

Remembering the Jewish Community of

Bagamer, Hungary

Remembered by Anna Levin

Bagamer (Ba-ga-mair), a small town in Hungary near Debrecen (De-bre-tsen), was the birthplace of Anna Levin. There were only a couple of hundred Jews living among the total population of about 3500 people. The Jewish community led a relatively tranquil but uneasy existence among their Christian neighbors. Thus, some of them (including Anna) attended the Catholic parochial school because of its better educational program, but at the same time the Jewish people wouldn't go out on the street on Sunday afternoons after church services for fear of being attacked by the worshippers aroused by the antisemitic tirades of the clergy.

The town was a vestige of old time life. The news was delivered twice a week by a town crier who beat his drum to assemble the people in the town square and told them what was happening in the country and in the world.

The Jewish community was poor, mostly small shopkeepers and tradesmen. Anna's father, z"l, was the chazzan, shochet, and otherwise attended to the community's religious needs. An itinerant rabbi would visit the town twice a year to offer instruction and guidance.

This life was abruptly shattered when the Nazis took control of Hungary in March of 1944 and, assisted by their Hungarian vassals and henchmen, embarked upon their murderous task of destroying the Jews. Anna, a young teenager, was in Debrecen helping out her grandparents when she got a message from her parents to come back home. They were being ordered to get ready for deportation. She was advised against it by family and friends who in their naivete thought that whatever "dislocation" was

happening to the Jews in a small town was far less likely to occur in a large city. So she stayed with her grandparents. She never saw her family, father, mother and a younger brother and sister again; they all perished in Auschwitz. She in turn was deported to Auschwitz some weeks later, as were her grandparents and her extended family and friends but, miraculously, she managed to survive. Her grandparents had 5 children and 23 grandchildren. Of this whole family, only one son and four grandchildren survived.

There are no more Jews in Bagamer.