Remembering the Jewish Community of 

Dolhinov

Remembered by Aaron Ginsburg

Dolhinov was a small town in the Vilna District, Poland, between the first and second World Wars. It is now in Belarus.

By 1667 there was an organized Jewish community of 485. After the partition of Poland in 1792, it was part of Russia. During the nineteenth century Jews had concessions and also went into trade, exporting grain flax and fruit through Danzig. There were anti-Jewish riots in the 1880s.

With small towns unable to provide a livelihood for growing populations during the 19th century, many Jews left for a better life...nevertheless the Jewish population increased to 2259 in 1897 out of 3552 total. After World War I Dolhinov was near the border with the Soviet Union. This prevented trade, making economic conditions difficult. The thirties brought the depression and an increasingly anti-Jewish Polish government.

There was a Tarbut school in the town before WWII and Zionist Youth movements.

Nachum Lankin recalled in the Yizkor book:

"A Yiddische Folkbank was established. A volunteer Bikkur Cholim committee visited the sick. A volunteer, Linat Hatzedek, arranged places to stay for poor visitors to the town. Achnasat Kala accepted donations for poor brides' dowries. A Hesed Shel Emet was established by Hevreh Kadisha to take care of the burials and to support the family members."
“A few days before Passover, there was a committee that contained young women and men who would go to all the homes to collect money for Passover. They called it "The Flower of Passover". For this they also received money from the town's residents who now lived in the US. Many families were helped by this organization. Many times, the Rabbi Mara De Atra distributed the money, and it would be done secretly, so that the families wouldn't be embarrassed about receiving donations. These missions were all done voluntarily without the backing of any of the other town's institutions.”

When the town was occupied by the Russians in Sept 1939, organized Jewish life ended, as people were coerced into outward conformity with totalitarian Soviet Society. Nevertheless, many Jews would rather have been under Russian than German occupation.

The Germans arrived at the end of June 1941. In September the Rabbi and 18 other men were murdered. A ghetto was set up on March 3, 1942

The Jewish community was destroyed in three incidents. On March 28, 1942, the 11th of Nisan, 1500 Jews were shot in the market square.

According to Zelig Dimmishtein, who was just a child and had not been present:

“When [I] got to Dolhinov [after the first shekhta] the snow on the ground was not white - it was red from Yiddishe blood from when they killed out everyone the day before.

The streets were empty. That evening was Pesach. They locked up the windows and they recited the Haggadah. The next morning they went out and dug mass graves to bury the dead.
"Every year since then I sit on Pesach and read the Haggadah - Ilu lo yotzianu miMitzraim - had You not taken us out of Egypt... what was that??!! Absolutely nothing. When I compare Yitziat mitzraim to what we went through in Europe - mitzraim was nothing!!"

On May fifth, 1200 more were murdered and finally on May 22 the third shekhita- the remaining three hundred perished.

Among the few who escaped was Moshe Furman. Moshe could not save his 25 year old wife Henia and their daughter Rakhel, who was not even one year old, and his wife’s parents, Shimon Kusinitz and and his wife Sara, maiden name Berkovitz. Before the first Shekhita, he found them a hiding place with a Polish noblewoman, but during the second Shekhita, their hiding place in the ghetto was discovered. Moshe’s father-in-law Shimon Kusinitz, was a brother of Temple Israel member Aaron Ginsburg’s grandmother, Dvorshe Kusinitz Ginsburg.

Moshe Furman later met a woman in Minsk with a child. They married and later made their way to Palestine on the ship “Exodus.”