JewishGen

PASSOVER COMPANION

5782 | תשפ״ב



Kiddush cup used by Berl and Lota Landau for Passover in the Chechelnik ghetto, Ukraine (part of Transnistria during WWII). Gift of Iser Volkhovitser in memory of Perl Volkhovitser, 2004.A.139.

MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE
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JewishGen
מרכז עולמי לגנאלוגיה יהודית
The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy



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JewishGen is an affiliate of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. JewishGen serves as the global home for Jewish genealogy. Featuring unparalleled access to 30+ million records, it offers unique search tools, along with opportunities for researchers to connect with others who share similar interests.

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INTRODUCTION

APRIL 2022/NISSAN 5782

Dear Friends,

Jews throughout the world are currently preparing for the Passover holiday, which begins at sundown on April 15th, 2022. This time is generically marked by feverish preparations as families eagerly anticipate the joyous nature of the holiday.

Yet we are living during a time period that is fraught with pain, suffering, and fear. Millions of people in Ukraine, including tens of thousands of Jews, have had their lives destroyed and disrupted due to the horrific events currently taking place in that country. And our brethren in Israel have been the subject to horrific attacks in recent weeks, and live with a sense of dread of what's to come.

How is Passover to be celebrated in such circumstances? How can we sit with our families, and describe our national redemption, in view of the tragic events currently taking place right before our eyes?

In this year's JewishGen Passover Companion, we once again highlight Passover related excerpts from Yizkor Books that JewishGen has translated. They offer a window into daily life of destroyed Jewish communities, and how they celebrated the holiday - sometimes under the most trying of circumstances.

The second article describes how a family living in Csenger, Hungary, celebrated Pesach in 1944:

> "In what way is this night different from all other nights?" Every year this was a very usual question, and everyone knew the answer. Now my father choked as he was about to speak, but the words didn't come out of his mouth. He looked at us speechless. Our dear mother wanted to alleviate the bitterness that we all felt and calmed us telling us that God will help us. My sister asked if there would be anyone left to help. My father told her that even when a sharp sword is on a person's neck he shouldn't give up hope for the Mercy of God.



The Brodsky Synagogue in Odessa, Ukraine. Established by Jews from Brody in 1863. Source: https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/odessa/

This is the story of the Jewish people. We never give up hope. We celebrate our survival, while yearning for a better future. When we sit at the Seder table this year, and recite the opening words of the Haggadah, "This is the poor man's bread which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt" – we remember the many people who are still eating the "poor man's bread" today.

And then we remember the following words: "Anyone who is hungry, come and eat [with us]." Let us open our hearts and homes to those in need, and not forget those less fortunate. With regard to current events, we consider how to "include" those impacted by what is happening in Ukraine and Israel in our Seders. Perhaps it is a special moment of reflection. Perhaps it is hosting a refugee. Perhaps it is making a contribution to one of the major organizations working to provide relief and support. In whatever form your help manifests itself, it will make a difference.

We hope you will be inspired by the articles contained in this Passover Companion, and that next year our celebration will be marked by good tidings, with peace and harmony in the world.

Jack Kliger
President & CEO
Museum of Jewish Heritage –
A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

Avraham Groll
Executive Director
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PESACH PREPARATIONS

Ciechanowiec, Poland

Ciechanowiec, a small town in the heart of the great Jewish community in Eastern Europe, which has been entirely wiped out during the Holocaust. In 1795 there were 340 houses in Ciechanowiec and the population numbered 2,650 persons. In 1847 it had a Jewish population of 2,054; and according to the 1897 census the total population was 5,569 of whom 3,743 were Jews.

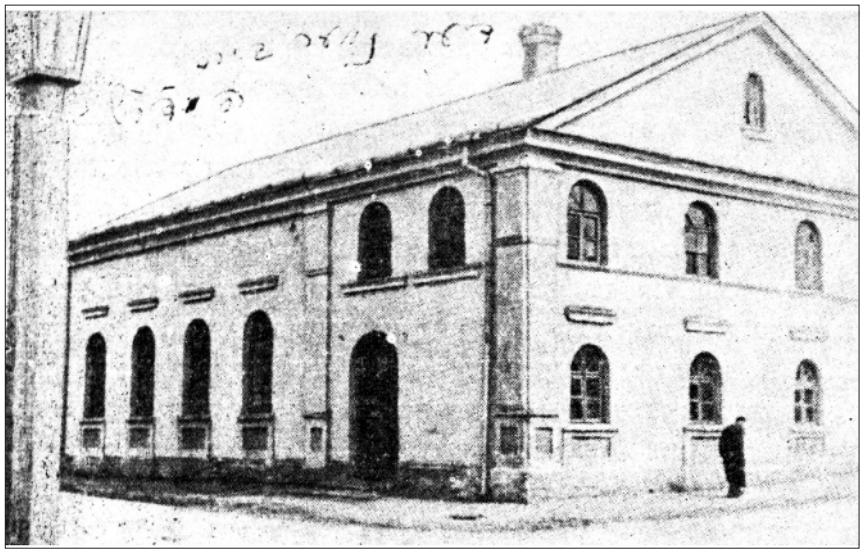
The oldest synagogue in the town was built in the 15th century, though some claim that its construction actually took place during the 14th. Next to it stood six houses of study (Batei Midrash), three built of wood and three of stone.

The River Nurzec divides the town into two unequal parts. The "Old City", spreading along the left bank, belonged to the Bielsk District of Grodno Gubernia of Russia; while the "New City" on the right bank belonged to Łomża Gubernia of Congress Poland. Between the two world wars, Ciechanowiec was in the Białystok province of Poland, divided between the districts of Bielsk and Wysokie Mazowieckie.

In this excerpt, the author describes the preparations for Passover, which began several weeks before the Holiday.

MUCH has been written about "Zman Cheruteinu" ("Season of our Freedom," part of the Pesach Haggadah). The Yiddish and Hebrew literature is rich in prose and poetry, in which the dear holiday Pesach is reflected with its very beauty and holiness. But there's still enough space to add something.

Erev Pesach, the evening before Passover, is starting up several weeks before the holiday. The matzo bread, bakehouses, and matzo bakeries, where matzos are baked for Pesach, show up. Everyone wants to snatch a part-time job.



The "New" Synagogue

The girls rolling and pressing, the women kneading and molding, the boys pouring the mixture. Then there are the persons handing over water, perforating matzo, carriers, and Rabbinic supervisors. Everyone toils long hours for small earnings. Each of them would like to be able to celebrate Pesach, and that actually requires Korach's treasures.

Girls need a new chintz dress, shoes with high heels and the like, in order to be perfect in a respectable way. Cane-twirling bachelors, who are of marriageable age, must have new ties, rubber collars and cuffs, to look at the girls, that Shmuel-Ber, the matchmaker, has praised all day.

The houses are cleared from furniture. One had to cleanse, oil them, and make them kosher. Meanwhile, one is sleeping on the ground and hastily takes a snack on a box that becomes a bench, a barrel, and then a table. There is more than enough work.

In addition, one must take care of the kids, so that they do not reach the beets that have been placed on the barrel, being covered with a white tablecloth, the brewed mead in the Passover box and the matzos, which were placed in a basket hanging from the ceiling.

The gangs of little rascals also don't know where to go first: Either to the waters, or to the tailor and shoemaker to find out whether the shoes and the suit are ready, or to the chickens to stuff them – and catching the rooster that ran away.

Meanwhile, the preparations continue: One chops *rozshinkes* (raisins) for *yayn-tsimukim* (raisin wine), one cooks down *schmaltz* (chicken fat) for Passover and does many things that are necessary. When the last days before Passover arrive, the householders take care of the *mekhires khomets* (the sale of leavened food, or *chametz*, before Passover).

That is of course done at the rabbi's, and Stefan, the "shabbes-goy" (a gentile, who performs certain acts which are forbidden to Jews on Sabbath) is the buyer. Those, who are more conscientious, bake *matzah shmure* (matzo made with extra care to remain dry) themselves. There is even no time to eat. One quickly takes a dry bite and that is it.

The men must help making kosher the pans and other vessels – the tables, benches, the plate and the oven for the *tsholent* (cholent, slow–cooked Sabbath stew, left in the oven overnight). Kettles are boiled out with water and into them, burnt iron and stones are thrown. Then everything is scalded with hot water and heated with the burnt iron. One doesn't gamble with Pesach! For the smallest bit of *chametz* (leavened food), there is a penalty – *kareth*! ("cutting off", a severe divine punishment).

And just now, there is coming the night of *Bedikat Chametz* (ritual search for any possible remaining leaven on the evening before Passover eve).

Everything is prepared: A wax candle, a wooden spoon, a feather duster, a white rag, a few pieces of *chametz*, which were placed in certain very confidential and secret places. Hence the father does not know where. He must find the *chametz* because he should – God forbid – not make a *brokhe levatole* (a blessing made in vain).

On Erev Pesach (the day before Passover) people used to get up early, eat the *chametz* in a hurry, such as bread rolls with milk and then hide several *chametz* glasses. Finally, they would have finished the "making kosher" and soon would invite R' "Pesach" to come into their house.

Anyway, there is still a lot of work to do before Erev Pesach: Pounding the matzo crumbs, preparing matzo flour and *charoset* (an apple–nut mixture). The *sude* (meal) would be very meagre, to guarantee some more appetite for the evening Seder.

The Gemara (2nd part of Talmud) says, that "eating matzo during Pesach is like desire to the bride," although you have to admit that, actually, these two desires are not that similar.

The Passover meal is conducted according to a specific *seder* (order): *Kadesh* (sanctify; recital of Kiddush blessing and drinking of the first cup of wine), *Urchats* (wash your hands), *Karpas* (dipping of a vegetable, usually parsley or celery in salt water and eating them). Errors regarding the Seder meal have already been described, and there are enough anecdotes about them.

To learn more about **Ciechanowiec**, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/ciechanowiec/Ciechanowiec.html



PESACH 1944

Csenger, Hungary

Csenger is one of the numerous towns in the country of Hungary; one of which is in the district of Satmar. The district of Satmar was divided, between Romania and Hungary as a result of the agreement which was reached in the year 1918, at the end of the First World War. The town of Csenger was situated on the border, and only a few kilometers separated between her and the Romanian border. This fact contributed to the cessation of its thriving commerce after it was divided Prior to its being divided, Csenger and its train station were the crossing point to the part of Hungary which is called Transylvania. In the period between the two World Wars its economic growth was stunted. However, the city became the center of marketing for the fruits of the gardens which extended along the great river Smoosh that surrounded the city from both of its sides, the north and the south.

The focus of the town's Jews was centered mainly around its religious institutions, which fully enriched their lives. In 1900, there were 600 Jews living in the town.

Erev Pesach 1944

THE atmosphere was very tense and nerve-wrecking. The German army was marching in the main street of the village for the last few days. The Jews tried very hard not to be seen outside. But they had to prepare for Pesach. We always baked matzos Erev Pesach called *Matzos Mitzvah* to use for the Seder night. The men baked the matzos as they sang "Hallel." Every family received six matzos, which meant three for each Seder.

However, it wasn't possible to get to the bakery, since the streets were packed with German soldiers. Will the Jews risk their lives? No one

wants to do away with this custom of baking *Matzos Mitzvah*. In the end, everyone went to bake the matzos. Even those who in previous years didn't went now too.

I also went with my father. In one hand he held the sack with flour and he held me with his other hand. We took a crooked path, in back of yards and fields. It was a beautiful Spring day and the trees were in full bloom. The multi-colored flowers formed beautiful rows on the sides of the roads. However, our minds were not occupied with the beauty of the Spring. I held on tight to my father, because I was terrified. Yesterday I had travelled to Mátészalka to bring wine for Pesach for the four cups which are drunk at the Seder. My non-Jewish friends hid me in their wagon and travelled with me to the city. My heart was beating louder from one minute to the next, and it sounded like the banging of a hammer on an anvil.

We walked together in great fright. We were afraid that maybe the birds or the rabbits would hear us, or maybe the branches. Now I understood the *possuk* in Vayikrah (26:36) "And the sound of a banging leaf will scare them." Soon we got to the bakery of Weiss Mozi. A few Jews were waiting. Every one sat in his corner. No one spoke to anyone. They waited in silence. We kneaded the dough, and sang "Hallel." We sang (Tehillim 118:25) "Please Hashem help us," as we were begging for mercy. At night the davening in shul was in whispered tones. The window panes were shattered to bits the night before by the Gentiles. We sat in the dark and didn't have the lights on in order not to attract attention. With a voice full of pain and sorrow Rav Hersh Elimelech said the words, "From the narrowness of distress I cried out to Hashem and he answered me with the breadth of Divine Relief" (Tehillim ll8:5). We quickly finished davening and went home to make the Seder. This was the last Seder that my father conducted, and also the last Seder that the Jews of Porcsalma made.

We sat down to the Seder. After the first cup of wine my younger brother asked the four questions. He asked, "In what way is this night different than all other nights?" Every year this was a very usual question, and everyone knew the answer. Now my father choked as he was about to speak, but the words didn't come out of his mouth. He looked at us speechless. Our dear mother wanted to alleviate the bitterness that we all felt and calmed us telling us that Hashem will help us. My sister asked if there will be anyone left to help. My father told her that even when a sharp sword is on a prrson's neck he shouldn't give up hope for the Mercy of Hashem.

Pesach 1944

Pesach is the festival of liberation, but for the Jews of Porcsalma the slavery had already begun. This Pesach remains in the memories of the survivors as the one that had the most suffering. There was not one day during Pesach that a new edict wasn't issued to harm the Jews. One day we were forbidden to travel by train, and the next day we were not allowed to leave the confines of the village. In my grandfather's house the windows were broken to bits. One of the elders of the village who was a *Talmid Chochom* and successful merchant was beaten in the street when people were passing by. (Of course no one came to save him). Jews stopped



View of the main synagogue of Csenger built in 1794

working in the fields and stopped doing business because they were afraid to leave their houses. The small Jewish girls went out to do the shopping because the adults were afraid to go out in the street. We heard that in Mátészalka the streets were being enclosed in fences in order to confine the Jews there. Thus passed the holiday of Pesach, with our being always afraid of what the next day would bring. After Pesach the worst thing happened to us. We were ordered to pack our belongings, and were only allowed a limited weight per person. Within twenty four hours we had to be prepared to leave our homes.

Even the meanest among the Gentiles were shocked at this decree. They didn't imagine that the Hungarian government would go so far as to banish the Jews from their homes! There were good neighbors who appeared in the homes of the Jews and who honestly offered to be of help. They could mainly offer to hide our belongings until we returned (How naïve!). They offered to bake bread for us, since Pesach was already over.

One policeman went to the house of Rav Hersh Elimelech, and with tears in his eyes apologized for not being able to help him. He said that the banishment of the Jews was something he couldn't prevent.

Very few of the Gentiles really felt sorry for us. Most of them were hoping to profit from all the Jewish property that they could seize from the houses and stores and land which the Jews owned. Everything would be in their hands.

At night we heard that in the nearby villages all the Jews were gathered in the yard of the shul of Porcsalma. They were told that the next day they would be taken to a Ghetto. Will the same thing happen to us? Will we have to leave our property and belongings? For generations we toiled in different trades, and in cultivating the land, and now we will be bereft of all this. What about our lives? Will we be treated like the Polish Jews? These questions bothered us. Yet we had no one to turn to. The young people could have still fled to the big cities where it was easier to hide. They didn't want to leave their parents, and the old people and small children would probably also need help. My brother and sister who were thinking of escaping decided quickly against it.

The chief of the Police told us that we were being taken for agricultural work to the surrounding farms. Every promise we received enchanted us like a magic wand. It's comforting for a person to believe good things in times of trouble. It frees him of all his sad forebodings.

How good it is for one to hold on to hope, thereby freeing people from trying to do things (in this case escape). This also severed our dear ones from life.

To learn more about **Csenger**, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Csenger/Csenger.html



BAKING MATZAS

Mlyniv, Ukraine

Mlynov is a town in the area of Vohlyn, along the Ikva River and large lake, with beautiful scenery. It was once a village that the King Alexander Jagiellończyk gave as a gift to a man named Bobr Muskvitin, but after the death of the latter, the village reverted to a possession of the Crown. In 1508, the village was transferred by Sigmund I to Jacob Michelyovetch, the delegate of Kremenets. Later the village belonged to the Chodkiewicz family. In 1789 Stanisław August, with the advice of his council, decided to hold four fairs each year in the town.

The town of Mlynov is in the region of Vohlyn, in the district of Dubno. According to the 1847 population census, the number of Jewish persons in the community was 209. According to the census of 1897, there were 1105 residents in Mlynov and 672 of them were Jews.

In this excerpt, we read about the significance of baking matzos, and the symbolism it represented during times of extreme hardship.

BEFORE the great tragedy, matzas were baked in Mlynov. There was a machine which was always used, from Passover to Passover, for that purpose. All the Jews from Mlynov and Mervits and the surrounding villages bought their matzas from Mlynov. The profits were used to support the surrounding villages with matzas for Passover. At the same time, several unemployed artisans earned enough for their own Passover expenses from their work with the matzas. For a few of them, these were their first earnings in the spring; most of them probably sat through the entire winter without earning anything, which was quite usual for a part of the population.

They baked matzas and *shmura-matzas*![1] The Vaynshtok family and a few others also made a few egg matzas for Passover. All these preparations were an annual celebration for the entire Jewish population in all houses.

When the matzas were brought into the Jewish home, cheer was brought inside with them. People kept wishing for each other, "May we live until next year with happy hearts, with, with, with …"



The Great Synagogue in Mlynov

And when the first seder night approached, one could feel everyone's joy, which reigned in every house without difference. And so stretched an entire eight-day holiday with happiness. We investigated whose matzas were more successful, thinner, fresher, tastier, not burned, and not raw. We even discussed the wine used in the four cups at the seders – who received wine from the land of Israel for Passover, and who had raisin wine. The main points were the taste and color. We talked about prospective brides and grooms, and who was going to the bride-to-be after the first two days of the holiday. There was never any talk about a man riding to visit his fiancée in another town on the first two days; that was simply a sin.

I do not remember that ever happened.

There was talk about preparing for Passover in general, how difficult it was. Firstly, whitewashing the houses, which was a tradition from ancient times. Being kosher for

Passover had many difficulties, especially if it was a late spring and the snow was still an obstacle, or if there were large mud puddles. So the whitewashing came with bitterness, and therefore the joy after that was large.

Then dressing up for Passover! That is an entirely separate chapter. Not all Jewish families could afford this luxury. It happened quite often that the tailors could not afford new clothes for the holiday for themselves, unfortunately. Those, though, who could have special clothes made for the holiday, talked about the quality and beauty of the clothing in various meetings, at the synagogue, or visiting. It was this way with shoes and other small things. We had quite a lot of laughter in celebrating the seder, which was different in all Jewish homes. In more than one Jewish house entire histories were related, and very often happy ones.

The dear, warm summer would be approaching, and everything would blossom and grow, and the hard winter with its cold difficulties would leave. The livelihood of many toiling Jews would, with the coming of summer, improve. Bricklayers and carpenters would revive with the coming of summer, because their jobs were unsteady in the winter because of the cold. The young people would walk out a little freer from the narrow streets of the shtetl. And so, all areas would improve with the arrival of summer.

Also our *shtetele* Mervits, both separately and often together with Mlynov, made all the above-mentioned preparations with small exceptions. Until the First World War, for quite a few years, matzas were baked in the so-called "meadow": girls and women from the shtetl gathered, and from early in the morning until the evening, they kneaded and rolled out the dough for matzas. The men were more active in carrying the matzas to everyone's home. Shoveling and measuring meal was done by the young. I do not remember exactly how much a matza worker earned in 3-4 weeks, working 12-13 hours a day, but in the shtetl people talked that this one and that one would already earn enough for Passover.

That is how it was until about three years before the First World War. There were no other ways of baking matzas outside of a "meadow" until Peysakh Rimer brought a machine, paid the rabbi to certify it was kosher, and baked matzas with it. And usually, who provided the power to turn the wheels of the machine? People. We, pranksters, kept running out of the *cheder* to at least look through the window, to see how the new wonder makes matzas, which used to be the job of 20 women. And when Peysakh Rimer could not drive away the curious *cheder*-boys, he teased his little dogs. His was the only Jewish house with dogs. That stopped us from leaning on his windows to see the miracle machine.

After The First World War, people in Mervits did not bake any more matzas. They bought them in Mlynov.



I will mention mainly how we baked matzas that first year when the Hitlerite criminals, may their names be blotted out, were already in our shtetl, in 1942; and how we baked them one time before we left Mlynov in 1945 after the winter.

There could not be any talk about baking

matzas in 1942, because that was simply life endangering, if it would, God forbid, be discovered. As we know, people strive to do what is forbidden, and so it was also in this instance. We kind of thought that the honor of the good deed, and maybe also good wishes, would maybe help, and our wishes would be realized. We baked and we wished, but our good wishes did not come true. To cover up our baking, we, not yet being in the ghetto, gathered in a house which was not on the main road from Mlynov-Lutzk. That was at my brother-in-law Note Gruber[2], may he rest in peace. His house was slightly hidden by trees on Mikhalovske's land. Several of my relatives baked matzas there, like my Uncle Chaim-Meir z"l[3], with his family; my brother Yankev-Yoysef z"l, with his family; and my Uncle Yankev Gruber z"l; and my brother-in-law Yankev and Khayke, z"l[4] with their families.

And so it was in other houses. Several people got together–and they baked. I acquired meal from the mill where I worked. Also we were able to trade with a "better" Christian. We would exchange a dress or a shoe for meal. The baking took place during the day, so that the night shine would not, God forbid, ever interest our enemies who would ask, "What is shining over there?"

While rolling out the dough and baking, everybody wished each other well. Yet in truth bloody tears poured out of our eyes by themselves, as though everyone had a premonition: God knows if next year I will still bake matzas…

Despite all the difficulties, somebody would get an egg, somebody a piece of meat, we wiped away the tears, and we held a seder.

I cannot describe what took place at the seder tables. This could only have taken place in Spain during the Inquisition, and in other similar circumstances. Tears poured out like water. We all had the feeling that we were celebrating the last seder in our lives. Old and young, everyone had the same premonitions.

The sad days of Passover went by as usual. There could not be any talk about observing Passover as a holiday. Everybody who had what to do worked, because the enemy's hand did not drop its baton on Passover. Right after Passover, they [the Nazis] started to demand that people go to work in Rovne. Work was bitter enough at home, but we survived Rovne with only a few victims, among whom were Gershon Peysi's two sons, twins. They did not return from the hands of the murderers. Others, though, managed to run back home, like, for example, Asher–Nokhum's [son][5], Avrohom–Khayke's [son], and others. That was a great victory.



We who survived the great fire returned to spend about 15 months in Mlynov. We decided we would bake matzas with the consciousness that even though we had been freed, and we could bake the matzas freely, we knew that in Mlynov matzas were being baked for the last time, and nobody, nobody, would ever bake matzas here again.

We baked in my home, where my wife Sonia and I and the three children of my cousin resided[6], at the house of Yankev Tesler z"l. We had the remaining survivors of Mlynov, and a

few outside of Mlynov who had come there for various reasons after their liberation, and a few Jewish officers in the Russian army. We were not short of anything then, like meal, wood, and all necessary things which were needed for baking matzas. But missing were the best and the most beloved Jews!

When we baked the matzas, we sang whatever came into our mouths, to jab our enemies who were around us. Previously, when they were important people at the top, they did us much harm, not less than the Germans.

Our only form of revenge was to bake matzas freely, to pretend our hearts were okay, and to sing a song, even though bloody tears were still covering our faces. And in addition, we knew that in a few weeks we would leave Mlynov altogether.

The second of Tamuz 5705 (13 June 1945) we left Mlynov for ever.

End Notes

1 Matzas made with extreme strictness and supervision

2 Brother of Mendel's wife, Sonia.

3 Mendel's uncle Chaim-Meir Teitelman.

4 Mendel is referring to his wife, Sonia's, siblings: Yitzhak Gruber (later Hofri) and Chaika (Gruber) Schichman

5 Referring to Asher Teitelman son of Nahum. See his story of survival in **https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Mlyniv/documents/The_Asher_Teitelman_Story.pdf**

6 Probably referring to his cousin Nahum Teitelman and their children Asher, Shifra and Yosef. Nahum was married to Rachel (Gruber), the sister of Mendel's wife, Sonia (Gruber) Teitelman. All of them were first cousins.

To learn more about **Mlyniv**, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Mlyniv/Mlyniv.html



DAYS OF FASTING

Tarnogrod, Poland

The town of Tarnogrod was located in Lublin *gubernie* [province], in the *rayon* [district] of Zamosc, near Bilgoraj. Jews were among the first inhabitants of the town in 1569. In 1772, the town came under the soereignity of Austra, and in 1815, became part of Congress Poland under Russian rule, where it remained until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

In those days, the Jews there were able to make a living, and Tarnogrod was renowned for having wealthier rich people than other towns in the area. This was because the town was situated close to the Austrian border, where both legal and illegal business was conducted.

There were 2,238 Jews living in the town in 1921.

In May of 1942, the Germans created a Ghetto, from where Jews were sent to labor camps. On November 2, 1942, all remaining Jews – some 2,500 men, women and children, were ordered to meet in the market place, from where they were marched to Bilgoraj. The next day they were put aboard the train to Belzec.

TARNOGROD Jews have always kept the fasts such as: Seventeen Tammuz, Tisha B'Av, Yom Kippur, Fast of Gedaliah, Fast of Esther, Monday and Thurday, and the Tenth of Tevet, etc. However, when it came to the evening before Passover, and the Fast of the Firstborn, who would fast in memory of the plague in Egypt and would thank G-d because the Jewish firstborn sons were saved, the Jews of Tarnogrod found a way not to fast.

The evening before Passover, every firstborn son came into the *beit hamidrash* where the teachers were waiting for them having prepared a *siyum* [completion of a tractate of the Talmud,

followed by a celebratory meal], that they learned all year and left the last page with the *Hadran alakh* [prayer recited at the end of each tractate] for the evening before Passover, and would finish together with the firstborn of the town.

The happiness from the *siyum* and finishing the tractate required a small meal and the firstborn did not have to fast. Thus all firstborn had a gift.

On the day before Passover the scholars had true satisfaction from their study. Those who persisted and studied a lot could, on that day, serve a great number of firstborn and so received more money.

I remember when it came to Hanukkah, in the *beit midrash*, the boys studied small tractates such as Masechet Megilla, Ta'anit and Horayot that had only twelve pages. This was done so that on the evening before Passover they would be able to complete more tractates.

It was strange to observe, in those days, when every Jew had so much to do in the house by cleaning and bringing in the Passover dishes and cutlery and various other *erev yom tov* [evening before holiday] duties, the *beit midrash* boys all sat at their tables with the Gemorahs and taught the unlearned Jews: Hersh-Meir and Itche "Jokim Galis," Shmuel-Itskik-Hersh, Meir Bershis, Leizer and Yekhezkel Mosheles, Alter Itsiks, Shiala the Biala-Vans (Schlechterman), Hershele-Yossel Retczyks, etc. The money that they received brought them great joy, but this



Yoel Hochman who was a prayer-leader in the Belzer shtibl, owner of a hardware store and a prominent person in town, who was forced by the Germans to shave the beard of another Jew whom they had apprehended in the Tarnogrod ghetto. This happened in the first days of terror and lasted until the final liquidation of the Jews in Tarnogrod.

was not the only important thing they gained on this day.

I also remember something else. My grandfather, Reb Avraham, may his name be blessed, was a firstborn son, and I remember that he left a page of the Gemorah to finish on the evening before Passover.

To learn more about **Tarnogrod**, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Tarnogrod/Tarnogrod.html



IN THE JAWS OF THE NAZI BEASTS: PASSOVER IN 1942

Vileyka, Belarus

In 1900, there were 1,328 Jews living in the town, which is located 65 miles E of Vilnius, 49 miles NNW of Minsk. This excerpt describes the dedication to celebrating Passover during the Holocaust.

IN one room lived Old Malishkevitch and his wife, and in the second room the family of Chaia (Hayya?) Gita, and in the third, Muleh Norman and I lived. Old Malishkevitch decided that we must celebrate Passover to spite the Jew-haters. We celebrated it according to the traditions, with matzos and wine, as it was celebrated all over the Diaspora.

He wanted to say, "Even if it will be the last Passover in our lives, we will not deny it. We will celebrate as all of Israel, as all of the Jewish people in every nation, and we will shout *Shfoch Hamat-ha* [revenge on the nations who harmed the Jews]."

The old man did everything on his own. He cleaned the house and the dishes and the oven of all *chametz*, and baked matzos not only for us but also for the Jews of Kurenets who lived in the camp. Instead of wine we had to use tea, and we had plenty of *maror* (bitter herbs). When Passover came we all prayed in the minyan and everyone said Kaddish. Malishkevitch, with the other Vileykans, were busy preparing the table for the seder.

To this day, I still don't know what happened to me that evening. I remember as soon as I entered the room I started crying. It was a deep cry of mourning for all my family. I couldn't take control of myself. In front of my eyes stood all my family members that had been alive until recently. And in front of the line stood my sister-in-law carrying her baby in her arms. It had been less than 30 days since they had

been taken from this world, and the picture of her face was haunting me. The look in her eyes that wasn't from this world, when she stood in front of her killers… it seemed as if her spirit was no longer in this ugly world and with the

Meanwhile the table was prepared and the old man came to me and begged me to take control of myself, and to re-enter the room and not to take away from the holiness of the holiday. I answered him, "How can I celebrate when I am



A convention of supporters of the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael) in Vileyka. The people in the photo are standing in two columns, apparently to receive guests, and have flags displayed. Photographed beside the local synagogue on June 21, 1932.

image I heard the sounds echoing in my ears, the passages of those who had given the death sentence. Even the silence was echoing in my ears, screaming to me their last testament, "You are spared to live alone as fate chose. The last remnant of your family, you must keep your life, escape to the forest and avenge our deaths."

the only one left from all of my family?" And once again I started crying.

He wouldn't let go. He demanded that I join the other people, and when I arrived there they begged me that I must not add to the sorrow, that I must stop crying. Come to think of it, this was the only time during the days of the

Holocaust that I could not control my tears. The truth is, I hadn't even reached the age of 18 at that point.

When I asked Malishkevitch what he planned to do if the Gestapo came to take us in the middle of the seder, he answered, "If that is what they demand, we will accept it."

At that moment my decision became very clear. I would not go as a lamb to the slaughter. They will never catch me alive. My head was filled with thoughts of revenge. I was able to convince Muleh that evening that we must be always prepared for the trouble that would come and if they would come to get us we would escape from the window straight to the bath house, where we had prepared a hideout.

In the seder ceremony, the son of Hayya Gita asked the four questions, and received the traditional answers: we were slaves, but the fifth question, "Why do we deserve all that?" was left without an answer. I still do not know if anyone can answer this question until maybe the day when the Messiah comes.

To learn more about **Vileyka**, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Vileyka/Vileyka.html

JewishGen
Yizkor Book Project

About the JewishGen Yizkor Book Project

Yizkor Books (Memorial Books) were traditionally written to memorialize the names of departed family and martyrs during holiday services in the synagogue (a practice that still exists in many synagogues today).

Over the centuries, as a result of countless persecutions and horrific atrocities committed against the Jews, Yizkor Books (*Sefer Zikaron* in Hebrew) were expanded to include more historical information, such as biographical sketches of famous personalities and descriptions of daily town life.

Following the Holocaust, the idea of remembrance and learning took on an urgent and crucial importance. Survivors of the Holocaust sought out other surviving residents of their former towns to memorialize and document the names and way of life of those who were ruthlessly murdered by the Nazis.

These remembrances were documented in Yizkor Books, hundreds of which were published in the first decades after the Holocaust. Most of these books were published privately, or through *landsmanshaftn* (social organizations comprised of members originating from the same European town or region) that still existed, and were often distributed free of charge.

Sadly, the languages used to document these crucial histories and links to our past, Yiddish and Hebrew, are no longer commonly understood by a significant percentage of Jews today. It is our hope that the translation of these books into English (and other languages) will assist the countless Jewish family researchers who are so desperately seeking to forge a connection with their heritage.

To learn more, and to access the translations at no cost, please visit:
https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/translations/

JewishGen
Yizkor Book Project

About the JewishGen Yizkor Books in Print Project

This is an initiative to print and publish Yizkor Books that had been fully translated, so that hard copies would be available for purchase by the descendants of these communities and also by scholars, universities, synagogues, libraries, and museums.

These Yizkor books have been produced almost entirely through the volunteer effort of researchers from around the world, assisted by donations from private individuals. The books are printed and sold at near cost, so as to make them as affordable as possible.

To learn more, and to access a list of all published Yizkor Books, please visit:
http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/ybip.html

JewishGen
KehilaLinks

About the JewishGen KehilaLinks Project

KehilaLinks aims to create virtual Yizkor Books online, where anyone with an interest in a place where Jews have lived can commemorate that community.

To learn more, please visit: **https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/**



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