Jews began living in Gusyatin, in the Ukraine, in the sixteenth century. The town stayed small until 1772, when Poland was partitioned, with the border between Austria and Russia following the Zabrotz River through the center of the town. As a border town, Gusyatin became an important center for trade. Many Gusyatin Jews became wholesale merchants, shipping grain and lumber from Austria to Russia.

Gusyatin grew quickly in the 19th century. A Satmar Hassidic Court was set up, and hundreds of Hassidim moved to Gusyatin to live near the rebbe. New synagogues were built, as were ritual baths, hotels, hospitals, and old age homes. The town supported a Jewish-owned factory to make fountain pen nibs, print shops and paper merchants, as well as an organization to publish rare manuscripts.

Secular Jewish life also thrived. Zionist groups were started. A Toynbee-Hala club was established to present popular cultures on Saturday evenings. Modern services came to the town, including banks, electricity, and a new sewage system. Among the thriving businesses was a factory that produced uniforms for the Austrian army under the management of Osias Guttmann, a Satmar Hassid and the great-grandfather of Temple Israel member George Aronson.

In the early 1900s, the town was haunted by the prospect of war between Austria and Russia. Crossing the border became more difficult. Fearing the war, some Gusyatin
students emigrated (including Osias Guttmann). On August 9, 1914, the Russian Army attacked Austria through Gusyatin. Jews dispersed to avoid the oncoming armies. Many died from typhus or were victimized by local peasants. Others were exiled to Kiev.

After World War 1, the border between Poland and Russia divided the town. The border was closed and trade stopped. The communists confiscated property from Jewish-owned businesses. Yet Jews returned to Gusyatin and began to rebuild. A rabbi was hired. A Hebrew school was opened. The mikveh was repaired. Zionist groups reorganized.

And although crossing the border was prohibited, once each year, on Rosh Hashanah, the Jews from the Polish and Russian portions of the community were allowed go to their respective sides of the river for the Tashlich prayer --- the only time of the year when they were allowed to see and speak with each other across the river.

On July 6, 1941, Gusyatin was conquered by the German Army. Immediately, the local Ukranians began to attack the local Jews. The community was burdened by forced labor and confiscation of property. Many died of hunger and disease. Then, in March 1942, the Jews of Gusyatin were rounded up by the Nazis and deported by train to camps in Kofichintza and Provozna. None would return. None live in Gusyatin today. So ended 500 years of Jewish life in Gusyatin.

See: Pinkas Hakehillot, the Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland, Volume II, Eastern Galicia, pages 181 to 184, listed in Hebrew by Yad Vashem in 1980. Thanks also to Eldad Ganin, who assisted in translation. Jewishgen.org has created a shetlinks site about Gusyatin, to which George contributed.