Remembering the Jewish Community of

Lechevitz, Russia

Remembered by Paul Maltzman

When I was a little boy, several years before my Bar Mitzvah, I would hear the adults in my family speaking in Yiddish on a variety of subjects, including some family matters, which they probably did not want me to hear. But I could speak and understand Yiddish much better then than I do now. You see, my tatte and bobbie would speak only Yiddish to me, from when I was first able to comprehend the spoken word, while my mother tried to converse with me in both English and Yiddish, but mostly English, so that I would be appropriately assimilated in public school later on.

During the numerous conversations that I heard, intentionally or not, the name of an eastern European shtetl kept cropping up. I didn't pay much attention to it then, but the name clung to my memory. During my adult years, I discovered that the name of that shtetl represented the little Russian village that was the family home of my father, before he emigrated to the United States. He never spoke in great detail to me relative to his early childhood, but I did discover that the shtetl in question, which he called Lechevitz, or something close to that, was a very poor little village, and the little house he lived in was its equal in poverty. As my father described it, the tiny house had a dirt floor and in the winter he would have to run through the snow barefooted.

My father and his brother, my uncle Shloimie, came to this country when they were both in their early- to mid- twenties, a few years after the beginning of the 20th century, while the rest of the family, for some reason, which was never explained to me, decided to remain in Russia. There was continuous correspondence between the family here and the remaining members in Russia, until World War II, when all communication from Europe suddenly ceased. When victory over Germany became a
reality, the family contacted the International Red Cross for any pertinent information. None was discovered and it was subsequently concluded, after many searches and inquiries, that they all had perished in the Holocaust.

The name Lechevitz kept ringing in my ear, and I was determined to do something about it. With the aid of the computer and the Internet, I searched several pertinent web sites, but to no avail. There seemed to be no information on the little shtetl my father called home. Finally, after many years and attempts, I contacted a site that permitted me to submit a few phonetic spellings of Lechevitz and several possibilities resulted. But the actual answer to my quest was not realized. There were too many possibilities and no one certainty.

Subsequently, years later, in conversation with an older cousin of mine on my father's side of our family, I discovered that there was a town larger than Lechevitz located fairly close to it, by the name of Brody. I was quickly back to the computer, where I checked out all the possibilities from the phonetically spelled-out names that I had previously obtained. I was able to acquire the longitude and latitude values of their map locations, in degrees, to two decimal places of accuracy. I also discovered similar information for Brody. With this data at my disposal, I selected the one phonetic name for the shtetl that was in fairly close proximity to Brody. It turned out to be a place spelled Luchevits, which for me was close enough to the shtetl name that has been clinging to my memory all these years.

After plotting the pertinent longitude and latitude values on a proper geographical map, I also discovered that a fairly large city by the name of Shepetovka was reasonably close by. This was significant, because my parents are buried in the Shepetovka Cemetery at Baker Street in West Roxbury. Realizing how many Jewish cemeteries acquired their names, the connection then seemed clear to me and increased my
feeling of certainty that I had discovered the true location that I had been searching for.

Maybe someday, God willing, I will be able to travel to that part of the world and visit the place where my father's family lived. I'm almost certain that it doesn't exist anymore. Maybe I'll stand in the center of what once was the little shtetl called Lechevitz or Luchevits or whatever, and look around. I'll guess where the schul was. It would have been great to daven there. But, I'm sure it's not there anymore. The Nazis took care of that. It would have been wonderful to be able to enter the little house where my father lived as a young man. But I'm sure it does not exist anymore. The Nazis took care of that, too. And I won't be able to visit the grave sites of my father's family - his parents and his two sisters, my grandparents and aunts, who chose to stay in Russia and were killed in the Holocaust, with no remaining records. I have no factual proof, but there was a Holocaust, and there has not been any sign of them since. I guess that's proof enough for me.

And, if I do manage to travel to what once was Lechevitz, and stand in that likely center of the tiny village, I'll daven there, maybe even with a minyan. Because to me it is sacred, hallowed ground. It's the location of the Little Shtetl that Was.

*Jewishgen.org has a [shtetlinks site](https://www.jewishgen.org) about Lechevitz.*