

Remembering the Jewish Community of

Chudnov, Ukraine

Remembered by Ed Worobey

Temple member Ed Worobey's parents both came to America in 1921 from a shtetl in Russia named Chudnov. His father's immediate family all left Chudnov together, but his mother's family - her parents, 2 brothers, 2 sisters and 4 nephews all remained in Chudnov.

Chudnov is a small town southwest of Zhitomir and near Kiev. Jews were mentioned as living there in the 17th century. The Jewish community numbered 1283 in 1765, and increased to 2623 by 1847. The 1897 census lists 4491 Jews in a total population of 5580. Many Jews from Chudnov emigrated to the United States and Palestine from 1900 to 1920. The pre World War II Jewish population was 4067.

The shtetl was built along the Teperovka River engulfed in greenery and surrounded by forests and meadows. Jewish livelihood was derived from skilled workmanship such as hat making, tailoring, and shoe making. There was also a spirits brewery that provided employment. There were two synagogues, a pharmacy, and a school that was built right after the Soviet revolution.

Prior to World War II, a new village was built on the opposite side of the river from the shtetl. This area, known as the New Chudnov, was populated by Ukrainians who were hostile to the Jewish population. Many became willing collaborators and accomplices to the Nazi terror.

Immediately after the Nazis occupied the town in July of 1941, they ordered all the older Jewish people to report to the Firemen's Club, a windowless building, with all their

personal belongings. They were kept there for three days without food or water, and then taken to a grove on the outskirts of town where freshly dug trenches awaited them. They were all massacred and buried in the trenches. The remaining young people were forced to do hard labor until, on September 22, Yom Kippur Day, they were all taken, men, women, and children, to the same spot and mercilessly slaughtered.

Testimony to these events was given by a woman who had fallen into the trench but had not been shot. She escaped in the darkness and was hidden by a Christian family until the village was liberated.

Today the location of the mass grave is fenced off. A marker was erected in 1944 by the Russian authorities commemorating the "3000 peaceful citizens who fell victim to German Fascism." Of particular note is that nowhere did it say that the victims were Jews. There is also a memorial to the Martyrs of Chudnov at the Valley of Communities located at Mt. Zion.

After the war, the town was rebuilt without Jews. In the year 2002, there were seven Jewish families in Chudnov. A rabbi from the nearby city of Zhitomir conducts services on Shabbat. The services are held in a house that was donated by a member of the community to be used as a shul.