

Remembering the Jewish Community of

Rohatyn and Putiatynce, Galicia

Remembered by Sharon Schulkind

Jerome Klein, father of Temple Israel member Sharon Schulkind, was born in 1923, in Putiatynce, a village on the outskirts of Rohatyn, Poland. From 1792 until 1919, Rohatyn was considered a town in the Austrian province of Galicia, from 1919 until 1945 it was part of Poland, and then it became part of Ukraine. Rohatyn had a population of 10,000.

Putiatynce had a very small population in comparison and was rural, without any streets or stores. Although Jerome left Putiatynce to come to the United States when he was 8 years old, he still remembers the one-room house that he lived in with his parents, grandmother, 2 half-brothers and half-sister. His family and their ancestors had lived in the house for more than a hundred years.

The thatch-roofed house had no electricity or plumbing. It had several beds around the perimeter of the single room. In the center of the room, there was an opening in the floor, which led to a kind of root cellar, which was used to preserve their food. All cooking was done in the fireplace using wood for fuel. The family owned a tavern and a small farm with a vegetable garden, a cow, chickens, and geese. Jerome walked with his mother to Rohatyn to sell eggs at the market there. On Fridays, Brana, Jerome's mother, baked challah for Shabbat and other breads for the rest of the week.

Although they could go to shul only during the summer months, when the weather was good enough to walk there, they observed all of the Jewish holidays. Jerome remembers celebrating two family weddings that were held outdoors at his home. One

of Jerome's half-brother's, Molke, was a tinsmith, who built tin roofs. Jerome went to cheder, a Jewish elementary school, in a shul in Rohatyn.

Jerome's father, Nachman Moses, was a soldier in the Austro Hungarian army during World War I. In 1928, relatives from Brooklyn, NY, sent Nachman Moses money that enabled him to emigrate to New York. Four years later, he had earned enough money to enable Brana and Jerome to travel to the United States to join him.

There was a Jewish community in Rohatyn as far back as the 16th century. In 1857, Rohatyn had 5,101 inhabitants including about 3,000 Jews. They were engaged primarily in business - the sale of agricultural products (such as flour and milk), clothing, fur, shoes, woven goods, and groceries, and the operation of taverns, inns, and restaurants. Crafts included tailors and furriers. There was a town candy factory, a soda factory, bakeries, a printing press, and an American style flour mill. Moshe Faust and his four sons comprised Rohatyn's orchestra. In the Census of 1900, Rohatyn appeared with a population of 7,201, including 3,217 Jews. In 1939, there were 3,002 Jews.

Rohatyn was a small but modern and vibrant town. The avenues were wide and tree-lined, the businesses were flourishing, and there were museums, libraries and a movie theater. The synagogues that were used from World War I until the time of the Shoah were the Beth Haknesset Hagadol (the main synagogue) with two wings, each housing a separate synagogue, the Schneider Shulechel (the tailors' small shul), and the Schuster Shulechel (the cobblers' small shul).

In 1896, Rabbi Natan Lewin became the rabbi of Rohatyn. He was a man of wide education and nationalistic views. He urged the establishment of Jewish schools and a Jewish gymnasium, because he viewed a well-rounded education as the solution to and defense against the assimilation of youth. He took part in the Congress of the Jewish

Communities in May 1900. In 1903, he participated in the first general rabbinic congress, which assembled on August 13 in Cracow. Representatives of Rohatyn played an important role in the national Zionist convention that took place June 26-27, 1898, in Stanislawow.

The Germans marched into Rohatyn on July 6, 1941. A ghetto was formed. Hunger in the ghetto was widespread. The Jews were ready to do anything to save themselves from starvation and to give their children a bit of food. The lack of food, unsanitary living conditions, and crowdedness made the ghetto prey to terrible sicknesses, especially dysentery and typhus. On "Black Friday," March 20, 1942, 70% of the ghetto's inhabitants were murdered by the Germans and their helpers. The other 30% of Rohatyn's Jews had managed to hide in cellars and attics. They thus succeeded in living a little while longer, until the second "action" six months later. On Rosh Hashana 1942, another 500 Jews were murdered. On Shvu'ot, June 5, 1943, the Gestapo came to Rohatyn, and the last inhabitants of the Rohatyn ghetto were killed.

Today there are simply a few Jewish monuments that remind the current Rohatyn inhabitants of the Jewish community that was wiped out by the Nazis.

Sharon's interest in her roots has led to her involvement with the Holocaust Committee. Her role is to work with the author's of remembrances so that they are ready to be read at Yizkor. Thank you Sharon.

There is an excellent site about Rohatyn at jewishgen.org . The site includes many links, including links to the English translation of the 369 page Yizkor book.