

Remembering the Jewish Community of

## Radom, Poland

Remembered by Irving Kempner

Radom (rä'dôm) is a city of east-central Poland south of Warsaw. It was founded in the 14th century. Radom is a railway junction and an industrial center. The main products are textiles, glassware, chemicals, and processed food. One of the oldest Polish settlements, its first church was built in 1187. The first Jewish families, totaling 65 people, came to Radom in about 1795. When Radom passed to Russia in 1815, the Jewish population had grown to 435 people. Radom reverted to Poland after World War I, and Jewish businesses and culture began to thrive. By the time WWII broke out, there were 24,475 Jews living in Radom. Among them were Irv Kempner's mother Marlene, her sisters Regina & Frances, her brother David, and parents Isaac and Tersa Freidenreich.

The Germans bombed Radom right at the outbreak of war. Many houses, both of Polish and Jewish townspeople, were damaged by the explosions, and there were also fatal casualties.

Towards the end of October, 1939, the Germans began to seize control of the Jews' properties. Jewish businesses were expropriated for the benefit of the Reich, and German administrators were appointed over them. Many of the business owners still continued to work in their businesses in exchange for a token wage. Among them was my grandfather Isaac Freidenreich who ran a small general store at 61 Zeromskiego Street. And my married Aunt Regina, daughter Hadassah, and husband David Lesser, operated a small dress shop adjacent to their apartment building at 9 Zeromskiego Street.

On the first of July, 1940, all the property of the Jews in the region was transferred to the German administrative office. The Judenrat of Radom was made responsible for the maintenance and financial administration of the Jews' property for the German administrative office. After December, 1940, a regulation was introduced that forbade Jews to use public transportation.

At the end of March, 1941, the Judenrat decided to open a Jewish school for the children of the two ghettos and called upon the parents to register their children. Within a short time about 2,000 children were registered, but the Germans refused to give their permission to the opening of a school. In the end, the ghetto residents were forced to be content with informal and very limited educational activities.

Young men and women who were graduates of the Jewish high school in Radom and teachers residing in the ghetto gathered the children of kindergarten age and organized playing and reading groups for them. In November, 1941, several of the engineers and technicians initiated the opening of courses for professional development: with the aim of enabling the ghetto's Jewish youth to participate in essential work that might keep them alive within and outside the ghetto.

On the 5th of August, 1942, 6,000 Jews were sent from Radom to Treblinka.

At sunrise on August 18, 1942, the workers of the Gelka factory where my mother Marlene Freidenreich worked were lodged in apartments on Szwarkowska Street, which had been emptied of their residents. The remaining ghetto residents were transported in the morning to the train station under the heavy guard of SS men and a Ukrainian auxiliary force, were crowded into the cargo cars, and were sent to Treblinka. About 400 Jews were killed by the Germans on that night during the course of gathering the deportees.

My grandparents Isaac and Tera Freidenreich, along with my uncle David and his new wife Liva, were taken from Radom to Treblinka to be killed in this action. My mother Marlene never saw her parents or brother David again. Their deportation of the 17th of August, 1942, affected the vast majority of the Radom ghetto residents, 20,000 men, women and children. Their property was sold or distributed for free to Polish residents of Radom.

On the 13th of January, 1943, the Jews that were still remaining in Radom's labor camp were brought to the field at Szwablikowska Street. About 1,600 of them, whose names appeared on the list of those requesting a visa to Eretz Israel or who received permits for Aliyah (immigration) to Israel, were separated from the others and were sent on that very day to Treblinka. This action earned the name, "The Palestine Action".

On January 20, 1943, the Germans arrested a group of Jews who were accused of intentional sabotage at work and took them out to be killed. In the months of April and May 1943, an additional small group, which included some Judenrat leaders, was sent to Wolanów and were all killed there.

In May, 1943, the few remaining Jews in Radom were sent to Auschwitz. My mother and her sisters Frances and Regina, and Regina's 4 year old daughter Hadassah, were among them. Regina and Hadassah were selected to be killed the day they arrived in Auschwitz. My mother and Frances were chosen to live and eventually sent to work at a munitions factory near Kaunitz, Germany, until they were liberated by the USA Army in April 1945.

In May 2006, I visited Radom during the March of the Living trip and found my family's ancestral home. There are no more Jews living in Radom today and the few Poles I spoke to were suspicious that my visit was intended to reclaim my family's property. I can assure you that no living member of my family has any intention of ever residing in

Radom again. May the memories of the 27,000 Jews of Radom never be forgotten and serve as a reminder to us that the tolerance and freedom we enjoy in the USA are precious, but they are not free of sacrifice and must be defended here and in Israel.