to the camp. There was great danger that the Nazi guard might search through the unit and confiscate all the things that we had so carefully saved, and in addition would administer severe punishment. Therefore, we needed the cooperation and help of our Cappo (group leader) who was also a Jew. He gladly accepted sharing the responsibility. He also advised us to make very small packages and to distribute them to many people, and he would see to it that everything reached the camp in the best order possible.

With joy and thanks to G-d that we had succeeded in

our undertaking, we came to the camp. The Profound holiness of Passover made us feel neither hunger nor weariness, although we had worked very hard all day without food. We did not touch anything that was prepared for us by the camp kitchen. Our block leader, a split personality and a Pole, was informed in advance of our intention to celebrate the Passover Seder, and he promised not to interfere with our observance. Nevertheless, we had to give him a big bribe beforehand, besides a share of our meager food.

When night fell and darkness covered the earth and no other light was permitted in the block, we managed to light several candles and distribute them among the people lying in the bunks. A man guarded the door in case an S.S. man should come unexpectedly. We filled the first cup and made kiddush by heart without any hagadot.

A young boy, twelve years of age, asked “Mah Nishtana” saying, “Why are we Jews different from other people?” Tears flowed from everyone’s eyes and question after question found each one pondering why it is so. And since we had no hagadot, each one tried to give his own interpretation of the eternal question of why do we Jews suffer so much more than any other nation. Some brought out the idea that the Maror (bitterness) that we suffered is due to

the fact that we tried to run from one Galut (place of exile) to another Galut because we thought that what happened to our brethren yesterday will not reach us in the new places today.

All night long we were discussing the history of our people and what we expected in the future and what would happen if some of us would come out alive. No one slept and all celebrated the Pesach the entire night with tears and hopes. The discussion did not end until the gong rang that it was time to get up and go to work. And as it rang, we wished each other that we live to come out of this hell and again celebrate the Passover as free people.

The celebration of this Seder night left imprints on my soul. Now, when I perform the Passover service, I understand the meaning of the statement that each man in every generation is obliged to consider himself as if he personally was redeemed from slavery into freedom. I have some garments which I wore that Passover as a reminder of Moror, “ze sh’anu ochlim, al shum mah.” This garment that I keep, why? Because of the Holocaust that befell the Jewish People during World War II.

To learn more about the Jews of Jedwabne, please visit the following JewishGen Pages:

Communities Database: <https://tinyurl.com/Jedwabne-C>

Yizkor Book Translation: <https://tinyurl.com/Jedwabne-Y>

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