

Remembering the Jewish Community of

Kamen-Kashirskiy, Ukraine

Remembered by Kenneth Porter

Temple member Ken Porter's Grandmother Dinah Karsh Brodsky and her family lived in Kamen-Kashirskiy until 1920. Ken wrote the following memorial of the community.

The precise founding-date of Kamen-Kashirskiy is unknown to us; neither do we know when and how the Jewish community first developed there. We do know that in the years 1648/9, there was already a notable Jewish settlement in Kamen Kamen-Kashirskiy is mentioned as having 100 established Jewish householders, while in Kovel at that time there were 400 householders. In 1847 there were 862 Jews living there; in 1897 there were 1189 Jews (in a total of 1220 residents); in 1921 - 716 Jews.

The gangs of Hetman Bulak-Balachovitz raided the community in the 1920 pogrom and burnt 20 Torah Scrolls out of a total of 30 belonging to the community. This was when my family left for the US. There were a couple of stories that have been handed down to me about these pogroms and how they afflicted my family. One such story is that my great-grandmother was hanged by the Cossacks because they wanted money. It was hidden beneath the floor in the dirt. By happenstance, the rope had slipped to her chin. A shot sounded and they fled. My great-grandfather cut her down and he was fortunate to revive her. I'm told that after that, he called to the children, but they didn't answer right away, because they were afraid that the Cossacks were still there. They did come out of hiding when they realized it was safe. I believe at that point they decided it was time to leave.

Kamen-Kashirskiy was well known throughout the entire area. The township typified Jewish life as it had been in that area of the country for countless generations. Over

forty small Jewish villages in the vicinity clung to Kamen-Kashirskiy - it became a prosperous town. There were Rabbis, Dayans, ritual slaughterers and their families. Nearly the entire town was known for its Zionism. Many were active in the Jewish National Fund and the Keren Hayesod. Life went on between pogroms, struggles and self-defense.

The town was Jewish, warmly endearing and pleasant. In the area were the villages of Christian farmers and a few Jewish villages. Most of the houses in the town were built out of wood and around each one was a garden. The majority of the Jews in the village were engaged in trade, a few were artisans and the rest professionals. There was a Beit Midrash, a Hebrew school, and Talmud Torah, a library and a Bikkur Cholim. Among the public enterprises were: evening classes, a pioneering Zionist Movement, "Ha-Shomer HaTzair" and various organizations. According to the map of the community I have, there were four synagogues in the town, one the court of the Trysker Rabbi's disciples, and another in the care of Kovel's Rabbi Ya'acov Ariele. My great-grandfather, Ben Zion Karsh, was from a learned family and his wife, Elke Kojfman Karsh, who was from a rich family, did not want to come to the US.

In 1920, the situation improved somewhat for the Jews. They occupied themselves in small trading, peddling and mainly in all the trades and professions that the local, non-Jewish population was in need of, such as carpentry, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, shoemaking and repairs, tailoring, etc. There was virtually no trade that did not have its Jewish artisan. Once a week on Tuesday (twice if things were good), there was a fair to which all the farmers in the area would come to sell their produce and purchase their needs, such as salt, kerosene, clothes, boots, sheepskins, and work tools. This fair was the main source of sustenance for the Jewish traders.

In 1937, with the rise of Hitler in Germany and the blossoming of anti-Semitism in Poland, a pogrom was organized against Jewish property, especially against the business center of Klurman Family & Partners. Two Jews, who resisted the rioters, were

jailed and heavily fined. With the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the Jewish community numbered over 2000 souls.

From then on the situation for Jews continually deteriorated. At first for the older generation, the main hardship was the denial of our religion in being forced to work on the Sabbath. Obviously all the Jewish and community institutions were closed and involvement in their activities, Zionist or otherwise became dangerous. During the summer of 1941, Jews were obliged to submit to forced labor and were required to wear the "yellow star." In June of 1942, Jews had to confine themselves to a ghetto of one street - Kovel Street. All the Jews from the surrounding villages and communities were brought in until the number of people confined was about 3000 souls. On Sunday, 9th August 1942, about 2500 Jews were murdered in graves prepared beforehand. About 600 people survived. In the ghetto, preparations were made to escape. About 400 of the 600 people escaped from the ghetto and their work places. Those who remained were taken the following day to the cemetery and executed.

All that remains of the community is the Jewish cemetery. A Yizkor book came out in 1965. It is available on the Internet, complete with photographs. I remember being told that my grandmother would look at the book and mourn for her friends and family that were no more. We must continue to do that for all the Jewish communities lost in this way, or else our Jewish history is diminished. May all such communities and their martyrs be remembered for a blessing.

Here is a link to the partially translated [Yizkor book](#) on Jewishgen.org and here is a [chapter](#) about Kamen-Kashirskiy from another Yizkor book.