Remembering the Jewish Community of

Pryzemsyl, Poland

Remembered by Drorit Bogen

Natan (Haber) Antman, father of Temple member Drorit Bogen, grew up in Pryzemsyl, Poland. Pryzemsyl (pronounced Pshemishel or in short Pshemish) is a town in the region of Galicia. Prior to WWI, Pryzemsyl was the third largest Jewish community in Galicia. Between WWI and WWII, the Jewish population declined due to tougher economic conditions, as well as emigration to other European countries, America, and Israel.

The first statistics on the Pryzemsyl Jewish community date back to 1542, when 18 Jewish families lived there. In the early years, the Polish government was quite welcoming. In 1559, King Sigmund August gave them a "bill of rights," awarding the Jewish community, "full freedom in the town of Pryzemsyl when it comes to commerce and business, the same as all other residents of the town." In June 1576, King Stefan Bаторi published a document giving the Jewish community in Pryzemsyl total autonomy.

Pryzemsyl was a city of strategic importance. It was the converging point of two trade routes that originated in Spain, split at the Rhine River in Germany, and met once again in Pryzemsyl. From there the routes continued on to central Asia, India, and China. In addition, Pryzemsyl was a strategic army point because of its location along a major river and trade routes. Consequently, the region of Galicia was fought over by Eastern European governments and often changed hands.

For religious reasons (Kashrut and Shatnez), the Jews preferred to work in the food and clothing industries. Many were tailors and furriers. The fur industry in Pryzemsyl
prospered and acquired a good reputation, with an annual fair that lasted eight days. Among the furriers was Natan's father, Tzvi Vainshtein.

Before WWII, Pryzemsyl enjoyed a rich Jewish life. There were many types of synagogues, similar to the Conservative, Orthodox, and Ultra Orthodox synagogues that we have today. In addition to Jewish day and boarding schools, hospitals, nursing homes, food kitchens and orphanages, there was a Jewish sports stadium. The complex included a track, tennis courts, soccer field with bleachers, and changing rooms for those who took a swim in the river.

In 1932, David Ben-Gurion, who later became the first prime minister of Israel, visited Pryzemsyl and commented, "There I saw youth eager to immigrate to Israel." The vibrant Jewish community supported several Zionist and youth organizations, including the JNF, Keren Hayesod, and Zionist labor movement. One of these organizations, Gordonia, re-established Kibbutz Hulda in 1930, after it was destroyed in 1929. Natan's friend from Pryzemsyl, who became like a brother during the Holocaust, had family that made aliyah as part of Gordonia. It was this friend who convinced Natan to move to Israel after the war, since the family in Israel was the only family left.

In September 1939, the Germans invaded Poland and entered Pryzemsyl two weeks later. Pryzemsyl is far from the German s friends returned to visit Pryzemsyl, the locals were extremely hostile.

The New York Public library has online a 574 page Yizkor Book about Pryzemsyl.

There is an excellent site at jewishgen.org for this town. The web master for the jewishgen site is Temple member David Sotkowitz, who wrote the remembrance about Delatyn. David is involved with web pages for several communities. Here is a wonderful blog about Pryzemsyl.
Although Jewish visitors to these communities may encounter hostility, there are attempts at reconciliation, as is attested by this program that took place in Pryzemsyl. Here is a story of heroism during the Shoah. Albert Battel, a German officer is recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous among the Nations. Read about a recent visit to Pryzemsyl.